

SIX ESSAYS ON PRESS FREEDOM

Michael Custode

ColdType

WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY ● MAY 3, 2003

ABOUT WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY

May 3 has been designated World Press Freedom Day to recognise the sacrifices made in the struggle for freedom of the press and to put pressure on the numerous countries that continue to deny their citizens this basic human right. This day marks the anniversary of the Declaration of Windhoek, a statement of principles drawn up by African journalists calling for a free, independent and pluralistic media on that continent and throughout the world. The Declaration affirms that a free press is essential to the existence of democracy. The material published here has been provided by the Paris-based World Association of Newspapers (WAN), a global organisation which defends and promotes press freedom worldwide. It represents 18,000 newspapers and members include 71 national newspaper associations, newspaper executives in 100 countries, 13 news agencies and nine regional and worldwide press groups.

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Dedicated to the 47 journalists were killed in the line of duty in 21 countries in 2002

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Press freedom needed for economic development

BY LARRY KILMAN, FRANCE

A traditional press freedom argument and one that will be heard frequently on World Press Freedom Day is that access to free information and a free press is a basic human right.

Certainly, the World Association of Newspapers (WAN) and other press freedom organisations support and promote this concept. But beyond the argument that press freedom is moral and a self-evident good thing, there is compelling evidence that a strong, independent and free press is a powerful ally to economic and social development and the reduction of poverty.

In short, press freedom pays.

WAN, the global organisation of the world's press, has long argued that a free and unfettered press plays a highly positive role in accelerating economic and social development. And there are others who are making the same argument.

One is Amartya Sen, the 1998 Nobel Economics Laureate, whose work has established a link between an active free media and the avoidance of famine and other disasters. Mr Sen was invited by WAN to address the World Newspaper Congress in Belgium last year, where he said:

“It is not at all hard to see why uncensored and

active news reporting helps to prevent famines. Even though hardly any famine ever makes the ruling group suffer directly from it, the stigma and disgrace resulting from adverse press coverage impose direct costs on the rulers, and when combined with a functioning democracy, this can make it impossible for the incumbent government to withstand scrutiny or to be re-elected.”

The link between press freedom and economic development has also been explored by the World Bank, which released a ground-breaking report last year entitled “The Right to Tell – The Role of the Mass Media in Economic Development”.

The report is a serious and substantial contribution to the research, analysis and arguments on the positive role of a free press in economic

development and the reduction of poverty. Its 19 chapters by a wide range of experts explore the role of the media as a watchdog of government and the corporate sector, the media's power to influence markets, its usefulness as a transmitter of new ideas and information, and its ability to give a voice to the poor.

The study comes at an opportune time, for at least two reasons. Firstly, freedom of information has become a casualty of the so-called war against ter-



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rorism, with numerous governments taking initiatives to restrict it in the name of national interest. In truth, as the study demonstrates, a free press helps remove the conditions of poverty, controlled information and the lack of public debate in which terrorism breeds and prospers.

Secondly, the World Bank report puts another nail in the coffin of the idea, propounded by numerous autocratic governments, that economic and social development is somehow obstructed by the existence of a free press or that it is a higher priority that justifies the postponement of free information and free expression until a satisfactory level of economic development has been achieved.

As World Bank President, Jim Wolfenson says, “Free press is not a luxury. It is at the core of equitable development. The media can expose corruption. They can keep a check on public policy by throwing a spotlight on government action. They let people voice diverse opinions on governance and reform, and help build public consensus to bring about change.” The Bank’s report concludes that free media help markets work better, that they facilitate trade and that they are important for human development. It also makes powerful arguments in favour of freedom of information laws and against state ownership of the media – not as philosophical concepts, but as

the basis of clear evidence that free access to information and the predominance of private media accompany and encourage economic development.

To cite one finding, the report says: “In countries with higher state ownership of the media, we observe inferior school attainment, enrolment and pupil-to-teacher ratios. Health outcomes, such as life expectancy, infant mortality and malnutrition are also worse in countries where the government owns more media outlets.”

It is gratifying to observe, that in a study of India, the report finds increased government responsiveness to a wide range of problems in areas with higher newspaper circulation. “We have strong evidence,” say the authors, “that variation in newspaper circulation can explain how responsive the government is to the needs of its citizenry.”

We hope that these arguments will help raise the importance of press development aid on the agenda of governments and inter-governmental agencies.

Larry Kilman is the Director of Communications of the Paris-based World Association of Newspapers, the global organisation of the world’s press. He previously worked as a journalist for the Associated Press, Agence France-Presse and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.



The highs and lows of reporting from Baghdad

AN INTERVIEW WITH URBAN HAMID, IRAQ

Urban Hamid is a Swedish/French national who works as a freelancer for a number of publications worldwide. He was an independent journalist, based in Baghdad, covering the recent war in Iraq. In this interview with the World Association of Newspapers (WAN), he discusses the problems of covering war under restrictions.

WAN: What are the greatest obstacles to press freedom in Baghdad in your day-to-day activities?

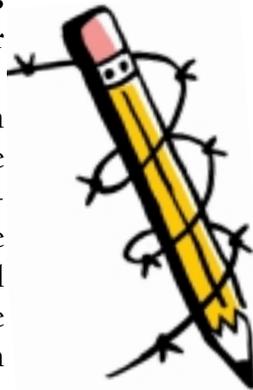
HAMID: First of all there is an extremely tough control exercised by the information ministry. We are under constant surveillance. The Iraqis call these people “Guides”, the journalists call them “Minders”. Whatever story we want to do we need a green light from the “Press Centre”, a sub-division of the Iraqi Information Ministry. Most of the stories we want to cover we cannot, our movements are extremely limited. We are rarely allowed to leave the hotel, and must pass through a huge amount of bureaucracy before being able to do what we want to do. This is very frustrating, particularly in an age where photos and eye witnesses play such a key role. Even more frustrating about the restrictions is that as

journalists situated in Baghdad, we would be very interested in writing about things that would be of relevance to the Iraqi people, and that which the Iraqi government would even gain from, for example reports on bombings, but the Information Ministry appears not to be interested. If there is a bombing in Baghdad, we don’t get the authority to visit the sites until a few days after the event, at which point the interesting information or evidence is gone and the

opportunity to write coherently about these incidents has been missed. This reflects the extreme paranoia of the Iraqi authorities. Finally, physical risk is an obvious obstacle to reporting freely – the risk of being bombed or shot at, or getting caught at roadblocks acts as the ultimate deterrent to real press freedom.

