

Dangerous Assignments

covering the global press freedom struggle

Spring | Summer 2004

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Inside Bangladesh's Culture
of Violence



Escape from Haiti

Doing the Dirty Work in Iraq

Dangerous Assignments Spring|Summer 2004

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On the cover: A peaceful student demonstration turns violent in Bangladesh's capital, Dhaka, in March. This photo was the last one taken by *Prothom Alo's* Firoz Chowdhury, who was then severely beaten by members of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party's student wing. Chowdhury remains hospitalized.

Photo: *Prothom Alo*/Firoz Chowdhury

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Against the Odds

If you read CPJ's news alerts on a daily basis, it's hard not to become disheartened at the state of press freedom, and concerned for the many journalists around the world who are under constant legal and physical attack. We think it's important to highlight these stories in-depth in *Dangerous Assignments*, but we also know that there is more to them than shock and sadness. In fact, the stories you will find in this issue are as hopeful as they are horrifying, because many of these journalists have overcome great odds to continue their work.

In our cover story (page 14), CPJ Asia Program Coordinator Abi Wright takes you inside the media in Bangladesh, where both of the country's political parties target journalists with harassment, violent attacks, and murder. Almost all of these crimes go unpunished, but members of the press there say they are determined to report the news, despite hazardous conditions.

Haiti is another country where a polarized political climate has put journalists at risk. With some help from CPJ and others, one very lucky radio reporter, Pierre Elisem, was evacuated after a vicious attack. CPJ Journalist Assistance Coordinator Elisabeth Witchel visited Elisem in exile in the Dominican Republic to learn about his daring escape from his troubled nation (page 11). In Zimbabwe, several journalists have also been forced into exile by the repressive regime of President Robert Mugabe. CPJ Africa Program Coordinator Julia Crawford examines why the South African government refuses to criticize Mugabe—and how journalists there are hoping to change that policy (page 30).

Elsewhere in Africa, Burundian journalist Aloys Niyoyita brings you the story of Radio Publique Africaine, a media outlet that employs journalists who previously fought on two different sides of a brutal ethnic conflict that has killed 300,000 people (page 24). In the process, the station has helped foster peace and reconciliation in a country where some thought that was never possible.

But peace seems a long way off in Iraq, where the security situation has deteriorated even further, so much so that Western news organizations are relying more and more on local stringers and journalists for firsthand reporting. As CPJ Researcher Hani Sabra's interview with an Iraqi journalist working for a Western media outlet shows, being a local reporter in Iraq has become more dangerous than ever (page 8).

War also lingers in the southern Russian republic of Chechnya. Last summer, journalist Ali Astamirov, a stringer who covered Chechnya for Agence France-Presse, was abducted by unknown assailants. CPJ Europe Program Coordinator Alex Lupis investigates who was behind the kidnapping: Russian authorities or Chechen rebels? (page 27) No one knows for sure, and Astamirov remains missing. But hope lies in the fact that his colleagues continue searching—and continue the hard work of covering a war in the face of dangers and tough restrictions. ■

—Amanda Watson-Boles



Getting the Story, page 8



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AP/Howard Yanes



AP/Javier Galeano

Caracas, Venezuela

Felipe Izquierdo (being carried in both pictures above) knows what he's talking about when he says his job is dangerous. "The political situation is so polarized in Venezuela that it is very difficult to work as a journalist. ... Someone like me, who is clearly identified as a journalist because I'm carrying a camera, has to keep a very low profile while covering street protests. Any comment can be taken as an offense, and you can be physically attacked, threatened, or intimidated by either side."

Twice in two years, Izquierdo, a cameraman for the international television channel Univisión, has been

wounded while covering demonstrations in Venezuela's capital, Caracas. In January 2003, when the country was paralyzed by a two-month general strike aimed at ousting President Hugo Chávez Frías, opposition activists clashed with National Guard troops, and Izquierdo was hit in the head with a rock (above left).

Fast-forward one year, and things don't seem all that different in the streets of Caracas. On February 29, 2004, Izquierdo was hurt again, this time when he was shot in the foot (above right) while filming protesters who had filled the city to demand a recall on Chávez's presidency. In all, nine people were killed during the

unrest and hundreds were wounded, according to CPJ sources.

As a result of these attacks, Izquierdo has decided to work with lighter equipment so he can escape more easily should he find himself in danger again. He says he also plans to wear military boots, in addition to the bulletproof vest, gas mask, and helmet he already dons for protection.

The cameraman is recovering, but he still has difficulty walking. Nonetheless, he is determined to continue filming the news. "Next time, I'm going to be more cautious. I'm going to feel afraid, but I'm still going to do my work." ■

—Amanda Watson-Boles

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

November

13 Cuban journalist Bernardo Rogelio Arévalo Padrón is released after serving six years in prison on “disrespect” charges for alleging during a radio interview with a Miami-based station that while Cuban farmers starved, helicopters were taking fresh meat from the countryside to the dinner table of President Fidel Castro (below) and other Communist Party officials. During his time in prison, says Arévalo Padrón, he suffered physical and psychological torture.



AP/John Lindsay

24 The U.S.-appointed Iraqi Governing Council closes the Iraq offices of the Dubai-based satellite news channel Al-Arabiyya for airing a tape of Saddam Hussein urging Iraqis to resist the U.S.-led occupation. The offices reopen two months later.

28 A Burmese court sentences Zaw Theth Htway, editor of the sports magazine *First Eleven*, to death for high treason. The government has denied that he was tried for his work as a journalist. However, the summer before his conviction, military intelligence officers raided *First Eleven*'s offices and arrested four employees after the magazine published an article questioning how money from the

international community for the development of soccer in the country had been spent.

December

11 A secretary for the editor of the Kuwaiti daily *Al-Siyassah* is injured after opening a letter containing explosives. The editor says he believes that his paper was targeted for criticizing “political and religious fanatics in the Arab world.”

January

13 A group of armed individuals arrive at a radio transmission plant (below) outside Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, tie up the plant's guard, and smash the transmitters with hammers. As a result, eight radio stations and one TV station are forced off the air. The attack came in the wake of violent street clashes between government supporters and opponents.



AP/Walter Astrada

17 Two unidentified men assault Tomas Nemecek, editor-in-chief of the Prague-based independent weekly *Respekt*, while he leaves a grocery store near his home, spraying tear

gas in his face, throwing him to the ground, and repeatedly kicking him in the head and chest. Although police have not yet determined a motive for the attack, his colleagues at *Respekt* believe that Nemecek was targeted for the paper's hard-hitting reports exposing corruption.



AP/Apichart Weerawong

21 Amnat Khunyosying (above), publisher of *Phak Nua Raiwan* (Northern Daily) in Thailand, calls the verdict acquitting the four soldiers accused of trying to kill him “a funeral for justice.” Despite evidence from the journalist and other witnesses identifying the assailants by name, the court says there is insufficient evidence to convict the soldiers, who were on duty when they attacked the journalist in reprisal for his newspaper's exposés about powerful and corrupt politicians in the city of Chang Mai.

22 Ivoirian police officer Sgt. Théodore Séry Dago is convicted and sentenced to 17 years in prison for the October 2003 murder of Radio France Internationale correspondent Jean Hélène, who was shot in the head outside the national police headquarters in central Abidjan while waiting to interview detained opposition activists who were being released.

28 The Qatar-based, Arabic-language satellite channel Al-Jazeera is informed via e-mail by the U.S.-appointed Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) that the outlet will not be allowed to cover official IGC activities because it had shown “disrespect to Iraq and its people and harmed prominent religious and national figures.”

February

2 A package explodes outside the home of Russian journalist Yelena Tregubova, who had recently published a best-selling book criticizing the Kremlin. No one is injured, and police classify the attack as an act of hooliganism.

3 Employees of the Gaza City weekly newspaper *Al-Daar* return from the Eid al-Adha holiday to find most of their office equipment destroyed by unknown assailants. The magazine’s editor-in-chief says he believes that the vandalism came in retaliation for the publication’s editorial stance against corruption in the Palestinian National Authority.

12 CPJ sends a letter to U.S. President George W. Bush urging him to raise press freedom issues with Tunisian President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali, who has transformed his



AP/Susan Walsh

country’s press into one of the most restricted in the Arab world. On February 18, Bush urges the Tunisian leader to develop “a press corps that is vibrant and free,” according to the *Los Angeles Times*.

26 Three days after suffering a heart attack after being questioned by government security agents, Turkmen journalist Rakhim Esenov, 78, is detained and accused of smuggling 800 copies of his novel, a historical account of the Mogul Empire, from Russia into Turkmenistan. He is released on March 10.

March

7 Spanish TV journalist Ricardo Ortega (below), of the station Antena 3, is shot dead while covering demonstrations in Haiti’s capital, Port-au-Prince. The protesters were calling for the prosecution of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide.



AP/EFE

19 South Korean journalist Jae Hyun Seok is released by Chinese authorities after more than one year in detention. Seok, who was charged with human trafficking, was taking photographs of North Korean refugees in Yantai, Shandong Province, China, when he was arrested.

22 A group of Polish journalists take 30-minute turns locking themselves into an empty rented tiger cage outside the Polish Parliament to protest the three-month prison sentence handed down to journalist Andrzej Marek on libel charges. Following the protest, a local court postponed Marek’s sentence for six months.

25 CPJ sends a letter to U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld urging swift, thorough, and public investigations into incidents where journalists are killed, injured, or mistreated by U.S. troops in Iraq.

April

13 Six armed men storm the building housing the printing press of the private Gambian biweekly *The Independent*. The men fire shots into the building before dousing the equipment with gasoline and setting it ablaze. In October 2003, the paper’s offices were burned in a similar attack.

15 Three Japanese civilians, including one photographer (below, middle), are released one week after being abducted by Iraqi insurgents. The kidnapers had threatened to burn the hostages alive if Japanese troops did not leave Iraq. At that time, at least six journalists were abducted as part of a broader campaign against foreigners. ■

—Amanda Watson-Boles



AP/Kamran Jebreili

The Future of Ethiopia's Free Press

The Ethiopian government is annihilating independent journalism.

By Elias Wondimu

For five of the last 10 years, CPJ has singled out Ethiopia as one of the world's worst places to be a journalist. During these years, the government of Prime Minister Meles Zenawi has been responsible for harassing, imprisoning, and forcing journalists into exile.

But now, Zenawi is taking even more steps against Ethiopia's free press, starting with eviscerating the Ethiopian Free Press Journalists Association (EFJA)—the only group in the country that has continually expressed strong criticism of the government. The new strategy is not to imprison journalists but to deprive them of a voice.

On November 10, 2003, the Ethiopian Justice Ministry suspended EFJA's activities, allegedly because the group had failed to submit a certified audit of its budget for the last three years. Shortly after, the government's true intentions became clear when officials took matters into their own hands and presided over the selection of a new executive committee. As a result,

Elias Wondimu, an exiled journalist from Ethiopia, is the founder and publisher of *Tsehai Publishers*, the managing editor of *Ethiopian Review* magazine, a member of the board of directors at PEN USA West, and an exiled member of EFJA.

the government has split and severely weakened the EFJA. Following a recent mission to Ethiopia, the International Federation of Journalists called for the EFJA to hold another general assembly that would bring both the old and new members together.

