

Asien

Military coups hit freedoms

Military coups that were supposed to restore democratic order in Thailand (135th) and Fiji (107th) in fact led to a deterioration in the situation of the news media. The Bangkok-based media continue to be relatively free, but the military prevented the deposed prime minister's supporters from launching a TV station, and several website editors and bloggers were arrested. In Fiji, there were several weeks of tension between the army and journalists, and a foreign reporter was expelled. Thereafter, the pressure focused on those voicing criticism online.

Pakistan (152nd) continues to get a low ranking. All authority is concentrated in the army, led by Gen. Pervez Musharraf, who seized power in a coup in 1999. The privately-owned TV stations were prevented from working freely and dozens of reporters were beaten and arrested during a crisis precipitated by Musharraf's dismissal of the supreme court president.

War and peace

War is largely responsible for the low position assigned to some countries. The increase in fighting in Somalia (159th) and Sri Lanka (156th) has made it very hard for journalists to work. Several have been killed and censorship was stepped up as clashes became frequent. The belligerents refuse to recognise journalists' rights and accuse them of supporting the other side.

In Afghanistan (142nd), the threats initially came from the Taliban and their allies. An Italian reporter's driver and fixer were beheaded by one of Mullah Omar's lieutenants, while several radio stations were attacked by armed groups. Weakened by the fighting and corruption, the government showed signs of nervousness. Several journalists were arrested by the intelligence services on trumped-up charges.

As predicted last year, Nepal (137th) has surged more than 20 places in the ranking. The end of the war and the return to democratic rule resulted in a revival of basic freedoms and created new space for the media. But ethnic violence in the south of the country exposed journalists to new dangers.

Unexpected improvements

Cambodia (85th) climbed a few rungs thanks to the government's decision to decriminalize press offences. No journalist was imprisoned. But some journalists were targeted by death threats, especially when they covered corruption.

Philippines (128th) had fewer murders than in previous years. And President Gloria Arroyo's associates brought fewer defamation actions against journalists and news media.