WAN: In what way, if any, can the authorities manipulate journalists in times of warfare? Have you had any experience of such attempted manipulation?

Hamid: We don’t know whether the things we are authorised to see, for example bombing victims in the hospital, are staged. Ultimately we have no way of verifying what we see – although in my gut I think when we see victims they are legitimate casualties of the war.



Paul Stroede

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WAN: You are living in close quarters with each other and are isolated from the rest of the world. How does this influence you mentally?

HAMID: It is quite emotional. The mood fluctuates between highs and lows, which is influenced by the days we are able to leave the hotel and interview ordinary Iraqis – those days you are up and feeling good. Being in Baghdad seems meaningless other days. Certainly a few journalists are here for the adventure, the adrenalin rush, but the majority of us want to try to inform the world what is happening, in order for the world to be a better place. This may sound pretentious, but that is how it is.

WAN: How has your perception of press freedom and freedom of expression changed since your arrival in Baghdad? How would you compare the idea you had of press freedom when living in the West to now?

HAMID: It is obvious that press freedom and freedom of expression in Iraq are very limited. Yet there are also limits to press freedom in the United States. The difference is that in the US, barriers to press freedom and freedom of expression are much more sophisticated. This is quite apparent in coverage of the war. Today, people in the West are inundated by

news and the personalities who present it, which means you rarely get the whole picture of what is happening. Often what you actually see is an illusion, a chimera. For example, the embedded journalists travelling with the troops offer the public only fragments of what is going on. They are the victims of propaganda, which translates into subjective reporting, and they are not always particularly conscious of that. Someone gives them a picture of what is going on, and they don't really have the possibility of questioning that picture.

Furthermore, the embedded journalists can't help but develop a fraternity with the soldiers they are travelling with. This "brotherhood" means they can't help but identify with a certain side, and the other side necessarily becomes the enemy. Likewise, however, the majority of journalists here (in Baghdad) feel empathy for the Iraqis. We feel as though we too are sharing a similar experience.

Urban Hamid Hamid is co-founder of "Great Angular, a network of freelance photographers and journalists specialising in producing features for the written and audio-visual press. He spent 12 years in the United States and now lives in Cairo.



Free media is necessary for democratic Iraq

BY HAMID ALI ALKIFAEY, IRAQ

Now that Saddam Hussein's regime has been overthrown, and so much damage and so many casualties have been inflicted on the country because of his dictatorial rule, Iraqis aspire to an open, democratic and pluralistic political life, and certainly to a different kind of media?

In a country where writing was first discovered more than 5,000 years ago, and where the first printed Arabic newspaper, 'Azzawra', was published 135 years ago, one would expect the media to be very sophisticated and more advanced than any other country in the world, or at least in the Middle East.

Far from it; press freedom in Iraq in the last 35 years has been virtually non-existent. From the time Saddam came to power in 1968 until the 1990s there were only two daily newspapers, two radio stations, and just two TV channels operating in the evening only. There were also only a small number of profession-based magazines. All that these media did was to praise the 'leader necessity', as Saddam was often called, and show his 'immense and exceptional' abilities, his 'wisdom', his 'extraordinary' leadership qualities, and of course, his achievements, which, according to them, have 'transformed Iraq

from a backward primitive country under the previous leaders, to an advanced and modern one' under Saddam Hussein.

In the 1990s, the leader's elder son, Uday, thought it would be 'fun' to have more newspapers, magazines, and TV channels. So, he started more publications, as well as a radio and TV channel, 'the Youth Radio & TV'. Uday's media outlets were not so different from those of his father. Their main aim was also to

hammer one message home: 'Saddam was a 'heaven-sent' leader to Iraq, and Iraqis should feel grateful for this 'god-given' gift.

Any Iraqi who didn't show gratitude did not have the right to live. No word of criticism of the leader or the regime would be tolerated. When a young journalist wrote an article in 'Althawra' newspaper, the

official Ba'ath party newspaper, in 1991, criticizing a series of articles written in the same paper, he disappeared a week later, and no one has heard from him since. Dhurgham Hashim's 'crime' was that he dared to criticize a series of articles believed to have been written by Saddam Hussein personally, although they appeared under the name of a journalist, Jabbar Muhsin, who was close to the regime.

The articles in question were critical of the Shia



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majority in general, and of the Marsh Arabs in particular. Saddam accused them of being of Indian origin – which he apparently believed was the ultimate insult – because they rebelled against his rule in 1991. The articles claimed that the Marsh Arabs were ‘brought from India with buffalos by the great Arab conqueror, Muhammed Alqassim’. Of course, every one knows that the Marsh Arabs are the descendants of the Sumerians, the ancient inhabitants of Mesopotamia, as Iraq used to be called.

Those articles caused so much anger among the Shia majority that a well-known writer and former editor of the Ba’ath party newspaper, Aziz Alsayyid Jasim, wrote a private letter to Saddam protesting about the accusations in the articles. Jasim disappeared a few days later, and is believed to have been executed.

Another magazine editor, Dawood Alfarhan, wrote an article in his magazine, ‘Azzamen’, in which he called ministers ‘fat cats’. He was imprisoned and tortured, but he was lucky enough to come out of prison alive and go back to his old job. Out of prison, Alfarhan knew the limits, and hence, praising the ‘wisdom’ of the great leader became the theme of his writings from that point on.

That was the state of press freedom in Iraq; no tolerance of any criticism at all, and execution awaiting everyone who criticized Saddam, his ministers, his officials or guards, or anything they did. Journalists could, however, sometimes criticise the ‘failure’ of local authorities to carry out the ‘wise instructions and guidelines’ of the president leader. This sort of ‘criticism’ was tolerated, if one could call it criticism at all.