With EFJA, the strongest voice of opposition in the media, neutralized, Zenawi has turned his attention to the country's legal code. Despite what government officials will tell you, Ethiopia's current press law serves not to enhance press freedom, but rather as a trap to catch and prosecute journalists who take it at face value. The law guarantees "freedom of expression without any interference," but if you actually pursue reporting as if this is true, you shortly find yourself in prison or worse. For example, journalist Tamirate Zuma was arrested in May 2001 after an article in his newspaper, *Atkurot*, quoted from an interview published by the U.S.-based magazine *Ethiopian Review* in which a retired Ethiopian army general predicted the imminent overthrow of the current government.

In addition, authorities have spent tremendous resources developing a harsh new press law that allows the government sweeping powers to repress the media. The law is still being debated, but it is likely to pass sometime this year.

Early drafts are no different from the current law, and although the government has said it was amending the bill, there has been little transparency in the process. Early drafts do not conform to international press freedom standards but rather criminalize the activities of journalists and editors who peacefully practice their profession. The bill discourages investigative journalism, outlaws the publication of any material deemed to threaten "national security," empowers the state prosecutor to bar or suspend any publication, and allows journalists who make reporting errors to be jailed, among other restrictions. The threat of fines and imprisonment is always there for those who do not obey the law.

In the face of such oppression, Ethiopia's journalists remain courageous. Dawit Kebede, a fellow exiled journalist, recently wrote that, "A free press lies in the hearts of individuals; when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can save it. ... While it lives there, it needs no constitution, no law, no court to save it." Because we cannot let press freedom in Ethiopia die, we must help return EFJA to freely elected members who represent Ethiopian journalists and ensure that the media work under laws that protect, rather than trap, them. ■

Ruel Endrinal

A journalist's murder highlights a culture of impunity in the Philippines.

By Hector Bryant L. Macale

The Philippine press has often been described as the “freest in Asia,” mostly because of the constitutional protection the media enjoy. But the failure of the justice system to arrest, prosecute, and convict anyone for killing journalists has created a culture of impunity that encourages further murders and demonstrates that neither liberal laws nor constitutional guarantees can ensure the full exercise of press freedom in the Philippines.

Press freedom in this nation of islands has reached one of its most critical points since democracy was restored in 1986. According to CPJ research, at least 40 journalists have been assassinated for their work since that time, and no one has been prosecuted for any of these murders. In 2003 alone, five journalists were killed in the line of duty, the worst recorded year in the country during the last decade.

Press freedom groups in the Philippines fear that the murders will continue this year, which had barely begun when a radio and print journalist was killed.

Ruel Endrinal, host of a news and commentary program for radio station

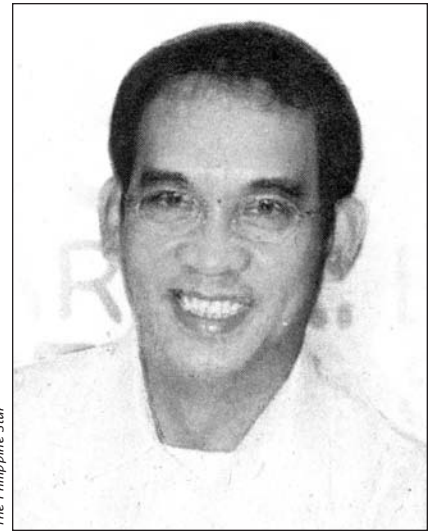
Hector Bryant L. Macale is a staff writer and senior press alerts project officer at the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility, a Philippines-based press freedom organization.

DZRC-AM and publisher of two community newspapers, was murdered on February 11, 2004, in Legazpi City, Albay Province, about 345 miles (556 kilometers) south of the capital, Manila. He was 45 years old.

Endrinal was shot dead by two unidentified gunmen at 6:20 a.m. while on his way to the radio station where he did a daily commentary on political affairs, according to Jess Magayanes, a colleague from Endrinal's station. Aniceto Dimatera, a correspondent for the national daily *The Philippine Star* and a friend of Endrinal's, told the Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility (CMFR) that Endrinal was gunned down near his home in Legazpi City.

Endrinal, who hosted the radio program “MBA sa DZRC” (MBA in DZRC) and was the publisher of *Metro Banat Albay* (MBA-Metro Hit Albay) and *Bicolano Ngayon* (People of Bicol Today), was shot in the head, left arm, and stomach. He was taken to a nearby hospital but died on arrival.

The local police are looking into the possibility that Endrinal could have been targeted because of his commentaries. Endrinal, according to Magayanes, criticized politicians in the area, including Albay Governor Al Francis Bichara, for their allegedly corrupt activities. Both Dimatera and Magayanes said Endrinal had been receiving death threats before he was killed.



The Philippine Star

Ruel Endrinal

Endrinal was the first journalist killed in the Philippines in 2004. His death came a day after the three-month campaign period for national and local elections began.

The local police have said they have two witnesses who say they can identify the gunmen. The witnesses claim that they saw the two men in Endrinal's neighborhood three consecutive days before he was killed. Endrinal's widow, Mina, told CMFR that the police have also identified two suspects.

Although arrest warrants have been issued, Mina says the fact that the suspects have not been detained could mean yet another police failure to prosecute anyone in a case involving a journalists' murder. ■

Getting the Story

For Iraqi journalists, covering the violence in Iraq means facing danger on many fronts.

This spring, the worsening security situation in Iraq—including several kidnappings of foreigners—significantly diminished the ability of journalists to move around the country. In response, many news organizations are relying more and more on Iraqi stringers and fixers to cover the news.

An unfortunate result is that this year, Iraqi journalists have become increasingly vulnerable to attack. According to CPJ research, 12 journalists have been killed in Iraq since January 2004. All of them were Iraqi, and at least three of them were killed by U.S. gunfire.

In addition, insurgents have stepped up their targeting of Iraqis who work for foreign media outlets as part of a broader attack on local citizens who work with international organizations. At least two Iraqi media workers were shot dead by assailants in March, and several more have received threats, leading a number to quit work altogether.

In late April, CPJ Middle East and North Africa Researcher Hani Sabra conducted an interview with an Iraqi journalist who has been working as a cameraman and reporter for a Western media outlet in the Iraqi city of Fallujah, about 35 miles (56 kilometers) west of the capital, Baghdad. For safety reasons, he agreed to speak

*Translated from Arabic by **Hani Sabra**.*

with CPJ only on the condition that his name and the name of his employer not be used.

Can you describe the security situation for Iraqi and Arab journalists currently working in Iraq?

Yes, but firstly, I can tell you that Western journalists are not wanted at the present time in Iraq, especially in areas where there is resistance. There are doubts among the people, the resistance, and the mujahedeen that foreign journalists could possibly be spies. The problem is that when the Western press and the Arab press come to do a story or a piece about the resistance or about events taking place, their questions are direct, the journalists go straight to the heart of the matter, which elicits doubts in some people that the journalists have other motives.

Secondly, U.S. troops are a problem. They see [Iraqi journalists'] cameras and our press badges, and they fire at us. The American army considers their first enemy to be journalists.

Why do you think they consider journalists the enemy? Can you give an example?

My family is in Fallujah, in the center of Fallujah. Because Fallujah is a small area, if I just hear a sound, I can determine where the firing took

place. I know the streets, and if I see smoke or fire I go to the area immediately. I arrive at the scene, in the heart of the matter, at the beginning of an incident. So I call [my news agency] and report to them, or film. Now U.S. troops wonder, "How did we journalists know about the operations?" They think, "What allowed us to know what was going on?" This is particularly the case with journalists who always work in Fallujah. So now the U.S. troops think that journalists are collaborating with the resistance. But we report the truth, the facts. We report what incidents are taking place.

What are the dangers to Arab and Iraqi journalists from armed Iraqis and the mujahedeen?

This is a danger not only to Iraqi journalists, but also to foreign journalists in the region. For instance, when I go in to film events in Fallujah, the mujahedeen have doubts that my motives are not to show the true picture, but to reveal who the mujahedeen are. In Fallujah, some journalists filmed mujahedeen whose faces were uncovered, and it created trouble. I remember the LBC [Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation] had footage on television of insurgents whose faces were uncovered.... Now there is resentment and hatred toward all journalists, not just the LBC.

Other journalists have also created problems. For example, a journalist who is from Baghdad, not from Fallujah, doesn't know the ins and outs here, or the customs and practices of Fallujah, what people do and don't want. So they come to cover an incident without taking into account the feelings of the people. So the people also have come to hate journalists.

A week ago, I had an experience in Fallujah. I was surprised by masked mujahedeen who tied up my hands, took me away, and said, "Bring your camera." I said, "Why are

with Alhurra written on it. They eventually let me go, but sure enough, they detained the correspondent/cameraman working for Alhurra in Fallujah, and he told them, "I am Iraqi, I am of you, with you. Why do you detain me?" They broke his camera and said, "As long as you so much as work with the Americans, we reject your presence here." They detained him for five hours before releasing him.

But our real fear is the Americans. We want to put out the true picture, present the true account. We fear them more than other people here.

journalists are rejected. It used to be that if an Egyptian or Jordanian or Lebanese journalist came in, identified himself to the people in the city and said, "I am person X from place X and I want to do a story," the people would accept it with no problem. But under the current circumstances, what we are seeing in Fallujah is that people are only welcoming to a few journalists.

You said that previously Western journalists entered Fallujah and other cities. When did the prob-



AP/Murad Sezer

Arab journalists walk out of U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell's press conference in Baghdad on March 19, 2004, to protest the shooting deaths of two Iraqi reporters by U.S. forces.

you detaining me, who are you, and what did I do?" And they said, "Because you are with Alhurra TV station [a U.S. government-funded television station that is broadcast in the Arab world]." I said, "No I'm not with Alhurra." They said that I was because they had been told that there was a journalist with a microphone

Since you are a journalist from Fallujah, do you think that you are safer than other Arab journalists or an Iraqi from Baghdad who comes to cover Fallujah?

Of course. Especially under the current circumstances, especially at this time. But it is difficult. Western

lems really begin for Western journalists?

I would say in the last three months. That was when the doubts began. Someone would say, "I'm a journalist." They would be asked to show their identification, and the person would pull out his ID and say, "I'm



AP/Khalid Mohammed

Colleagues of Al-Arabiyya television correspondent Ali al-Khatib, who was killed by U.S. gunfire in March, carry his coffin during a funeral procession in Baghdad.

French.” But the people began to have doubts that he was perhaps Israeli with a French passport. Or there were doubts that this person was not a journalist and had ulterior motives for being there.

Do you think that foreign news agencies now depend more on Iraqi journalists because it is rare for Western journalists to go to Fallujah?

Certainly. I used to work for [another Western media organization] as a journalist. I worked as a correspondent in the beginning and then the idea came that I should be a cameraman. So I worked as a correspondent and a cameraman with [them]. It used to be that journalists would come, they would have stories, articles, they would complete them. But when these problems began, they would contact me and say we have this idea for a story and ask me to complete it for them. When I left [my

former employer] and went to [my current media outlet], I would cover events for them. They would ask me for a story, and I would complete it. But now I work without being asked. I know what they want, so I write articles and send them directly to [my news outlet].

So you work as a correspondent and a cameraman?

Exactly. If something happens and I'm nearby, I'll cover it. But if I don't have work, if there is not a particular assignment or problem, I'll do a story about regular life, schools, religious scholars, mosques, anything.

