

## Bangladesh - Annual report 2003

With more than 110 journalists physically attacked, 130 threatened and 25 arrested, the toll under Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's government was exceptionally heavy. The government's composition – an alliance of conservatives and Islamists – led to greater intolerance toward the independent press.

Press freedom violations in 2002 culminated in a wave of arrests of journalists linked to the reporting carried out by a TV crew from Britain's Channel 4 on the political situation in Bangladesh. At least five journalists were arrested and accused of activities against the state and participation in an international conspiracy. The police went so far as to torture some of them during interrogation, including Reporters Without Borders correspondent Saleem Samad.

The government exploited patriotic sentiment to convince the population that certain Bangladeshi and foreign journalists, backed by organisations such as Reporters Without Borders, were trying to destabilize the country by investigating the rise of Islamist movements. According to the authorities, religious violence was not a problem and there were no radical movements in Bangladesh. Those who contradicted this were subjected to harassment with the support of an Islamist and conservative press inclined to the worst excesses.

The government's acute paranoia contributed to the already existing level of violence against journalists. With at least 250 journalists assaulted or threatened with death, three reporters murdered, 20 newspaper offices or press clubs attacked and 25 journalists detained by the authorities in 12 months, Bangladesh is by far the world's most violent country for journalists. <sup>3</sup>Not a day goes by without the press reporting an attack or death threat against a journalist,<sup>2</sup> said Nayeemul Islam Khan, a former editor of the daily *Ajker Kagoj*. This endemic violence against journalists is serious threat to press freedom.

<sup>3</sup>The general security situation is horrifying,<sup>2</sup> said a European diplomat based in Dhaka. Around 280 persons were believed to have died in politically-motivated killings in February alone. Nothing seemed to be able to rein in violence against the press, which undermined the readiness of national and local media to tackle issues that were crucial for the country: corruption, collusion between organised crime and politicians, and conflict between religious groups. In 90 per cent of the attacks on the press, the perpetrators were known: political activists, organised crime groups, petty criminals and police.

Bulbul Monjurul-Ahsan, who heads the Bangladeshi press freedom organisation Media Watch, attributed the violence above all to the principles of allegiance and protection governing relations between the political class and the underworld. <sup>3</sup>Once the small-time gangsters enjoy the protection of local politicians or officials, they can get away with

anything, including physically attacking journalists. It is always hard to say if attacks were instigated by politicians or if they were carried out on the initiative of the criminals.<sup>2</sup>

Nearly a thousand journalists marched through the streets of the capital on 2 October to shouts of <sup>3</sup>Down with violence against journalists.<sup>2</sup> They were protesting against both physical attacks and the fabrication of prosecution cases in retaliation for their reporting on corruption, organised crime and religious intolerance. Some paradoxically thought that the violence was a sign of press maturity. Reporters Without Borders correspondent Saleem Samad said: <sup>3</sup>Journalists are better trained and bolder. So they are more exposed when they tackle sensitive issues. The politicians, especially the local ones, are unable to accept this positive evolution.<sup>2</sup>

Nonetheless, Bangladesh's media landscape was never so diverse. According to the information ministry, there were 294 national and local daily newspapers. The most widely sold was Jugantor with a circulation of 270,000, followed by Prothom Alo with more than 220,000 and Ittefaq with nearly 200,000. The top ten in circulation size also included Janakantha, Inqilab, Bhorer Kagoj and Ajker Kagoj, but no English-language daily. On the other hand, the closure of the first privately-owned broadcast TV station, Ekushey TV, as a result of a controversial court decision was a major blow to diversity in the broadcast media. It left just one TV channel with nationwide coverage, BTV, which was closely controlled by the government. Two other channels of limited range and resources tried to report the news, although in December the government asked them use the official agency's dispatches in all of their news programmes.

Aside from self-censorship, due mainly to government pressure on editors and violence against the press, the Bangladeshi news media were not generally subject to any control. Nonetheless, succeeding governments have never really liberalised the radio waves and there is only one privately-owned radio station, Metro Wave, but it does not carry political news. The English and Bengali-language services of Voice of America in 2002 finally obtained the right to retransmission in Dhaka on the state radio's FM frequencies.

After years of armed struggle, extreme-left movements in the southwest of the country such as the Purba Bangla Sharbahara Party (PBSP) have turned into criminal organisations and local correspondents who reported on this evolution were regularly targeted. With eight journalists killed in the past six years, this was undoubtedly the most dangerous part of Bangladesh for the press.

Two World Bank reports caused a stir in Bangladesh in 2002. The first accused its journalists of being easily corruptible and failing to do enough investigation. The second denounced the culture of administrative secrecy as an obstacle to good governance. It said journalists were denied access to much information classified variously as top secret, secret, confidential or restricted and were subject to an Official Secrets Act that makes it a crime to publish <sup>3</sup>secrets.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the government had an armoury of some 20 laws that could be used to jail a

journalists. As in many Asian countries, this includes <sup>3</sup>contempt of court<sup>2</sup>, a crime introduced by the British in 1926.

*Note: Because of the many cases often more than two a day of journalists attacked or threatened, Reporters Without Borders does not claim that what follows is an exhaustive list of press freedom violations. This is all the more so as the Reporters Without Borders correspondent, Saleem Samad, who has the task of compiling this information, was himself imprisoned in the latter part of the year.*

### **Three journalists killed**

Seven armed men abducted Shukur Hossain, 40, of the regional daily Anirban from his home in Dumuria in the southwestern Khulna district on the night of 5 July 2002, forced him into a boat on the River Ghangrail and then gunned him down when he tried to escape. Witnesses saw the gunmen fire shots at Hossain, especially at his head, before they left with his body. The body was never found, Hossain's editor told Reporters Without Borders in December. The police interrogated 11 suspects, most of them members of a banned group, the Biplobi Communist Party, which Hossain had criticised in several reports that had earned him a number of death threats during the three months before his death. His killers were never formally identified.

Harun-ur-Rashid, 44, of the local daily Purbanchal, was gunned down on 2 March as he was going home by motorcycle in the city of Khulna, southwest of Dhaka. He had joined his newspaper in the 1980s and often wrote about the far left and organised crime in the area. His close relations with the Communist Party of Bangladesh (which abandoned armed struggle) and his contacts with the police made him a target for the Purba Bangla Sharbahara Party (PBSP). A Reporters Without Borders fact-finding mission that went to Khulna in March a few days after his murder was told by the local police chief it was linked to his reporting on organised crime and was probably the work of PBSP members. Interior minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury visited the family and local officials in Khulna, promising to catch those responsible and to help the family financially. No money was ever handed over, Reporters Without Borders was told. Seven suspects were identified, mainly PBSP members. The leading one, PBSP member Moktar Hossain Baby, was arrested by police in the city of Jessore on 20 April.

One other journalist was murdered in 2002, but at the end of the year it was impossible to say if his death was linked to his work as a journalist.

Police in the southeastern town of Srimangal found the mutilated body of Syed Farroque Ahmed on 3 August, more than two months after he disappeared. Aged 50, Ahmed brought out a local publication, Pubali Barta, on a regular basis. Relatives said they were unaware of his having any enemies. Police had no leads.

## **New information on journalists killed before 2002**

A police officer in the southwestern city of Khulna briefed the press in early March 2002 on progress in the investigations of the killings of journalists in the region in recent years. He said police had passed to the judge the results of the investigation into the murder of journalist Nahar Ali, killed in April 2001 near his home in Dumuria. The file had 16 suspects, most of them members of banned armed groups. Six were arrested but they had not been tried by the end of the year. Three persons received prison sentences for the 1994 murder of Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury of the newspaper Spulingah in the western city of Jessore. Four known criminals received life sentences for the 1995 murder in Jessore of a journalist known as Faruk, who worked for the daily Runner. The 1998 murder in Jessore of the Runner's editor, Saiful Alam Mukul, in which the police had 22 suspects, was in the process of being tried. In the January 2000 murder of Mir Illias Hossain, editor of the local daily Bir Darpan, police had submitted to the courts a file with the names of five suspects, members of far-left groups, two of who had been arrested.