Now that Saddam Hussein’s regime has been overthrown, and so much damage and so many casualties have been inflicted on the country because of his dictatorial rule, Iraqis aspire to an open, democratic and pluralistic political life, and certainly to a differ-

ent kind of media.

The absence of free media helped idolize Saddam Hussein, perpetuate his brutal rule, and shook the very fabric of Iraqi society. I, like most Iraqis, do not wish to see this happen ever again in my country, and I am sure that no Iraqi would ever tolerate the type of oppression we experienced under Saddam Hussein.

To ensure that it never happens again, we need a totally free media. The ministry of information must be abolished altogether, and replaced by a regulatory authority. All media institutions associated with the collapsed regime of Saddam Hussein must be abolished and replaced by new ones that have no political colour. Those journalists and writers who helped idolize Saddam must be removed from their positions and replaced by independent-minded journalists.

However, it is neither wise nor fair to put journalists, or other professionals, out of their jobs on the basis of their political allegiances, past or present, and this must not happen in a post-Saddam Iraq. No one expects Iraqi media to make this great leap forward overnight, as these far-reaching reforms will take time to implement. But we need a new media law to be incorporated in the Iraqi institution as soon as possible, in order to provide journalists with the legal protection they need to carry out their duties.

At the same time, we also need a code of ethics for journalists, in addition to the legal provisions and safeguards. We need such a code to protect people’s privacy as well as stop the media from being used inappropriately by political or business rivals. A large section of our society is still conservative and religious; any attack on cultural or religious values or institutions may cause unnecessary tension within society.

The 35 years of Saddam’s repressive regime caused much deterioration in Iraqi political and social ethics,

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making it imperative for any new government to built strong media laws to protect individuals as well as politicians from defamation and personal attacks. The code of ethics must be binding on all members of the association of journalists and writers and this membership should be mandatory. Any journalist who engages in any defined subversive act, for political or commercial reasons, must be held to account.

I am currently working with lawyers, media specialists, human rights campaigners and sociologists from many countries, in order to draw a new media law for Iraq. I, as well as other colleagues in the International Conference on Free Media in Iraq, believe that a free media in Iraq will have wide implications across the Arab world. That is why we felt it was necessary to include people from Arab countries in order to have an Arab perspective.

The experience of lawyers and media specialists who have helped reform media laws in Russia, Eastern Europe, Bosnia and Kosovo will indeed be very valuable in the case of Iraq. More journalists, media specialists, sociologists, and lawyers will join us in the International Conference on Free Media that will be held in Athens before the end of the spring. The recommendations of the conference will by no means be binding on any future Iraqi government, but it will no doubt be useful if not valuable. Let us hope that by 3 May 2004, Iraq has a new constitution, a new elected government, and a new functioning media law in a healthy political environment.

Iraqis need to work together, and forgive each

other, but they must never forget the traumatic and painful 35 years of Saddam's rule. The lesson from this bitter experience must be learned, if it hasn't already.

Hamid Ali Alkifaey was born 1959 in Iraq in the town of Rumaytha, near Uruk. In 1981, due to political persecution and repression under Saddam Hussein's regime, he fled from Iraq. Hamid emigrated to England, where he studied economics, politics and languages at a number of British universities. Throughout the 1990s he worked as an economic reporter in the London based Arabic press, as well as a translator/editor for a Middle Eastern economic research centre in London.

In 1999 Hamid joined the BBC World Service as a journalist & producer. A vocal opponent of Saddam Hussein's regime, he resigned from the BBC in March 2003 in order to be free to speak on Iraqi political matters without the constraints of impartiality that the BBC imposes on its journalists.

Hamid has written numerous articles on economics, politics, and culture in various English and Arabic publications. He recently completed a novel discussing social life in Iraq in the 20th century, which is awaiting publication. He is currently working with other media professionals and lawyers to draw up a new media law in Iraq. Hamid left Britain for Iraq on 13 April in order to fulfill a long-standing pledge to go back to his country 'the moment Saddam falls'.



Journalists need access to war

BY KAVI CHONGKITTAVORN, THAILAND

Journalism is a damned profession whether journalists are telling the truth like it is or not. In time of war, the truth has different facets, all depending on access to information.

In the case of war in Iraq, there are four different kinds of reporting. Because of their direct access to battlefields, the embedded journalists with the coalition forces bring an instant eyewitness report. Then, there are smaller groups of journalists reporting on the ground directly from behind the enemy lines in and around Baghdad as the US troops continue to advance. Outside the conflict zone, thousands of journalists are stationed at US command centres including beat reporters and foreign correspondents in the US and UK following up on the latest development.

Away from the Middle East, the US and UK, even larger groups of journalists and editors in far-flung corners of the world are reporting on the war relying on information access they have from Western wire services as well other syndicated and individual reports. Like their counterparts in battlefields, they are trying to make sense of the daily development from their armchairs.

Normally, journalists from developing countries do not have much access to war, especially those involving major powers. Throughout modern history, Western journalists dominated war reporting. In the case of war in Iraq, the majority of journalists come from the countries that are part of the coalition. It is no surprise that press reports also come mainly from the Western sources, especially the widely available

CNN and BBC 24-hour news channels. From Asia, other news channels like Al Jazeera, which caters to Arab views, and the new Singapore-based Channel News Asia, geared for Asians, are useful but have limited audiences.

For whatever it is worth, media in the developing world must select news items carefully to reflect diversity of views and

information available. Editors of various capacities must exercise their judgement because they have access to information that comes from various parts of the world.

What appears in the papers the next day is the result of their choices.

In this case, news sometimes has been twisted and mangled to suit local editorial policies and audiences,



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or in some cases to suit the journalist's own biased views on the war in Iraq. The question of patriotism is not an issue here, as troops from their countries are not taking part in the war. It is not an extension of war.

But for the hundreds of embedded journalists reporting from frontlines inside Iraq, it is a different situation. It is an extension of war. These war correspondents have a great responsibility to their units first and later on their readers. Their exclusive knowledge and information of the units they are attached to are a matter of life and death. They are part of the war even though they are not doing the fighting but reporting. As part of the agreement for embedding, their reports, whenever necessary, must be seen by a commander of the unit. The exercise of self-censorship is automatic.

