

TOLERANCE AND UNITY

Conflict-Sensitive Journalism

SAFETY IN SOLIDARITY

A Survival Guide for Journalists in Bangladesh



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Readers who wish to learn about these issues in greater depth should consult published works available at the websites of the following institutions.

- ◆ Transnational Foundation for Peace and Future Research.
- ◆ Centre for War, Peace and the News Media, New York University.
- ◆ Media Peace Centre, South Africa.
- ◆ Nepal Press Institute
- ◆ Free Media Movement, Sri Lanka

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TOLERANCE AND UNITY

Conflict-Sensitive Journalism in Bangladesh

Handbook
Bangladesh, 2008



Introduction

As we rush down the slope of hate with gladness
You trip us up like an unnoticed stone,
And just when we are closeted with madness
You interrupt us like a telephone.

_____ W.H.Auden

Journalism is a profession that involves a constant battle against deadlines. And in the process of beating the competition in providing news of interest, the journalist also has to ensure accuracy and authenticity. Journalism has been understood in various ways. Since the media became an industry, public attitudes towards journalism have changed.

Journalism is consigned in the commercial understanding of the media to a purely supportive role to the advertising function, which is where the profits of the industry come from. But for journalists who are committed to their mission and are sensitive to the history of their craft, their function is little else than to enable the public to make well-informed decisions.

The difficulties that journalism faces even in placid and peaceable conditions, are aggravated in societies prone to conflict. If journalism is about giving a voice to people in society, then conflict is all about denying people a voice. Opposing sides seek to control the media, because the media could potentially give a voice to people they are locked in conflict with. Conflict is not merely about violence, but also about one side refusing to listen to what the other side says. Censorship is the norm, whether through official notification, or through informal mechanisms such as threats to the safety of the journalist and his family. When information is unreliable, the conditions that feed conflict flourish. Journalists are denied their freedom and dignity. They also suffer personal risk.

Good journalism is among the first casualties. Professional morale collapses in conditions when journalists find that they are caught in the crossfire between opposing groups and have no mechanisms to enforce their rights.



When good journalism is silenced, the public loses its right to speak. And conflict resolution becomes more difficult. Suppressing voices that may have a legitimate viewpoint to express is no way of resolving conflict. Often it is only when conflicting parties have a sense that they are being heard through the media, that they begin to feel that there may be a common basis for engaging in a public conversation through which conflict resolution becomes a possibility.

Thus it is in precisely the conditions when it is most difficult, that the good journalism becomes most vital.

To provide reliable information to the public in a time of conflict requires journalism skills of a high order. This is true whether conflict is overt or more subtle. Conflict in its visible and violent variant claims lives and causes human suffering that is palpable. Conflict that more quietly seeps through all spheres of everyday life can often result in the deadlocking of governance processes. In such a situation, people may be deprived of basic services and amenities, lose faith in the processes through which governing structures were created and begin to favour strong-arm methods of claiming what they believe is rightfully theirs. Such action can aggravate conflict and deepen mutual antagonism between contending political parties and social groups.

A public that is well informed about sources of conflict is more likely to decide that its best interests lie in not feeding a vicious cycle of antagonism. For this reason, journalists need to understand more about what causes conflict and how conflict develops. They also need to know, above all, about how to end conflict. Journalists and media institutions need to know where to look for causes and solutions. By providing this information to the public, journalism helps people be better informed about root causes of conflict and violence.

In Bangladesh, conflict is most apparent in the public sphere in terms of power politics, as well as occasional insurgency actions in Chittagong Hill Tracts. Partisan passions normally are dissipated in electoral processes, so that once the people have had their say through the ballot box, all parties agree to honour their mandate and function accordingly. There are situations though, when partisan passions are enhanced rather than contained in the electoral process. Conflict in this sense, becomes a way of life, and governance processes suffer. Programmes designed to benefit society as a whole become subverted to suit one partisan interest or the other. Poverty is perpetuated and essential social reform measures in terms of gender equity and participative development, fall into neglect, since adversarial sides would typically have other priorities in such circumstances.



The journalists' community and media organisations have an important role to play in promoting the peaceful resolution of conflicts in Bangladesh, to the benefit of the wider society. But first, they need to understand what their role might be. An exclusive focus on conflict would be equivalent to a health reporter being focused exclusively on disease. He or she would then cease being a health reporter. The more accurate description for his or her craft would be "disease reporter". A reporter who focuses on conflict without looking at the underlying causes and the possibilities of conflict resolution, would likewise, be a person with an opposite professional identity.

War reporting for historical reasons, has gained immense prestige among journalists, partly because the cycle of conflict between States in the 20th century, representing the application of industrial principles to warfare, coincided, in the western hemisphere, with the growth of the media as an industry.

Peace journalism unfortunately, has never enjoyed the same kind of professional prestige. This is in part because journalists have, since the media became an industry, keenly identified themselves with national interests. But following World War II, and in particular since the end of the Cold War, any mapping of global conflicts would reveal that the major sources of conflict today are within nation-states rather than between them. This is a situation calling for a greater sensitivity on the part of journalists towards their immediate environment and less of an identification with what has traditionally been understood to be the "national interest".

This handbook offers journalists an introduction to the skills and understanding needed to do this.

The handbook derives from interactions in workshops conducted by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) in Bangladesh in 2007 and 2008 and a survey of journalists conducted in the country as part of the same project. The survey conducted mid-2007, covered a sample of 60 working journalists, of whom, 35 were from print, 12 from television, 10 from radio and 3 from the online media. Of the respondents, 55 were working in different positions from reporter to news editor while the rest were editors in different newspapers. Nine of the respondents were from news organisations working in the English medium while the rest worked in the Bengali medium, or a mix. The survey covered three of the country's administrative divisions: Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi..

Similar exercises have been conducted in other parts of the world by International Media Support (IMS) and the Institute for Media Policy and Civil Society (IMPACS), involving experienced reporters and editors in conflict-threatened societies. As such, the handbook is a distillation of the IFJ's experience in diverse milieus.

The handbook is intended to serve as a reference and a reminder for journalists in Bangladesh as they go about their work in future years. A fundamental principle guiding the development of the handbook is that journalism that is sensitive to conflict in its various dimensions can make a difference in mitigating human suffering and addressing discord within societies.

The expertise available in Bangladesh in the area of conflict journalism is yet to be tapped. However, as the IFJ found in the course of the diverse engagements that were part of this project, much expertise is indeed available in this area in Bangladesh. Some of it is reflected in this handbook, though it is hoped that future versions will reflect this more fully, helping in the process to make conflict sensitivity an ingrained element of media practice in Bangladesh.

This handbook should be used to start discussion in your newsroom, to raise the issues through local journalists associations, trade unions and press clubs, and to open up discussions with local communities that will improve the quality of reporting, diversity of coverage and safety of journalists.

Finally, this handbook could usefully be read by politicians and media owners for an insight into why journalists take press freedom and editorial independence so seriously and for an understanding of why good political leadership that wants to make enduring contributions to public welfare, should encourage diversity of media, transparency of government, and a spirit of freedom and adventure among journalists.

CHAPTER



1

Conflict and the media in Bangladesh

The continuing political conflict in Bangladesh, most marked by a culture of confrontation between political parties and the continuing state of emergency, has a profoundly negative impact on the wider society, including drawing the local media into the self-defeating nexus of the politics of confrontation and polarisation.

On the one hand, journalists must deal with conflict that targets media personnel directly as they contend with intimidation, assault and enforced censorship at the direction of government members, political mafias, law enforcement authorities, corrupt business people and criminals. Freedom of the press is daily curtailed by official suppression and self-censorship.

The media was under constant pressure during the tenure of the four-party governing coalition, headed by the Bangladesh National Party (BNP), between October 2001 and the induction of a caretaker administration late in 2006. Ministers, members of parliament, local leaders and workers of the ruling coalition, verbally attacked and harassed journalists when they dared to report on allegations of corruption and anomalies in the governance process.

In 2006 alone, at least 462 journalists were reportedly attacked or harassed in 238 separate incidents. Among them, 247 were physically assaulted and 73 received death threats. Some 43 cases were filed in which at least 137 journalists were being sued. There is a culture of impunity, with no headway made in investigations into attacks on journalists.

While circumstances have been hostile, journalists and media institutions must necessarily accept that they too did contribute to the promotion of conflict. Reportage that focuses on the negative, resorts to stereotypes, takes one side over another and fails to investigate underlying causes of conflict or to highlight positive options for conflict resolution, tends in all such situations to damage media credibility. In such circumstances, the media loses the protection of the larger community. Attacks on the media fail to elicit the kind of social outrage that would make the defence of media rights a viable venture.

Country in conflict

The promulgation of the state of emergency in Bangladesh on January 11, 2007, created multiple uncertainties within the media on the limits of “safe” reporting.

In the immediate aftermath of the emergency declaration, calls made from the presidential office to all broadcast channels ordered that news and current

During the political turmoil of 2006, journalists found themselves caught in the middle. Here political activists take on the security forces with their own variant of tear-gas: a form of tobacco that causes severe distress to the eyes and nasal passages.

© Abir Abdullah







affairs programs be suspended until further notice. The verbal advice was conveyed predominantly to the electronic media, but also had a chilling effect on the print sector.

In later weeks, the emergency administration settled down to a more comfortable relationship with the media, but failed seemingly, to sustain the new comfort levels beyond the first challenge that was mounted to its diktat by civil society.