The trial of suspects in the murder of S.M. Allaudin, editor of the local weekly Ogradoot, was for the moment blocked, although police claimed to have submitted the results of their investigation identifying 10 suspects in 1996. In the murder of journalist Bazlur Rahman in Chuadanga, police were on the point of submitting a file with seven detainees for trial. Finally, proceedings were reported to be advancing in the July 2000 murder of Shamsur Rahman, the Jessore correspondent of the newspaper Janakantha. But Reporters Without Borders was told that most of the suspects in this case, including some close to the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), had been released on bail and were pressuring police and other authorities to have their names removed from the list of accused. As a result, the authorities had effectively written off the original police investigation, which had clearly identified who was responsible. The victim's wife accused the government of obstructing the case.

## **14 journalists imprisoned**

Journalist and human rights activist Shahriar Kabir was released on bail from Dhaka central prison on 20 January 2002 after two months in detention. Dozens awaited him outside, including family members who had been barred from visiting him in prison. His release, as a result of a high court order the day before, was held up for several hours at the last moment on the pretext that a senior official was absent. Accused of sedition, Kabir was granted only a six-month conditional release pending trial but no trial date had yet been set at the end of 2002. He faced a possible death sentence or life imprisonment under criminal code article 123 A (sanctioning those who condemn the creation of Bangladesh and call for the end of its sovereignty), article 124 A (sanctioning sedition) and article 505 A. Hours after leaving prison, Kabir confirmed that he still wanted to make a documentary about the recent violence against religious minorities in Bangladesh, which was the reason police arrested him on 22 November 2001 at Dhaka airport, confiscating his passport and dozens of video and audio cassettes. Kabir said he would continue to combat <sup>3</sup>the fundamentalist forces<sup>2</sup> and thanked all those who campaigned for his release.

The Islamist press had waged a campaign of calumny against Kabir while he was detained, issuing what was tantamount to calls for his death. This was especially so with the daily Inqilab, owned by former Pakistan army ally Maulana Abdul Mannan, considered a war criminal by several human rights organisations. Inqilab's editorials accused Kabir of being a traitor and selling out to India, and urged its readers to demonstrate against his release. Worse still, the newspaper published Kabir's private e-mail correspondence, which it had evidently obtained from a Bangladeshi intelligence agency. Kabir called Inqilab a <sup>3</sup>Taliban press mouthpiece<sup>2</sup> and said it had declared him to be <sup>3</sup>murtad<sup>2</sup> (against Islam). <sup>3</sup>If I am killed by one of these Islamists, the responsibility will lie with the newspaper Inqilab,<sup>2</sup> he told Reporters Without Borders.

Aminul Islam Chowdhury, the daily Ittefaq's correspondent in the northeastern town of Sirajganj, was arrested on the night of 30 January by police who came to his home with a warrant for not paying his electricity bill. Although he showed payment receipts, they took him to the police station. In a court appearance the next day, his lawyers requested his release on bail, which was refused the following day. He was finally released two weeks later. His arrest was thought to be linked to Ittefaq reports during the election campaign in September 2001 that displeased local BNP candidate Iqbal Hassan Mahmud, who subsequently became energy minister.

Shakawat Hossain Ibne Moin, editor of Sheekal, a local newspaper in the western town of Kushtia, was arrested on 2 April as result of a libel complaint brought by a local government official who had been accused of corruption in the newspaper. As he was ill, he was taken handcuffed to hospital and was released on bail five days later.

Shamim Ahmed of Tetulia, a local newspaper based in the southern town of Mirzaganj, was arrested on 8 May because of his reporting about violent crime in Mirzaganj, which is where interior minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury comes from. He was freed on bail on 20 May. His editor refused to confirm the arrest for fear of further reprisals against the newspaper.

Ashokesh Rai and his brother Amaresh Rai, correspondents in the western city of Faridpur for different daily newspapers (Bhorer Kagoj and Ajker Kagoj, respectively), were jailed in the city's prison on 23 September after Islamists and conservatives accused them of being the authors of a play, <sup>3</sup>Katha Krishnakali,<sup>2</sup> branded as blasphemous. Officials initially said they were being held for their own safety because the Islamists had called for the death of everyone linked to the theatre troupe performing the play. It later emerged that they were detained as suspects, apparently at the behest of a judge before whom they had appeared the previous day in response to a summons. The judge added newspaper articles they had written to their case file.

Helal Uddin, correspondent of the daily Bhorer Kagoj in the northwestern town of Sirajganj, was arrested on 21 October during a nationwide anti-crime operation by police. When he was

taken before a judge a week later, his request for release on bail was turned down. It was not known what he was charged with.

Moniruzzaman Monir, correspondent of the newspaper Jugantor in the southern town of Nalchity, was arrested by a police inspector on 23 October as a result of a complaint for intrusion and extortion brought by the brother of Abu Baker Siddique, the leader of the fundamentalist party Jamaat-e-Islami, over an article by Monir accusing the local Jamaat-e-Islami leader of corruption. Monir was being held in Nalchity prison while the police carried out an investigation.

Reporter Zaiba Malik and cameraman Bruno Sorrentino of British television's Channel 4, their interpreter Priscilla Raj and their driver Mujib were arrested on 25 November as they were about to cross the eastern border into India near Benapole. Accused of <sup>3</sup>activities against the state<sup>2</sup> and <sup>3</sup>subversion,<sup>2</sup> they were taken to Dhaka for questioning. They had just spent several days in Bangladesh preparing a report on the political and religious situation. Malik and Sorrentino had entered the country with tourist visas to avoid monitoring the authorities. The same day as they were arrested, police began searching for journalist Saleem Samad, Reporters Without Borders<sup>1</sup> correspondent in Bangladesh, who had worked as their fixer. Secret service agents watched Samad's home, his family was harassed and his telephone was cut. At the same time members of the BCDJC, a press freedom organisation affiliated to Reporters Without Borders, especially Mainul Islam Khan, were also watched and threatened because they had helped the Channel 4 crew. This harassment was supported by conservative and Islamist newspapers. An article in the pro-government newspaper Dinkal on 16 November branded the Channel 4 team as <sup>3</sup>conspirators.<sup>2</sup>

Plain-clothes police arrested Samad at 3 a.m. on 29 November at the home of a friend in Dhaka, took him to a police station in the city and tortured him during interrogation. Shortly thereafter, Khan fled the country to avoid arrest. The authorities released Malik and Sorrentino from Dhaka prison and deported them on 11 December. Foreign minister Reaz Rahman said at a press conference that they benefited from the government's generosity after agreeing to sign a letter in which they voiced regret for investigating the presence of al-Qaeda in Bangladesh without a press visa and undertook not to use any of the video footage they had shot. Rahman added that the situation of Raj and Samad would be considered subsequently in the light of <sup>3</sup>the country's laws.<sup>2</sup>

Malik voiced concern about Raj and Samad in a statement on 13 December. <sup>3</sup>We appeal to the Bangladeshi authorities to release them too, and to ensure their future safety and their families' safety,<sup>2</sup> she said. On 18 December, the high court ruled that Raj should be released on bail and she was set free four days later. She confirmed to the press that she had been tortured psychologically and physically, above all by means of electric shocks. The high court ordered Samad's release on 23 December in response to a petition by his lawyer. But the next day the government had his detention extended by a month under the Special Powers Act, without ever explaining its grounds for invoking this law. During the last week of 2002, his lawyer and family were barred from visiting him in prison, while the Islamist newspapers

Inqilab and Sangram on 31 December accused Samad, other journalists and the Indian secret services of an <sup>3</sup>international conspiracy<sup>2</sup> against Bangladesh.

Journalists and human rights activists Muntasir Mamun and Shahriar Kabir were arrested on 8 December in Dhaka. Mamun was accused of publishing articles criticising the government and participating in the <sup>3</sup>conspiracy<sup>2</sup> against his country. Kabir was suspected of giving an interview to the Channel 4 team on the political situation in Bangladesh. Tortured while under interrogation, Kabir had a heart attack. He was released from the prison in the southeastern city of Chittagong on 7 January. Three days earlier, the high court had ruled that he was illegally detained under the Special Powers Act and ordered him set free within 24 hours. Nonetheless, the government had tried to have his detention extended by 90 days, claiming that the high court's order did not reach the prison. Kabir told the press his arrest had been an act of revenge by the ruling party and said his fellow inmates were being mistreated. Mamun was set free from the Dinajpur district prison on the orders of the high court on 9 January.