You have spoken of your fear of U.S. troops. Have there been particular incidents?

Yes, more than once it has happened. For instance, I went to cover a conference in Fallujah. It was the governing council of Fallujah, and there was a meeting between them and the

Americans in Fallujah. The moment the Americans saw me, a soldier raised his weapon at me. I had my camera, they knew I was a journalist. I took out my press identification so he could see it, but he refused to look at it. Other journalists were inside, but he refused to let me in and pointed his weapon at me. He told me to leave the area. So I collected my things and left.

Another time, there was a fire-fight between U.S. troops and Iraqi resistance fighters in Khaldiya [west of Baghdad, near Fallujah] that lasted for nine hours. I was with a group of journalists from different news agencies in the area covering it. Even though the U.S. troops saw us, and we presented our identification to them, they shot at the house that we took shelter in. They surrounded the house and shot at it. It was as if the people who owned the house were going to get killed on account of us. The Americans knew that we were in the area, and they fired on us. ■



CPJ/Elisabeth Witchel

Pierre Elisem gets some comfort from listening to the radio in his hospital bed.

Lucky to Be Alive

When a Haitian journalist was left for dead after an attack by government supporters, heroic efforts were made to save him.

By Elisabeth Witchel
with reporting by Jean Roland Chery

Pierre Elisem cannot feed himself. On a good day, he can raise one leg a foot off the bed where he must stay, except for the few hours a day he is able to sit upright in a chair. His lively eyes dart back and forth when talking, but his head remains immobile. When he speaks he stops occasionally, in pain or in a sweat-inducing effort to move an

*As CPJ's journalist assistance coordinator, **Elisabeth Witchel** helps journalists worldwide facing immediate danger. She and CPJ Americas Program Coordinator Carlos Lauría helped arrange Pierre Elisem's evacuation from Haiti in February. **Jean Roland Chery** was a reporter at the Port-au-Prince-based station Radio Haïti-Inter for 12 years. He now lives in New York.*

arm to a more comfortable position. Usually this attempt fails, and an attendant must move it for him. A large, still-tender scar bulges from his neck. Despite his condition, Pierre Elisem is a lucky man.

By all accounts, Elisem, a radio journalist from northern Haiti, should have died on February 21, when a rebellion swept across the country and members of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's Fanmi Lavalas party beat and shot Elisem twice in the neck. Instead, he lies in recovery in the neighboring Dominican Republic.

The 40-year-old father of four is a long way from where he was in 2000, when he founded Radio Hispagnola in the small northern town of Trou du Nord, 18 miles (29 kilometers) from his hometown of Cap-Haitien,

Haiti's second-largest city. "I decided to go to the countryside because people there needed news and information," says Elisem, who was also director and a program host at the station. In addition to broadcasting local and national news, Radio Hispagnola aired the opinions of callers. "I let the people call in and express different views. I was not working for any one group, just the population."

Members of local pro-Aristide organizations apparently felt otherwise and often accused him of working for the opposition. "They said my programs were against the government," says Elisem. In October 2003, he began receiving threats against him and his employees. In early December, he received an envelope with a bullet inside. Later that month,

armed Aristide loyalists attacked Radio Maxima, another news station in the region. “Every other journalist except Elisem left Cap-Haïtien,” recalls Pierre Claudel, a presenter for Radio Maxima who has since fled Haiti.

When Haiti’s escalating political crisis exploded into violence in September 2003 in the western port of Gonaïves, public information was a scarce commodity in northern Haiti. “People in the north didn’t know anything about what was happening in other towns in Haiti,” says Elisem. He broadcast national news received from the Port-au-Prince–based Radio Métropole, for whom he worked as a correspondent, incurring the wrath of local Fanmi Lavalas politicians and militias mobilized to support Aristide. Finally, in late January 2004, when friends warned him that armed men were looking for him, he left for the capital.

After spending several weeks in hiding in Port-au-Prince, Elisem ventured an ill-fated return to the north in late February. Arriving by plane in Cap-Haïtien, he picked up his car at his brother’s house, intending to drive to Trou du Nord. Sometime between noon and 1 p.m., while driving through the city with his 14-year-old son, a red car with six men cut him off. The men pointed rifles at



CPJ/Elisabeth Witchel

Three members of the Air Ambulance team that evacuated Pierre Elisem from Haiti: (from left) Dr. Porfirio Cabral, pilot Alejandro Reynoso, and security consultant Cristobal Perez-Siragusa.

down the road, they told him to stop the car, and they shot him twice in the neck.

Elisem keeps an even tone while recounting what happened to him, but when talking about his would-be assassins and their audacity, his voice rises. “I knew them. It was on the street. People saw but were afraid to do anything.” Elisem has named five of his assailants: Nahoum Marcelus, a Fanmi Lavalas national

had taken him. By this time, however, his assailants had learned their target was not dead and went to the hospital, presumably to finish the job. Fearing for his safety, medical staff hid Elisem in the only place they were sure the attackers would not think (or dare) to look—the maternity ward.

The next day, under the cover of rebel militias who had begun to encroach on Cap-Haïtien, Elisem was able to safely board a plane to Port-au-Prince. Later that same day, the rebels took Cap-Haïtien and all flights were suspended, according to Elisem’s brother Pierre Sadrace.

But conditions in the capital were less than hospitable. By then, the streets were full of government supporters manning barricades to fend off the nearing rebels. Many residents avoided leaving their homes. Meanwhile, Elisem’s physical condition was quickly deteriorating. Ariel Henri, Elisem’s doctor in Port-au-Prince, told CPJ at the time that he feared the journalist might not survive if he did not go to a hospital outside Haiti immediately. Canapé Vert, the only functioning hospital in

Fearing for his safety, medical staff hid Elisem in the only place they were sure the attackers would not think (or dare) to look—the maternity ward.

Elisem and began to strike him with their guns and fists. “I heard them say, ‘Let’s kill him now; no, let’s take him with us,’” Elisem recalls.

According to Elisem, four of the men got into his car and ordered him to drive while continuing to beat him. When he pleaded with the men not to beat him in front of his son, they had him stop the car and threw out his son. Then, a few blocks

assemblyman; Adonija Sévère, the mayor of Saint Raphael, a town near Cap-Haïtien; Richard Estimable and Shelo Magloire, regional representatives of the central government; and a man known locally as Beбето, the coach of the local soccer team. All five remain at large.

Miraculously, Elisem survived and awoke later that day in the hospital in Cap-Haïtien, where his family

Port-au-Prince, lacked the equipment needed to test and treat him and, like much of the city, suffered from frequent power outages.

CPJ and Radio Métropole Director Richard Widmaier set about making arrangements to airlift Elisem to a hospital in the Dominican Republic. But amid the violent uprising that had then reached the capital, no flights were going in or out of Haiti.

On February 27 at 7 a.m., pilot Alejandro Reynoso and doctors Porfirio Cabral and Synthia Pons de Cabral set off for Haiti from the Dominican Republic in a medically equipped Cessna 401. According to Cristobal Perez-Siragusa, a security consultant and director of Air Ambulance Transport International Link, the company that arranged for the medevac, the group made the early-morning start to ensure that the operation would be complete before any of the day's fighting broke out. But Reynoso says that when they neared Port-au-Prince, he received a call that the airport was closed. "They asked us to leave Haiti's airspace, but we decided to land anyway. We were the only plane at the airport," he says.

Once on the ground, the team still had to wait 40 minutes for the Red Cross caravan Widmaier had arranged to navigate dozens of police checkpoints and roadblocks between the hospital and the airport. During this time, Cabral says they heard gunfire in the distance and saw several small explosions. When they asked the one security guard at the airport what was happening, his somber, one-word response was: "Troubles."

Finally, the van carrying Elisem and a colleague from Radio Métropole arrived on the runway. Their plane was the last to take off from Port-au-Prince for several days, says Reynoso. That day rebels continued to close in on the city, and two days later, Aristide left Haiti.

The emergency evacuation team checked Elisem into the intensive care unit at Clínica Abreu, a private

hospital in Santo Domingo. But a week on the run with a bullet wound in his neck caused additional complications for Elisem. According to Clínica Abreu's medical report, he arrived delirious, suffering from a number of infections, including E coli. "When I learned of his condition and what he had been through, I did not think his chances would be very good," says Dr. Luis B. Rojas Grullón, president of the hospital.

But after spending one month there, Elisem's condition stabilized. Tests revealed that the bullet had passed through his neck without leaving any permanent neurological damage. Even the doctors at Clínica Abreu, who predict that Elisem may be able to walk again after several more weeks of intense physical therapy, are amazed. "It is very rare to escape that kind of wound with no spinal cord damage," says Dr. Manuel García Sugranes, Clínica Abreu's medical director, adding, "He is very lucky."

Elisem, though grateful to be alive, would perhaps disagree. For now, he must rely on family, friends, and medical staff for virtually every

need, and he faces at least a year of physical therapy. While doctors in the Dominican Republic think his prospects of recovery are good, they are certainly not assured. But Elisem says the worst thing for him is the fear he still lives with.

For Elisem and dozens of other Haitian journalists who have fled the country during the last few years due to threats from organizations linked to the Fanmi Lavalas party, Haiti's change of government does not mean it is safe to return. Though Aristide is gone, his supporters—many of whom are still armed and have terrorized journalists and others viewed as government critics—remain. "In Haiti, there is no justice," says Elisem, who has heard reports from friends back home that the men who shot him walk the streets openly. This gives him nightmares almost every night. "Sometimes I imagine they are behind me, coming to kill me."

But few who know Elisem are pessimistic. "He is a fighter. That is what I like about him," says Radio Métropole's Widmaier. "And I tell you, he is one lucky guy." ■



CPJ/Elisabeth Witchel

At the end of March, Pierre Elisem was released from the hospital and began outpatient physical therapy.



AP/Pavel Rahman

Riot police detain a Dhaka University student during a demonstration on March 3, 2004. Thousands of students had gathered to protest a recent knife attack on a professor.

Culture of Violence

*In a country marred by political corruption,
Bangladesh's journalists suffer for telling the truth.*

By Abi Wright

From his hospital bed in Bangladesh's smoggy capital, Dhaka, photographer Firoz Chowdhury tries to explain why he won't file any charges against the men who beat him up the day before.

"It's too dangerous. They are carrying arms. It's too risky for me."

Chowdhury, the chief photographer for the country's most popular daily, *Prothom Alo*, has 13 years' professional experience and covers the

politically violent demonstrations and strikes that frequently erupt on the streets of Dhaka. On March 3, he was beaten in the chest, back, shoulders, and legs by several members of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party's (BNP) student wing, the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), while covering a student protest on the Dhaka University campus.

Bangladesh, as Chowdhury can attest, is a place where crime, poli-

Abi Wright is CPJ's Asia program coordinator. The reporting in this story is based on a mission Wright and CPJ Executive Director Ann Cooper conducted to Bangladesh in March 2004 with Iqbal Athas, defense correspondent for Sri Lanka's The Sunday Times, and Andreas Harsono, managing editor of Indonesia's Pantau magazine.

tics, and violence all cross paths, making independent journalism in this country of 146 million people a very dangerous profession. Political officials routinely punish journalists who expose corruption by ordering political activist henchmen to beat them. In addition, a highly polarized political climate divides the country—and even journalists themselves—compounding the challenges they face.