As the media began to cover student protests at Dhaka University in April 2007, the authorities reportedly sent out a caution, drawing pointed attention to the special provisions that had been invoked for regulating the media under the emergency regime. The media subsequently toned down its coverage.

Ongoing corruption investigations by the emergency regime have destabilised the functioning of the media. At least 11 directors and senior executive officers of media houses have been detained for alleged acts of corruption in their business activities. Many of them have failed to secure bail. This has disrupted the day-to-day functioning of their media houses, and resulted in irregular wage payments and growing economic distress within the media community.

Many journalists do not want to be quoted on the impact that emergency rule is having on the media. But it is clear that self-censorship prevails.

Adapted from International News Safety Institute (South Asia), February 2008.

Bangladesh: state of emergency, media situation and safety concerns of journalists)

What is conflict?

In situations of conflict, whether it be all-out war or, more commonly, social conflict, journalists are vulnerable in two ways – their personal safety and their professional integrity. In any conflict they will have to cope with rapid changes in situation and growing rumour. Awareness and training can help them cope with conflict and report on it sensitively.

Conflict comes in many guises. Journalists may tend to think of conflict as all-out war, either between states or within a state, or as fierce antagonism among political players. But most journalists will deal with conflict in one form or another in their

everyday work, whether they report on all-out social upheaval and war, or crime, health care, the environment and social issues. Conflict encompasses domestic violence and disputes among neighbours, as well as disputes between states and political rivals.

Not all conflict is violent. Not all conflict is political.

Not all violence is political. Not all violence is conflict.

Much violence could be just plain criminal. “Crime” though is also a form of conflict, between the system of law accepted by society at large and particular individuals. Often, what is characterised as “crime” could be a consequence of the system of law being formed through consultation processes that fail to understand diversities of perception. Still more often, “crime” could be the consequence of the system of law being enforced in blatantly partisan or biased fashion.

There are of course underlying reasons for crime. And without being apologists for criminals, journalists should seek to understand what these underlying reasons are.

There is an old saying that nothing is constant in society except change. And conflict invariably happens when there is change, since change could be to the advantage of some and the disadvantage of others. This disagreement could be managed peacefully. It could just as easily break out into violence and warfare.

Essentially, conflict is about power. It arises because two or more people or groups perceive one another as an obstacle to achieving a certain aim, be it possessing some material thing or pursuing an idea or belief. Most journalists will understand this in the course of their work. However, they may not dig deeper to understand the underlying causes of conflict in its many manifestations, or consciously seek to include in their reports information about how conflicts might be resolved. Yet journalists will be better at their job if they develop the skills to analyse conflict deeply and share that information with others. In seeking to present information that is accurate, fair and aware of the bigger picture, journalists have a role to play in reducing conflict.

In Bangladesh, an IFJ survey found that most journalists do not see their country as prone to conflict according to conventional definitions of states at war or a state in civil war. They did not think conflict involving disputes between communities was a significant factor. Nor did they think there was a persistent pattern of conflict along ethnic or communal lines, aside from occasional outbursts and turbulence involving indigenous communities in areas such as the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Most of the journalists surveyed believed, however, that conflict is endemic in Bangladesh due the character of power politics and tensions within the country.

Commonly, there are repeating and overlapping sources of conflict within and between societies, including the following:

- ◆ resource scarcity;
- ◆ inequitable access to essential resources (food, housing, jobs, land, water);
- ◆ power inequities;
- ◆ limited communication or a lack of communication among different groups;
- ◆ misconceived ideas about groups other than one's own; and
- ◆ historical enmity and grievances.

Inequality in the distribution of power and resources can pitch different parts of a society against each other as they retreat into groupings – including ethnic groupings – and compete for power and access to resources. Conflict is likely when communication between groups (political, cultural, religious or ethnic) breaks down and past grievances go unresolved. Different views of a shared history can also be a source of conflict, such as different readings of the partition of the Indian sub-continent in the wake of the retreat of British colonialism.

All citizens of Bangladesh want change that would better the circumstances of their lives. But all aspirations towards change, it seems, also involves conflict. Some people want change and others may disagree. In electoral political systems, governments that take power seek to portray their decisions as representing the consensus within society. Yet, they often fail to recognise the difficulties of converting an electoral verdict into a political mandate. They overlook the complexities of the popular vote and in that manner, submerge the diversity of views and understandings within their societies. Conflict may be buried, temporarily, under this pretence of a political consensus. But it is likely to break out afresh when the pretence wears thin, as it invariably must.

Disagreement may be managed peacefully or may lead to violence and warfare. Violence can manifest when a society lacks the means to manage and resolve conflict. In many cases, conflict lurks just below the surface of a seemingly peaceful society, contributing to recurrent outbreaks of violence between



contending social groups and political parties. In violent conflict, people fear for their safety and survival.

Unresolved conflict, whether or not it involves violence, is socially destructive. The negative impacts are often felt beyond the immediate centre of a conflict, as when a child suffers the consequences of a family dispute, when communities suffer a loss of water rights as a consequence of business lobbies competing for access to a scarce resource and refusing to honour their obligations to protect this resource from serious pollution, or a society's economic development is stymied by inequitable distribution of resources and high-level corruption.

In the case of Bangladesh, most journalists surveyed by the IFJ thought that the conflict fuelled by power politics can be resolved. They believed though, that this would require promoting greater people-to-people contact and mutual understanding, which in turn would build social pressure on political players to negotiate over their differences. Survey respondents tended also to favour the establishment of clear professional guidelines and codes of conduct as a means to improve reporting on conflict.

Reporting conflict

Most journalists in Bangladesh say they are professionally exposed to conflict almost on a daily basis, according to the results of the IFJ survey.

Of all the respondents to the survey

- ◆ 66 per cent had prepared more than 10 news reports on conflict in the previous 12 months
- ◆ 18 per cent prepared six to 10 reports.
- ◆ 8.33 per cent prepared between one and five reports.
- ◆ 1.66 per cent had not encountered or reported on any conflict situation in the previous year.

An overwhelming majority of over 80 per cent believed they would be more efficient if they received proper training on reporting conflict.

CHAPTER

▶ **2**

The role of journalism

It is not the job of journalists to resolve conflict. However, the media plays an important role in promoting a conversation within society about issues. This in turn could contribute to a pluralist political debate. In providing information about issues, policies and strategies to the public, the media could limit tensions, create the conditions for equitable development and reduce the ignorance and fear that contribute to misunderstanding and hostility in society.

To do this, journalists need to investigate and analyse the origins and causes of conflict, in order to report effectively and fairly on discussions and practical suggestions for resolving problems. In reporting conflict, there is a great difference between a journalist who reports just the bare facts as he sees them and a journalist who questions these supposed facts. In terms of its value to the public, a journalist who investigates underlying causes and wider impacts on ordinary people, contributes much more than his “fact-based” counterpart.

Bare facts allow only limited understanding and help to fuel prejudices derived from a lack of full information. Media presentation of a deeper assessment, especially where ideas about resolution are included, can help people to see that there are various points of view and perhaps lead them also to identify positive solutions.

Journalists can promote fear and violence by unquestioning, unbalanced and misinformed reportage. Or they can be “conflict-sensitive” and look at all sides, thereby helping people to become better informed and more able to see a way out of conflict.

Peace agenda: Objectivity and the truth

A common question is whether the pursuit of peace is compatible with a commitment to truth in journalism. Can a journalist have an agenda for peace and still uphold a commitment to the truth and impartiality?

The real value of objectivity is that it requires that journalists do not accept things at face value. Whether it is the statements of officials or the mood swings that could come from being swept up in a street demonstration, the journalist is obliged to test “facts” as he or she has seen them, against a variety of other perceptions.

“Objectivity”, which is a prized virtue, requires that journalists seek a variety of views in order to gain a more accurate understanding and depiction of a particular situation, which is then reported in a way that allows people to be better informed.



The pursuit of balance and more voices in the news is essential. However, it is common for journalists to rely on only one source for their information, and often that source is an official spokesman for a government authority.

It is sometimes suggested that journalism guided by objectivity is no guarantee of truth. This is particularly a danger when objectivity is pursued by seeking to present a balance of views and leaving it to the audience to decide. The danger according to Neil Levy, an ethicist at Melbourne University, is that “the indiscriminate pursuit of balance leads not to objectivity, but to outright distortion of the truth.”

One of the issues is that not all positions are of equal merit, particularly in conflict situations. Journalists need to make an assessment of the relative merits of each position and report them fairly and according to their conscience. For example, if domestic violence against women is wrong, as most people would agree, then journalists do not make their reporting fair by giving credibility to those who commit such violence.

This point of view does not offer a licence to promote propaganda. Journalists have a duty to minimise their own bias and report in a way that is fair to conflicting points of view.

The profession of journalism is committed to truth as a major goal. Journalists also need to reconcile this commitment with a commitment to fairness. Simply seeking the views of both sides will not of itself advance the cause of truth. Journalists need to look at how they can take people beyond the “official” truth, even if it is presented objectively, to an understanding of the real consequences.

Journalists need to look beyond objectivity to how they can dig deeper, analyse, explain and put the news in context, so that an audience has all the information they need to see and understand what is “spin”, what is true and what is false.