Few correspondents inside Baghdad have done an exemplary job given their unique access in reporting street battles across the firing line. Sometimes, they were incomplete and at time incoherent. But taken along with other reports, viewers could form a broad picture of the state of war.

Journalists in two situations share a similar dilemma regarding access to war. Both embedded

and armchair journalists demand complete access to information so that they can form their opinions and report accordingly. In the process, they have to select news that they deem the most suitable at the given time. Given the wide spectrum of news and views, their selections can only give one aspect of the huge developments in the war in Iraq.

The war in Iraq creates a unique situation for journalists as eyewitnesses. As they are in different locations witnessing war, their accounts are considered evidence, especially when they report on the spot as things unfold. With their satellite-TV broadcasts and videophones, they have brought war into the audience's living rooms.

Access to war at frontlines or reports coming to journalists in air-conditioned pressrooms require common sense and fairness. Otherwise, human frailty would not be able to capture the reality of war.

Kavi Chongkittavorn is Assistant Group Editor of Nation Multimedia Group in Bangkok, Thailand and a Niemann Fellow at Harvard University.

He is also the current chair of the Southeast Asian Press Alliance, a regional alliance of free press-oriented organisations.



Governments must scrap “insult laws”

BY RAYMOND LOUW, SOUTH AFRICA

“One who, with threats or insults, offends the President of the Republic, shall be punished with six months to two years in prison and a fine.” This law extends the range of protected people to members of the parliament, judges, magistrates, “or any other public official” and includes punishment for people who fail “to show respect” to public institutions or public officials with contemptuous words, gestures or actions or who disturbs or interrupts him shall be punished.” (excerpt of an Ecuadorian ‘insult law’)

In the two centuries since African countries began throwing off the yoke of colonialism, the emancipated have been zealously ridding themselves of the symbols and practices of colonial rule. Revolutionaries scrutinised oppressive laws and the more glaring inroads on freedoms were quickly removed from the statute books; and in some countries, healthy constitutional freedoms were brought into being.

Revolutionary fervour, however, has nearly always stopped short of removing one of the most iniquitous features of the colonial legacy, the rigorous protections of the “divine right of kings” or, under the new

dispensation, of presidents and their cohorts. These are the “insult laws”, the laws that protect presidents and other state officials from scrutiny of their conduct. In many countries they are used ruthlessly against journalists.

“Insult laws” have generally provided for frequently heavy prison sentences that are imposed on journalists for making references to heads of state or officials

that are deemed “insulting”. They have also been used against reporting of alleged police or military misconduct, politically embarrassing material, and unfavourable references to state symbols or institutions. A report alluding to an illness that the president or some other state dignitary is suffering from – one of the imputations being the person may be incapacitated from carrying out duties – is sufficient for

the writer to face a criminal charge resulting in a lengthy prison sentence. Accuracy or fair comment is ignored and the cases where editors and journalists have been jailed for such reports are legion.

The fact that insult laws are still in existence means that they can still be invoked by a future government or despot. These laws have a chilling effect on editors and journalists, who either ignore them at the risk of



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possible jail sentences or practice self-censorship.

“Insult laws” have no place in countries professing to be democratic. Indeed, it is impossible to pursue the freedoms enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 19), to which most nations subscribe, without seriously complying with its provisions.

Nor is it possible for democracy to flourish if the free flow of information and its dissemination are seriously inhibited by such laws. This year in Chad, two journalists were jailed for allegedly defaming the director of social services in the ministry of social action and women. The journalists had accused the official of avenging the theft of jewellery by torturing the alleged thieves, one of whom reportedly died of his wounds. The police claimed the man had died of an incurable disease and had not been detained.

There cannot be good governance if the media does not have freedom to gather and disseminate news, and this cannot be assured if legal barriers continue to exist to protect state officials from scrutiny of their activities and conduct. In Kenya, insult laws were scrapped in 1996. In South Africa, only criminal defamation remains a legal offence. 12 other countries world wide have also scrapped “insult laws”.

These figures illustrate the fact there remains a lot to be done to address this issue. As such, in an attempt to challenge the continued existence and practice of insult laws throughout the African continent, certain press freedom organisations have put forward a proposal for the African Union to begin its

own continent-wide good governance campaign with a call for the scrapping of all “insult laws” amongst member countries.

Johannesburg-based Raymond Louw is Editor and Publisher of the Southern Africa Report, a current affairs newsletter on South Africa, and is the Africa Representative of the World Press Freedom Committee (WPFC). Raymond is a former editor of Johannesburg’s Rand Daily Mail.

A note on the campaign against “Insult Laws” . World Press Freedom Committee, Article 19, Media Institute of Southern Africa, the International Press Institute, Journaliste en Danger and the International Federation of Journalists are calling on other press freedom organisations to raise awareness of this particular issue in commemoration of 3 May by lobbying the governments in those countries where insult laws are still in existence, or by demonstrating their support through their membership of regional and international institutions for the elimination of the laws worldwide. These laws, invoked against the media when personal references to heads of state officials are deemed insulting or when journalists allege official or other misconduct, present a direct affront to freedom of press and expression. To join in the effort to raise awareness of the issues of insult laws on World Press Freedom Day, please contact the World Press Freedom Committee (WPFC) mail to: mgreene@wpfc.org.



The state of the media in West Africa

BY ALAGI YORROW JALLOW, GAMBIA

The principal weapons used against freedom of expression in West Africa today aren't confined to arbitrary detentions and violent physical attacks on journalists and their press houses. More and more frequently the courts have been coerced into providing the gags and handcuffs.

The emergence of independent, privately owned newspapers in the past decade is one of the surest indications of the movement toward democratisation in West Africa. This form of media pluralism, however, exists in a number of countries against a backdrop of incessant demands and challenges.

The 1990s were boom years for media development in West Africa. Newspapers covered streets in capital cities, while radio stations filled the airwaves across the region. Gambians once had to make do with two radio stations. Two decades into their independence, however, Gambians have witnessed a steady rise in the number of stations and listeners. Today, the government monopoly of mass media has been irrevocably shattered, leaving an increasingly inquiring audience with a variety of choices for information.