Enamul Huque Chowdhury, a reporter with the official news agency BSS and a stringer for Reuters, was arrested on 13 December because he had quoted interior minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury in a Reuters dispatch as saying al-Qaeda could have been behind the cinema attacks in the northern city of Mymensingh on 7 December. The minister had quickly denied having said this, and Reuters had killed the report. After being charged, the journalist was detained for seven days at the request of the police Criminal Investigation Department, and was interrogated without being able to see his family or lawyer. Under torture, he admitted writing a <sup>3</sup>false report<sup>2</sup> to harm the interior minister at the request of opposition leader Saber Chowdhury. Within hours of his arrest, he was dismissed by BSS. Information minister Tariqul Islam asked Reuters to publicly apologise because, he said, there was no al-Qaeda network or Taliban in Bangladesh.

### **Nine journalists detained**

Sakhawat Hossain of the newspaper Matribhumi was detained in a Dhaka street on 5 February 2002 as he watched a traffic policemen obtain bribes from drivers. Colleagues had to intervene to obtain his release later the same day.

Farid Ahmed, the news agency UNB's correspondent in Dhaka university, and Kabir Ahmed Khan, correspondent for the daily Ajker Kagoj, were arrested on 15 February when paramilitary forces raided university dormitories searching for <sup>3</sup>terrorists.<sup>2</sup> Soldiers threatened to throw acid in the journalists' faces if they did not accompany them to their headquarters for questioning. They were held for 18 hours in a cell, blindfolded and with their hands bound.

Al Amin Shahriar, the correspondent in the southern city of Bhola for the daily Manavzamin and the Barisal-based regional newspaper Dakinanchal, was arrested on 8 September and then released on bail by a judge the next day. He faced charges under articles 385 and 387 of

the criminal code over a series of reports about an underworld godfather in Bhoola, who filed a complaint. Home-made fire-bombs had been thrown at Shahriar's home in 2000.

Saiful Islam, a correspondent with the newspaper Jugantor, Omar Ali Sani, a correspondent with the daily Ittefaq, and a third journalist known as Babu, who worked for the local daily Gono Jagaron, were arrested in the southern locality of Agailjhara on 30 October on a charge of extortion fabricated by the local police chief, using false testimony. Their arrests were thought to have been prompted by a series of articles on illegal logging. They were released on bail the next day after fellow journalists in the nearby district capital of Barisal protested.

Sumi Khan, a correspondent of the weekly Shaptahik 2000 in the southeastern city of Chittagong, was detained by police on 28 November on suspicion of having met the Channel 4 television team. This turned out to be untrue. She was released the next day.

Foyizur Rahman, a correspondent in southeastern Chittagong province for the daily Ajker Kagoj, was harassed and detained by police at a post in the Chandanish district on 19 November while investigating in the area. He was accused of planning to write reports criticising the police.

#### **Four journalists kidnapped**

Mamunur Rashid of the Bogra-based daily Korotoa was kidnapped for several hours on 3 January 2002 in Naldanga, in the western district of Natore, by members of the ruling BNP party led by a local party official known as Jahangir. The daily Prothom Alo reported that his abductors beat him and threatened to kill him, and that he had to be hospitalised.

Shawkat Hossain, the editor of Bholakantha, a local daily newspaper published in the southern city of Bhola, was abducted on 8 January by BNP members who threatened to kill him and demanded a ransom from his family. The daily Bhorer Kagoj reported that he was set free a week later.

Mohammad Iqbal Hossain Ratan, Prothom Alo's correspondent in Keraniganj (south of Dhaka), was abducted from his home by six members of the BNP's youth wing led by Eklal Hossain on 9 July, after his newspaper ran a report on land appropriation by BNP members. They tortured him for several hours, broke both of his hands, tried to kill him and left him unconscious at a roadside. His family filed a complaint, naming three of the BNP activists, whereupon family members were told they would be killed if they did not withdraw the complaint. No arrests were made. Local journalists said Eklal Hossain's gang had links with certain Keraniganj police officers.

Shibly Al Sadeq of the local newspaper Purbakone was abducted by armed men in Raozan, near the southeastern city of Chittagong, on 29 September after local BNP leader Giasuddin Qader Chowdhury criticised him for one of his reports. He was forced into a van and taken to an isolated spot where he was beaten. He managed to escape.

### **At least 108 journalists physically attacked**

Kamal Uddin of the daily Ittefaq was attacked by members of the ruling party in Chagalnaiya in the southeastern province of Feni on 1 January 2002, a day after he wrote a report accusing the prime minister's supporters of being implicated in the smuggling of Indian products.

Litu Anam, a photographer with the daily Prothom Alo, Altaf Hossain Dulal, a reporter with the regional Korotua, and Khaled Ahmed, a reporter with the daily Manavzamin, were attacked at a local fair on 1 January in the northern town of Badarganj. The incident began when someone snatched Anam's camera and the other two intervened. Fairground people beat them up, locked them into an unlit room and threatened to kill them if they reported the incident in the newspapers.

Tariqul Islam of the daily Purbanchal was attacked as he was returning home on 1 January in the southwestern city of Khulna by a member of the BNP's youth wing called Tariq. When the journalist fought back, the youth fired two shots in the air and fled.

Humayun Kabir of the daily Ittefaq was beaten up by young BNP supporters in Muladi in the southern province of Barisal on 1 January over a report on clandestine gambling. They left him with a broken rib and multiple bruising.

Quamrun Nahar Shapla, a freelance journalist based in the western town of Natore, was beaten by thugs in the street on 2 January.

Masum Sharif of the daily Dainik Shahnama, based in the southern city of Barisal, was attacked in the street on 5 January by members of the Juba Dal (the ruling BNP's youth wing) as he was covering a brawl between local gangs. The newspaper Bhorer Kagoj said one of the brothers of the Juba Dal leader shoved Sharif aside and then hit him while he was on the ground. He was hospitalised.

Kapil Gosh, correspondent for the dailies Dainik Jugantor and Aparadh Chitr in Chitalmari, in the southeastern district of Bagerhat, was investigating incidents of violence on 6 January when he was assaulted by members of the youth wing of the Awami League (the main opposition party) led by their branch secretary known as Modhusudan. They threatened him with reprisals if he told the police. He had to be hospitalised.

Reazzudin Jami, Janakantha's correspondent in the eastern city of Brahmanbaria, was attacked in his office on 8 January by armed members of the BNP's youth wing who did not like a series of reports Jami had written about their organisation. They smashed up his office and tried to take Jami away with them, giving up because of the protests of the office's employees. Before leaving, they threatened him with further reprisals if he was not more <sup>3</sup> objective<sup>2</sup> in his reporting. Jami filed a complaint with the police.

Hossain Chisti Shiplu, correspondent of daily Jugantor in Siddirganj, a suburb of Dhaka, was attacked and threatened with prosecution on 11 January outside Siddirganj police station by a police officer who did not like his reporting on a kidnap case the day before.

About 10 journalists were manhandled and beaten on 12 January outside the offices of the judicial police in Dhaka, to which they had rushed on learning of the arrest of Haji Mohammed Selim, one of the leaders of the opposition Awami League. On their arrival at judicial police headquarters, they were received by police with batons, who drove them back. Some of the journalists were badly hurt.

Shawkat Milton, Janakantha's correspondent in the southern city of Barisal, was badly beaten on 14 January by a group of thugs led by Kabir Uddin Hannu, a parliamentarian affiliated to the ruling alliance, because of a report by Milton in that morning's issue accusing Hannu of being involved in the fraudulent takeover of a local bank. Two other reporters were also attacked. Police arrested Hannu but he was released on bail on 23 January. Meanwhile, Hannu's sister filed a complaint against Milton on 16 January.

Abu Saleh Musa of the Barisal-based monthly Anandalikhon was beaten and threatened with further reprisals on 27 January by about 10 members of the ruling BNP who did not like his articles criticising the government.

Abu Zafar, editor of the local weekly Faisala in the southern city of Noakhali, was beaten on 2 February by a group of BNP activists, who ransacked his home before leaving. They appeared not to like his newspaper's coverage of local politics.

Al Main Miraj, Jugantor's correspondent in the southern town of Bakerganj, was beaten by a BNP member on 4 February.

Two journalists and a cameraman with the privately-owned TV station Channel i were abducted and beaten on 13 February in the southeastern city of Chittagong by the employees of a hospital abetted by young BNP activists who accused them of planning to criticise health services in Chittagong, the country's second largest city.

Shamyol Sarker, Ajker Kagoj correspondent in the southern Jhalkathi district, was beaten up on 2 March by thugs critical of his regional reporting.

Jasim Chowdhury Sabuj, Jugantor bureau chief in Chittagong, was hit on 9 March by a local government official who objected to his reporting of administrative corruption. Police detained the official.