A journalist's duty in reporting on conflict

1. To understand conflict, how it develops and how resolutions can emerge.
2. To report fairly, to report the complexities and opinions of all factions and to make personal allegiances, if any, clear to readers and viewers.
3. To report the background and causes of conflicts, to represent accurately both the legitimate and perceived grievances of all parties, and to remind readers that even perceived grievances are important to perpetuating and resolving conflicts.

4. To present the human side, to represent people's trauma and the human stories of a conflict's victims in a balanced, professional and non-exploitative manner. This is an obligation both to those people and to media audiences.
5. To report on peace efforts, of those working on peace and reconciliation every bit as much as those who exacerbate the conflict, including seeking out sources outside the primary belligerents.
6. To recognise our influence and how our reporting will affect a conflict and the lives of people caught up in it.

The Institute of War and Peace Reporting

Truth: Getting the story

The media has an ethical, moral and professional obligation to provide the public with honest, accurate and reliable reporting that does not distort or suppress information. There will be situations in which the journalists cannot obtain complete information. But in these situations it is necessary for them to record the reasons why the situation defies a full presentation of information. It is important for journalism, and for the proper functioning of democracy, that people can trust news media and know that what they read, view and hear are true, fair and balanced reports.

Clearly, a key problem for journalists reporting on a wide range of conflicts is how to ensure accuracy at a time when information may be manipulated or censored and various versions of "truth" compete for attention. Inaccuracy commonly derives from journalists using unreliable sources. State authorities are often the worst offenders in terms of giving self-serving accounts to the public.

In the days following the informal warning from the Bangladesh emergency administration, media leaders in Bangladesh communicated their unease about the new restrictions on their functioning. By this time the military-backed emergency administration was apparently realising the utility of a free media, since normal politics remained suspended and there was no apparent means available to the administration for gauging public sentiment.

The administration also showed an inclination to seek the support and endorsement of the media in what it claimed would be a transitional arrangement toward a more transparent political dispensation. Media endorsement was also sought for the mission of curbing corruption, which was seen as a cause that transcended political partisanship.

Yet, the next steps taken by the administration conveyed an impression that its commitment to media freedom was conditional. On April 17, 2007, just over three months into the emergency regime, the government Press Information Department issued a letter to all newspapers, television channels and radio stations urging that “ill-motivated and misleading reports” be avoided.

The advisory letter claimed that “some of the media are publishing or broadcasting dishonest and unprofessional political statements, satirical sketches, cartoons, features, etc, which are creating confusion among the people.” Certain of the newspapers, it continued, “are publishing motivated and exaggerated reports about government officials, businessmen, professionals, intellectuals, and politicians.” All this was being done, allegedly, with the deliberate intent to “create confusion among the people.”

The administration “requested” the media to be “more vigilant to ensure that (it does) not provide any room for activities, propaganda or reports that are unnecessarily harassing or misinformative about anyone.” “The government hopes that the country’s mass media will take greater care in publishing/broadcasting apolitical and substantial news, features, discussions, satirical sketches and cartoons, in order to maintain the positive role of the electronic and print media,” the advisory added.

There also seemed to be an effort to co-opt the media into the administration’s plans and projects, rather than to respect the media’s independent role. “The mass media’s role in carrying out the government’s ongoing multifaceted reform programs has been praised by all quarters,” the letter said. And it was because of this “positive role” that the administration was “always proactive in maintaining the freedom of the electronic and print media (despite the) state of emergency.” This “positive role” was held up as underpinning the “flexible and tolerant” approach of the Government in terms of enforcing the “provisions of the Emergency Powers Act.”

Clearly spelling out the conditions under which it would continue to show similar “tolerance,” the circular urged the country’s mass media to “take greater care” in its published or broadcast output. Subject to this clause, the circular promised, the Government would be “proactive in maintaining” media freedom.

This subtle change of mood was made overt and clear when the first signs of a challenge to the new administration surfaced with student protests at Dhaka University in August 2007. As the unrest spread, the government sent out a diktat to the media that reporting should be done “conscientiously and responsibly.” Soon afterwards, several talk shows and news analysis programs went off the air.



Following another suspension, broadcast channels were permitted to resume talk shows by mid-September. The move followed several appeals from senior media people, who argued that the public deserved the freedom to discuss matters of urgent public importance, such as floods that had ravaged vast swathes of the country and uprooted millions of people. Again, the permission granted was conditional.

The media has obviously had a rough time in Bangladesh through the emergency administration. But if the media were to be united on a minimum charter of rights, it would not be susceptible quite in the same manner to pressures from the administration. Such agreement on a minimum charter of rights would also involve the acceptance of a set of responsibilities. And in turn, without a consensus on conflict-sensitivity in a society prone to endemic political conflict, such agreement on media responsibility would prove elusive.

The issue is highlighted by revelations of the IFJ survey on the use of sources by journalists in Bangladesh.

Among respondents, a third (33.33 per cent) said they used the police as their primary source while 25 per cent said they used politicians and political parties. Just 5 per cent said they went to non-government organisations (NGOs) for primary information, and 6.66 per cent said they referred to sources among people affected by conflict.

Yet these journalists were not convinced of the reliability of their sources. More than 60 per cent thought information on conflict issues provided by information departments, police and military was limited, with 36.66 per cent believing that information from such sources was “biased”.

Getting to the source

Of the respondents to the IFJ survey:

- ◆ 33.33 per cent of journalists in Bangladesh used the police as their primary source.
- ◆ 25 per cent used politicians and political parties.
- ◆ 5 per cent used NGOs.
- ◆ 6.66 per cent used sources among those affected by conflict.

However, the surveyed journalists were not convinced of the reliability of their sources.

- ◆ 61.66 per cent thought information on conflict issues provided by information departments, police and military was limited.
- ◆ 36.66 per cent believed information from these sources was biased.

Language barriers, and the difficulty of securing accurate information from people who speak a language other than the majority language, is also an obstacle to achieving accurate reporting. This is not too serious a factor in Bangladesh, which shares a large measure of linguistic community. But terms used even within a shared language, can often have the effect of dividing perceptions.

If a report is later found to contain inaccuracies, the first step is to issue a correction that explains the mistake and the situation, in order to maintain public trust.

Accuracy checklist

- ◆ Distinguish between first and second-hand sources.
- ◆ Always use reputable sources, and wherever possible use first-hand information.
- ◆ Cultivate an extensive network of sources that can be called upon to give expert first-hand information on issues or events.
- ◆ Cultivate sources belonging to groups that are marginalised or tend to be excluded from public discussion.
- ◆ When reporting on a crime, try to get the suspects' side of the story as well.
- ◆ Avoid citing death tolls when verification is difficult.
- ◆ Take steps to correct any errors that occur in a report.

Context

It is important to give background to a news report, but journalists also need to be clear that their reporting on news does not cross the line into editorialising or offering an opinion that promotes a certain point of view. News reports should present information from all sides, or specify when attempts to contact all sides fail. To leave out important information or to add unfounded information about an event, is falsification. False reporting, especially in relation to conflict, undermines people's trust and can put lives at risk.



Context checklist

- ◆ Research the history of the conflict.
- ◆ Avoid focusing on individual acts of violence and try to present the broader picture.
- ◆ Examine what each party to the conflict has to lose or to gain.
- ◆ Provide the perspective of the ordinary people who are affected.

Objectivity

Two rival propositions seem to contend for influence among journalists in situations of conflict:

- ◆ The first claims that the journalist's responsibility is only to report conflict, not to seek solutions to the conflict. That is best left to others.
- ◆ The second claims that the journalist must not merely report conflict, but actively explore means of resolving it.

In any gathering of journalists, it is common to find a pretty even split between these two perceptions. And there is no denying that professional journalists do not set out to reduce conflict. They seek to present accurate and impartial news.

There can however, be several interpretations of "accuracy and impartiality". For instance, it could be argued that in simply representing different points of view on a conflict – or in other words, by filing a complete report – a journalist could create the conditions for a conversation between opposing sides. When people find that the media is reflecting their point of view, they begin to view it as a platform through which a sound and healthy public conversation can be conducted. The media is seen as a forum for expressing all the richness in society, rather than suppressing particular points of view. Good journalism becomes in this sense, the means through which a conversation can take place between contending viewpoints. It becomes a means of conflict resolution.

Needless to say, when an environment of coercion prevails, journalism is unable to perform this function. For instance, recent media reports on a matter of immense public importance for Bangladesh – the supply of essential agricultural inputs such as seeds and fertiliser – are known to have attracted the emergency administration's ire. On November 13, 2007, the emergency administration sought to blame "propaganda" for creating a sense of panic among farmers about the



Media faces police brutality. During a countrywide blockade called by one of Bangladesh's main political fronts in October 2006, police forces brutally attacked Ahsanul Karim Pintu, cameraman for a national TV channel in the Gulistan area of Dhaka City.

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availability of fertilisers for an upcoming sowing season. This heightened anxiety among the farming community led to riotous scenes at several fertiliser distribution points. Presumably, the media, in reporting this situation, was only accurately reflecting the reality. But the intolerance of the administration's reaction, led to a severe sense of insecurity within the media, in turn, leading it to default on its basic mission of keeping the public informed.

Most of the journalists in the IFJ survey in Bangladesh (88.33 per cent) believed the media was biased in conflict coverage. They thought this was mainly due to the media's commercial considerations (56 per cent) or the political interests of media owners (18.33 per cent).

More broadly, 85 per cent of respondents said the media generally reported all sides of an event. However, a significant number (15 per cent) disagreed. Half said their reports were balanced, while 7 per cent said there was no balance. All the respondents claimed that they sought to prepare news stories in what could be described as an "analytical" fashion.