For now, those challenges are unclear for Chowdhury as he grapples with the larger implications of his attack. He is in pain, and he speaks quietly as he describes how the students' peaceful demonstration against a recent knife attack on a professor turned violent after JCD activists began forcibly breaking up the crowd. Chowdhury's last photos before the JCD members turned on him show a young woman being beaten by police and a JCD activist kicking a group of protesters.

When they saw Chowdhury photographing them, the JCD members grabbed his digital camera and smashed it before beating him. Police and JCD leaders stood by and watched, according to Chowdhury. Several other journalists covering the protests were also beaten that day by JCD members and police.

This was not the first time Chowdhury had suffered violence at the hands of political activists. He says that what happened to him was a "normal and regular occurrence" for the press, and that JCD members at Dhaka University punched him in the face just last year. "We [journalists] are always targeted. The government covers up for them, and there is no punishment. They should be punished. The police knew that the JCD was going to attack."

Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, who, as home minister, was in charge of internal security at the time of the attack, has a different perspective. Chowdhury, who has since been reassigned to the Commerce Ministry,

believes that journalists who cover demonstrations do so at their own risk because police and other authorities cannot distinguish between the press and protesters. "The police are just doing their job," Chowdhury says. Local photographers disagree and say they are well known in town as journalists. According to the photographers, their cameras and equipment make them stand out in a crowd, and the JCD targets them to keep news of the group's violent attacks out of the press.

Dhaka University is in the center of the capital, and it is on the front lines of Bangladesh's turbulent political life. It is the frequent scene of rallies and clashes, which the press widely covers. The campus played a key role in Bangladesh's liberation war from Pakistan in 1971, when radical students fought the Pakistani army, which shelled the university and massacred many students and intellectuals in response.

Student support is considered to be such a priority for Bangladesh's political factions that both main par-

ties—the ruling BNP and the opposition Awami League (AL)—formed student wings and youth leagues dedicated to garnering student votes.

The student groups in turn utilize "street muscle" to enforce their will, both on campuses and in towns throughout the country, employing armed thugs and older political activists. According to Dr. Kamal Hossain, a leading lawyer, human rights activist, and one of the authors of Bangladesh's 1972 constitution, this practice dates back to the 1980s—and it has unfortunate consequences for the press.

"Young armed thugs, unemployed youth, were drafted for the purpose of manipulating elections, enhancing their power as they go along, serving their patrons and themselves, evolving into systematic extortion, even institutionalized extortion, because the police are getting a share, too," says Hossain. "The main targets of these groups are the journalists who expose this."

Among the targets is 25-year-old Hasan Jahid Tusher. As a master's student of journalism and the Dhaka University correspondent for the



AP/Pavel Rahman



AP/Pavel Rahman

Under the governments of both former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina (left) and current Prime Minister Khaleda Zia (right), violence against journalists in Bangladesh has continued with impunity.



AP/Bappy Khan

Family members of veteran journalist Manik Saha, who was killed by a homemade bomb in January 2004, mourn in his hometown of Khulna, 85 miles (136 kilometers) outside the capital, Dhaka.

English-language *The Daily Star*, Tusher used to live on campus and covers the lively political scene there, including the violent activities of the BNP's student wing, the JCD. On May 8, 2003, Tusher wrote about a group of JCD activists who had allegedly beaten a student for refusing to obey their orders.

him outside the dormitory. Students brought Tusher to a hospital, where he was treated for injuries to his shoulders, back, and arms.

The attack caused outrage on campus, but little was done to punish those responsible. Four of his assailants were expelled from the JCD but allowed to remain on cam-

Criminal organizations dominate the towns of rural Bangladesh and target the journalists who try to expose them.

After the story was published, Tusher says he began receiving threats from the group's leaders in his dormitory demanding that he stop writing about their activities on campus, but he continued reporting on the JCD. On the night of July 31, 2003, a group of 20 JCD activists ransacked Tusher's dorm room and beat him severely with iron rods and sticks before dragging him down three flights of stairs and leaving

pus. Although members of the Dhaka University Journalists' Association said that, based on his earlier threats against Tusher, the head of the dormitory's JCD unit, Tanjilur Rahman, was responsible for ordering the attack, Rahman was never punished. Tusher decided to move out of his dorm after the incident. "All the time on the campus we have to be careful about our movements, especially me," says Tusher. "Sometimes I feel

insecure and am afraid of the JCD and the people around them."

Two months after journalist Shafiul Haque Mithu was almost killed in a brutal attack, he is still in pain from the head and arm injuries inflicted on him by local BNP activists. Mithu, the local correspondent for the popular Bangla-language daily *Janakantha*, is from Pirojpur, a town 100 miles (160 kilometers) south of Dhaka in one of Bangladesh's infamous southwestern districts, which are known for violence against journalists and a lack of law and order.

One editor calls the area "the valley of death." Five journalists have been killed there in the last four years in retaliation for their reporting, including Manik Saha, a veteran journalist with 20 years' experience who was murdered in January 2004 by a homemade bomb in Khulna, a neighboring southwestern division.

Criminal organizations dominate the towns of rural Bangladesh and target the journalists who try to expose them, according to lawyer Hossain. "Local criminal networks with political bosses have institutionalized a structure of terror in the countryside," explains Hossain. "They are predatory groups, the more violent crime pays, and their patrons want more wealth."

In December 2003, Mithu reported a two-part series about a criminal gang in Pirojpur that was abusing and terrorizing the local Hindu minority community in an effort to take over their valuable lands. In the articles, Mithu detailed how the criminals, allegedly under the protection of local BNP officials, looted valuable fishponds and forcibly took over 85 acres of land from the Hindu community. When the local residents tried to resist, the criminals beat them severely.

After the first article ran on December 17, a group of BNP activists began following Mithu and threatening him. Local BNP members

of Parliament and political leaders denied the story and publicly denounced the journalist. They even formed a commission to prove that his reporting was false, says Mithu, but were unable to refute the evidence in his story.

When the second part of the series ran two weeks later, on December 28, the BNP activists made good on their threats. Mithu was attacked on his way home from the Pirojpur Press Club by a group of thugs, including local BNP activists, who trailed him and then ambushed him. The three assailants then tried to kill Mithu, beating him in the head repeatedly with pipes, knocking him unconscious, and breaking his right arm in several places. Fortunately, when local passersby heard his cries and came upon the scene, they saved Mithu. His assailants tried to flee, but one of them, a local thug known simply as Russell, was captured. Mithu has identified two other assailants in the group as BNP activists Chowra Kamal and Akram Ali Molla.

“There is a culture of protection and patronage for people who indulge in violence,” explains Hossain. “Police are prevented from taking action against them because they enjoy protection. Courageous journalists are among the leading targets, particularly journalists working outside the capital.”

Authorities arrested Russell and charged him with attempted murder in March 2004. Kamal and Molla were officially charged with attempted murder later that month, according to *The Daily Star*. But they remain at large and have not been arrested

even though they have been publicly sighted in the Pirojpur area at political meetings.

Mithu doubts that police will apprehend those responsible for the attack because local political leaders from the JCD, BNP, and the Islamic

Mithu to a hospital for treatment, but he still suffers from severe headaches and pain in his right arm, which has not yet been properly set. He is scheduled to travel to India for treatment on his arm in the coming months. Currently, he lives in Dhaka

Seven journalists received threatening notes, along with pieces of white cloth cut from a funeral shroud.

fundamentalist party Jammāt-i-Islami oversee the local police station and use the police as their “muscle,” according to Mithu.

After the attack, locals brought

with relatives because he says it is too risky back home in Pirojpur.

Even before he was attacked, Mithu says he was constantly under threat from BNP activists and Jammāt members because of his reporting. In July 2003, he was one of seven journalists in Pirojpur to receive anonymous death threats by mail. Pieces of white cloth cut from what appeared to be a funeral shroud were sent to the journalists with notes threatening them to stop reporting on criminal acts.

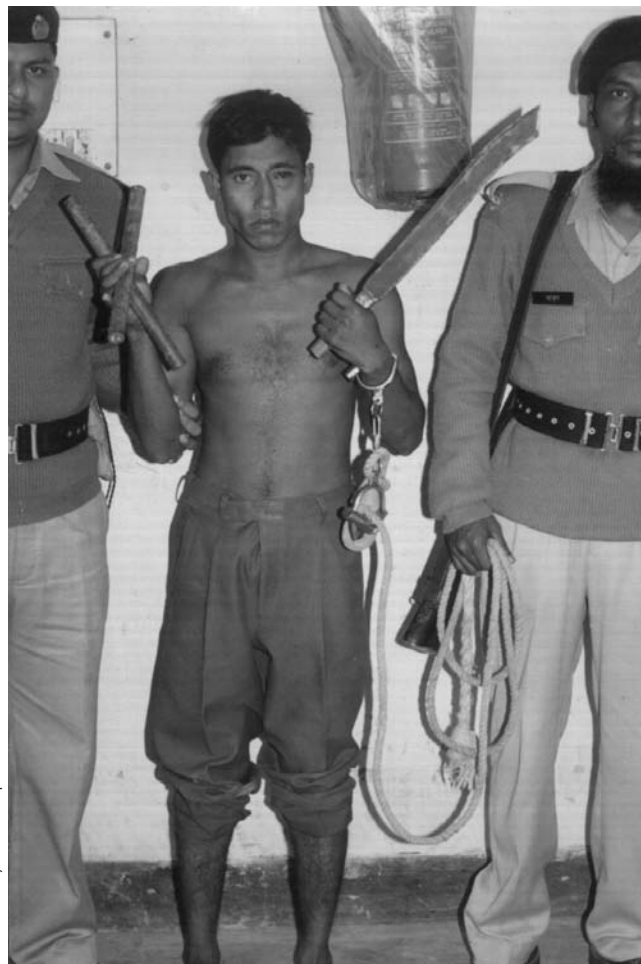


Photo courtesy Zahirul Haque Mithu

A local thug known simply as Russell poses for a mug shot after being captured and identified as one of the assailants who brutally beat journalist Shafiul Haque Mithu in December 2003.

The current climate of violence for the Bangladeshi press does not reflect its history, journalists say. According to *The Daily Star's* editor and publisher, Mahfuz Anam, during the colonial era, Bangladesh had one of the most outspoken, anticolonial presses in the region. Under the subsequent rule of Pakistan, from 1947 to 1971, the local Bangladeshi media carried strong anti-Pakistan coverage. The turning point for the press came in 1991, when the country held its first democratic elections after enduring a series of mili-

tary dictatorships and bloody coups from 1975 to 1990.

The BNP's slim victory in the 1991 election caused deep resentment among the AL leadership and engendered pronounced political divisions across the country. These tensions are responsible for much of the political violence against the media today, according to Anam. "The restoration of democracy was a springtime for the press." But since then, "there has been a failure of governance, and a blaming of the press for these shortcomings."

During the rule of AL leader Sheikh Hasina from 1996 to 2001, journalists in Bangladesh also suffered dozens of violent threats and physical attacks. In 1999, the *Janakantha* office in Dhaka had to be evacuated after an anti-tank mine was left in the lobby of the building. Although the mine was removed before it detonated, it could have flattened a city block if it had exploded, says Mohammed Masud, the paper's publisher. And in January 2001, wire service reporter Tipu Sultan was brutally beaten on the orders of AL parliamentarian Joynal Hazari. (See sidebar on this page.)