Barun Majumber, correspondent of the newspaper Korotua in the northern town of Mahadevpur, was attacked by young members of the ruling party on 17 March after reporting that one of them was arrested.

Kusmat Ali, a freelance journalist in the northern town of Ranisankayl, was beaten with steel bars by thugs linked to the opposition Awami League on 9 April. The same day, members of a criminal gang attacked a journalist known as Faisal, the Runner's correspondent in the western town of Satkhira, breaking one of his legs. Also on 9 April, thugs acting at the behest of a local official attacked Saiful Islam Jahangir, the editor of the weekly Rangpur Barta, in the northern city of Rangpur.

Neaz Mohammad Khan Bitu, a reporter for the newspaper Dinkal in the eastern city of Brahmanbaria, was attacked on the evening of 20 April by members of Jatiyatabadi Chattra Dal (JCD), the student wing of the ruling BNP, as a result of a report in the newspaper that had angered the BNP local branch secretary Haji Syed Emran Reza. During the day, the JCD's local leader had threatened Bitu and grabbed him by the collar of his jacket. As a result, Bitu went to the police station to file a complaint. The police officer did not take the complaint, and instead phoned Reza, the BNP branch secretary. That evening, armed JCD thugs sent by Reza burst into the offices of a local newspaper and dragged Bitu into the street, where they punched, kicked and stabbed him before leaving him for dead in front of the newspaper. Bitu was hospitalised. Police arrested several suspects in the next few days but Reza was not one of them.

Nasir Uddin, Prothom Alo's correspondent in Comilla (east of the capital), and a freelance photographer known as Sadeq were abducted and beaten by BNP supporters on 20 April while investigating the destruction of a number of homes in a village that had been attacked by the same BNP group on account of its support for the opposition.

Jahangir Alam Akash, correspondent in the northwestern city of Rajshahi for the daily Sangbad, was attacked by BNP activists on 30 April while going to a neighbouring village to cover a human rights group's investigation into BNP-orchestrated violence in the area. Injured by stones and bricks that were thrown at him, he took refuge and returned to Rajshahi. The police refused to register his complaint, in which he blamed the attack on the ruling BNP. Akash had often reported on BNP violence against the Hindu minority in the Rajshahi area.

Nazmul Imam, correspondent for the newspaper Manavzamin in the southeastern town of Kushtia, was attacked by five masked thugs using sticks and knives on 28 May. They cut off his right thumb and stabbed him 11 times, a doctor said. Kushtia's journalists protested and called for the arrest of Imam's assailants. Police detained four gang members a few days later, one of whom confessed to participating in the attack. He said they had wanted to punish Imam for writing about their activities and he even named the attack's instigator, who was not however arrested. Gang members threatened to kill Imam's relatives if they pressed the police to pursue the investigation.

Syed Mobin Bin Asad Zillu, a photographer for Prothom Alo and the local newspaper Dainik Chandnibazar in the northern city of Bogra, was the target of an attempted abduction on 29 May by Zahirul Islam Bedha, a businessman and deputy chairman of the BNP's local branch.

As Zillu was leaving the city's police station, Bedha and another man tried to force him on to the back of a motorcycle. Zillu resisted, alerting passers-by who overpowered Bedha and took him into the police station. There Bedha hit Zillu and threatened to kill him, so police handcuffed Bedha and searched him, finding a pistol. Bedha was detained as a result of the complaint filed by Zillu, but was released a few days later.

A.Q.M. Shakawat Hossain of Banglabazar Patrika, Halim Mohammad of Ajker Kagoj and Mumtaz Uddin of Matribhumi were beaten by police on 29 May when they went to a crime scene and found the police taking a bribe from a bus driver. The three journalists filed complaints with the Dhaka Crime Reporters Association and the Khilgaon police station. Senior police authorities said the policemen involved would be punished.

Rafiqul Islam Tuhin, Janakantha correspondent in the northeastern town of Habiganj, was physically attacked on 15 June as he was leaving town because of death threats apparently linked to a report accusing Syed Mohammad Kaiser, a local politician, of war crimes during Bangladesh's independence war.

A crew from the privately-owned TV station ATN Bangla were manhandled by a police officer when they went to Dhamrai police station in the Dhaka suburbs on 18 June to ask about the death of truck driver. The policeman pushed the TV crew out, breaking their camera. ATN Bangla reported the incident in their evening newscast, but the police issued a denial and brought a complaint against the TV station.

About 10 reporters and press photographers were beaten by police on 21 June as they were covering President A.Q.M. Chowdhury's departure from the presidential palace after he had been removed from office. Imran Ahmed, a photographer with the Daily Star, and Sukla Haroon of the television station ETV were injured and their equipment was damaged.

Sheikh Abdul Kashem, Inqilab's correspondent in the southwestern city of Khulna, was badly beaten by thugs on 6 July and was hospitalised in a critical condition. His assailants were believed to have been members of the BNP's student wing.

Jahangir Alam Shahin, Janakantha correspondent in the northern city of Lalmonirhat, was physically attacked on 8 July by members of Jatiyatabadi Juba Dal, a group close to the ruling BNP, including its general secretary, A.K.M. Mominul Haq. Passers-by intervened and took Shahin to hospital.

Mainuddin Hasan Shahed, Prothom Alo correspondent in the southeastern town of Chakoria, and Zahirul Islam, Jugantor's correspondent in the same town, were attacked in front of the police station on 13 July by a group of thugs led by Jashim Uddin Kishore, an associate of a local BNP leader. That evening, the thugs went to Shahed's home and threatened his wife, mentioning newspaper reports about the BNP. The police said they would investigate and arrest those responsible if a complaint was filed, but they insisted that Kishore was not a

criminal. The two journalists left Chakoria and took refuge in Cox's Bazar, in the far southeast of the country.

Anti-riot police attacked 10 journalists on the campus of Dhaka university on 29 July during a student protest against the vice-chancellor's decision to close the university. Borhanul Haque Samrat of Prothom Alo, Mahabul Haque Sabu of Ittefaq, Shakil Islam of New Nation and Nurun Nabi of the Financial Express were taken to hospital with injuries from kicks and blows with gun butts. The police also hit Dipak Acharya of Dainik Probhat, Jahurul Islam of the Daily Star and Reuters TV cameraman Rafiqur Rahman, and struck freelance photographer Haji Zahirul Haque in the course of trying to take his camera from him. Two other journalists, Abdul Bashir Salim of Dainik Janata and Khademul Islam Hridoy of The Independent, were briefly detained after being hit. The interior ministry promised to punish those responsible and three police officers were suspended.

Mamunul Islam of The Independent and Tapan Kumar Khan of Janakantha were attacked and detained by thugs on 7 August while taking photographs of the northwestern port of Joypurhat, on the river that forms the border with India. Port workers obtained their release and negotiated the return of their cameras, but their film was damaged. The journalists asked police and local authorities for help, but they refused to intervene.

Anti-riot police attacked three press photographers, Sanaul Haque of Janakantha, Shamsul Haq Tinku of the daily Bhorer Kagoj and Shiekh Hasan of Ajker Kagoj, as they were covering protests in Dhaka on 15 August against a government decision to cancel ceremonies to mark the death of Bangladesh's founder, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Thugs armed with machetes and axes attacked Belal Chowdhury, a reporter with the local newspaper Thikana, in a market in the western city of Faridpur on 24 August. Unconscious and losing blood, he was taken to Faridpur hospital, where a doctor diagnosed 15 serious injuries and ordered his transfer to a hospital in Dhaka. The journalist's brother filed a complaint with the police naming three local thugs, but a month later no arrests had been made. The attack followed death threats by an Islamist group, Touhidi Janata, against journalists who supported a local theatre troupe. Fundamentalists had persuaded the local authorities to ban the troupe from performing a play called Khatha Krishnakhali on the grounds that it was blasphemous, and police had arrested the play's author and producer following an Islamist street demonstration.

A group called Human Command attacked the press club and assaulted journalist Golam Dastagir in the southern town of Char Fashion on 29 August after several newspapers carried reports denouncing the group's clandestine activities. A suspected Jamaat-e-Islami member known as Mahmud was arrested for the attack, but was freed after BNP members intervened.