When there is a violent threat in a society, the media sometimes takes sides. This happened in Nepal when the Government declared a state of emergency in regard to attacks by the Maoist insurgency. The main media outlets agreed with the action and did not note that the emergency powers overrode media freedom. The media generally used the language of the Government to describe Maoists as terrorists. The media very quickly became a voice of the Government against Maoists. Journalists found it difficult to report independently and analyse the actions of all sides. Journalists censored themselves and lost impartiality.

Balance checklist

- ◆ Avoid becoming a cheerleader for one side.
- ◆ Establish the different viewpoints and ensure they are presented respectfully and accurately.
- ◆ Bear in mind the context in which these views exist. Are some views held by an extreme majority?
- ◆ Rather than paraphrase other people's points of view, where possible, quote them directly.
- ◆ Ask yourself whether the story, as it is written, would harm or aggravate religious, racial or ethnic sensitivities
- ◆ Be careful not to create a false balance – balance does not mean equal merit to all sides.
- ◆ Remember you are reporting for the whole community, not just your ethnic group.

Language

As journalists, our most powerful tools are the words, images and sounds we use. We can use these tools to build understanding instead of fear and myths. The use of language that promotes hate and conflict – hate speech – must be avoided at all costs.

Under Article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), signatories agree that "any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law".

Journalists generally agree that they should not use hateful language or allow themselves to be used to stir up ethnic violence through careless or malicious

reporting. This creates a dilemma when political leaders use derogatory terms and verbally attack specific sectors or groups of people in a way that could incite or fuel conflict. The tension between professional and political commitment is a lively discussion point among all journalists, with many expressing a range of opinions about their role in reporting the hate speech of public figures. Some say the priority is to preserve social harmony. Others say there is an overriding responsibility to report the statements of a public figure. Others argue the question is not about whether or not to report hate speech, but rather how to report it.

Broadcasts incite ethnic violence in Kenya

Media monitors in Kenya say inflammatory statements and songs broadcast on local language radio stations contributed significantly to post-election ethnic violence in which almost 900 people were killed and 255,000 others were displaced after December 2007.

The broadcasts that incited Rwandan ethnic Hutus to commit genocide used dehumanising language against ethnic Tutsis.

According to the state-funded Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, which monitored hate speech before the December 27 (2007) national elections, local radio stations in Kenya also aired opinions that used dehumanising language and obscure references to make negative, sometimes genocidal, comments about other ethnic groups.

On one Kalenjin-language station, some callers said there was a need for people of the milk to cut grass, which the Kenyan rights group says was a call for ethnic Kalenjins, who are cattle herders, to remove ethnic Kikuyus from traditional Kalenjin homelands in the Rift Valley province. Other Kalenjin callers referred to ethnic Kikuyus living in the Rift Valley as settlers and as a mongoose that came to steal Kalenjin chicken.

Meanwhile, a Luo-language station, which supports ethnic Luo opposition leader Raila Odinga, aired a song that called Kenya's ethnic Kikuyu President Mwai Kibaki and his Kikuyu-dominated Cabinet a leadership of baboons.

On January 1, two days after Kenya's electoral commission declared Mr Kibaki the winner of an election the opposition says was rigged, a mob of ethnic Kalenjins and Luos burned to death more than 30 ethnic Kikuyu women and children seeking shelter in a church. Since then, hundreds more have been killed and more than 100,000 ethnic Kikuyus have been forced to leave the Rift Valley.

Caesar Handa, the head of Strategic Research, a company hired by the United Nations to monitor Kenya's election coverage, says the ferocity of the violence is linked to the anti-Kikuyu broadcasts.

"When you say, 'We want to reclaim our property. We do not want settlers in our midst,' then what you are saying is that you are evicting these people from the place they have called home over the years, and that, of course, comes with a level of violence and leads to death," said Handa.

The Kikuyu tribe, the largest in Kenya, is the tribe of Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta, who resettled hundreds of thousands of ethnic Kikuyus on fertile Rift Valley farms after independence from Britain in 1963.

Two of three post-independence presidents have been ethnic Kikuyus. Kalenjin, Luo and other tribes say they resent decades of Kikuyu dominance in government, business, and land ownership.

They complain about Kikuyu arrogance, noting that two Kikuyu-language stations Kenyan Commission on Human Rights says it is deeply concerned about reports that the song was sponsored by President Kibaki's political party.

Alisha Ryu, Nairobi
Voice of America
30 January 2008

Journalists need to be sensitive and careful in their work, but self-censorship risks permitting rumours to flourish. In reporting truthfully and fairly when such attacks are made, journalists should ensure they provide accurate context and background, and seek a diversity of views. They should also seek, in their reporting to distance themselves from expressions of hate speech by public figures, so that a report on a reprehensible public utterance does not become an endorsement of it.

Mind your language

- ◆ Among respondents to the IFJ survey in Bangladesh, 6.66 per cent said they were sensitive about the language they used and sought to avoid some words in conveying certain kinds of information. However, a quarter of the respondents said they did not do this.
- ◆ A total of 35 per cent admitted their reports contained elements of emotion; 17 per cent thought otherwise.

- ◆ Some 53.33 per cent said media reports in general were sensational; 23.33 per cent disagreed.
- ◆ Apart from these, 30 per cent thought that media reports in general were inflammatory; 21.66 per cent disagreed.

In view of the comments of respondents to the IFJ survey above, consider the excerpts below of two reports of the same event in Bangladesh. To what extent do these reports show a careful use of language? What words used here are emotive? Is there balance in quoting sources from various sides? Does either report seek to put the problem in context by giving background information? What would you do to ensure these reports are conflict-sensitive?

Report-1	Report-2
<p>Dhaka: Garment workers went on the rampage through the city's Mirpur area on Monday, vandalising at least five garment factories and a number of vehicles.</p> <p>More than 50 people, including 10 policemen, were also injured as several thousand garment workers fought pitched battle with the law enforcers and the workers of other factories.</p> <p>During the four-hour clashes, Mirpur and neighbouring Kachukhet area turned into a battlefield, holding up vehicular movement between Mirpur-10 and Kachukhet for more than four hours.</p> <p>Witnesses said the garment workers of ABC Apparels Limited decided to start work abstention during lunch hour, demanding</p>	<p>Dhaka: The Mirpur area of the capital turned into a virtual battlefield yesterday afternoon as several thousand garment factory workers locked into a fierce clash with police.</p> <p>More than 100 people including 50 workers and 20 police personnel suffered injuries during the clash that started around 5:30pm and continued till 9:00pm.</p> <p>Police lobbed at least 40 teargas shells and fired rubber bullets at the agitating workers who retorted by pelting the law enforcers with brickbats. The agitating garment workers also went on a rampage and attacked several factories damaging window panes and other furniture. Commuters going home suffered the most as vehicular traffic to and from Mirpur ground to a standstill. The clash ensued when police clubbed the workers of ABC Garments around 5:30pm. The workers of ABC were demonstrating on the street at Mirpur Section 13 with an</p>

their full salaries and protesting at firing the workers without prior notice.

Following the decision, agitated workers took to the streets and blocked Mirpur-Kachukhet Road in front of Mirpur Police Staff College at around 4:00pm.

As the workers spread a rumour that the workers of XYZ Factory killed their two colleagues after confining them inside the factory, the agitated workers attacked the XYZ Factory and continued to vandalise it ...

A huge contingent of policemen from the Mirpur and Kafrul police stations rushed to the scene and swung into action, clubbing the workers in a bid to bring the situation under control.

The entire area virtually turned into a battlefield as more workers from different factories joined the angry workers and clashed with the law enforcers, leaving 50 people, including 10 lawmen, injured.

The duty officers of the Mirpur and Kafrul police station said the situation was under control and the law enforcers were patrolling the area.

eight-point demand that included a demand for a pay raise ...

Rumours were spread among RMG workers that two of their fellow workers including a female were beaten to death inside XYZ Factory Ltd by hired goons of the factory owner and their bodies were dumped inside the factory. As the rumour spread among the workers of other factories like wildfire, they joined in the violent demonstrations with the workers who had already been on the street. They rained brickbats on the police and garment factories, damaging several RMG units. Police at that time swooped on the agitating workers, charging batons and firing teargas shells and rubber bullets, witnesses said ... Around 8:00pm, police along with six worker representatives entered XYZ Factory Ltd to find out whether the two workers were really killed inside the factory. The six workers and police came out of the building half an hour later finding no dead body.

However, the situation turned volatile once again and the workers started attacking police and vandalising the factories as a rumour had already spread that the six workers who had entered Opex are flunkies of the factory owner ...

Capt (retd) M Nurul Azim, director (finance) of XYZ Factory Ltd, denied the allegation of torturing the workers and said, "The vested quarters are trying to influence the workers to be violent."

CHAPTER



3



June 2007: A demonstration by Bangladesh's main journalists' organisations, demanding that the emergency regime restore media rights.

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Hearing multiple voices Ensuring access to media space and time

There is often a danger that the media caters to narrowly segmented audiences. Media units then tend exclusively to use the vocabulary that is familiar to their target audience and to reflect exclusively their social and political interests. In Bangladesh, the print media covers at best about 2 million in a country of over 140 million. Those excluded are rarely seen or heard in the print media. They become objects to be written about, not active agents whose interests are reflected in the news agenda.

