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According to one estimate, up to 2,000 journalists have lost their jobs across the country. The government has completely closed reports on FM radio, a main source of information in Nepal, especially in rural and remote areas of the countryside. Fm was a thriving news venue until a few weeks ago, offering news in many languages, helping to build a national identity, and fostering debate on vital issues. Today, an estimated 1,200 FM journalists are inactive, and music has replaced the news bulletins and community discussion programs that made fm popular. Many countries have spoken out against the king's breathtaking grabbing in power, forcing the regime to accept the deployment of United Nations observers to document human rights and press abuses. Nepal's 14-year-old democracy has been deeply troubled - plagued by a bloody and protracted conflict with Maoist rebels - but it has fostered the creation of a strong independent news media (see A young and dynamic media). A number of these independent journalists in Nepal are now risking their lives and safety, challenging the government and pushing restrictive boundaries. Yet, as every day passes, the government is getting closer and closer to a controlled by the state. Censorship, self-censorship, and intimidation, and demoralization are massive, said Kanak Dixit, publisher of the Nepalese language Himal Khabarpatrika. The Committee to Protect Journalists met with dozens of journalists, activists and publishers in April to paint an alarming picture of Nepal's press conditions. Palace officials did not respond to CPJ's request to meet with King Gyanendra to discuss the crisis. Tanka Nepal's Minister of Information and Communications did not respond to a series of CPJ requests for a meeting. Brigadier-General Dipak Gurung, spokesman for the Royal Nepalese Army, spoke by telephone with CPJ. Gurung said he would deal with complaints of military harassment of the press referred to him by CPJ. Shortly before 10:30 a.m.m on February 1, 2005, King Gyanendra went on radio and television to announce the impeachment of the government and the imposition of a state of emergency. Fundamental rights, including freedom of expression and freedom of the press, have been suspended indefinitely. The measures were needed, the king said, to allow security forces a freer hand against Maoist rebels who now control up to threequarters of Nepal's rural districts and wield much of the rest of the country. In his speech, the king sought reassurance that freedom of expression is one of the inherent characteristics of multi-party democracy and that the press serves as a means of raising the level of democratic consciousness. But the actions of the king's forces were at odds with his noble rhetoric. Even before the king's address began, the Royal Nepalese Army was deployed to enforce the newly imposed restrictions on the media. Armed soldiers went to newspapers and radio stations with instructions to prevent the publication or dissemination of anything that violated the letter or spirit of the Royal Proclamation. Narayan Wagle, editor-in-chief of Nepal's largest print newspaper, Kantipur, arrived at work to find the building surrounded and the newsroom occupied by soldiers. There were 40 or 50, said Wagle, all in uniform, all armed and scattered as in the order of combat. We had men with M-16 guns in our newsroom, officers who went through the news pages and told us what to write. They were pretty polite, but every time you turned around, there was an armed soldier. The scene was repeated in Kathmandu's newsrooms, but special attention was paid to the capital's FM radio stations, all of which had been ordered in advance to broadcast the speech. While the king's proclamation was relayed, soldiers arrived to enforce these royal orders. I looked out the window, and three army jeeps were parked in front of our building, said Gopal Guragain, founder of the fm news and information network Communications Corner, which provides programs to 14 stations across the country and operates one of its own. The soldiers went to our Nepal FM. They went into the newsrooms and asked us to close, to stop broadcasting. We told them we were releasing the King's Speech and nothing else, and after it was finished, we had run clips as our only news article. They agreed, but stayed there with their weapons. It was extremely scary. Similar situations have been Radio Sagarmatha, City FM, Star FM, Radio Metro, Kantipur FM, and other stations in Kathmandu. Outside the capital, the king's forces used different approaches. In some areas, newspapers have been ordered to stop publication of when they may be allowed to resume. The army shut down some radio stations for a few days, while forcing others to play only music or clips of the king's speech. Advertisers were told not to open their microphones, not to identify songs, not even to give the time of day. State-run Radio Nepal has completely abandoned the BBC's Nepal-language news service and has briefly stopped broadcasting BBC World Service's English-language reports. When he took over the BBC World Service broadcasts, he replaced the first 15 minutes of each hour with patriotic music. The articles about Nepal in the headlines or opening sequences of the program were actually pre-empted. Following the King's proclamation, cable television companies discontinued international news channels from India, Great Britain and the United States, although it is not clear whether the owners