This progressive trend in mass media pluralism

and freedom of expression is among the most visible and remarkable victories in the nascent democratic strivings of the people in the region.

Independent journalism has emerged as a powerful force capable of rooting out entrenched dictatorships and educating the masses about the responsibilities of elected governments.

Consequently, West African leaders have devised new ways to deal with journalists who refuse to be silenced.

The media in West Africa has made a tremendous effort to defend democratic gains and to expand the bounds of freedom by trying to force accountability from officials and political institutions.

These efforts have, however, made the independent media vulnerable to potential cases for libel suits, seditious charges, contempt charges, exorbitant fines, and not infrequently, prison sentences.

One of the greatest forces preventing freedom of expression from thriving beyond statute books in West Africa has to do with unjust laws tracing back to colonial times, while successive post-colonial governments have introduced other capricious and damaging laws.

In West Africa, there has been a growing tendency in the courts to criminalize speech by invoking and



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interpreting existing repressive laws to intimidate and cower a daring, young and fragile independent media industry.

Gambia's fledgling media learned how to emerge from crippling harassments by Yahya Jammeh's military regime reincarnated as a civilian government. The most recent attempt to monitor Gambian media – the newly instated Media Commission – will also serve to undermine and eventually denigrate the workings of the media, as is too often experienced in other African countries. The composition of such a Commission makes little or no room for a fair degree of media representation, while some of its provisions reduce journalists to mere apologists of established order.

Legal sanctions have not entirely replaced other forms of oppression. For, in this decade, there have been countless arrests, detentions, harassments, beatings and murders of journalists. Progress has inevitably been met by more attacks.

The daring nature of such sabotage differs from country to country. In the late 1980s Nigeria witnessed the cruel murder of Dele Giwa by a parcel bomb, which revealed the bloody extent a military dictatorship would go to suppress press freedom in Nigeria. Warlordism also crept out of the shadows of war and dealt severe blows on the media. Charles Taylor's thuggish rebels slaughtered two Nigerian correspondents in Monrovia in the heat of the country's civil war. Moreover, the RUF butchers in Sierra

Leone's mayhem did not spare journalists. They sought, kidnapped, tortured and eventually murdered 11 of them. In 1998, the gruesome murder of Norbert Zongo in Burkina Faso provoked international outcry, anger and indignation.

If it is not unruly soldiers and gendarmerie brutalising media people, or subjecting them to arbitrary detention, it is the courts frightening them out of their wits. Journalists who guard their freedom of expression and oppose officials who want to be treated as sacred cows will continue to be gagged by the courts and thrown into prison.

The greater the expectation of the public and of the international benevolent forces leaning over the cradle of African democracy, the deeper the disenchantment appears with the current state of the media in West Africa. In demanding freedom of expression the African press must also commit to delivering the responsible and accurate news it has fought so hard for the right to provide. As such, the survival of newspapers in this sub-region arguably has as much to do with eradicating judicial sanctions as with meeting the public's expectations.

Alagi Yorro Jallow is Managing Editor and Director of The Independent, one of the largest bi-weekly papers in Gambia. He is also a member of the West Africa Press Union (WAPU) an organisation set up by journalists to support journalists from Liberia, Senegal and Sierra Leone living in exile in Gambia.



Media employees killed in 2002

47 journalists murdered in 21 countries

ARMENIA

Tigran Nagdalian, December 28, 2002

Tigran Nagdalian, head of state-owned Armenian Public Television, was shot in the head as he was leaving his parents home in Yerevan on 28 December 2002. Mr Nagdalian was rushed to hospital but died during surgery. Mr. Nagdalian hosted a weekly news programme, and in the mid-90s worked for Radio Free Europe, a station funded by the US government. The police did not immediately establish a motive for his murder.

KUWAIT

Patrick Burrat, December 22, 2002

Veteran French television journalist Patrick Burrat died in a Kuwaiti hospital a day after he was injured while covering military exercises in the Kuwaiti desert. He was reportedly trying to warn a colleague in danger when he was hit by a tank.

NEPAL

Ambika Timsina, December 12, 2002

The body of Mr Timsina, who used to work for the pro-Maoist weeklies Janadesh and Mahima but had surrendered to security forces after a state of emergency was

declared in November 2001, was found on 12 December near a village in southeastern Nepal. He had been shot and beaten. The previous day, eight masked men had kidnapped Mr Timsina from his home, saying that they wanted to 'settle a few things' with him. Some reports suggest that the murderers of Mr Timsina, who had been granted an amnesty after surrendering, may have been Maoists who suspected him of being an informer.



Michael Custode

INDIA

Ram Chander Chaterpatti, November 23, 2002

Ram Chander Chaterpatti, publication director of the Hindi-language newspaper Poora Sach (The Whole Truth) was shot four times outside his home in Sirsa on 24 October, allegedly by a member of the Dera Sacha Sauda sect. He died in a New Delhi hospital on 23 November. The shooting was apparently linked to

articles Mr Chaterpatti wrote about alleged sexual abuses and other illegal activities by members of the sect and its guru, Sant Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh Ji. According to his family, Mr Chaterpatti had been threatened on several occasions. A sect representative confirmed that Mr Chaterpatti was "warned several times to stop his attacks against the sect because he was upsetting its members." At least

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four people, including one of the sect's directors, were arrested in the course of the investigation carried out after the shooting.

COLOMBIA

José Eli Escalante, October 28, 2002

José Eli Escalante, a correspondent for the radio station La Voz de Cinaruco, was shot three times and killed while returning home from a visit to his mother's grave in the town of Arauca. Mr Escalante tried to avoid reporting on sensitive issues and had resigned from his position as town councilman a few months earlier, after the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia threatened to kill all of Colombia's elected municipal leaders unless they resigned. No one has taken responsibility for the killing, and the case has not been pursued any further by local police as the crime report has been lost.

SWAZILAND

Zweli Mabila, October 24, 2002

Zweli Mabila, a sports reporter for the government daily The Swazi Observer, was stabbed death by unknown assailants in Mbabane, the country's capital, during the night of 23 to 24 October, as he was returning from work. He is the third journalist from the newspaper to be killed in one year. Mr Mabila died the next morning from his injuries. The police have not yet established a motive for the murder.