Journalists accompanying opposition leader Sheikh Hasina on a tour of the southwest were attacked on 30 August in Kolarua, where BNP activists had erected roadblocks. When Hasina's vehicle slowed down, hundreds of persons armed with sticks and steel bars attacked

the motorcade, throwing bricks and home-made firebombs. Hasina's police escort managed to protect her vehicle and clear the road. But journalists Kalidas Rai, Yearob Hossein, Hibrahim Hossein and Habibur Rahman, who were at the rear of the convoy, were attacked and injured by BNP activists. They sought refuge in the Kolarua press club, but the BNP thugs continued to insult and hit them, despite the presence of police. After being besieged for 30 minutes, the four journalists were escorted by the police to the Kolarua police station. This in turn was invaded by activists from the BNP's student wing, who threatened that the journalists would not leave alive. Two hours later, as they were about to leave the police station under police escort, one of the four, Rahman, a reporter for the Runner, was attacked by Abdul Kader Bacchu, the leader of the local branch of the BNP's youth wing. Three days later, journalists of the district staged a march to protest against the attack. Rahman filed a complaint against six activists linked to the BNP.

BNP counter-demonstrators attacked about 10 journalists during a meeting on 7 September in the southern city of Barisal to protest against the closure of the television station ETV. Those attacked included Mintu Basu, Bhorer Dak correspondent Shamin Ahmed, and Monir Hossain of the government-run Bangladesh Television. Shawkat Milton of Janakantha was pursued, thrown to ground and badly beaten, and had to be hospitalised with several fractures. Belayet Hossein Bablu, a reporter with the local daily Shahnama, was critically injured to the head. Passers-by went to the help of Masum Nizam, a photographer with the local Dakinanchal, who was also hit. Another group of counter-demonstrators attacked Shamsuddin Haider Dalim, Kauser Mahmud, J.E. Mamoon and Badal Mustafiz of ETV, ordering them to leave town or face reprisals.

Anti-riot police attacked about 10 photographers from different national dailies on 10 September in reprisal for newly published photos showing engineering school students being injured by police during demonstrations. Police first attacked Ajker Kagoj photographer Mamun Abedin, and detained him. When a group of colleagues went to demand his release, police hit them with batons and kicked them. One policeman grabbed Agence France-Presse photographer Samad Jewel by the throat.

Mujib Masud and Mamoon Abdullah, reporters with <sup>3</sup>Roving Eye,<sup>2</sup> a programme carried by the privately-owned TV station Channel i, were attacked and kidnapped by education ministry staff while in a government building on 27 October because of a report criticising the state of the education system. They were rescued by members of Dhaka Reporters Unity, an organisation of journalists.

### **At least 130 journalists threatened**

Shakir Ahmed, a journalist with the newspaper Ittefaq, received death threats by telephone in Dhaka on 1 January 2002. His caller criticised his reports on the problems of the city's bus service. Ahmed filed a complaint with the police.

Deep Azad, Jugantor's bureau chief in the southwestern city of Khulna, received death threats by telephone and letters on 2 January which may have been linked to the publication nine days before of a report on extortion by BNP members.

Abdus Sabur, Dinkal's correspondent in the northwestern city of Rajshahi, was threatened on 2 January with having his legs and arms broken if he continued to write about one of the city's leading figures, Dr. Ajhar Uddin. The newspaper Prothom Alo said he was also told to leave town. A few days before, Dinkal had run a series of reports about corruption in Rajshahi's hospital and alleged links between certain members of the medical staff and a local criminal gang.

Abdullah Al Jaber, the brother of Prothom Alo correspondent Mamun Abdullah, was attacked in the southeastern city of Chittagong on 7 January by thugs led by Jahurul Alam, a former BNP youth leader. He was beaten with gun butts and a steel bar, but finally managed to escape. His assailants were angry about a report his brother wrote on their group in the newspaper's issue of 10 November 2001. Activists had often threatened the family since the report came out.

Angered by a report about him, Minhaj Fakir and other armed BNP activists threatened to kill Tapan Basu, correspondent for the daily Ajker Kagoj in Agailjhara, near the southern city of Barisal, on 8 January. Fakir gave orders for Basu to be hunted down in order to <sup>3</sup>give him a good lesson.<sup>2</sup> The newspaper Bhorer Kagoj reported that Basu holed up for several days in his home, fearing for his life.

An officer at Siddhirganj police station (in Narayanganj district, south of the capital) insulted and threatened Jugantor journalist Hossain Chisti Shiplu on 11 January.

BNP youth activists threatened Kartik Das, Prothom Alo correspondent in the southwestern town of Narail, on 16 January. Attorney Mokbul Hossain, one of the ruling party's local leaders, detained the journalist in the centre of the town and threatened him with reprisals if he continued to report on the BNP's activities. Das asked the police for protection.

Saidur Rahman, the brother of a government minister's close associate, threatened to kill Mushin Ali Angur, Janakantha correspondent in the western town of Meherpur, during a telephone call on 21 January.

Sushanta Kanu, Prothom Alo correspondent and press club president in the northern city of Jamalpur, was threatened by local BNP leader Mahbubur Rahman Ansari on 26 January at a meeting with local authorities. Kanu had protested when deputy finance minister Anwaruk Kabir Talukder accused local journalists of corruption. At the end of the meeting, Ansari and other BNP leaders tackled Kanu and said he would pay with his life for insulting the deputy minister. The press club asked Ansari to apologise. He responded with further threats, saying that Kanu, a Hindu, could be the victim of religious violence. Kanu also received dozens of

death threats on his mobile telephone. The Jamapur police refused to register his complaint against Ansari.

Abul Kalam Azad, correspondent of the newspaper Manavzamin, was manhandled and threatened on 31 January by a drug trafficker in Mongla, in the southwestern Khulna district.

Shahina Ajmeen, Jugantor bureau chief in the southern city of Barisal, was threatened on 4 February by young BNP supporters and gang members who tried to set fire to his office.

Shahidul Islam Biswas, BNP parliamentarian for the western city of Chuadanga, threatened to kill Rajib Ahmed, an editorialist with the regional newspaper Matabangha, on 4 February after he wrote a series of articles accusing the mayor of Chaudanga, Biswas<sup>1</sup> brother, of corruption and nepotism. Ahmed, who lives in Dhaka, received a series of telephone calls warning him not to go to Chaudanga if he wanted to stay alive.

Habibur Rahman Badal, Ittefaq correspondent in Narayanganj, southeast of the capital, was threatened with reprisals by telephone on 5 February in connection with an article he wrote.

Mahahub Rahman Biplob, a reporter for the local newspaper Dabanol in the northern town of Badarganj, was threatened with arrest by a police officer on 9 February.

BNP activists threatened A. Musharraf Hussain, Ittefaq correspondent in the northern city of Jamalpur, on 27 February as a result of two stories in the previous day's issue of the newspaper about the <sup>3</sup>terrorist<sup>2</sup> activities of two BNP members, Milon Ansari et Ajmeri Alam Sohan. Hussain was working in his office at the local journalists<sup>1</sup> association when he received a visit from Sohan's elder brother, who threatened to kill him if he published any more reports about Sohan.

Abu Sawood Masud, a journalist with the daily Manavzamin in Dhaka, received anonymous telephone calls on 27 February advising him to stop writing about a political activist's murder.

Rafiqul Bahar, a journalist with Prothom Alo in the southeastern city of Chittagong, received a package containing a shroud on 4 March. A written message and calls to his mobile phone confirmed that this was intended as a death threat, his editor said. On 26 February, the newspaper had run on its front page a photograph of the deputy interior minister at a public meeting in Chittagong. Behind him, their faces circled in red by the newspaper, could be seen two activists wanted for murder who were being protected by local authorities. The deputy minister had reacted by questioning the <sup>3</sup>professionalism<sup>2</sup> of the journalists involved, without giving a thought to Bahar's security or explaining why he was next to two persons wanted for murder. Similarly, a local BNP leader had cautioned journalists who published <sup>3</sup>inaccurate information.<sup>2</sup> On 28 February, local BNP youth leader Muhammad Abdur Razzak one of the two circled in red had sued Bahar and the newspaper's editor for libel.

Shafiqul Islam, Ittefaq correspondent in the central town of Sharishabrai, was threatened by a police official on 5 March as a result of a report on a dispute between him and BNP leaders.

Mohammed Abu Taleb, press club president and Ittefaq correspondent in Keraniganj (near Dhaka), was threatened on 7 March by thugs who criticised a report he had written about a leader of the ruling BNP party.

Moktar Hossain, correspondent for the daily Bhorer Kagoj in the southwestern city of Khulna, received telephone threats on 9 March after reporting on organised crime.