pulled the plug as a precaution or did so on government orders. For much of the day on February 1st, there was no BBC World, no CNN, and no star or zee TV news from India. Other TV stations offered soap operas and pop videos, leaving the nation without access to independent news immediately after the king's dramatic announcement. In the coming days, most of the TV channels were restored to cable networks, but some Indian channels, blamed in the past for their sensationalist reporting on events in Nepal, were still not available in mid-April. The February 1 restrictions went beyond the media. The king's speech was barely over when all phone lines in Nepal were blocked and the national cell phone network was shut down. People who had just heard the monarch proclaim his takeover asked for a phone to check on the loved ones or to discuss what had happened, only to find that all the lines were dead. The country's six Internet service providers have been shut down by the military, blocking local Internet access and preventing the updating of Nepal-based news websites. It was scary, said Nepalese author Manjushree Thapa, who now lives in exile in Delhi. We weren't giving up what we heard dial tones or just silence. There was nothing on television or radio, nothing on the web. That's when the panic sets in. Developments in the coming days have done little to allay this fear. Soldiers remained in newsrooms and radio stations for up to a week. A government directive from the Ministry of Communication and Information (see Nothing against the Letter and the Spirit) was issued on 3 February to put the actions of the King and the forces on a legal basis. Provisions allowing censorship and restrictions on reporting under an existing law - the Written Press and Publications Act (LP), passed by an elected government in 1991 (see Invoking powers to suppress) - were invoked. In addition to the restrictions on the press authorized by the APP, the 3 February directive adopted a six-month ban for any interview, article, news, opinion, opinion or personal opinion that goes against the letter and spirit of the Royal Proclamation. Journalists were prohibited from encouraging terrorism or reporting anything that undermines the morale of the security forces, the 3 February directive said. Some representatives of the regional government went further, detailing what was banned and what was not. The district administration office in Nepalgunj City, in the Midwest, issued its own 12-point order (see The Do's and Don'ts List of a region) that said, among other things: Losses of civilian life cannot be published beyond what is mentioned in the statement issued by the government spokesman. In newsrooms, where armed soldiers were still stationed or at least made frequent calls to demand changes in stories, censors largely interpreted orders. In Himal Khabarpatrika, Nepal's most widely read news magazine, several army officers visited the first two editions of the post-coup and made many changes. When the magazine was put up for sale, there were white spaces without text in almost every story about the takeover. The magazine's editor-in-chief, Rajendra Dahal, said the censors' targets included comments from UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Richard Boucher of the US State Department and British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw. They didn't really know how to deal with such things, Dahal said, referring to the army major and two junior officers who sat in his office looking at fake pages for the next issue. They panicked and pulled everything, so we had to leave empty spaces, even in the profiles of the new ministers who were studiously neutral. At that time, small acts of defiance were taking place. Yubaraj Ghimire, editor-in-chief of the weekly Samay, refused to censor the international reaction. Do you want me to whitewash Kofi Annan? he asked his army censors. Ghimire went even further in the second week after the coup. I told the army that I wanted specific written instructions on what to wear and what not to print - none of this business letter and spirit. I wanted to see Kofi Annan or the name of another international figure in a government directive as a banned commentator on Nepal. I haven't received [written orders], so I just printed my paper and I wrote all-cautious criticism, but criticism nonetheless. Other publishers have tried different methods to defy government restrictions. Shortly after the Order of the Ministry of Information, five newspapers appeared with blank editorial pages; one of them, Sanghu, noted that journalism in Nepal was in the intensive care unit and needed to be revived. This act did not work well with the Kathmandu authorities and the five drafters were summoned to the office of the city's top official, the district chief. There, they were told not to publish blank pages or spaces and threatened with arrest or worse if they were not ordered. At this point, threats have been sent to all newspaper editors in Kathmandu. Wagle de Kantipur and Prateek Pradhan, editor-in-chief of the sister publication, The Kathmandu Post, were summoned to a meeting with Yogeshwor Karki, the press officer of the Royal Palace. Wagle said he was unable to attend the meeting, and Pradhan went alone. Later, when the press officer's voice came to the line, informing him that this is a historic moment. As Wagle noted, Karki made it clear what he said: He said that if I didn't cooperate at this historic moment, then the security forces could make me disappear