Television has attained a broader coverage, though it remains mainly focused on entertainment programmes. The reach of television also is potentially limited by the unreliability of electricity supply in several parts of the country.

This leaves radio as the medium with the greatest potential. And in this respect, it is an encouraging sign that the emergency administration has in March 2008 notified a community radio policy and shortly afterwards, called for expressions of interest in starting community radio (CR) broadcasts.

In terms of eligibility criteria, the policy is as permissive as can possibly be conceived. It defines a community in fairly broad terms as a “group of people who share common characteristics and/or interests such as sharing a single geographical location i.e. a specific town, village, or neighborhood; sharing of economic and social life through trade, marketing, exchange of goods and



Collateral damage: An innocent rickshaw puller falls victim to a random bullet fired by police to disperse a demonstration by garment workers agitating for fair wages. Journalists often face similar risks.

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services". And it permits any such "community" to apply for a community radio licence. Specifically prohibited are applications from individuals, registered companies, political parties, international organisations (whether non-governmental or otherwise) and foreign media entities.

The policy spells out the usual range of proscribed broadcast content, in terms of anything that could be deemed detrimental to the security and sovereignty of the State and friendly relations with other States. Other fairly unexceptionable prohibitions include anything that may constitute contempt of court, or incitement to an offence. But there is some concern over the stipulation that community radio in its particular domain should "be relevant to the needs of that particular community" and "should not go beyond the community's cultural and historical heritage".

Aside from the negative proscriptions on broadcast content, there are also a number of positive prescriptions. These latter include speeches on developmental issues by local government functionaries and anything else that the national government may specify.

Governments often act on the premise that people cannot be trusted with using scarce resources – such as the broadcast spectrum – responsibly. This anxiety is especially sharp in societies prone to conflict. But giving people the means to have their voices heard may often be the best means of enabling them to understand their common interests with others they are otherwise isolated from, or locked in conflict with. A credible CR policy without excessive restraints and safeguards, could be a tool of empowerment and in turn, of conflict mitigation. It could be a means of having a multitude of voices influencing the national agenda.

Aside from allowing multiple voices to speak through direct access to the broadcast media, journalism should seek to reflect the richness of human experience. This can be done by developing first-hand sources who can help to tell the stories about ordinary people, the way they live, their fears, their hopes, their triumphs and their disasters. This sense of richness does not come to journalists waiting in a newsroom for press statements to be released by government authorities and other agencies.

In promoting conflict-sensitive journalism, journalists and media organisations need to look for, listen to and report on people's experiences arising from conflict. This requires also that media organisations dedicate resources to getting journalists into the field.

The best reporters are known to have extensive networks of sources, which also allows for more rigorous cross-checking of information. Journalists who want to make space for a diversity of voices in their reports must develop a bank of reliable sources who reflect that diversity, including doctors, lawyers, academics and community leaders, to name a few. It is important also to make contact with sources able to speak in a variety of languages.

In the end, first-hand sources are always preferable. Relying on hearsay and speculation from second-hand sources can result in inaccuracies and misinformation.

Sources: Good practice

- ◆ Compile a list of sources, share it with colleagues, and keep adding to the list as you conduct your everyday work.
- ◆ Focus on building contacts among men and women of other religions and ethnic groups who can provide reliable information on a variety of subjects.

Ethnicity

It is essential to quality and conflict-sensitive journalism that news reports refrain from using stereotypes or making assumptions about people of different cultural, religious and ethnic groups. Journalists must never use racial or ethnic slurs, and they must be on their guard about adopting unconscious assumptions about ethnicity, race, religion and caste. Journalists should always question whether the inclusion of information about ethnicity, race, religion or caste is essential to their reports.

While just 1.66 per cent of the journalists responding to the IFJ survey said they identified the members of minority or ethnic groups when reporting on crime or social disputes, almost three-quarters (73.33 per cent) said the media in general was often guilty of perpetuating stereotypes about certain ethnic and religious groups. Most believed the media was generally biased in favour of Bangladesh's dominant religious and ethnic groups. Many also thought that reports about ethnic or religious conflict received undue prominence in news presentations (61.66 per cent).

Although almost a quarter of respondents (23.33 per cent) said their media houses had guidelines for reporting on ethnic or religious conflict issues, only a negligible number reported having seen such guidelines.





Participants at a workshop in Dhaka, January 2008, on "Building Tolerance and Unity through Media". Speakers and resource persons included Shahidul Alam of DrikNEWS, Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul of the Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists, and staff of the IFJ.

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An important element of such guidelines would be to remind journalists always to keep in mind that individuals have multiple identities. They may see themselves as male or female, as part of a family, as a citizen, as a believer in a certain faith, and as part of an ethnic group, all at the same time. The extent to which they stress their ethnic identity commonly depends on their historical, political and social experience and the state of harmony or tension in the area in which they live.

Why mention ethnicity, religion or caste?

Ask yourself: Is ethnicity, race or religion or caste important in my report? If not, remove such references.

- ◆ Among journalists responding to the IFJ survey in Bangladesh, 88.33 per cent said the media was generally biased to the dominant religious and ethnic group.
- ◆ Story placement on issues of ethnic or religious conflict was very prominent, according to 61.66 per cent, while another 35 per cent thought placement generally gave such issues a "medium" priority. The rest thought that this kind of reporting merited very low priority.

- ◆ Some 23.33 per cent of respondents said their media houses had guidelines for reporting on ethnic or religious conflict issues. But only a negligible number reported having seen these guidelines. More than 65 per cent said that they had no guidelines.
- ◆ Some 86.66 per cent believed they would be more efficient if they had received proper training in conflict reporting.
- ◆ Only 1.66 per cent said they identified the members of minority or ethnic groups involved in an incident in reports on crime, drug abuse or social disputes.
- ◆ According to 73.33 per cent of the respondents, the media was often guilty of perpetuating stereotypes about certain ethnic and religious groups.

Ethnicity checklist

- ◆ Avoid reference to a person's ethnicity, race, religion or caste.
- ◆ If it is necessary to refer to a person's ethnicity, race, religion or caste, confirm the details with the person to ensure accuracy.
- ◆ Ask sources how they would like to be described.
- ◆ Where other news sources unnecessarily treat ethnicity as a causal factor in conflict, educate readers on the real causes and point out that ethnicity was not a factor.
- ◆ Understand your own biases and be wary of them when preparing or selecting news reports.

Gender

The way in which journalists and media institutions report on women and issues of special concern to women has a profound influence on how a society regards women. In conflict situations, it is common for the media to employ depictions and images of women merely as victims in order to dramatise a situation. While women may indeed be victims of a conflict, stereotypes reinforce the notion of women in a traditional role as mother and wife, rather than presenting women as actors for positive social change.





Journalists and press workers protest at the Jatiya Press Club, Dhaka, against a mass layoff at a major newspaper. Job security for journalists is always a requisite for true media freedom.

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Children

In conflict situations, children are most vulnerable to harm, including exploitation, and adults and governments must take responsibility to protect them. Journalists play an important role in ensuring that children receive as much protection as possible within conflict situations – be it a case of domestic violence, extra-judicial attacks against children living on the streets or an all-out war. Children, like anyone else in society, have the right to voice their point of view about conflict, its causes and the solutions.

Journalists around the world, through the IFJ, have agreed on guidelines for reporting on children. Journalists have affirmed the importance of including children's opinions, without exploiting them, and without making children more vulnerable to those who might exploit or otherwise harm them.

The IFJ logo is located on the left side of the page. It features a stylized orange bird with its wings spread, perched on a branch. Below the bird, the letters 'IFJ' are written in a bold, orange, sans-serif font. The entire logo is set against a white background.

Newsroom diversity

Media management and journalists have a responsibility to examine their employment, training and reporting techniques in order to assess how they can improve and measure the results.

The first step to newsroom diversity is to recognise the need for it. In Bangladesh, almost all the respondents to the IFJ survey (96.66 per cent) said that their respective newsrooms comprised staff from diverse ethnic, religious and political backgrounds.

A staff profile that is ethnically balanced, a training regime that covers ethical dilemmas involved in dealing with intolerance, and a willingness to examine and to monitor the editorial performance of media will raise awareness, broaden the horizons of news gatherers and reduce the incidence of error and prejudice arising from ignorance and incompetence.

Broadly, an institution that seeks diversity of views in the newsroom should improve its capacity to report on the diversity of views in the community, thus assisting in providing more balanced coverage of conflict issues when they arise.

News content diversity

Media organisations and journalists need to address the extent to which they embrace diversity and reflect different community viewpoints. This entails a conscious and careful training program, not just for new journalists, but also to review existing practice and where necessary to change it.

News organisations often tend to close ranks against external criticism. Strong leadership and significant catalysts are needed inside a news organisation to allow journalists to start to discuss these issues openly. Once the issue is opened up, it will become apparent that far from threatening a journalist's ability and freedom to report, diversity in the workplace enhances a journalist's ability to conduct quality work.

The first step is an audit to question which sections of the community, if any, may be neglected by the organisation.

Communities that have historically been neglected or misreported may harbour mistrust of the media and be accustomed to seeing reporters only when something bad happens. They may not welcome the first approach. Journalists may need to develop allies within such communities in order to develop contacts. This requires mutual trust.

Access to information

Sunlight is the best disinfectant. It is often argued that the most effective manner of ensuring accountability in public affairs is to make all relevant information a matter of public knowledge. Right to information (RTI) legislation is now emerging worldwide as a vital instrument of people's empowerment. Needless to say, having the information on issues of public importance also means that the people become participants in governance processes like never before.