Mahfuzzaman Rubel, correspondent for the regional weekly Sona Masjid in the northern town of Mahadevpur, received a death threat on 10 March as a result of an article on trafficking in the area.

Thugs in the southern city of Barisal ransacked the home of Nazrul Islam, a Prothom Alo correspondent, on 11 March. The journalist and his family went into hiding for several days for fear of further reprisals.

Prothom Alo's editor had to send a reporter from headquarters to Maniganj in March to write about the activities of the president of parliament and his son, who are from the area, because the local correspondent felt it was too dangerous for him to do so. The local correspondent nonetheless went into hiding for several days. The parliamentary president's supporters confiscated copies of the newspaper in Maniganj.

BNP supporters threatened to kill Mohammad Jamaluddin, correspondent for the daily Manavzamin, and Bakhtiar Islam Munna, correspondent for Prothom Alo, on 14 March in the southeastern town of Feni. The instigator of these threats, Mushfiqur Rahman, was on a local list of wanted criminals, but police never tried to arrest him.

Anonymous callers threatened to kill Prothom Alo's correspondent Tuhin Aryanak in the southwestern town of Meherpur after the newspaper ran an article on 15 March about complicity between members of the ruling party and outlawed armed groups.

Fifty-six journalists in the northern town of Gaibandha asked for police protection on 20 March after receiving death threats from thugs who had already beaten up an employee of the local press club.

At a public meeting on 23 March, Maulana Delwar Hossain Sayeedi, a member of parliament for Jamaat-e-Islami (a junior member of the ruling alliance), criticised journalists who <sup>3</sup>confuse Muslims and Islamists<sup>2</sup> and called for blood tests for journalists <sup>3</sup>to see if they are Muslims or not.<sup>2</sup>

Tanvir Hassan, Prothom Alo's correspondent in Munshiganj (south of the capital), received a death threat on 28 March following a report on security in the area.

Youths linked to a BNP leader in the western city of Jessore warned Delwar Hossain Khokon, editor of the local newspaper Lokesamaj, on 4 April that he would see his own<sup>3</sup> lifeless body in the streets.<sup>2</sup> Khokon, who is himself close to another BNP leader, had just published the photographs of criminals on the front page. Police detained one of them.

Thugs employed by a BNP leader in the southern town of Boalmari threatened to break the hands and legs of Prothom Alo correspondent Russel Ahmed on 4 April after he wrote several pieces on organised crime.

Gang members on 5 April threatened to kill M.A. Feroz and Latif Siddiqi, two journalists based in Gazipur (north of Dhaka), and blow up the town's press club after they wrote an article about a local underworld leader's involvement in illegal gambling.

Young BNP activists in Nawabganj (near Dhaka) on 13 April threatened to cut off the hands and legs of local journalists who had reported in their newspapers that a recently arrested criminal belonged to their organisation. The police advised the journalists not to file a complaint.

Zahurul Islam Thandu, Jugantor's correspondent in the northern town of Sarishabari, asked the police for protection on 15 April after gang members forced their way into his home for the third time in a month in order to make death threats.

BNP local branch leader Sheikh Wahiduzzaman Dipu threatened to kill journalists Delwar Hossain of Purbanchal, Sheikh Ahsanul Karim of Manavzamin, Rezaul Karim of Ittefaq, Babul Sardar of Janakantha, S. M. Tajjudin of Prabartan and Azadul Haque of Runner in the southwestern city of Bagerhat on 2 May because of the reports they had written about him. He also threatened to blow up the offices of the local daily Purbanchal, while some of supporters went to the journalists<sup>1</sup> homes and harassed their families. The journalists filed a joint complaint.

BNP parliamentarian Abdul Gafur Bhuiya told Salim Zahid of the newspaper Ajker Kagoj in Dhaka of 21 May that, <sup>3</sup>your life as a journalist is over,<sup>2</sup> after he wrote a report on the parliamentarian's implication in a case of corruption.

Six journalists in the northern city of Lalmonirhat asked the prime minister on 22 May to ensure their security after they received death threats from a local criminal organisation, which had already ransacked the local offices of the news agency UNB.

Backed by BNP leaders, Muslim religious leaders in the northern town of Raiganj threatened at least five reporters after their newspapers commented on the religious punishment imposed in a case of rape, in which the victim was sentenced to 101 lashes and the perpetrator was fined 155 euros.

Arifur Rahman of the daily Prothom Alo received death threats on his mobile phone and at his office on 15 July from a certain Pabani, who claimed to be the son of the BNP's chief whip in parliament, Khandaker Delwar Hossain. The newspaper had just run a front-page story on a vast extortion racket by truck drivers on the Dhaka-Aricha motorway west of the capital.

Manzur Ahsan Elahi, editor of the local daily Andoloner Bazar in the western city of Kushtia, was threatened with reprisals if he continued to bring out his newspaper on 2 August, a day after he ran a front-page story on the burgeoning power of a local drug trafficker. He called the police but they took no action. At nightfall, armed men went to the newspaper's offices and padlocked the entrance. Then they forced their way into the Quality Printing Press, which prints Andoloner Bazar and three other newspapers, Bajropath, Ajker Alo and Bangladesh Barta, vandalised the presses and threatened employees. None of the four newspapers was able to appear the next day.

The head of security at Rajshahi university (in the west of the country) threatened to <sup>3</sup>break the legs<sup>2</sup> of any journalist trying to enter the campus on 10 August. The next day, journalists were formally denied access to the campus. The head of security had already brought complaints against correspondents on the campus, trying to stop them from being students and journalists at the same time. Prothom Alo correspondent Mahboob Alam Lablu took refuge at a local station after receiving a telephone threat from the head of security.

Leaders of the local branch of the Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami barred the way of the Janakhanta correspondent in the northern town of Parbatipur on 14 August, insulting him and threatening to kill him because of a report that appeared in the newspaper that morning.

The imam of the mosque in the northern city of Mymensingh and his followers threatened to sue and kill Janakantha correspondent Babul Hossain on 14 August because of a report implicating the imam in irregularities in the mosque's finances.

Shawkat Milton, Janakantha's correspondent in the southern city of Barisal, fled to Dhaka at the start of September fearing for his safety because BNP activists had just held rallies to protest against <sup>3</sup>media terrorism.<sup>2</sup>

Local authorities in Derai, a small town in the northeastern Sunamganj district, brought a complaint against Jugantor correspondent Tipu Sultan on 1 September, accusing him of <sup>3</sup>blackmail and extortion<sup>2</sup> in connection with reports published on 28 August about corruption in the municipal government. Sultan tried to file a complaint against the local authorities for harassment on 2 September, but the police refused to register it. He then went into hiding while a local judge issued a warrant for his arrest. He preemptively obtained his release on bail on 8 September, before being detained. But Derai's mayor continued to threaten Sultan, and accused him at a press conference of <sup>3</sup>immoral practices<sup>2</sup> and of being a disgrace to the press corps.

Shubrata Bappi, Prothom Alo correspondent in the southern town of Gopalganj, was threatened on 23 September by a local BNP youth leader identified as Hussein because he had reported the previous day that thugs fired volleys of shots in the air as school students were going by. Hussein told Bappi his body would be 'riddled with bullets' if the newspaper did not publish a correction.

### **Pressure and obstruction**

The government changed the distribution of newspapers to Bangladesh's embassies worldwide at the start of January, adding the BNP newspaper Dinkal and two newspapers that support Jamaat-e-Islami (junior partner in the BNP-led ruling coalition), Sangram and Inqilab. The three newspaper had been removed from the distribution list by the previous government of Sheikh Hasina. At the same time, many fewer of copies of Janakantha, Prothom Alo, Jugantor and Sangbad (dailies that criticise the government) were henceforth included in diplomatic pouches. A foreign minister spokesperson acknowledged that changes had been made.

Police in Nikly, in the Kishoreganj district northeast of Dhaka, registered a complaint against Ittefaq correspondent Abu Zaman Khokon by local BNP leader Abdur Rashid on 11 January. Khokon, who faced the possibility of arrest, said the accusations were fabricated in order to silence him.

The Dhaka power company DESA cut off supply to the printing press of the daily Janakantha without warning on 16 January. A DESA employee said the orders to cut power had come 'from on high'.<sup>2</sup> The newspaper insisted that it had paid its latest bills and claimed that it was being punished for criticising the Khaleda Zia government. In response to a complaint by the newspaper, a Dhaka court ordered that power be reconnected on 20 January.