PAKISTAN

Shahid Soomro, October 20, 2002

Shahid Soomro, a correspondent in Kandhkot for the Sindhi-language daily Kawish, was shot dead as he was trying to resist five men who wanted to kidnap him. Soomro, 26, was allegedly killed in revenge for his reporting during the recently concluded election campaign. Press reports quoting sources close to his family said Soomro's reports had angered a recently elected member of the provincial assembly (MPA) from Kandhkot, and that

Soomro had received death threats.

MEXICO

José Miranda Virgen, October 16, 2002

José Miranda Virgen, journalist and vice-president of the daily El Sur de Veracruz, was fatally injured when an explosion destroyed part of his apartment on 15 October. The journalist died on the following day. The authorities said the explosion was an accident caused by a gas leak but the local press questioned this allegation. Pablo Robles Barajas, El Sur de Veracruz general director, noted that Mr Miranda Virgen had recently published a series of articles on alleged links between drug traffickers and state police officers.

INDIA

Yambem Meghajit Singh, October 13, 2002

Television journalist Yambem Meghajit Singh was tortured and shot dead by unidentified men in Imphal, in the north-eastern state of Manipur. Singh, who worked on the audio-visual production company North East Vision's weekly programme, was found with his hands tied behind his back and his body was covered with bruises. The motive for the killing is still unknown, but colleagues suspect that one of the region's separatist groups killed Singh. Singh, who was also the Manipur Electronic Media Journalists' Union vice-president, had criticised separatist groups and local politicians on his programme and had also planned to investigate corruption in the state.

UKRAINE

Mykhailo Kolomiyets, October 2002

Mykhailo Kolomiyets, founding director of the financial news agency Ukrainian News in Kiev, was found hanged in an apartment in Belarus. Mr Kolomiyets went missing on 21 October. Following his disappearance, his colleagues asked national authorities to investigate his disappearance, fearing that he had been targeted because of his agency's reporting. Mr Kolomiyets's family said they feared his dis-

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appearance might be connected to the agency's independent reporting. But shortly after the body was discovered, a spokesman for the Ukrainian interior ministry said he was certain it was a case of suicide, and that Mr Kolomyiets' death was not linked to his professional activities.

BRAZIL

Domingos Sávio Brandão Lima Júnior, September 30, 2002

Domingos Sávio Brandão Lima Júnior, publisher and a columnist of the daily Folha do Estado, was murdered on 30 September in Cuiabá, in the central Brazilian state of Mato Grosso. The paper attributed Brandão's death to the paper's extensive coverage of drug trafficking, illegal gambling, and acts of corruption involving public officials, but also mentioned that the journalist was a businessman who owned construction and publishing companies. Brandão had not received any threats, according to the newspaper. Police investigators said evidence indicates that his murder was a contract killing, but that the motive remains unclear. No suspect has been apprehended.

RUSSIA

Roderick John Scott, September 26, 2002

Roderick John Scott, British freelance cameraman, was killed in an exchange of shots between a group of Chechen fighters and Russian soldiers in the Caucasian republic of Ingushetia, adjoining Chechnya. Scott's body was found by Russian forces among those of Chechen rebels killed in the Igush village of Galashki. Scott was one of the few freelance journalists to cover the Chechen conflict. He had been doing so for several years, often working for Frontline TV, a television news agency.

PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY TERRITORIES

Esam Al Tellawe, September 22, 2002

The Palestinian journalist Esam Al Tellawe, working for

the Voice of Palestine radio, was shot dead while he was working in Ramallah. He died immediately from a single gunshot wound. The incident took place, says the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate, during a peaceful public protest over the Israeli isolation of President Yasser Arafat, which gathered several thousands of people. Tellawe was wearing a press jacket, thus clearly identified as a civilian working journalist.

COLOMBIA

Américo Viáfara, September 16, 2002

Américo Viáfara, a reporter and producer of documentary, was assassinated in Cali (west). The murder occurred while Viáfara and two other men, a lawyer and businessman, and an accountant, were in a car. The police reported that two hired assassins on a motorcycle fired several shots. The assassination seemed to be directed at the lawyer and businessman who accompanied Viáfara and was not related to his journalistic work, according to reports. There had been no previous reports that the journalist had received threats. Authorities initiated an investigation into the assassination but have no leads regarding the motives or perpetrators of the crime.

PHILIPPINES

Sonny Alcantara, August 22, 2002

TV commentator and magazine editor Sonny Alcantara was shot in the head in San Pablo City (80 kilometres south of Manila). Persons close to Alcantara said he had felt under threat because of articles criticising the city's former mayor, Vicente Amante, a very influential businessman in the region who is reputedly close to certain criminal organisations. Police said they believe it is likely that Alcantara was killed because of his work as a journalist but refused to speculate on who might have ordered the killing. Alcantara was editor of the local bi-monthly magazine Kokus and presented a political affairs programme called Quo Vadis San Pablo on the private cable television station Celestron Cable.

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NEPAL

Nava Raj Sharma, August 13, 2002

Nava Raj Sharma, editor of Kadam weekly, published in the remote northern district of Kalikot, was abducted by Maoist insurgents on June 1, 2002 at Syuna VDC, in the district. Sharma's body was recovered in the area on 11 August, 2002. According to local journalists, he was also the president of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists' (FNJ) ad-hoc committee in Kalikot. Maoists ripped out his eyes, cut off his arms and legs and shot him, local people told journalists and human rights workers in Kalikot. Mr. Sharma was under surveillance from both the administration and Maoist rebels. Maoists have frequently warned journalists in Kalikot not to write about the security forces. No newspapers are published in the Karnali zone.

MALAWI

Don Kulapani, August 8, 2002

Freelance journalist who used to work for The Chronicle newspaper, Don Kulapani, was killed during a hold-up at a bar in the capital, Lilongwe. The killing coincided with recent attacks on journalists by the ruling United Democratic Front (UDF) party. Four armed men burst in the bar and opened fire. They shot the journalist and subsequently stabbed him many times. The journalist's death follows the release of a statement by the ruling UDF denying media claims that it had organised a unit tasked with silencing investigative journalists who "embarrass" the government. In early August, the National Media Institute of South Africa claimed to have discovered a UDF plot to attack journalists of the Daily Times, Weekly Chronicle, Pride and the BBC because they had accused the UDF of intending to change the constitution to allow President Bakili Muluzi to run for a third term in 2004.