for a few hours. Comments like this, Wagle said, explain why self-censorship became so prevalent among journalists long after soldiers left newsrooms. In fact, it was worse in the FM radio stations of the capital. Radio Sagarmatha had soldiers stationed in and around the station for eight days. Just like many other FM outlets specializing in news and information. Nothing but music was played in the first week, so the soldiers didn't have much to do. On 2 February .m 5 a.m., Monica Upadhyay, a 23-year-old journalist and press anchor at Kantipur FM, arrived at work and was accosted by four armed soldiers who appeared from the shadows. It was so scary, she says. I left after my morning shift on February 1st, without soldiers at the station. Like everyone else, we had only harassment over the phone and other means continued; publishers said they received calls almost every day about coverage. After this week, said Kathmandu Post, they didn't need the soldiers to tell us what to do. We censored ourselves in fear of our jobs and, in some cases, our lives. Economic pressures are now weighing on journalists. Upadhyay and 13 of his colleagues - most of Kantipur FM's news staff - were laid off in early March. The station managers had kept them for several weeks, hoping for a rules that never came. Up to 2,000 journalists, editors and other journalists have lost their jobs since 1 February, the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) reported in April. Even more work without pay or for a fraction of their old salaries due to declining advertising revenues. It could get worse. In late March, the Nepalese newspaper Jana Aastha published a directive from the Ministry of Information that stated that government advertising would only be placed in public publications. Government advertising accounts for 25 percent of national media revenue, according to local journalists, so the move could lead some publications to bankruptcy and leave more journalists unemployed. The biggest risk is that an entire sector of independent media will be destroyed, said taranath Dahal, fnJ president. The people who now run our country have long been against private newspapers, information they cannot control. So they are going to destroy us by saying that we are helping terrorism, corruption or something else. That is simply not true. Private advertising has also declined since February 1, according to publishers and publishers and some, such as The Kathmandu Post, have had to abandon entire sections devoted to sports, culture or special events. We are at our lowest level of advertising in years, said Kunda Dixit, editor-in-chief of Nepali Times, an English-language weekly that has regularly made a profit while adding pages, color and content. The big Indian multinationals don't like the economic climate since February 1st, Dixit said. It affects us all. Several advertisers told publishers that they had been asked not to buy space or time at certain outlets. Kathmandu's business sector is small and closely linked by class and family ties. It is easy to send such messages through social gatherings and barely disguised gossip. Take Kantipur for example, said a media analyst who asked that his name not be used. This document has long been a thorn in the side of the military, the civil service and even the monarchy. Active measures are being taken to deny them access to successful advertising measures. It's working. The heads of the parent company Kantipur Publications will not explicitly say that the regime is systematically trying to reduce its revenues. But threatens a Company. As the country's largest media company, Kantipur created a television station in 2003, hiring several hundred technicians, producers and journalists. The government's first licence allowed only broadcasts in the vicinity of Kathmandu. Last year, the company obtained permission to link its signal to a satellite, making it widely available in Nepal and around the world. Whole, was purchased and installed this year at a cost of approximately US\$50 million. Then, at the end of February, a letter arrived from the Ministry official, said Kailash Sirohya, general manager of the Kantipur Group, and in three or four sentences he said that our ascending link licence had been revoked. No explanation, no reason given, nothing. And no one in the department responds to our requests for information. For Sirohya and her partment is telling them to control their journalists if they don't want to lose their huge investment in satellite technology. If it's him, we're going to shut down the TV station, Sirohya said. This will reduce our losses without compromising our independence, but it would be a tragedy for journalism and broadcasting in this country. Kathmandu dominates Nepal economically, politically and culturally. Attempts have been made to move power to other parts of the country, but these have been rendered meaningless by the growing power of the Maoist rebel insurgency outside the capital. For several years, security forces and the civilian government have been confined to major cities and district capitals, leaving the countryside and small communities under Majorst for the security forces, observers say the government has lost ground at rebel level or, at best, has kept the conflict in a stalemate. But journalists work alongside employees of the government news agency and radio services in most parts of the country. Thousands of small newspapers are published at regional, regional and village levels. The journalists of these