Radio and TV crews were denied access to the annual world congress of imams in Tongi, near Dhaka, on 21 January.

The management of Metro Wave, the only privately-owned FM radio station, decided to stop carrying political news in January. It cited technical problems, but a former member of the editorial staff said the station may have pressured to take this step. When launched in 2000, Metro Wave was authorised to broadcast 'positive news'<sup>2</sup> but no politics. Subsequently, from July 2001 to January 2002, the authorities permitted Metro Wave to broadcast news programmes.

The government on 7 February banned distribution of the 11 February issue of the US magazine Newsweek. The department of press and information said this was because the issue contained a representation of the Prophet Muhammad that was likely to shock Muslim believers. An issue of Newsweek with a report on Islam was banned in Bangladesh in September 2000.

A judge in the southeastern city of Chittagong on 19 February ordered the police to formally register the complaint made on 26 January by local underworld leader Mahbubul Alam against three newspaper correspondents in the nearby town of Sitakundu: Mahmudul Haque of Sangram, Didar Hossain Tutul of Jugantor and Mohammed Hedayet of Karnaphuli. The complaint was prompted by articles implicating Alam in extortion, kidnapping and the illegal recycling of shipwrecked vessels. Alam brought a similar complaint on 6 February against Prothom Alo correspondent Ekramul Haque Bulbul.

Thugs vandalised the offices of the local newspaper Ajker Alo in the western city of Kushtia on 9 March, threatening further reprisals if it did not stop carrying reports about extortion rackets in the district.

Police in Keraniganj (south of Dhaka) registered a complaint on 9 March against five journalists with different newspapers who had accused BNP officials of fraudulent practices.

The new information minister, Tariqul Islam, called for <sup>3</sup>responsible journalism<sup>2</sup> on 13 March, threatening to prosecute news media that stir up <sup>3</sup>social unrest.<sup>2</sup>

Anti-riot police and guards posted around parliament in Dhaka turned away journalists during a debate on a new public security law on 22 March. Parliamentary public relations officials had to intervene so that most of the reporters could be allowed into the building. However, crews from the privately-owned television stations ETV, ATN Bangla and Channel i News were not admitted.

The Islamist movement Bangladesh Khelafat Andolon staged a protest outside the headquarters of the daily Jugantor in Dhaka on 29 March after it published a short story by writer Shelina Hossain deemed to have <sup>3</sup>wounded<sup>2</sup> Muslims. The movement, which wants Bangladesh to become an Islamic republic, said newspapers should ban such writing. The newspaper apologised for upsetting Muslim believers, but stressed that it was a piece of fiction, not an editorial. The author also said there had been no intent to hurt Moslems. The story was about the rape of a young girl in a village.

At the start of April, parliament began considering a bill proposed by ruling party parliamentarian Mohammad Abu Hena that would create the offence of <sup>3</sup>contempt of parliament<sup>2</sup> along the lines of <sup>3</sup>contempt of court<sup>2</sup> and introduce long prison sentences for journalists who defame parliamentarians. Journalists would face sentences of two to seven years in prison and fines of 1,500 to 8,000 euros. Called the Special Privileges and Powers Act 2002, the proposed law sparked an outcry from the privately-owned news media. Shafiqur Rahman, president of the Parliamentary Journalists Association, said if the bill were passed, journalists would have nothing more to contribute and <sup>3</sup>it would be pointless going to parliament.<sup>2</sup> Working journalists, like any other persons inside the parliament building who are not employees or parliamentarians, were defined in the draft law as <sup>3</sup>strangers<sup>2</sup> who under no circumstances could report sensitive matters discussed in parliament. Called a new <sup>3</sup>black law<sup>2</sup> by an opposition leader, the bill had still not been passed at the end of 2002.

A French TV crew consisting of reporter Joy Banerjee, a cameraman and a sound technician were closely watched when they prepared a report on microcredits in Bangladesh in April. As required by law, the crew was permanently accompanied by a cameraman appointed by the governmental department of films and publications. They had to specify in advance the hours and places where they were going to shoot. Their interviews were recorded. Police and security service agents questioned the persons they interviewed and the staff of their hotel. Banerjee said the government never believed they were reporting on microcredits and suspected all along that they were looking into repression against Hindu and Christian communities.

The interior ministry announced on 3 April that all copies of the 4 April issue of the Hong-Kong based magazine Far Eastern Economic Review had been confiscated and that its <sup>3</sup>publication, sale, distribution and possession<sup>2</sup> were banned in Bangladesh. The reason was a report by Bangkok-based journalist Bertil Lintner, headlined <sup>3</sup>A Cocoon of Terror,<sup>2</sup> on the growing power of Islamist groups in Bangladesh and the activities of extremists with links to international terrorist organisations. Officials said the report was baseless. In parliament, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia denounced those at home and abroad who tried to sully the country's image with <sup>3</sup>false and malicious<sup>2</sup> reports. Most of the mainly daily newspapers referred to the FEER article. Some columnists confirmed the emergence of influential Islamist groups while pointing out mistakes in Lintner's reporting. Dozens of demonstrators, mostly businessmen of Bangladeshi origin, burned copies of the magazine outside its headquarters in Hong Kong on 5 April and brandished placards with such slogans as <sup>3</sup>FEER articles without foundation and false<sup>2</sup> and <sup>3</sup>Far Eastern Error Reporting.<sup>2</sup> The magazine published a response from the Bangladeshi government in its issue of 11 April.

The government increased controls on the issue of press visas as a result of the FEER article. An information ministry official quoted by the daily Bhorer Kagoj said the government decided on 18 April to limit the visas issued on arrival at the airport to one month. The security services were asked to keep better control on foreign journalists arriving with tourism visas. Bangladesh's embassies were also asked to submit all visa requests by foreign journalists to the interior ministry. Salahuddin Akbar, the head of foreign press relations at the foreign ministry, told Reporters Without Borders that all foreign TV crews would have to be escorted by an information ministry official during their stay. Akbar criticised foreign journalists who abused their press visas by reporting on different subjects from those given on their application.

Ten journalists with the official news agency BSS were dismissed on 9 April because they had been hired during the preceding Awami League administration. In all, some 20 journalists had been victims of what the opposition called a <sup>3</sup>witch-hunt.<sup>2</sup>

The press in the southern town of Motbaria was harassed by the ruling BNP at the start of May and, at one point, its press club was attacked by BNP members who fled when the police arrived. This took place after a BNP activist brought a complaint against the press club's

president, Salam Azadi, and its secretary, Mizanur Rahman Mizu, accusing them of defaming the prime minister and Motbaria's parliamentary representative, Dr Rustam Ali Farazi, because they circulated photocopies of newspaper reports from the capital about the alleged rape of a young girl by Farazi's brother. Government supporters attacked several newspaper stands, threatening to burn down vendors' homes if they sold Janakantha, Ittefaq or Prothom Alo. Copies of these newspapers were seized and burned.

The information minister announced on 19 May that, as a result of an <sup>3</sup>agreement<sup>2</sup> with cable TV operators, 13 foreign TV channels including HBO, Star Movies, MTV and AXN were banned in Bangladesh in order to combat an <sup>3</sup>invasion of foreign culture.<sup>2</sup> ATN Bangla, the Bangladeshi satellite channel, was also required to drop foreign films that could be <sup>3</sup>shocking<sup>2</sup> for the public. The information ministry argued that since most homes in a poor country like Bangladesh only had one TV set, only programmes that could be viewed by the entire family should be screened. Because of an outcry from the public and other cable operators, the ban was lifted the next day except for the music channels MTV and Channel V.

The managing editor of the newspaper Manavzamin, Matiur Rahman Chowdhury, was convicted on 20 May of <sup>3</sup>contempt of court<sup>2</sup> for publishing excerpts of the transcript of a telephone conversation between former military president Hussain Mohammad Ershad and supreme court president Mohammad Latifur Rahman. Chowdhury was sentenced to a month in prison and a fine of 2,000 takas (40 euros), his wife Mahbuba Chowdhury, the newspaper's editor, was fined the same amount and Gen. Ershad was sentenced to six months in prison. All three appealed, thereby delaying execution of the sentences. In the conversation, recorded by the Justice Rahman without Gen. Ershad's knowledge, Ershad had pressed for a favourable judgement in a corruption case. The high court ruled that publishing a confidential conversation between a senior judge and a politician constituted contempt of court, and it deplored the newspaper's <sup>3</sup>sensationalist<sup>2</sup> treatment.