BANGLADESH

Syed Farroque Ahmed, August 3, 2002

Syed Farroque Ahmed, the editor of a local publication,

Pubali Barta, who had been missing for more than two months, was found dead on 3 August in Srimangal, south-eastern Bangladesh. RSF says there is no clear information indicating he was killed because of his journalistic work and police have not found any leads in the case.

ALGERIA

Mourad Belkacem, July 26, 2002

Mourad Belkacem, a journalist with Canal Algérie, the ENTV public television station's satellite channel, has been assassinated. His body was found at his home in Algiers on 26 July 2002. According to the official APS agency, the journalist was "killed with a sharp weapon" and "his body was found in a closet, with his feet and hands tied up and several stab wounds to his head". According to several sources, the victim's apartment was ransacked and his vehicle was stolen. According to information obtained from various Algerian journalists, documents were also reportedly stolen from the journalist's home.

COLOMBIA

Dennis Segundo Sánchez, July 17, 2002

Dennis Segundo Sánchez of the radio station 95.5 Estereo in El Carmen de Bolívar, was murdered while at home with his wife. A gunman reportedly shot Mr Segundo Sánchez four times in the head before fleeing.

PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY TERRITORIES

Imad Abu Zahra, July 12, 2002

Imad Abu Zahra, a Palestinian freelance photographer, was killed by Israel Defense Forces gunfire in the West Bank town of Ramallah. Abu Zahra, died in hospital. The previous day, after a curfew had been lifted, the photographer was in the centre of Jenin with Said el-Dahla, a photographer from the official Palestinian news agency Wafa, when Israeli tanks fired on them without warning. Both men were holding cameras and Dahla wore a flak jacket clearly marked "Press".

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COLOMBIA

Mario Prada Díaz, July 11, 2002

Mario Prada Díaz, a journalist with the weekly El Semanario Sabanero in the Santander Department, was abducted from his house on the evening of 11 July. His body was found, riddled by gunshots, the following day not far from his home.

COLOMBIA

Efraín Alberto Varela Noriega, June 28, 2002

According to reports, Mr Varela, owner of Radio Meridiano 70, was driving home from a university graduation in Arauca Department on the afternoon of 28 June when gunmen pulled him from his car and shot him dead. Mr Varela hosted two news and opinion programmes for the station in the town of Arauca and criticised all sides fighting in Colombia's 38-year civil conflict.

BRAZIL

Tim Lopes, June 2, 2002

Tim Lopes a reporter for TV Globo, disappeared on the night of 2 June while investigating accusations that local drug dealers were organising parties at which they recruited new clients and sexually abused minors. His body was found on June 4 in the northern Rio de Janeiro 'favela' of Vila Cruzeiro. Local residents claimed to have witnessed about 20 drug dealers beating a man before burning his body on the night of 2 June.

NEPAL

Krishna Sen, June 2002

Krishna Sen, editor of Jana Disha daily and Janadesh weekly – both Nepali language publications said to be close to the underground Maoists – was detained by security forces on 20 May 2002. He reportedly died in police custody due to torture, probably in early June.

PHILIPPINES

Edgar Damalerio, May 13, 2002

Edgar Damalerio, managing editor of the weekly newspaper Zamboanga Scribe, and radio host on DXKP radio station on the island of Mindanao, was shot and killed by an unidentified gunman as he was driving home from a press conference in Pagadian City. The murderer fled the scene. Damalerio was known for his critiques of corruption among local officials.

RUSSIA

Valery Ivanov, April 29, 2002

Valery Ivanov, editor of the newspaper Tolyatinskoye Obozreniye in the southern Russian city of Togliatti, was shot dead outside his home on the evening of 29 April. He was about to enter his car and was shot down by a young man who fled the scene. Ivanov reported on local organized crime, drug trafficking, and official corruption. Colleagues believe his killing was related to his professional activities. The police have opened a criminal investigation.

INDIA

Paritosh Pandey, April 14, 2002

Paritosh Pandey, a 32-year-old reporter for the Hindi-language local daily Jansatta Express in Lucknow, northern India, was murdered on the evening of 14 April while watching television at his home in Lucknow. The assailants managed to escape. No motive for the murder has been established so far. Pandey's colleagues call for an in-depth investigation. Local sources say that the involvement of the local mafia is not to be ruled out.

VENEZUELA

Jorge Tortoza, April 11, 2002

Venezuelan journalist Jorge Tortoza died on 11 April after being shot in the head while covering the violent clashes in the capital, Caracas, that forced Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez Frías to resign. A witness says Tortoza was shot by a military sniper from the roof of the City Hall in

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Caracas. Several other journalists were injured during the unrest.

COLOMBIA

Wálter López & Héctor Sandoval, April 11, 2002

Two members of a television news crew were shot while covering fighting between the Colombian army and leftist rebels from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Wálter López, the crew's driver, died on Thursday, while Héctor Sandoval, a cameraman with RCN Televisión, died the following day. The two men were shot several times by an army helicopter while in their clearly identifiable vehicle, according to witnesses. The army has opened an investigation into the killings.

BOLIVIA

María Teresa Guzmán de Carrasco, April 10, 2002

María Teresa Guzmán de Carrasco, executive director of El Diario newspaper, was killed on her way home from the newspaper at 10 :15 p.m., when a bomb went off in the back of the vehicle. Meanwhile, the chairman of the IAPA's Committee on Freedom of the Press and Information, Rafael Molina, indicated that the IAPA suspects the attack could have been directed toward the victim's husband, the newspaper's general director, Jorge Carrasco Jahnsen who used that vehicle, but stayed behind to review the front page of the next day's edition. Carrasco believes the attack was in retaliation of the journalistic work of the newspaper, including some investigations that El Diario was about to publish that had leaked to the public.