Although many popular Bangladeshi dailies in the capital, such as *The Daily Star*, *Prothom Alo*, and *Janakantha*, run critical articles and even political cartoons about the ruling BNP government on their front pages without direct or violent reprisal, independent dailies still feel pressure from the government, says Masud. In retaliation for critical reporting, *Janakantha* reporters have been denied access to government officials, the current government has withdrawn advertising money from the newspaper, and an angry mob attacked and tore down a wall outside Masud's home last summer.

In addition, the bitter rivalry between the two majority parties and their leaders, ruling BNP Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and opposition AL leader Sheikh Hasina, has con-

Justice Delayed

The case of Tipu Sultan

By Abi Wright

When journalist Tipu Sultan was brutally beaten and left for dead on the side of a road in January 2001, it quickly became clear who was responsible for the attack. According to Sultan, one of the assailants told him that Joynal Hazari, a Parliament member from the Awami League (AL), which controlled Parliament at that time, had ordered the beating in retaliation for Sultan's reporting on Hazari's many abuses of power.

But little was done to bring Hazari to justice. Despite the mounting evidence, then Prime Minister and AL leader Sheikh Hasina doubts the facts. "I am not 100 percent certain [that he is guilty]," she said in a recent interview. "Even in the Parliament, Hazari denied it."

In October 2001, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) unseated the AL. Before the vote, BNP leader Khaleda Zia promised to prosecute Sultan's attackers if elected. But more than three years later, both of the country's political factions have failed to resolve Sultan's case. And in the absence of any resolution, Sultan remains at risk, regularly receiving threats from



Bangladeshi journalist Tipu Sultan in Dhaka in June 2003, two-and-a-half years after he was brutally attacked

AP/Pavel Rahman

Hazari. It seems that in Bangladesh, it doesn't matter who is in power—violence against journalists remains acceptable.

Sultan's troubles began on the night of January 25, 2001, when a group of armed men kidnapped the journalist in Feni, in southeastern Bangladesh. The gang savagely beat him with iron rods and hockey sticks, breaking bones in his hands, arms, and legs. The assailants specifically maimed Sultan's right hand—his writing hand—and the beating left a gaping wound in his right arm. (See *Dangerous Assignments*, Summer 2001.)

According to Sultan, because the local police chief was known as "Hazari's man," police did not allow Sultan to file charges against Hazari immediately following the attack. Hazari's supporters, however, did file a false case charging rival political activists with orchestrating the assault. In September 2001, after Awami League leader Hasina had stepped down before national elections, Sultan was finally able to file a local police report against Hazari. But by then, Hazari had gone into hiding, reportedly in India.

After a 28-month investigation, Hazari and 12 associates were charged with attempted murder in absentia in April 2003. Hazari was formally indicted in October 2003, and the trial began in a local district court in Feni on November 5, 2003. Sultan testified against Hazari in December, but the legal proceedings were soon derailed when two of the accused men filed separate petitions in the High Court to quash Sultan's case. The court agreed to review their petitions on January 26, 2004, postponing the trial for six months.

Sultan appealed to Law Minister Moudud Ahmed for help in February, and in an interview with CPJ in March, Ahmed said the attorney general had already been instructed to submit an application for an expeditious hearing in Sultan's case.

Although Sultan is back at work as a reporter for *Prothom Alo*, the country's the largest Bangla-language daily, he is continually reminded of that horrible day three years ago. Hazari may be out of the country, but he is not far enough away to stop threatening the journalist and those associated with his case. Hazari called Sultan in August 2003 saying he would kill the journalist and his family unless he withdrew the case, according to Sultan. One of Sultan's key eyewitnesses, Bakhtiar Islam Munnah, the local correspondent for the daily *Ittefaq*, has also received threats from Hazari and was attacked twice last year. These attacks have made other witnesses "feel insecure," says Sultan.

And the lack of action from Bangladesh's current and previous administrations hasn't made things any better. Today, the case remains bogged down in legal delays, and only one of the 13 men accused in the attack is currently behind bars; six remain at large, including Hazari, and six of them were freed on bail. "We are doing everything we can for Tipu," says government minister Altaf Choudhury. But as long as Hazari remains free and Sultan's trial is postponed, Bangladeshi journalists remain at risk. ■

tributed to the growth of a culture of violence in Bangladesh. "We have seen an increasing dependence on criminal forces to thwart opponents and get votes. Known criminals are nominated for Parliament," says Anam, and that adversely affects the press's development. "Independent journalism was growing, while politics became more criminal."

Even the journalists themselves are divided in Bangladesh. All of the country's journalists' unions, from the national level to the local level, are split in two along party lines; there is a BNP-affiliated Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ), and an AL-affiliated BFUJ.

After the BNP retook power in 2001, a group of 27 journalists from the state-run news agency Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS) were summarily fired because they were considered to be affiliated with the AL. BSS soon hired 40 new people for the jobs and refused to rehire the 27 journalists even after a court ruled that they had been illegally fired and ordered their reinstatement. Many of the 27 journalists remain angry at the BNP. "This was an illegal termination, and a violation of normal procedure," says Haroon Habib, one of the dismissed journalists.

Although journalists in Bangladesh remain vulnerable because threats and attacks go unpunished, few in the government are willing to take responsibility. Prime Minister Zia told Parliament on March 17 that Bangladeshi journalists "enjoy full press freedom," and that when journalists are attacked, it is "for other local-level reasons, and not for journalism."

None of this comforts photographer Chowdhury. From his hospital bed in a cramped room, he sounds resigned to his fate as a journalist in Bangladesh. "In this climate, the political situation will get worse again," he sighs, "and I'll go out and cover what's happening again, and be at risk again." ■

Real Courage

by Ann Cooper

When we visited her headquarters in Bangladesh's capital, Dhaka, in early March, Sheikh Hasina, leader of the country's opposition Awami League (AL), handed our CPJ delegation a long list of press freedom abuses. On top was the gruesome photo of journalist Manik Chandra Saha's decapitated corpse, taken shortly after someone tossed a homemade bomb at him in January.

A day after our talks with the Awami League, we met with Bangladesh's information minister, where another list awaited us. This one gave the government's version of the press freedom story, a litany of abuses committed from 1996 to 2001, the period of AL rule until its election defeat by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

Taken together, the AL and BNP lists are testimony to the dangers encountered by Bangladeshi journalists, who are just doing their jobs. The lists also support one of the conclusions stated by CPJ's delegation at the end of its visit: "It takes real courage to be a journalist in Bangladesh."

But the two lists also reveal another hard reality in this deeply politicized country. The BNP points to press freedom abuses committed during the AL's tenure in office, but not a single incident since the BNP took power in 2001. Meanwhile, the AL's document would have the public believe that threats and violence against journalists began only in 2001, under BNP rule.

State media play the same political game. After sitting through a sometimes contentious meeting between CPJ and officials from the Bangladeshi Information Ministry, a reporter for the government's mouthpiece news agency wrote about the information minister's claim that, "We do highly respect the right of expression and free flow of information." Missing from the report was any mention of CPJ's detailed research presented to the minister documenting that killings, beatings, threats, and harassment of the media are commonplace in Bangladesh, regardless of which party is in power.

State media also ignored CPJ's protests against the government's heavy surveillance of our delegation's movements, including tailing us to nearly every meeting and eavesdropping on conversations with journalists who met us at our hotel. A reporter from a privately owned newspaper who phoned to confirm details of the government's surveillance of CPJ revealed that, "They've done that to me, too." His paper and others reported at length on CPJ's findings and our call for vigorous investigations and prosecutions of all those who murder, assault, or threaten journalists in Bangladesh.

But despite these few feisty, independent media out-

lets, deep and bitter divisions between Bangladesh's two main political parties permeate institutions throughout the country. These include the courts and even the media and the unions that represent journalists.

In 2002, in a decision widely viewed as orchestrated by the BNP government, a Bangladeshi court ordered the private Ekushey Television (ETV) off the air for technical violations in its license application. ETV provided viewers with popular and professional news and public affairs programming, but the government refused to approve its application to renew broadcasting. ETV employees say it looks unlikely that they will go back on the air as long as the BNP remains in power.

Some journalists in Bangladesh have protested the blatantly political silencing of ETV. But not Gias Kamal Chowdhury, president of the Dhaka Union of Journalists.

Chowdhury was a co-sponsor of the complaint that led to the court-ordered shutdown. When our delegation met with him, we asked why a journalist—particularly the head of a professional union—would want to see the closing of an independent media outlet admired for its professionalism. Chowdhury says that while he is a journalist, he is also a citizen of Bangladesh and cannot countenance a TV station operating with a flawed application.

The politics that keep ETV off the air also thwart justice in the dozens of cases of assaults on Bangladeshi journalists. The government's failure to prosecute these crimes only encourages more, and bolder, attacks.

Particularly shocking was last January's assassination of Manik Saha, whose tough reporting helped his readers understand the sinister web of corrupt politics and organized crime in southwestern Bangladesh. That region is notorious for its crime, and young journalists at provincial newspapers there are among the very few brave enough to investigate the mafia-like operations.

"We know the names of all the godfathers because of them," says lawyer Kamal Hussein, referring to the small band of provincial journalists willing to publicly name those criminals. Hussein has defended some of Bangladesh's courageous journalists, and he tells CPJ that what is needed most to protect them are credible, independent investigations of crimes against the press.

Manik Saha's assassination "is clearly a message, because he was kind of the dean of all these courageous journalists," says Hussein. Without justice in the case of Saha and others, predicts Hussein, investigative journalism in Bangladesh could become endangered, or even disappear. ■

Old Habits

Russia's security service is acting more and more like its Soviet predecessor when it comes to harassing journalists and media outlets.

By Nathan Hodge

Aleksandr Podrabinek sits in his cramped office in central Moscow. A small bank of computer equipment hums against a nearby wall. This is where he runs Prima News (www.prima-news.ru), an online news site that focuses on human rights.

With his black turtle-neck sweater, neatly trimmed beard, and thinning hair, the 50-year-old looks dressed for a poetry reading. He puts some water on for tea, lights a cigarette, and produces the Xerox copy of a single, handwritten page—a police report signed by Junior Sgt. S.E. Budrevich.

According to the report, on December 29, 2003, Sergeant Budrevich, who was guarding a police checkpoint outside Moscow, stopped a vehicle as part of an operation dubbed “Anti-Terror Whirlwind.” The

Nathan Hodge, a spring 2004 Pew fellow in international journalism, traveled to Russia from late February to early April.

CPI/Nathan Hodge

vehicle contained 4,376 copies of a book, titled *FSB Vzryvaet Rossiyu* (The FSB Blows up Russia, which was published in English as *Blowing up Russia: Terror from Within*), by émigré historian Yuri Felshtinsky and former FSB officer Aleksandr Litvinenko. Prima

had ordered the books from Giness, a company based in the northwestern Russian city of Pskov. Podrabinek, who has posted the book's complete text on Prima's Web site, had planned to sell copies to other Russian book distributors.



Aleksandr Podrabinek edits Prima from his home office in Moscow.

In the report, Budrevich wrote that “copies of a publication were discovered that in our view contained a hidden political agenda.” He immediately alerted the FSB—Russia’s state security service, the successor to the KGB—which promptly seized the entire shipment of books.