Information in conflict situations is often denied to the public, since governments and security agencies seek typically in such situations, to entrench their supposed monopoly on wisdom. RTI laws that provide for public disclosure with the least possible exemptions are generally regarded as the best. In this respect, the RTI ordinance introduced by the emergency administration for public discussion in Bangladesh is a welcome move. Although is not yet law, ordinance could be notified at any time and would supersede, in the event of any contradiction, all provisions of the country's Official Secrets Act.

Journalists' groups have studied the draft law and found it lacking in several respects. The most conspicuous shortfall is the large number of exemptions that would be granted to allow authorities to decline public requests for disclosure. Section 8 of the Ordinance sets out nine eventualities under which information could be denied. These include very broad provisions, such as potential harm to "the sovereignty, honour, (or) foreign policy" of the State, its "defence" or relations with foreign States. Any disclosure that could harm the "economic management of the Government" or "benefit or harm any particular person or organisation financially" also could be blocked. Matters related to the tax liabilities of individuals or organisations, currency exchange rates and interest rates also could be protected by prevailing secrecy laws. The list of exemptions is rounded off by one which is seemingly all-embracing in its scope: "information, disclosure of which is against public interests", could be denied to the public.

The non-specificity of many of these exemptions has journalists worried. However, they are encouraged that a debate on the right to information is at last beginning in the public domain. An RTI campaign potentially could unite otherwise opposed social forces in seeking a law that is to the best interests of all. And once such a law is enacted, it could become a part of the apparatus of conflict resolution in society.

Conflict checklist

Questions for editors

- ◆ Am I making diversity a priority in the assignment and scheduling of stories?
- ◆ Am I giving reporters the time to pursue diverse sources and stories?
- ◆ Do I get out of the office to develop sources and contacts in diverse communities?

For reporters

- ◆ Do I attempt to find out how the actions of organisations I cover affect people in different groups in our community?
- ◆ Do I seek stories that originate with community members affected by the organisation?
- ◆ How can I expand the types of people, places and organisations from which I draw story ideas and angles?
- ◆ How do I expand my own lists of contacts and sources?

On a story

- ◆ Have I sought diverse sources for this story?
- ◆ Have I allowed preconceived ideas to limit my efforts to include diversity?
- ◆ Am I employing "tokenism," allowing one person to represent a community, or am I seeking true diversity?
- ◆ Am I furthering stereotypes - or battling stereotypes - as I seek diversity?
- ◆ Am I telling the truth as I see it?
- ◆ What are the likely consequences of publication? Who will be hurt and who will be helped?
- ◆ Will I be able to clearly and honestly explain - not rationalise - my decision to anyone who challenges it?

Adapted from "diversity checklist" for reporters and editors, The Seattle Times.

Good practice

- ◆ Hold an editorial team meeting to discuss and assess recent news reports from the point of view of gender, age and ethnicity.
- ◆ Question how issues related to religion, race, ethnicity and caste are handled.
- ◆ How often are any of these issues presented as a “problem”?
- ◆ Do crime reports reinforce stereotypes? (Compare how many calls a week are made to the police with the number of visits reporters make into different communities).
- ◆ Build links with different communities and encourage reporters to visit them.
- ◆ Consider establishing an advisory group within a targeted community.
- ◆ Ask a community leader to be a regular guest commentator.
- ◆ Consider the images used by your organisation. Do they reflect social diversity? Count the number of men named as reporters or subjects of reports. Is their representation in the media a fair reflection of the wider community?
- ◆ Improve your contacts within marginalised and neglected communities.
- ◆ Ask reporters to pool contacts, and share ideas for getting more.

CHAPTER

▶ **4**

Ethical reporting is conflict-sensitive

Journalists make ethical decisions every day. In times of conflict, where the situation is usually unclear and where different sides have a strong interest in pushing their own agendas, the safeguards provided by journalists' codes of ethics and professional conduct are essential to promoting quality journalism that is sensitive to the risks of fuelling conflict and conscious of looking for resolutions.

Journalists need guidelines

- ◆ Because they work autonomously.
- ◆ To avoid pressure or influence from within and outside news organisations.
- ◆ To defend their work within a newsroom and in the community.
- ◆ To help solve ethical problems and dilemmas.

The best guidelines are not a set of do's and don'ts, but rather a framework for thinking through ethical issues so that journalists can confidently address the issues that confront them, especially when they report on conflict situations.

Guidelines also give journalists a basis for challenging any improper use of the information and material they gather and prepare, as well as distortions that may be introduced during the editing process. For example, a journalist needs to feel supported and able to speak out to their editors and others in a newsroom if their report is edited or presented in a way with which the reporter disagrees, as when a report is altered to stress the negative over the positive.

Guidelines also can educate members of the public about how journalists approach their work, and allow journalists to defend their decisions in public. By making guidelines public, journalists also help to reduce conflict about their own work.

Journalists concerned about the quality of their profession need to encourage all their colleagues to operate according to journalists' agreed codes of conduct, good practice and other means of self-regulation, and to make a stand against those whose actions undermine the pursuit of quality journalism.

Readers of this handbook should now reflect on the salient areas of conflict in Bangladesh: such as those involving the Chakma people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, or the minority religious community. Have these voices been heard through the media? Look for instance at the essay reproduced from one of the country's leading English-language newspapers (as essay 2 in this volume). Is this a fair representation of the situation involving the religious minority? How many such reports do you see in the media, typically?

Conflict reporting guidelines

The following guidelines, developed by journalists working in conflict situations and the Poynter Institute, are provided for consideration but are not intended to be exhaustive.

Factual Accuracy

Ensure accuracy by using a range of reputable sources and distinguishing between first and second-hand information. Establishing diversity in the newsroom by recruiting reporters from a range of language backgrounds helps to break down language barriers and allows access to a wider range of sources. It is essential that journalists cross-check their information for accuracy. Statements should not be accepted at face value from any source, as even “official” sources can be incorrect. Should an error be made, immediately acknowledge it and apologise for any inconvenience or offence caused.

Balance

Conflict situations are never cut and dried. Examine the views of all parties involved and include their perspectives in reporting the situation. Presenting an objective cross-section of views will allow audiences to make up their own minds without feeling that they are being fed pre-digested information. Mainstream media tends to ignore the voices of women, refugees, the elderly and children. Recognise the silencing of these groups and seek to reverse the situation. Going beyond the official line and empirical data is an important task for conflict-sensitive journalists. Reporting the human element will not only harness an audience’s attention but also will motivate people to become involved in an issue rather than sit back and watch it unfold.

Sensitivity

Referring unnecessarily to race, religion, ethnicity or caste can offend some people, fuel stereotypes and create assumptions. Likewise, seemingly neutral words or phrases can have negative connotations for certain groups. There are several ways to prevent this outcome. Firstly, it is necessary to understand any biases that you might have. Secondly, bear in mind how people will react to what is reported, and let this guide what you write or include in a report. Thirdly, where possible, use images to communicate details that are difficult to reduce to words without causing confusion or offence.

Context

Situating events in their historical context gives readers a better understanding of the present situation. Without context it is easy to lose sight of the underlying reasons for a conflict and the possibilities for resolution, change or reform. Putting



an issue in context also involves examining the experiences of the people involved. Ask such people directly, rather than asking a third party or making assumptions about how people feel or are affected. Conflict-sensitive journalism focuses hard on context because sharing such information and understanding helps audiences to understand the issues involved and to participate in resolving conflict.

Responsibility

In the absence of a high degree of care and responsibility, reporting on conflict can risk promoting existing tensions, opening the way for political manipulation by various parties and groups. Clearly, conflict-sensitive reporting requires much care and responsibility on the part of the journalist. It is important to consider the way in which certain statements, images, news content and headlines will affect people, particularly minority or marginalised groups. The media has a responsibility to seek objectivity that contributes to social stability.

IFJ Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists

This international Declaration is proclaimed as a standard of professional conduct for journalists engaged in gathering, transmitting, disseminating and commenting on news and information in describing events.

1. Respect for truth and for the right of the public to truth is the first duty of the journalist.
2. In pursuance of this duty, the journalist shall at all times defend the principles of freedom in the honest collection and publication of news, and of the right of fair comment and criticism.
3. The journalist shall report only in accordance with facts of which he/she knows the origin. The journalist shall not suppress essential information or falsify documents.
4. The journalist shall use only fair methods to obtain news, photographs and documents.
5. The journalist shall do the utmost to rectify any published information which is found to be harmfully inaccurate.
6. The journalist shall observe professional secrecy regarding the source of information obtained in confidence.
7. The journalist shall be aware of the danger of discrimination being furthered by the media, and shall do the utmost to avoid facilitating such discrimination based on, among other things, race, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinions, and national or social origins.

8. The journalist shall regard as grave professional offences the following: plagiarism; malicious misrepresentation; calumny, slander, libel, unfounded accusations; acceptance of a bribe in any form in consideration of either publication or suppression.
9. Journalists worthy of the name shall deem it their duty to observe faithfully the principles stated above. Within the general law of each country the journalist shall recognise in professional matters the jurisdiction of colleagues only, to the exclusion of every kind of interference by governments or others.