publications show courage simply by being in their posts, often caught between the security forces and the Maoists. As both sides have been accused of human rights violations, the fighters have reason to oppose a balanced report on the conflict. In the past, rebels have abducted and summarily executed journalists, accusing them of being spies. Security forces are wary of journalists and are trying to coercion information about the rebels' whereabouts. This, in turn, puts journalists at risk of the Maoists. Since February 1, reports from rural and remote parts of the country have become even more dangerous. Dozens of journalists were arrested by security forces and interrogated. Some were detained for only a few hours, but 10 remained in detention in mid-April, according to the FNJ. Many journalists working on the front lines of the Maoist conflict have been harassed, detained or injured. While JB Pun Magazine Himal Khabarpatrika, was held captive by masked men for several days in early March. At first he thought his captors were Maoists, but he quickly determined that they were vigilantes posing as rebels. He was released unharmed after being informed to report good things about the anti-Maoist campaign in the region. The subtle but constant threats faced by regional and local stringers to remote media houses in Kathmandu are more insidious than arrests or abductions. CPJ met with five of these journalists, all young men working in remote and underdeveloped districts far from their hometowns. Fearing reprisals, they asked that their names not be used. After February 1, the regional cordiers told similar life stories in their districts. All said they had been under direct and indirect pressure before the king took power not to report to the Maoists, but they had ignored the warnings of great personal risk. Now they face arrests, criminal charges, or worse if they simply follow their training and report on both sides of the conflict. One reporter said he had been sidelined by an army sergeant and said, We're back to the old days now. We can do whatever we want to make you behave better. Another had written a number of stories about corruption within the local government and security forces and was now subject to various reprisals, including the threat of arrest and the refusal of a fax line. The five stringers said their phone lines had been cut or interfered with, an action that not only silenced independent journalists based in regional cities, but also impoverished them. Nepalese newspapers only pay stringers for a published copy. Prior to February 1, the five stringers earned an average of just over \$100 per month, which was cut by almost half after reporter said. I'm going to have to get a job as a teacher or something. FM radio stations in rural areas have been particularly affected by emergency restrictions on news broadcasting. Many of Nepal's 46 independent radio stations were located outside Kathmandu, broadcasting a mix of news and current affairs in 13 local languages of the country as well as in the national language of Nepal. The was a growing source of employment for educated youth and the use of regional languages undoubtedly contributed to a decrease in the attractiveness of Maoists to Nepalese-speaking national mainstream. Stations such as Radio Bheri Awas in the western city of Nepalgunj also mixed national politics reports and events with local programs that encouraged community development. Dili BC, station manager program coordinator at Bheri Awas, pointed sadly to an empty studio and said, only music these days; no longer need advertisers or journalists. The station has not officially laid off employees, but no one is paid. He speculated that the army stopped its programs in regional languages because the soldiers could not understand what was being said, and therefore chose to completely silence the broadcasts. Only Maoists are free from government censorship here, he said, referring to the rebels' use of illegal and clandestine radio transmitters to spread propaganda in much of western and southeastern Nepal. In some of the worst conflict zones, government restrictions have shifted their hands to the Maoist waves that once were full of objective and relevant information programs. Kathmandu media staff journalists based in other parts of the country have also done poorly to get away with the new restrictions. Rameshwor Bohara, a correspondent for Himal Media based in the city of Nepalguni, said the frequent threats he receives from security forces and Maoists have limited him to reporting on non-controversial stories such as pollution, women's rights and blood drives. Bohara was one of the sensitive and complex situation. Photographers such as Shailendra Kharel of the Kantipur group must use Indian and international organizations to have their photos of daily life published in Maoist areas. Kharel's employers are officially prohibited from printing any material on rebels that does not come from the army, effectively banning his photographs of Maoists using forced labour and child labour. The army didn't send them, so they're illegal, he says, even if they show how the Maoists often accuse Nepalese journalists of being spies and, like the security forces, the rebels have been vicious towards these journalists. Maoists regularly threaten rural journalists and occasionally abduct, torture and kill them. Dekendra Raj Thapa, a reporter for the state-owned Radio Nepal, was abducted and killed last year for alleged crimes against the people's regime. In