PHILIPPINES

Benjaline "Beng" Hernandez, April 5, 2002

Benjaline "Beng" Hernandez, journalist and human rights activist, was killed by the army on Mindanao island, while investigating implementation of the peace process in the Arakan Valley, in Cotabato province. Hernandez, 22, was reportedly shot dead along with three local young people by soldiers of the Philippine army.

The army said the four were caught in crossfire between troops and rebels, but Hernandez's friends said she was wounded and then executed by the soldiers. The Cotabato provincial prosecutor plans to make an official enquiry. Between November 2000 and May 2001, three journalists were killed on Mindanao.

COLOMBIA

Juan Carlos Gómez, April 3, 2002

On 3 April, the body of Juan Carlos Gómez, 23, an intern at La Voz de Aguachica, a radio station in northern Colombia, was found in the Magdalena River along with the body of a friend, Óscar Guerrero. Gómez and Guerrero had been abducted by two unidentified men on the night of 1 April. The day after, Gómez's father, a journalist at the radio station for 25 years, received a phone call saying his son had been killed and thrown into a river. The two bodies were then found. Paramilitaries, who killed several persons in the region in the past months, are suspected.

RUSSIA

Sergei Kalinovski, April 1, 2002

The body of Sergei Kalinovski, 26, Editor-in-Chief of the Moscow daily Moskovsky Komsomolets-Smolensk, who disappeared on the evening of 14 December 2001, was found on 1 April by a lake near the city of Smolensk in central Russia. Kalinovski reported on local politics and crime and his colleagues believe he was killed for his professional activities. The police have opened a criminal investigation.

PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY TERRITORIES

Amjad Bahjat Al Alami, March 18, 2002

Amjad Bahjat Al Alami, a cameraman for Al Nawras, a local Palestinian news station, was killed in Hebron on March 18, 2002. Mr Al Alami was caught in an exchange of gunfire between Palestinian and Israeli forces and was killed by a single shot to the head by an Israeli sniper.

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Sources claim Mr Al Alami was wearing a bullet proof flak jacket marked by the letters "TV".

PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY TERRITORIES

Raffaele Ciriello, March 13, 2002

Raffaele Ciriello, an Italian freelance photographer working for the Italian daily Corriere della Sera, was killed in the morning of 13 March by gunfire in Ramallah during Israeli military offensive in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, according to press reports. He was shot six times and died of his wounds shortly afterwards. Israeli authorities say there is no evidence the shooting came from their part. An inquiry has been opened.

RUSSIA

Natalya Skryl, March 9, 2002

Natalya Skryl, 29, was a reporter for the Nashe Vremya newspaper in Rostov-on-Don, South-West Russia. She died on 9 March from head injuries sustained during an attack the night before, according to local press reports. Skryl was investigating an ongoing conflict over the control of Tagmet, a local metallurgical plant. Vera Yuzhanskaya, Editor-in-Chief of Nashe Vremya, believes Skryl was killed because of her professional activities. An investigation has been opened.

BANGLADESH

Harunur Rashid, March 2, 2002

On 2 March, Harunur Rashid, a reporter for the daily newspaper Dainik Purbanchal, was ambushed by gunmen while riding his motorcycle to work in the south-western city of Khulna. He was then brought to hospital by three unidentified men who said he had been injured in a car accident. The three men then disappeared. The doctor said Rashid had died of a wound in his chest. Rashid reported on corruption and organized crime. He had received death threats several times in the past, and his colleagues believe he was killed because of his journalistic activities. The police have arrested three suspects.

PAKISTAN

Daniel Pearl, February 21, 2002

Daniel Pearl, a Wall Street Journal reporter, was killed by the Islamic extremist group which kidnapped him a few weeks before. Pearl, 38, was investigating possible links between al Qaeda network and shoe bomber Richard Reid who boarded a Paris-Miami flight with explosives in his shoes. Four men were later convicted of his kidnap and murder.

MOROCCO

José Luis Percebal, February 12, 2002

José Luis Percebal, 47, was a correspondent for the independent Spanish radio Cadena Cope. He was found dead in his home on February 12 in Rabat. Percebal had been stabbed in the back, apparently the day before. His cell phone was missing. The police have not yet established a motive for the murder.

COLOMBIA

Orlando Sierra Hernandez, February 1, 2002

Orlando Sierra Hernandez, assistant editor of the regional daily La Patria, was shot several times on 30 January in front of the newspaper's offices in Manizales. He died on 1 February. The alleged killer was arrested, but the motive for the murder remains unclear. Sierra was known for his anti-corruption investigations.

MEXICO

Julio Samuel Morales Ferrón, February 1, 2002

Julio Samuel Morales Ferrón, 79, columnist for the daily El Sol de Medio Día, was killed in Mexico City by an unidentified assailant, who slit his throat. He was slain in the offices of the Mexican Radio and Television Association, of which he was President.

COLOMBIA

Marco Antonio Ayala Cardenas, January 23, 2002

Marco Antonio Ayala Cardenas, a photographer for the

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newspaper El Caleno of Cali, was shot and killed by two unknown assailants riding a motorcycle. Ayala Cardenas reported on sports and social issues, but had recently worked on legal matters.

COLOMBIA

Esaú Jaramillo Montaña, January 19, 2002

Esaú Jaramillo Montaña, a sports broadcaster for Caracol Radio in the capital, Bogotá, was found stabbed to death in his apartment. There is no known motive for the slaying, said press chief for the Attorney General's Office. Neighbors told authorities that two men, both drunk, visited the journalist in his apartment the night before his body was found. Jaramillo had been a sports broadcaster since 1964 and founded a magazine about basketball called Bajo la cesta (Beneath the Basket).

MEXICO

Félix Alonso Fernández García, January 18th, 2002

Félix Alonso Fernández García, editor of the magazine Nueva Opción, was shot and killed by two individuals in Tamaulipas state. A few days before his death, he had denounced alleged relationships between former local officials and drug traffickers.

UGANDA

Jimmy Higenyi, January 12th, 2002

Jimmy Higenyi, a journalism student at the United Media Consultants and Trainers (UMCAT) Institute, was shot and killed by police while covering a demonstration by the opposition Uganda Peoples Congress in Kampala. The event had been banned by the government, and the police fired bullets to break up the march. Three police officers have been arrested.



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