Adopted by 1954 World Congress of the IFJ

Amended by the 1986 World Congress

Essay 1

Of commitments and contradictions

By Abul Momen

The emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 was the result of a sustained nationalist movement by the Bengali people that began with the language movement, shortly after the partition of the Indian sub-continent.



Police personnel use brute force against journalists. This incident occurred on account of an argument over access to an international sporting event at the Chittagong Cricket Ground.

© Rajesh Chakrabarti/**Drik**NEWS

Even after independence while we in Bangladesh were drafting our constitution, our nationalist politicians and our intelligentsia, were not quite aware about the presence of various ethnic minorities living in the country. Manabendra Narayan Larma, a legendary leader of the minority communities of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), fought a lone battle in the Constituent Assembly to establish the rights of his constituencies.

Political leaders of the mainstream, including Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, failed to understand the wounds and worries of the hill people.

At the moment the newly independent nation was formally adopting its constitution, a dejected Larma refused his endorsement, as, in his words: "This constitution does not recognise the existence of other national communities in Bangladesh. It makes no mention about the CHT ... We have been deprived of our rights, the country has become independent, but we continue to have a cursed life."

When on January 23, 1974, the parliament passed a bill declaring Bangladesh a "uni-cultural and uni-lingual nation state" Larma once again expressed the anxiety of his people in a speech in parliament. "Our main worry is that our culture is threatened with extinction," he said, "we want to live with our separate identity." But these worries and frustrations of the leader of a group of marginalised communities of a particular region of the country were not shared by anyone in the upper echelons of government.

In that high-spirited nationalist spirit that followed the Liberation War, civil society as a whole, including its more discerning sections such as writers, journalists and teachers, also failed to notice, not to mention understand, the anxieties of the ethnic groups. The media also failed to respond properly to the issues and agendas raised by the hill peoples.

Today when we try to evaluate the problems in the CHT we cannot avoid accepting our failure to judge the consequences of both short and long-term interventions in the name of development. Again, the Bengalis were found completely unaware and totally apathetic to the sufferings and reactions of the hill people,

This apathy resulted in symbols of so-called development like the erection of Kaptai Dam and Hydro-electric project, which were seen by the hills communities as deeply corrosive of their identity and way of life.

The Kaptai project on the river Karnafully was conceived as a project to help develop the economy of what was then East Pakistan in diverse ways, including through

electricity generation, flood control and improved navigational facilities to the more remote parts of the hill tracts.

In the implementation of the project, all these benefits obviously went absolutely in favour of the Bengalis as the hill people were neither taken into confidence nor were prepared to exploit the benefits by overnight changing their usual way of life. Far from benefiting them, the dam had far-reaching adverse consequences for the hill people.

The dam submerged an area of about 400 square miles including 54,000 acres of arable land which is 40% of the total acreage of the district. This included 10 square miles of reserve forest with valuable flora and fauna, and Ragmati city with the Chakma Royal Palace.

The artificial lake, now a tourist attraction known as the Kaptai Lake, rendered nearly 10,000 Chakma ploughing families having proprietary rights and 8,000 Chakma jhumia (shifting cultivators) families, destitute. Together, these two categories comprised more than 100,000 individuals, persons who were forced to go to work as landless wage labourers for mere subsistence.

About 60,000 Chakmas crossed the border of whom the majority settled in neighbouring Indian states and others in Myanmar. This endless suffering of the hill people never attracted the sympathy of upcoming political forces nor of their zealous elite class, both of whom were then engaged in a relentless struggle against the rulers of Pakistan. But close to four decades since the liberation of the country, we cannot deny the fact that indifference and negligence, both at the official and the popular levels, have deepened their alienation from the national mainstream.

The experience and present condition of the ethnic minorities living in the plain lands are almost similar or may be worse. It is about a decade that we are becoming conscious about the presence of a good number of ethnic minorities in our country. It took us almost forty years to notice the existence of small groups of people who are linguistically and culturally different not only from the majority community but also from each other. We are yet to be fully conscious of their rights and aspirations and far from recognising their separate identity and destiny.

Today, according to different sources, there are 64 ethnic minority groups living in Bangladesh. They are Ahamiya, Barna, Banai, Basak, Bakti, Bedira, Bhumija, Bhuiyan, Bhuiyali, Bawm, Chakma, Chak, Dalu, Garo, Gurkha, Hari, Harijan, Khasia, Khaira, Khiyang, Khumi, Khanda, Koch, Kole, Karmakar, Ker, Khando, Lahar, Lushai, Lura, Marma, Mro, Manipuri, Mahato, Munda, Malo, Mahdi, Mikhir, Musahar, Oraon, Pankho,



Paharia, Pahan, Pal, Patro, Rakhain, Rajoar, Rai, Rangutar, Ramdas, Ruhia, Rajbangshi, Shak, Shora, Saontal, Shing, Turi, Tanchangya, Tripura, Teli, Ushui.

The plain-land entrepreneurs and peasants are continuously grabbing lands of these minority peoples since the partition.

Socio-economically they are marginalised and socio-political repression together with linguistic and cultural domination of Bengali population aggravated their plight. It is true that United Nations and many other international bodies are framing charters and declarations to protect rights of all sorts of minorities including the threatened ethnic groups. Special mentions are often made about cultural, linguistic and religious uniqueness of each group and importance of preserving those. But, although some of the civil society groups and NGOs in particular are showing sensitivity and taking up responsibilities to redress the problems of ethnic minorities yet most of the common people and the Government seem to be still unaware and negligent about the issues and problems.

The prevailing situation has been causing erosion of their political and civil rights and their total alienation from the political system of the mainstream. Over the years 100,000 Chakmas became landless and homeless, 60,000 became refugees, about 20,000 lost their lives (including Bengali settlers) in armed struggle in CHT, prominent leaders of ethnic minorities were killed by rival groups or by hooligans of Bengali land grabbers or died in the custody of government agencies. It is a heavy price and should stop immediately. The rehabilitation work in the CHT is not satisfactorily progressing, although more than a decade has passed after the signing of CHT peace Treaty. So, we have a lot to do in changing the reality so that the minorities find the situation favourable for them.

In the case of the ethnic minorities we also need to be more sensitive and well informed about the importance of forest, of bio-diversity and in a populous country with expanding agricultural activities how these are threatened. There is a continuous onslaught on forest and as our consciousness, as well as commitment, for such agendas are not clear or strong the waning of the forest together with their inhabitants is but a reality in this country. Media has a lot to do in all these aspects.

Historically we are aware of the Hindu-Muslim conflicts; the sub-continent has a long history of these two major communities living in harmony and hostility.

Bangladesh has inherited this issue from Pakistan and although the birth of the nation ushered in a new era committing itself to the ideals of both democracy and secularism yet with the lapse of time and specially seeing the developments in the

socio-political arena we have to admit that we could not heal the wounds of two-nation theory-led politics. The religious minorities, specially the Hindu community in Bangladesh, continue to suffer just as they suffered in Pakistan. We have again failed to create suitable politics, social order and state policies that would assure the religious minorities the same status and facilities like the Muslim majorities.

With the rise of politics of Muslim nationalism that patronised the militant groups in the country not only the secular democratic forces have become their target but also women in general are facing repressive attitudes from the traditional social leaders. Even with modern education spreading, democratic measures expanding the society in general is a male-dominated one and nurture adverse attitude towards women.

We have other areas where also the society is divisive. The gap between rich and poor is expanding with resources concentrating in the hands of a handful of people.

As regards development the country is not growing in an even scale, many of the important district towns and cities are suffering from negligence and underdevelopment. Life in the rural areas is facing more wear and tear than in the cities.

Inequalities in the society are nurturing issues of conflicts and contradictions, creating an atmosphere of distrust, taking away people one from the other. In such reality we all need to work to build tolerance and unity among the people. The media is to take the leadership in this venture of the society.

The author is a senior journalist and writer in Bangladesh who presently works with the Bengali Daily Prothom Alo, the country's biggest circulation broadsheet.

Essay 2

Hindu properties continue to be 'vested'

Some 2 lakh families lose 1.22 lakh bighas since 2001

By Khawaza Main Uddin

Nearly two lakh Hindu families have lost 1.22 lakh bighas of land, including their houses, in the six years since the Vested Property Act was annulled in 2001 to return the "vested" property to their original owners, according to a research on the issue.

Abul Barkat, a professor of economics at Dhaka University who has conducted the research, says some 12 lakh or 44 per cent of the 27 lakh Hindu households in the country were affected by the Enemy Property Act 1965 and its post-independence version, the Vested Property Act 1974.



At the current market price, the value of the 22 lakh acres of land (one acre roughly equals three bighas) that the Hindu families were displaced from is Tk 2,52,000 crore, which is more than half of the country's gross domestic product, he says.

"This is a man-made problem contrary to the spirit of humanity. We have to get rid of this uncivilised state of affairs to establish a civilised society. Otherwise, we have to face a bigger historic catastrophe," Barkat insists in the abridged version of his research paper, *Deprivation of affected million families: Living with Vested Property in Bangladesh*, which will be published in its entirety later.

In 2001, the then Awami League government enacted the Vested Property Return Act to repeal the Vested Property Act with a view to restoring ownership of the lost land to many an affected Hindu family. The move was criticised as a "political tokenism" aimed to appease minority voters prior to the general elections.

While trying to review the impact of the law on the land ownership of the Hindu community, Barkat has found that no list of the people evicted or the quantum of lands grabbed on the basis of the Vested Property Act has been prepared till date.