Unlike the KGB, the FSB is not supposed to be in the business of seizing critical literature. But increasingly, the agency is making it clear—to Russian and foreign journalists alike—that certain topics are off-limits. And this is not an isolated incident. In fact, many journalists and human rights advocates in Russia see a worrying trend of FSB interference, and although there’s no sign of it yet, they fear that this could lead to a revival of old habits of self-censorship among the press.

Among the taboo topics, says Leonid Velekhov, deputy editor of the investigative monthly *Sovershenno Sekretno*, is a bomb scare that gripped Russia in the fall of 1999—

convicted in absentia by a Russian court in June 2002 of abuse of office and now lives in exile in the United Kingdom. And second, as is pointed out in the book, at the time of the bombings, Vladimir Putin, who was head of the FSB, had just been chosen in August 1999 to serve as Russian President Boris Yeltsin’s prime minister. Four months later, Yeltsin resigned, making Putin president and allowing him to ride to power on a get-tough-with-Chechnya campaign.

On January 28, 2004, one month after the books were confiscated, Podrabinek was summoned to Lefortovo Prison in Moscow for about two hours of questioning by the FSB about his contract with Guinness. During the interview, Podrabinek, who says he refused to answer any questions, tried to find out why the books had been taken. He says the FSB told him that, in the summer of 2003, a criminal investigation had been opened over the divulging of state secrets in *Blowing up Russia*, as well as in

menting the abuse of Soviet psychiatry (published in the West under the title *Punitive Medicine*). In 1978, he was convicted of anti-Soviet activities and sentenced to five years’ exile in northeastern Siberia. In 1980, he was sentenced to an additional three-and-a-half years in a prison camp for the same offense after several of his articles were published abroad.

After his release and subsequent “rehabilitation” under the glasnost-era amnesty of political prisoners, Podrabinek continued writing and publishing. In 1987, he founded *Ekspres Khronika* (Express Chronicle), a crusading weekly newspaper that focused on human rights and social issues.

Ekspres Khronika folded in 2000 for financial reasons, and since then, Podrabinek has been working on Prima News and running a book kiosk in Moscow’s Pushkin Square. But this latest incident with the FSB has him concerned. “It wouldn’t have been illegal if it was based on some court order,” he says. “But in order to get that court decision you need some kind of legal basis. And there isn’t one in this case. They’re doing it just like they did in Soviet times: The KGB shows up and takes away the books, simple as that.”

But it’s not just books that the FSB is going after. In October 2003, a group of human rights organizations, including the Moscow Helsinki Group, the Russian PEN Center, and the Andrei Sakharov Museum, organized a Chechen film festival, following similar ones that had been held in the United States, Japan, and the United Kingdom. But on the eve of the festival that was to take place in Moscow, the manager of Kino Center na Presne, where the event was to occur, informed the organizers that they would not be able to show the films. One of the movies, a French documentary titled “The Assassination of Russia,” focused on one of the apartment bombings; others investigated the FSB’s role in the Chechen war.

Security agents promptly seized the entire shipment of books, which were deemed to contain “a hidden political agenda.”

and this is precisely what the book was about. Based on contemporary press accounts, official documents, and insider knowledge, *Blowing up Russia* centers around a conspiracy theory that the FSB was involved in a string of bombing attacks that leveled apartment buildings across Russia, and that these bombings, which Russian authorities blamed on Chechen separatists, were used to galvanize public support for the invasion of Chechnya, a region that had enjoyed de facto independence from Moscow following the humiliating withdrawal of Russian forces in 1996.

The book is all the more damning for two reasons. First, its co-author, Litvinenko, a former FSB agent, was

another book by Litvinenko. No individual, however, had been charged.

“They said there were at the time no suspects in the case,” Podrabinek recounts. “Which was funny, because the authors of the books were well known.” In fact, excerpts from the book were available in Russia and had been published in the August 27, 2001, issue of *Novaya Gazeta*, a respected political weekly.

The FSB did not return requests for comment.

Podrabinek is no stranger to a public fight with authorities. During the Soviet era, he was imprisoned and exiled for dissident activities, including publishing a samizdat book docu-

Yuri Samodurov, director of the Andrei Sakharov Museum, says he has no direct evidence that the FSB pressured the theater manager to pull out, but he surmises that the agency may have acted behind the scenes. “My hypothesis is based on my discussions with Kino Center, insofar as when I asked them what films they

had an objection to, they named the ones that had to do with the affairs of the FSB,” says Samodurov.

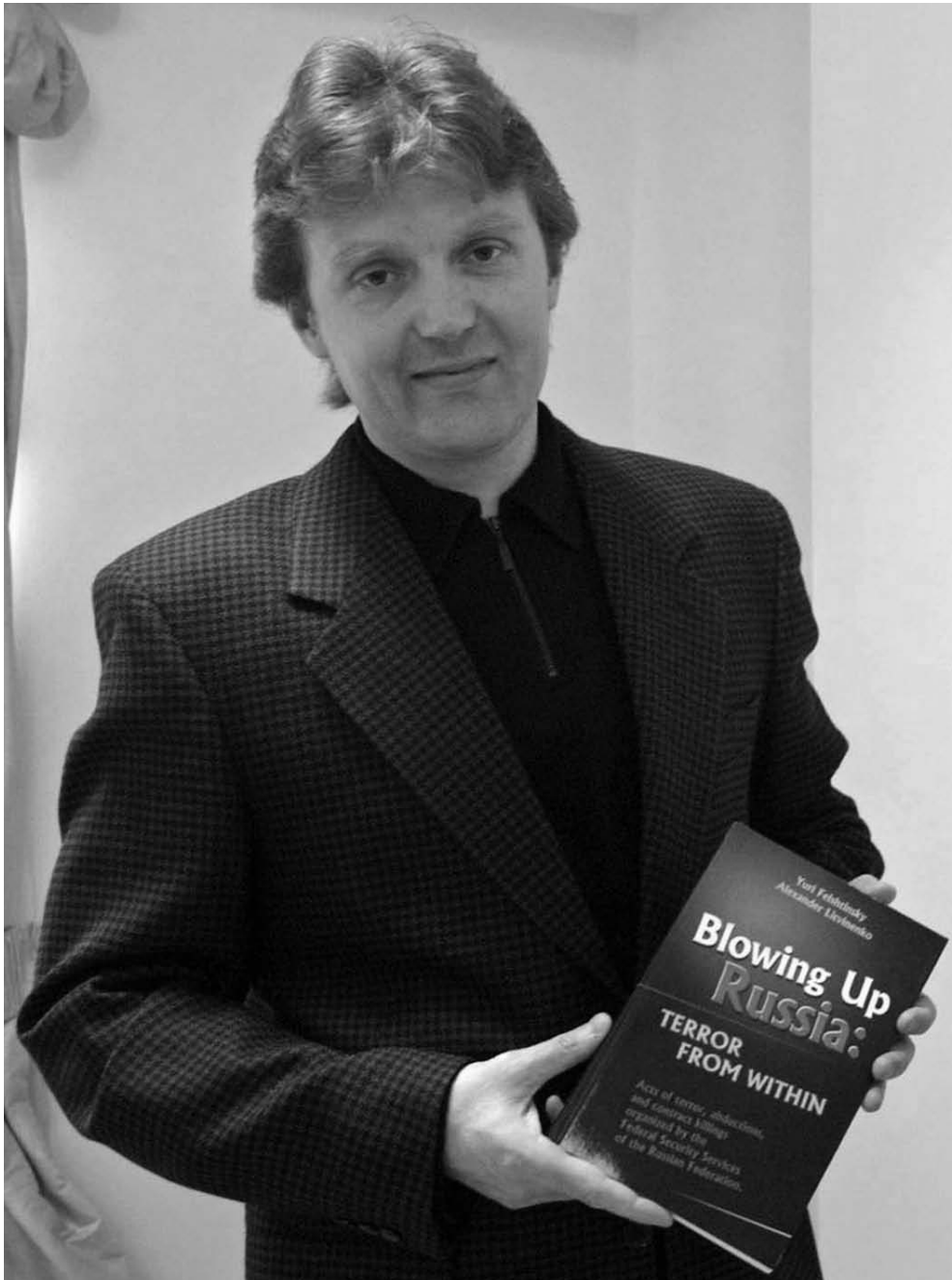
Three months later, on January 29, 2004, FSB agents raided the offices of the muckraking weekly *Versiya* and confiscated the remaining copies of a September 2003 issue of the newspaper that contained an article about

the technical specifications of a new class of submarine, one of which was supposedly operating near the nuclear submarine Kursk when it sank in August 2000, much to the embarrassment of the Putin administration. According to the statement of an unnamed FSB official, quoted by the news agency RIA-Novosti, the issue was confiscated because it allegedly disclosed state secrets. However, Andrey Soldatov, *Versiya’s* national security editor, has said that the article was based on publicly available information.

Leaning back in his chair among the shelves that are overflowing with books and papers, Podrabinek contemplates the fact that his book shipment remains in FSB custody. Asked what he thinks will happen with them, he shrugs, “What’ll happen tomorrow? No one knows. ... If everything here were done on the basis of law, then we would be able to say.”

He says he believes that the FSB launched the criminal case as an excuse to further intimidate those who cover the FSB’s activities, but that officials won’t bring it to trial.

Nonetheless, he definitely sees a worrying trend of FSB harassment and wonders about the future of press freedom in Russia. “There’s no official censorship,” he says. “None at all. But that internal censor lives on inside each editor, who remembers Soviet times and knows that if he doesn’t do what he’s supposed to, then they can put him away.” ■



AP/Alister Fuller

Aleksandr Litvinenko (above), a former FSB officer, co-authored *Blowing up Russia: Terror from Within* with émigré historian Yuri Felshtinsky.

The People's Radio

A Burundian journalist uses his radio station to bridge the ethnic gap.

By Aloys Niyoyita

The offices of Radio Publique Africaine (RPA), located in Burundi's capital, Bujumbura, look like those of any other station in this small central African country of 6.8 million. But as the staff convenes for its morning meeting to discuss the day's news, something is different. The editorial team is largely composed of former Tutsi soldiers and Hutu rebels. They are holding pencils and paper in their hands, not the guns and bullets some used to kill each other while fighting in one of Africa's bloodiest, most intractable ethnic conflicts.

Since Burundi's independence in 1962, tension between the nation's two main ethnic groups, the Hutus and the Tutsis, has run high. More than 30 years later, that tension became full-fledged war in 1993, when Tutsi soldiers assassinated Burundi's first democratically

Aloys Niyoyita is a journalist and producer at Studio Ijambo, which is owned by Search for Common Ground, a U.S. nongovernmental organization. Studio Ijambo produces radio programs that help build peace and reconciliation in Burundi. Niyoyita is also The Associated Press correspondent in Burundi.



A view of the building housing Radio Publique Africaine's offices in Bujumbura.

Aloys Batungwanayo

elected president, a member of the Hutu majority. The fighting that followed has left at least 300,000 people dead, most of them civilians.

But journalist Alexis Sinduhije, RPA's founder, is working to overcome that legacy of ethnic violence. At RPA, half of its 35 journalists are former government soldiers, Tutsi militiamen, or Hutu rebels who have learned journalism on the job. "By putting these people together," explains Sinduhije, "I wanted to humanize relations between the ethnic groups in Burundi and set an

example of former enemies working together to build peace."