a similar incident in 2003, Maoists in Sindhupalchowk district, east of Kathmandu, abducted Gyanendra Khadka, a reporter for the public news agency Rastriya Samachar Samiti. Later, they killed him after tying his hands a post and slit his throat so deeply that he was practically decapitated. The rebels have not found several other journalists missing and feared dead. The Maoists do not have a clear policy on the cover of their activities, although their supreme leader, who presents himself as Comrade Prachanda, sometimes has the press is welcome in rebel-held areas. In practice, this does not translate into safe access. On the ground, few local commanders seem to be aware of Prachanda's comments on the media. Foreign and Nepalese journalists frequently encounter hostile rebels or are caught in the crossfire between security forces and Maoists. Shailendra Kharel, from Kantipur, was covering a rebel rally in Rolpa in March, for example, when an army helicopter opened fire. He took refuge, but his jeep was hit by gunfire. Nepalese leaders have often sought to keep even the most pressing public issues secret, such as the circumstances of the 2001 palace massacre that claimed the lives of King Gyanendra's predecessor and other members of the royal family. But in the 14 years since the palace allowed democracy, FM radio stations and private newspapers have shown journalistic courage in chipping away at this secret. They competed to provide the most relevant information on policy, conflict and public policy issues such as poverty and health care. The influence of the private media was clearly seen as a serious threat by the state, and the February 1 proclamation and subsequent restrictions were the most devastating blow to private media since the beginning of democracy. At a press conference in Kathmandu on 12 April, CPJ called on the Nepalese government to end the harassment and imprisonment of journalists and to repeal restrictions on private media, including the ban on FM news broadcasts. CPJ Executive Director Ann Cooper noted that since the beginning of democracy in 1990, private media had become Nepal's main forum for responsible and constructive public debate. But now the authorities seem determined to close this forum and force a return to the days when news and information came only from tightly-restricted state media, Cooper said. It would be a huge loss for the Nepalese public and a big setback for democracy. Similar messages have been sent several times by the international community since 1 February, as well as calls to the king and his cabinet to overthrow the restrictive regime of new media. In an interview in April, the British Ambassador to Nepal, Keith Bloomfield, stressed that a free press is essential to the peaceful resolution of the conflict in Nepal. Indian Foreign Minister Natwar Singh told his country's parliament in late February that Nepal's democracy demands freedom The press. Official calls for the restoration of constitutional freedom of expression and guarantees of press freedom have come from the United States, the European Union and the United Nations, among others. The government's inability to reverse these restrictions of the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva last April. Threatened with international censorship for its human rights record, the government commission to send UN human rights monitors to Nepal, By signing the agreement, the government avoided a humiliating vote on censorship. But it is also under scrutiny from UN special observers, who will be deployed across the country to chronicle human rights violations, including violations of press freedom. They should arrive in May. UN observers will find that Nepal's private media are already fighting back. After initially running the white space to protest the government's heavy censorship, some newspapers and magazines began to test the limits. In April, criticism of the government, as well as the Maoist insurgency, began to return to the news columns, as did news of protests against the state of emergency. Journalists began to defend their colleagues from rival media; When police summoned kantipur's Wagle for questioning in March, journalists from Kathmandu joined him in protesting the government's attempts to intimidate the media. In a courageous op-ed published on the editor-in-chief Ameet Dhakal issued a warning to the country's leaders. Nepal's professional media and my generation of journalists are the product of a multi-party democracy, Dhakal wrote. Professionally, we have grown up idealizing pluralism, multiculturalism and an open society. Thus, Dhakal said, private media are seen as a threat by undemocratic leaders. The unitary state, governed by a group of never-elected people, has a short life in the presence of independent private media that constantly guestion their legitimacy and expose their inexplicability. That's why they're very committed to strangling the free press. Daniel Lak was the BBC's Nepal correspondent from August 2000 to January 2004. During this time, he traveled extensively in the country, including in areas held by the Maoists, and covered the infamous royal massacre in June 2001. In South Asia, it also reported on Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Afghanistan and the Maldives. Lak is now based in Miami as a BBC correspondent in the Caribbean. This report is based on a week-long fact-finding mission led by Lak and CPJ Executive Director Ann Cooper. Cooper.

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