The privately-owned TV stations Ekushey TV, Channel i and ATN Bangla were denied access to parliament by security officials on 4 June when they turned up to cover the first day of the budget debate. Asaduzzaman Samrat, parliamentary correspondent for the daily Ajker Kagoj, was also refused accreditation to attend the debate. He ascribed his exclusion to his reports on irregularities in the management of the parliamentary secretariat's budget.

The opposition Awami League on 18 June threatened to sue the state-owned television broadcaster BTV and issued warnings to privately-owned stations Ekushey TV, Channel i and ATN because of bias in their coverage. A party official maintained that 99.59 per cent of BTV's coverage of political party activity went to the ruling coalition against 0.41 per cent to the opposition. He said the share of coverage accorded the opposition by the privately-owned stations was slightly higher but far from satisfactory.

Chowdhury Ataur Rahman, editor of the local daily Aranyabarta and correspondent for Manavzamin, and Tarun Chakrabarty, editor of the local daily Protidin Khagrachari and correspondent for Ittefaq, were cited for contempt of court on 26 June by the court of the

southeastern town of Khagrachari because they published a citizens<sup>1</sup> committee communique accusing the municipal government of nepotism, favouritism and mismanagement. At a protest meeting held at the press club, the journalists called on the government to intervene to prevent local officials from harassing them.

Monjurul Azim Palash, the editor of Linkbangla, a magazine targeted at Bangladeshis living in Europe, announced in June that he was going to live in exile in Britain because of threats. Police had just raided the magazine's offices in Dhaka, seizing copies of the May-June 2002 issue. Police also interrogated members of his family.

The government on 5 July withdrew the licence of Uttarabanga Barta, a local newspaper published in the northern town of Natore, on the grounds that an article on independence day on 26 March had referred to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia as the leader of the opposition, and to opposition leader Sheikh Hasina as prime minister. The newspaper apologised and published a correction the next day. Publisher Hanif Ali Sheikh, a local leader of the opposition Awami League, blamed the error on a mistake in the handling of text-editing software. Accepting the apology and explanation, the authorities initially decided not to withdraw the newspaper's licence. But at the behest of the authorities in Dhaka, the local administration withdrew the licence three months later under article 20 (D) of the 1973 press law. The editor called it a <sup>3</sup>political decision<sup>2</sup> and said he would appeal.

A report in the daily Janakantha on 8 July about alleged corruption in the appointment of police officers drew a series of threatening letters from the interior ministry. In the first letter, the ministry accused the newspaper of trying to <sup>3</sup>demoralise the police<sup>2</sup> and insisted on being told the source of the report within two days. The ministry reiterated its demand in a second letter four days after the initial deadline expired. In a third letter on 21 July, the ministry threatened prosecution under articles 131 and 132 of the criminal code, which sets heavy penalties for sedition. In this letter, the ministry accused the newspaper of again trying to demoralise the police by reporting the dismissal of 36 policemen who were veterans of the 1971 independence war. The newspaper responded that its reporting on corruption should help the government punish those responsible.

Haroon Habib was fired on 11 July as special correspondent with the state-owned national news agency BSS, a position he had held since the government removed him from his post as the agency's editor in chief. Habib ascribed his dismissal to his reporting on religious fundamentalism and his ties with opposition leaders. BSS editors said they just had no reason to keep him on as a journalist. Habib was named editor in chief by the previous Awami League government. The new government kept the editor in chief position under the information ministry's direct control.

BNP parliamentarian A.K.M. Obaedur Rahman accused the daily Janakantha in parliament on 15 July of spreading <sup>3</sup>hate and lies against politicians<sup>2</sup> in an attempt to create a political void in Bangladesh and he called on the interior and information ministers to take measures against the newspaper.

Doctors in a hospital in the capital prevented journalists Hassanuzaman Tarun of Janakantha, Feroz of Prothom Alo and Nasim Shikder of Inqilab from taking photographs of victims of a dengue epidemic on 8 August. The same day, a journalist with the daily Manavzamin was ejected from the hospital while she was interviewing other victims. Two days before, another Janakantha photographer was insulted by a doctor.

The information minister warned the major national dailies on 12 August about the <sup>3</sup>harmful<sup>2</sup> impact of their reports of violence and especially crime committed in Bangladesh. The minister accused the media of inciting violence in the population.

Tajuddin Manik, a young police officer in the southwestern city Bagherhat who claims to be related to the interior minister, threatened to sue Ismail Hossain Litton of Prothom Alo and Babul Das of Jugantor because of reports accusing him of corruption and extortion that had appeared in several daily newspapers.

Bangladesh's leading privately-owned TV station, Ekushey Television (ETV), was stripped of its licence by a supreme court ruling issued on 29 August as hundreds of people, including performers and human rights activists, waited outside the court in a show of support for ETV. Technicians from the state-owned broadcaster BTB immediately shut down ETV's broadcasts. The supreme court's decision upheld the 27 March decision of the Dhaka high court closing ETV on the grounds that it obtained its licence under <sup>3</sup>illegal conditions<sup>2</sup> from the previous Awami League government, now in opposition. The decision was the result of a suit by two university students and a journalist close to the ruling BNP. ETV's lawyers had appealed the high court's decision before the supreme court, which rejected the appeal. ETV's lawyers then appealed to the supreme court to reconsider its own decision, and it was the rejection of this second appeal on 29 August that left ETV with no further legal recourse. ETV obtained its licence in 1998, becoming the country's first privately-owned news channel. It drew a large audience thanks to varied programming that offered an alternative to the state-owned television's monotonous, pro-government reporting. Tens of thousands of people throughout the country demonstrated against its closure. On 1 September, as technicians dismantled the satellite dish on the roof of the ETV building, the interior ministry launched an enquiry into the validity of the work permit held by Simon Dring, ETV's British chief executive and a former BBC correspondent. The government withdrew of Dring's visa and work permit on 1 October. He left the country the same day.

Security personnel refused to allow accredited journalists into parliament on 10 September. Journalists had to get a new pass supplied by the parliament's secretariat in order to attend sessions.

Correspondents of the dailies Janakantha, Jugantor, Sangbad, Ajker Kagoj, Daily Life, Purbakone and Karnaphuli were denied access on 23 September to the air base in the southeastern city of Chittagong where joint exercises were to take place involving US fighter planes and the Bangladeshi armed forces.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia urged the news media on 11 October not to publish photographs of <sup>3</sup>beaten bodies<sup>2</sup> because they encouraged terrorists to spread terror throughout the country. Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina meanwhile accused the media of bowing too readily to government pressure.

A foreign minister spokesperson accused certain foreign news media of an orchestrated campaign against Bangladesh on 17 October after Time Magazine published a report on the presence of al-Qaeda members in Bangladesh. Foreign journalists were abusing an open country's hospitality, he said. The government refused to confirm whether it had cancelled the visa of the journalist who wrote the report, Alex Perry.

The editor of Janakantha received telephone calls on 4 and 5 November from an army officer identifying himself as Maj. Javed, who asked him to come to his office. The journalist refused.

Housing and public works minister Mirza Abbas announced his intention on 6 November to sue the newspaper Jugantor for <sup>3</sup>false information<sup>2</sup> in that day's issue, which reported that he had links with underworld godfather Kala Farook. At the same time, a member of the central committee of the ruling BNP filed a complaint for <sup>3</sup>defamation<sup>2</sup> in connection with the same report in the southeastern town of Feni, where the magistrate ordered Jugantor's editor and the article's author to appear in court. On 10 November, the magistrate handling the Dhaka complaint issued a warrant for the arrest of Jugantor editor in chief Golam Sarwar and editor Salma Islam, as well as Nurul Islam Babul, the chairman of the Jamuna Group which owns the newspaper, accusing them of <sup>3</sup>defamation<sup>2</sup> under articles 500 and 501 of the criminal code. Two days later, the high court ordered the government to neither arrest nor harass any of the three men, and it preemptively ordered their release on bail, even though they had not been arrested.

Soldiers raided the offices of the local daily Prabartan in the southern city of Khulna on the afternoon of 13 November looking for its editor Mostafa Sarwar. Failing to find him, they went looking for him at his home, and then his sister's home, again without finding him. The army never gave the reasons for this arrest attempt.

At the end of December, the government ordered the privately-owned TV stations Channel i and ATN to broadcast at least two items from the official news agency BSS in every news bulletin.