One RPA reporter who used to fight with a Hutu rebel group admits that he was "completely overwhelmed" when he first came to work at RPA. "But now," he says, "I am happy to be helping build my country by holding a microphone out to people instead of throwing bombs at them."

I always dreamed of starting a radio station that was closer to the people, that would tell authorities about the concerns of ordinary

people and force our leaders to be accountable,” says Sinduhije, who was once a journalist at the state radio broadcaster, Radio Télévision Nationale du Burundi (RTNB). He resigned in 1994, when RTNB was still the only radio station in the country, “because I was disappointed in my colleagues,” he explains. “They treated [war] deaths differently according to whether or not the dead were from their own ethnic group. For me, that was not journalism, but the worst kind of fanaticism.”

After he left RTNB, Sinduhije, a former fellow at Harvard University, began a seven-year struggle to get RPA on the air. He says donors were reluctant to support his project, partly because of the incendiary role that some stations had played in the 1994 genocide in neighboring Rwanda, where 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were massacred during three months of ethnic fighting. In December 2003, several Rwandan media owners

were convicted by a U.N. tribunal of inciting the genocide. But Sinduhije finally raised enough support, notably seed money from the U.S.-based Ford Foundation, and in March 2001, RPA began broadcasting. The reaction has been extremely positive.

RPA’s listeners have nicknamed the station “Ijwi ry’abanyagihugu,” or “Voice of the People”—and with good

ing. But Calinie Kambiri, an aid worker from Rutana, a small town some 120 miles (200 kilometers) southeast of Bujumbura, thinks that is changing. In the last four years, she says, her province has become less isolated, due partly to RPA’s efforts to reach out to people in rural areas.

She says that because the director of a local water and electricity

Every morning, former Tutsi soldiers and militiamen sit with former Hutu rebels on the same editorial team.

reason. RPA Editor-in-Chief Jean Paul Ndayizeye says that, thanks to his team’s background and experiences, “My journalists speak a language that is easily comprehensible to people in the rural communities.”

“Far from the capital, far from development,” goes a Burundian say-

company was forced to answer questions on air from callers in September 2002, they eventually got water and electricity. Farmer Justine Ndiokubwayo lives in Mbare, a small village 11 miles (18 kilometers) northeast of Bujumbura that has seen frequent fighting

between government troops and Hutu rebels. She also appreciates RPA, which she sees as her community’s station, a place “where we can talk about our lives and our daily suffering,” says Ndiokubwayo.

However, RPA has been criticized for employing young people and training them on the job. Jean de Dieu Ndikumana, a civil servant who lives in Bujumbura, thinks RPA lacks professionalism and commits “too many professional errors” by reporting on such issues as spousal abuse or employers who refuse to pay their domestic staff. “Sometimes you get the impression that



Aloys Batungwanayo

RPA journalists listen to interviews before editing them for the midday newscast.

RPA is trying to invade people's private lives," he says. "I don't think that's the kind of news that people need to reach peace and reconciliation."

Sinduhije disagrees. He recounts how, in the early days, RPA was mocked for leading a news bulletin with a story about bosses who were not paying their domestic staff. "This was the first time that people of that category [domestic staff] could go on air in Burundi," he says. "Up to then,

especially in retaliation for the station's investigation into the November 2001 murder of World Health Organization representative Dr. Kassy Manlan, whose killing many believe was linked to the embezzlement of development funds by a senior politician. Although police made several arrests after the killing, RPA alleged that the real culprits remained at large. In May 2002, authorities tried to ban RPA from investigating the mur-

member of his house staff was murdered in an April 2003 attack that he believes targeted him.

RPA has also been punished for covering the civil war. In September 2003, the communications minister closed RPA after it aired an interview with Pasteur Habimana, a spokesman from the rebel National Liberation Front. Three days earlier, the government had shuttered another station, Radio Isanganiro, accusing it of endangering national security for airing a debate that featured Habimana.

Three other private radio stations, including RPA, announced that they would not broadcast any government news or statements as long as Radio Isanganiro remained closed. Three days later, the government ordered RPA shuttered for an indefinite period after it interviewed Habimana about Radio Isanganiro's closure. However, the ban was soon lifted in a move attributed largely to public pressure.

New Communications Minister Onesime Nduwimana has said that he thinks RPA did good work in the Manlan murder investigation, and that his predecessor's suspension of RPA in September 2003 was "harsh and sudden." But he also argues that RPA should not

have interviewed a rebel leader on a sensitive subject in a war situation. "I think that the radio station went too far," he has said.

But Sinduhije says he will go as far as he needs to ensure that his station can air news for the rural community he has long dreamed of serving and foster peace and dialogue in this ethnically divided country. "I think it was very positive to talk to the rebels," he says, "not to let them spout propaganda but to hold them accountable too.... I don't think we went too far; it was very important." ■



Aloys Batungwanayo

Alexis Sinduhije, Radio Publique Africaine's founder

radio was for the president and some influential people. Some of the elite laughed at us, and some of them got angry, saying it was dangerous giving the microphone to such people." He believes that perception has now changed, thanks to RPA. "For us, what counted was to point out that these people's rights were being violated," says Sinduhije. "I am happy because domestic staff ended up creating their own association to defend their rights."

Sinduhije says that he and his staff have been harassed frequently,

der, saying that media were now prohibited from discussing criminal cases still under investigation.

RPA nevertheless continued to air interviews with the victim's family and lawyers involved in the case. In October 2003, five new suspects were arrested, including senior figures in the Burundian security services who had been on the original committee appointed to investigate the murder. According to local journalists, RPA's reporting was instrumental in those arrests. Sinduhije says he received death threats during that time and did not feel safe. A

Missing

The mysterious abduction of a Chechen journalist haunts his colleagues.

By Alex Lupis

On July 6, 2003, Ali Astamirov, a stringer for Agence France-Presse (AFP), had just returned home from visiting a sick relative when the phone rang. An official from the local branch of the Federal Security Service (FSB) in Nazran, the capital of Ingushetia, a southern Russian republic, wanted to talk with him and his friend Aslanbek Dadaev, a local journalist with the U.S. government-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL).

The next day, Astamirov and Dadaev met the FSB official at a café in Nazran. “For about two hours ... [we] talked about some general things about life, nothing about our work,” says Dadaev. “After the meeting, we were driving home and stopped at a gas station when suddenly, a white

clavas and brandished Kalashnikovs. In a matter of seconds, the three men grabbed the journalists’ car keys, thoroughly searched their car and disabled its engine, confiscated their mobile phones, pulled Astamirov into the white car, and drove off toward Chechnya, a Russian republic that borders Ingushetia.

Since then, no one has heard from the 34-year-old journalist. No one has contacted AFP or Astamirov’s family demanding ransom for him. However, two-and-a-half weeks after the abduction, a source close to the FSB in Ingushetia that AFP described as “reliable” told the news agency that Astamirov was “alive and currently in Chechnya” without providing additional information. This source has not spoken to AFP since.



Agence France-Presse

On July 7, 2003, Ali Astamirov, a Chechen stringer for Agence France-Presse, was abducted by three men. His whereabouts remain unknown.

the Kremlin, the Foreign Ministry, and Kadyrov, but the news agency has received no substantive replies.

Ingushetia has remained relatively insulated from the conflict that has raged in neighboring Chechnya during the last decade. The leadership of the republic, which has close ethnic and cultural ties to Chechnya, has been critical of the Kremlin’s militaristic policies in Chechnya and opened its territory to tens of thousands of Chechen refugees fleeing the fighting.

Astamirov, an ethnic Chechen, was one of those refugees. He had

In broad daylight, three armed men grabbed the journalist and drove off toward Chechnya.

[car] without license plates drove up in front of us and cut us off.”

In broad daylight, three men jumped out of the car—one carried a pistol and the two others wore bala-

Alex Lupis is CPJ’s program coordinator for Europe and Central Asia. Lupis reported this story while on a recent trip to Russia.

Russian authorities were quick to insist that the abduction was not political or related to Astamirov’s work. “There is no link at all ... the kidnapers are people who do this as a business,” Akhmad Kadyrov, the top pro-Moscow official in Chechnya, told AFP a week after the abduction.

AFP has continued to raise the issue of Astamirov’s kidnapping with

worked as a journalist for Grozny TV and as a stringer for Western TV companies during the first Chechen war in the mid 1990s. Astamirov fled Chechnya in 1999, at the beginning of the second war, when Russian forces intensified their practice of abducting and torturing Chechen males suspected of collaboration with the rebels. While his wife and two children remained in Chechnya, Astamirov settled in Nazran and began working as a stringer for AFP in 2001.

However, security conditions began deteriorating throughout Ingushetia in 2002, when the Kremlin orchestrated the electoral victory of former FSB officer Murat Zyazikov in the republic's presidential elections.

Muradov, a Chechen journalist who also fled from Chechnya to Nazran in 1999 and then went to Moscow in 2001 after receiving threatening phone calls and anonymous death threats in Nazran. Astamirov "felt he was in a dangerous situation and wanted some advice from me," says Muradov, a 2003 CPJ International Press Freedom awardee who currently reports on Chechnya from Moscow for the Russian independent daily *Kommersant*. "Now I regret that I didn't specifically tell him to leave," says Muradov.

Although the abduction was barely reported in the Russian press, Astamirov's disappearance continues to haunt journalists reporting on the war in Chechnya.

ministry sat on the application for months. AFP's Moscow Bureau Chief Michael Viattu happened to be visiting the Foreign Ministry Press Office on the morning of Astamirov's abduction to conduct other business and decided to inquire about the status of the application. "I was told, 'We don't like his story and it's final, he won't get his accreditation,'" says Viattu. "When I asked why not, I was told, 'The FSB doesn't agree.'"

"It is a strange coincidence," adds Viattu. "We have no proof, but it was pretty clear that he was disliked by the Russian security services."

Nearly a year after the abduction, Russian officials in Moscow, Nazran, and the Chechen capital, Grozny, say they believe that Chechen rebels abducted Astamirov. But independent journalists and human rights activists point out that Astamirov's reporting would have angered only the Kremlin. They also suspect that the FSB or Kadyrov's personal security service was behind the abduction.

"He wrote about the human rights abuses that Russian soldiers and security services committed against Chechens, so by his work ... he could only have bothered the Russian security services," says Usam Basaev, a Nazran-based representative of the Russian human rights organization Memorial. "There is no evidence, but, you know, we've been working here for a while," adds Basaev, who believes that Astamirov's disappearance is a "classic abduction" by Russian security services. "Astamirov was under surveillance for some time ... people had broken into his home. The rebels don't work like this ... it wasn't the rebels."

Several journalists say that Astamirov may have been abducted because of his willingness to report on comments made by Aslan Maskhadov, a Chechen rebel leader who was elected president of Chechnya in 1996 and ousted from office by Russian forces in 1999. They say that Maskhadov supporters sometimes

Russian officials say that Chechen rebels abducted Astamirov, but independent journalists and human rights activists point out that Astamirov's reporting would have angered only the Kremlin and its allies in Chechnya.

Reports of mysterious abductions followed Zyazikov's decision to open the republic to Russian soldiers and security services hunting for Chechen rebels hiding in Ingushetia.

Reflecting the Kremlin's growing sensitivity to international media coverage and diplomatic scrutiny of the conflict in Chechnya, in early 2003, police and FSB officials frequently detained and questioned Astamirov about his reports on human rights abuses committed against Chechen refugees by Russian authorities. That spring, Astamirov began receiving more and more anonymous threatening phone calls. After several unannounced visits by unidentified men—sometimes in military uniforms—Astamirov began sleeping at different locations.

