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**Reporters Without Borders**

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**Evidence of Reporters Without Borders, an NGO with special consultative status, about  
press freedom in INDIA**

**Press freedom**

The Indian media is dynamic and protective of its freedoms and plays a crucial role in the country's democratic system. However, in states shaken by separatist or Maoist rebellions, journalists are caught in the crossfire. Some politicians and religious groups target media that expose their activity.

With more than 60 million subscribers, cable news channels have taken over as the country's leading media. Specialising in sensationalist stories, privately-owned TV stations were guilty of serious ethical lapses in 2006. In August 2006, journalists working for local stations in the state of Bihar bought petrol and matches for one desperate man so that he would kill himself on camera.

The New Delhi government in November promulgated a revolutionary law on community radios which opened the way to the long-awaited development of local media. But at the start of 2006, a local news and music station, *Raghav FM Mansoorpur 1*, launched without a licence by a young equipment repair man in Bihar State, was closed down under the archaic Indian Telegraphs Act. The federal government awarded several hundred licences for privately-run FM stations in 2006, after years of protectionism. *BBC Worldwide* obtained seven licences for the country's major cities.

The intrepidity of Indian journalists often leads to reprisals. At least 65 were assaulted or received death threats from police officers, criminals, company heads or political militants during 2006.

Two journalists were murdered while doing their job during 2006. Prahlad Goala, working on a regional daily in Assam State in the northeast, was killed after writing articles exposing nepotism on the part of a local official. Also, in the northeast, a bureau chief escaped a murder attempt by an armed communist group. A young correspondent for a regional newspaper in Maharashtra State, central India, Arun Narayan Dekate, was stoned to death by gangsters he had named in his articles

In 2007, a court in New Delhi sentenced the editor of the newspaper *Mid-Day*, two senior members of its editorial staff and one of its cartoonists to four months in prison after reporting that a former judge, Y. K. Sabharwal, had authorised the demolition of buildings in order to benefit his son's construction company. The four journalists were released on bail pending the outcome of an appeal.

The authorities in Chhattisgarh state, east-central India, badly hit by a Maoist revolt, sacrificed press freedom to the fight against this new "terrorism". A security order was adopted which allowed imprisonment from one to three years for journalists meeting Maoist rebels. A score of reporters were assaulted or threatened with death by police officers or members of local militia supposed to counter the Maoist influence. At least two correspondents for the daily *Hind Sat* were forced to give up their work in 2006 for fear of reprisals.

In Kashmir, increasingly radical separatist groups threatened suicide attacks on local cable television operators. Fearing for their safety, some of them decided to stop broadcasting channels considered "obscene" by the armed groups. Journalists were also targeted by these same groups. In June 2006, Shujaat Bukhari, correspondent in Kashmir for the national daily *The Hindu*, escaped a murder attempt by armed men.

Indian security services have also been implicated in attacks against the press in Kashmir, as in the assault, in September 2006, on three reporters who were beaten by police officers in the streets of Srinagar. Abdul Rouf of the *Srinagar News* and his wife, Zeenat Rouf, were arrested in November 2006 in disturbing circumstances. Photojournalist, Muhammad Maqbool Khokar has been held since September 2004 under an emergency public security law. Despite calls for his release from the courts and the National Human Rights Commission, police have refused to let him go.

### **Government efforts to improve the situation**

The police investigated some cases of physical violence but those responsible were rarely punished.

In Kashmir, the police did not respond to repeated inquiries by the National Human Rights Commission about cases of imprisoned journalists.

### **Recommendations**

- Punish police and military personnel responsible for physical attacks, threats and arbitrary arrests in Kashmir and Chhattisgarh.

- Decriminalize defamation, contempt of court and all press offences.
- Ensure that journalists are protected in Kashmir, Chhattisgarh and Manipur.

### **Methods used**

The material in this update was gathered and checked by Reporters Without Borders, which has a worldwide network of correspondents (in 130 countries) and partner organisations (in about 20).

Journalists in some countries can be sent to prison for several years just for a word or a photo that offends. Jailing or killing a journalist eliminates a vital witness and threatens the right of each of us to be kept informed. Reporters Without Borders has been fighting day-by-day for press freedom since it was founded in 1985.

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