A month prior to his abduction, Astamirov sought advice from Musa

While the Foreign Ministry insists that Russian authorities had nothing to do with Astamirov's abduction, many journalists speculate that the Kremlin may have been involved because of the Foreign Ministry's sudden interest at the time in a rarely enforced rule requiring Russian citizens working for foreign media to acquire accreditation from its press office. At a press conference three days after Astamirov's disappearance, ministry spokesman Alexander Yakovenko noted that the journalist was working without accreditation, the Russian state news agency RIA Novosti reported.

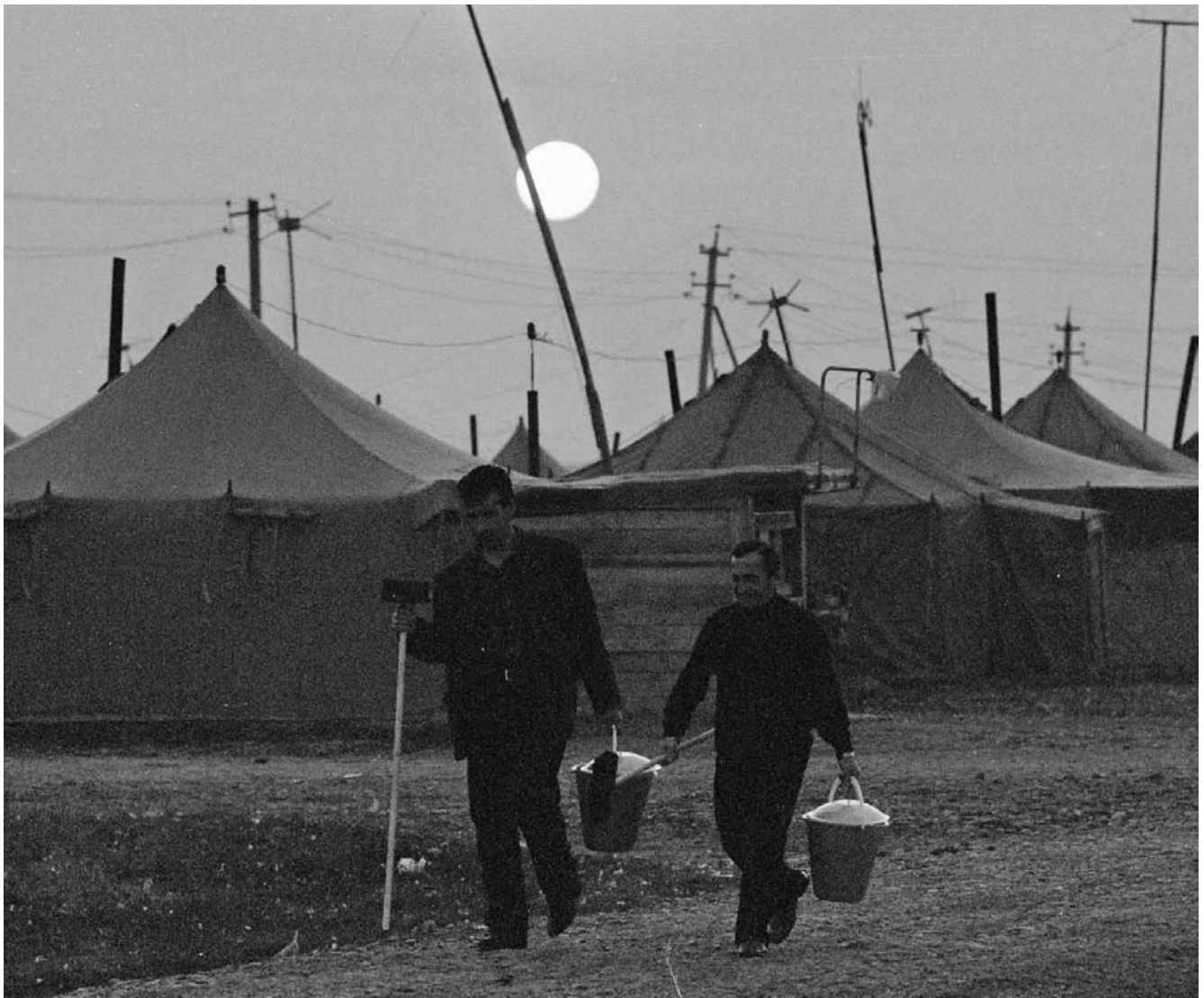
Yakovenko failed to note, however, that the AFP bureau in Moscow had applied for Astamirov's accreditation in December 2002 after the journalist received several anonymous death threats, and that the

make nighttime drops into the mailboxes of independent journalists working in Nazran. These packages contain videocassettes with clips of the rebel leader making statements. Russian authorities hate when Maskhadov is quoted in the press. In fact, during the last several years, Russia's Media Ministry has issued a series of official and unofficial warnings to Russian media outlets telling them not to publish Maskhadov's comments. Tracking down the sources of these cassettes and preventing them from getting into the international media has been of enormous interest to the FSB.

Andrei Babitsky, an RFE/RL journalist who was abducted by Russian authorities in Chechnya in 2000 because of his reporting on abuses committed by Russian forces, says that Astamirov was "active in his contacts with the rebels." Babitsky thinks that Kadyrov is responsible for Astamirov's abduction. "Nothing gets Kadyrov's guys more angry than a journalist who has contacts with Maskhadov," adds Babitsky.

When confronted with these allegations, Kadyrov's press officer in Grozny, Abdul-Bek Bakhaev, replies, "No comment." He says the abduction was "pure banditry."

Viattu, AFP's Moscow bureau chief, says that Astamirov's abduction has sent a chill through both the Russian and international press corps. Before, notes Viattu, the foreign press got away with more than their Russian counterparts in terms of quoting people like Maskhadov and providing an objective and balanced account of news about the conflict. Adds Viattu: "Astamirov was very precious to us because 99 percent of the information we get [about Chechnya] is heavy government propaganda, and Ali was providing additional elements of information." ■



AP/Musa Sadiyayev

One of many camps for Chechen refugees who have fled their war-torn republic for neighboring Ingushetia

The Silence of Quiet Diplomacy

Zimbabwe's beleaguered press has found little support from neighboring South Africa.

By **Julia Crawford**

For years, Zimbabwe's independent media have been fighting a government campaign of harassment, intimidation, and censorship designed to silence all criticism. The situation reached a climax in February 2004, when the country's Supreme Court upheld legislation criminalizing the practice of journalism without a government license. *The Daily News*, one of the few remaining voices of dissent in this repressed nation, closed for fear its journalists would be arrested.

tion party Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) four years ago, Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe has cracked down on all forms of criticism against his government. This repression has been directed particularly at trade unions and the private press. After Mugabe's contested re-election in March 2002, the situation worsened when the government acquired a new weapon: the badly misnamed Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), which allows a government-

that police finally obeyed an order to leave. *The Daily News* was back on the streets the next day, only to be closed two weeks later by a February 5 Supreme Court decision upholding AIPPA.

Meanwhile, individual editors, journalists, and photographers from the two remaining independent papers, *The Standard* and *Independent* weeklies, are subject to constant harassment. Zimbabwe's independent journalists have fought bravely, but they say that Mugabe has stacked the courts—and the future—against them.

In response, Zimbabwean journalists have tried to raise international awareness of their situation, especially in southern Africa. But they have been disappointed with the results, especially the deafening silence from their powerful neighbor, South Africa, whose President Mbeki, they believe, is one of the few people who could influence Mugabe. But despite pressure from both the Zimbabwean media and the press in his own country, Mbeki has remained defiantly supportive of Mugabe and pressed ahead with his policy of quiet diplomacy with Zimbabwe.

Basildon Peta, an independent Zimbabwean journalist who fled the country to South Africa in February 2002, is baffled at Mbeki's refusal to take a stand against Mugabe's repression when, he says, "Zimbabweans

The reasons behind President Mbeki's inaction toward Zimbabwe may have more to do with pleasing his own electorate than anything else.

Zimbabwe's journalists turned to the outside world, and especially to their influential neighbor South Africa, for help, but to no avail. When it comes to relations between Zimbabwe and South Africa, it has become increasingly clear that the worse things get for Zimbabwe's beleaguered press, the quieter South African President Thabo Mbeki's diplomacy becomes.

Ever since the rise of the opposi-

Julia Crawford is CPJ's Africa program coordinator. She visited South Africa in February 2004.

appointed Media and Information Commission (MIC) to decide who is a journalist and who is not. It is now a criminal act to open a media outlet or practice journalism in Zimbabwe without the MIC's approval.

The Daily News, which challenged AIPPA's constitutionality in the courts, was first shuttered in September 2003. The paper fought back, and though some courts ruled in favor of the daily as the case made its way to the Supreme Court, police constantly occupied the paper's offices, ensuring that *The Daily News* remained closed. It was not until January 2004



AP/Themba Hadebe

Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe (left) welcomed South African President Thabo Mbeki (right) at Zimbabwe's Harare International Airport in March 2002, shortly after Mugabe declared victory in contested elections.

suffered a lot for freedom in South Africa." Zimbabwe supported the anti-apartheid struggle, Peta explains, even when its own people were being bombed by South African forces, who said they were searching in Zimbabwe for anti-apartheid guerrillas.

Henry Jeffreys, chairman of the South African National Editors' Forum, agrees. "We find it extremely ironic and even sad," he explains, "that in a country such as ours, where we fought very hard to gain our freedom, our government ministers are having to try and almost explain away why the situation in Zimbabwe is the way it is, when it's as clear as daylight that you can't call what's going on there part of a democratic system."

The reasons behind Mbeki's inaction are various, observers say, but may have more to do with pleasing his own electorate than anything else.

Mondli Makhanya, editor of the independent weekly *Sunday Times*, stresses the "strong link" between the South African and Zimbabwean liberation movements, which helps explain why Mbeki is averse to publicly castigating his old comrade in arms.

Mbeki is also reluctant to slam Mugabe when much of South Africa's black population still admires the Zimbabwean president for seizing land from whites, according to journalists. The U.K.-based *Economist* newsweekly quoted Editor Themba Khumalo of South Africa's *Daily Sun* as saying that many black South Africans see Mugabe as "a hero" for "sorting [the whites] out."

In addition, says journalist Peta, Mbeki does not want to see the MDC gain strength in Zimbabwe because it could set a precedent affecting his own position. "In South Africa, they don't want a movement not born of the liberation movement to come to power," he says. "Mbeki wants Mugabe

there" because Mbeki fears that an MDC victory might embolden his challengers, especially those in the trade union movement.

Nonetheless, change seems to be afoot. The South African Press Association quoted Professor Willie Breytenbach of South Africa's Stellenbosch University as saying that although South Africans may admire Mugabe's land-reform policies, "there is concern over the human rights abuses, the bullying of trade unions, and the closing down of the media."

The *Sunday Times'* Makhanya also believes that change is possible. After all, Mbeki refused for years to give impoverished South Africans access to anti-AIDS drugs because of his stance that the link between HIV and AIDS was not proven. But he finally flipped his policy after years of intense domestic and international pressure. If that's what it takes then, "our job," he says, "is to keep on, but to scream louder." ■

A Chat Room in China