Instead, politically powerful people grabbed most of the land during the reign of the BNP-led alliance government between 2001 and 2006. Forty-five per cent of the land grabbers were affiliated with the BNP, 31 per cent with the Awami League, eight per cent with Jamaat-e-Islami and six per cent with the Jatiya Party and other political organisations.

An earlier research on vested properties, also done by Barkat in 1997, painted a diametrically opposite picture of political affiliation of direct beneficiaries of appropriated property - 44 per cent with the Awami League and 32 per cent with the BNP since the former was in power and the latter the main opposition.

In his latest research report, Barkat mentions that the affected Hindu families met with more incidents of violence and repression in the immediate-past five years of the BNP-led government than in the previous five years of the Awami League government.

Political elements, locally influential people in collaboration with the land administration, trickery by land officials and employees themselves, use of force and crookedness, fake documentation, contracted farmers and death or exile of original owners have also been blamed for land grabbing and perpetuation of the "vested properties".



Barkat points out that 53 per cent of the family displacement and 74 per cent of the land grabbing occurred before the country's independence in 1971 after the then Pakistan government, following the India-Pakistan War in 1965, introduced the Enemy Property (Custody and Registration) Order II, which was widely criticised as a tool for appropriating the lands of the minority population.

The issue came to the limelight in the form of another research on Impact of Vested Property Act on Rural Bangladesh: An Exploratory Study which was undertaken in 1995-96 and published in 1997 - a move that sensitised the public.

This time around, his research covered the progress since 2001 and used as samples 450 affected Hindu families in 16 union parishads in 16 districts across the country.

In view of the gravity of the problem that has had tragic effects on the demography over 42 years, Barkat acknowledges that it will also be a tough task to establish the rights of the original owners.

More than 60 per cent of the owners and the successors of "vested properties" are either dead or have left the country, he says.

He also dismisses the "Hindu versus Muslim" polarisation in the problem and claims that it is an issue created by communal elements and vested interests groups. "Criminals do not bother whether a piece of land is owned by a Hindu, a Muslim or a Santal; they resort to easy means to loot property," he adds.

To solve the residual problems of the Vested Property Act, Barkat has come up with a number of recommendations such as identification and listing of such cases and lands, amendments to certain provisions of the 2001 law that hinders its implementation, cancellation of leases of such land to different people for 99 years, and involving citizens' groups in addressing the problem.

He explains that the scrapping of the Vested Property Act in 2001 has not paved the way for its implementation to end deprivation of the Hindu community due to deliberate delay and criminalisation of the political economy.

"The vested property act incapacitated Hindu people in serving the nation, depriving the country of their more valuable contribution. Also the inability to raise protests against the repression by a tiny class of looters implies the weakness of the majority people who are though non-communal," Barkat observes.

From the New Age, Dhaka, May 26, 2007

SAFETY IN SOLIDARITY

A Survival Guide for Journalists in Bangladesh

Bangladesh, 2008



Introduction

Journalists and media workers in Bangladesh face serious safety and security issues, much like their professional colleagues elsewhere. However, the situation in Bangladesh is unique in that it is not a country that is threatened by overt forms of violence. Armed insurgent groups are becoming active and there are parts of the country where long-running ethnic conflicts continue to fester. But the major source of conflict is the bitter political polarisation in the country, which breaks out in recurrent riots and civil unrest.

Journalists often get caught in the crossfire of this conflict. They are frequently called upon to take sides and to declare a partisan commitment in the political struggle. This in effect renders them incapable of performing their basic mission of informing the public in an objective and dispassionate fashion.

With politics understood in terms of a partisan contest between the country's two main political formations, politics in the public interest tends to be forgotten by the media. But "power politics" as reported by the media is of limited interest to the public at large. Apart from this, the media faces an acute crisis of relevance and credibility. In a country of an estimated 140 million people, the print media covers fewer than 2 per cent. The electronic media has a far larger reach, but its main focus is entertainment rather than news and current affairs.

Nevertheless, there is a certain degree of pressure on journalists to conform with dominant power structures. The situation is made worse by the consistent failure of managements to stand by staff who face threats and coercion. A recent case involving cartoonist Arifur Rahman, who was compelled to resign his post with Bangladesh's leading daily newspaper after offending religious orthodoxy, highlights this issue.

Government forces and agencies exert pressure in myriad ways. An infamous incident that is still talked about among Bangladesh's press corps occurred in 1992, when armed personnel from the security agencies entered the Dhaka Press Club and opened fire in a bid to intimidate. The judicial inquiry that was subsequently ordered is yet to publish its findings.



The climate of intimidation has the expected chilling effect on media freedom. Journalists, including editors with whom the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has spoken, mention that any issue likely to excite a controversy will in all probability be left alone by the media. In recent times, a tendency to evade all risk has led to a conspicuous failure to report on issues of serious public importance, such as the failure of authorities to supply seeds, fertiliser and other vital inputs for the 2007 agricultural sowing season.

In Khulna division, one of the six administrative divisions of Bangladesh, journalists face threats from armed factions aligned with Islamic organisations and from radical left-wing groups. There is also an additional threat from smugglers and traffickers. This issue is common to several other districts, which border either India or Burma. In other regions, such as the Chittagong Hill Tracts, where the Bangladesh authorities face the security challenges of a long-running ethnic conflict, the denial of essential facilities to the media has become the norm.

About this handbook

This handbook is designed as a practical guide rather than a theoretical work and should be read by journalists who live and work in hazardous conditions and by those who may be assigned to risky areas. Much of the information comes from professional safety trainers and from other providers of safety information (although they are not responsible for any shortcomings). There has been a rise in the number of courses that combine the skills of highly trained ex-military personnel with the experiences of journalists on assignment. Some of the best information and advice in this handbook is distilled from journalists who have returned from risky assignments and who have reflected on what put them at risk and what kept them safe.

Of the chapters that follow, the first deals with the fundamentals of safety for journalists. The second goes over the basics of how journalists could prepare to work in hostile environments and the kinds of recourse that they may have when faced with specific contingencies, such as abduction. The third deals with situations of riots and civil disorder and how best to deal with them. The fourth briefly goes over the kinds of emergency medical aid procedures with which journalists should familiarise themselves. Finally, the fifth chapter deals with the all important issue of campaigning and building journalists' unity and solidarity around safety issues.

CHAPTER



1

Safety fundamentals for journalists

Over the past 15 years more than 1500 journalists and media staff have been killed in the line of duty globally. They died because someone did not like what they wrote or said, because they were investigating what someone did not want to be investigated, because someone did not like journalists, or because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Every job has its risks. Journalists, whose job is to bring into the open what someone may wish to keep hidden, are at greater risk than most. But the dangers today are unacceptably high. In some parts of the world harassment, threats and worse have become an unavoidable part of the job. When reporting on war or civil conflict the risks escalate and journalists lose their lives.

Each death is a tragedy for friends and families and a waste of talent and opportunity. Yet violent deaths do not tell the whole story, because the official figures focus on those who were killed in wars or civil conflict, or who were otherwise targeted. The figures record the deaths of journalists killed in accidents while on a hazardous assignment, but they do not record the deaths of journalists who die in traffic accidents because they are trying to reach a story too fast, or working past the point of exhaustion, or because they put their lives in the hands of drivers who do not know an unlit dangerous road. The figures do not tell of those who survive but who are so physically and mentally scarred that they are unable to work effectively again. They do not record the impact of death and injury on other journalists who may be reluctant to probe areas that have proved fatal for their colleagues.

Attacks on journalists have a widespread chilling effect. They sap the ability of journalists to investigate and report and they deprive the public of the right to know. Sometimes this is the objective of the violence. Violence against journalists is often a deliberate policy by people who cheat, rob and inflict harm on their communities so that they can avoid being exposed for a crime and stay in the shadows.

It is important to recall that of all the journalists killed over the past 15 years and more, more than 90 per cent were born and grew up in the land where they died. Foreign correspondents are the high-profile casualties, but most victims are local. When the victim is a journalist working in his or her own community, the news makes little impact elsewhere. Local journalists are at greater risk because they continue to live in the areas from where they report. When the story is over; they cannot board an aeroplane and fly away.

This handbook is primarily aimed, therefore, at journalists and other members of news-gathering teams working in their own country or region. Such journalists and camera crews are usually at a disadvantage compared with those who parachute in from overseas. Local correspondents, camera crews and photographers may have to take more risks with little or no support for themselves or their families if something goes wrong. They do not have the insurance or equipment or backup of international correspondents working for large media networks, and they are less likely to have been sent on a training course. Some international teams even hire local journalists to take their risks for them, without offering the same level of protection as they provide for their own staff.

Part of the answer lies in the growing campaign for equal rights for staffers and freelances and for better equipment, training and insurance. This is particularly needed for freelance staff, many of whom depend on one media outlet, but who are entitled to none of the protection offered to staff members. One objective of this handbook is to raise the awareness of journalists, their organisations and media employers of the need for greater protection. It forms part of a general demand that those who own and run the news media take more responsibility for the safety of their journalists and for the welfare of journalists' families. Greater legal protection for freelance journalists should be high on the agenda in all negotiations with employers.

However, there is also much that journalists and other media workers can do for themselves and for each other to increase safety and reduce risks. Journalists on hazardous assignments can look out for each other, even if they work for rival news organisations. Journalists also need to understand how inflammatory journalism and poor standards of reporting can have negative consequences for all journalists by souring relations with local groups and institutions.

People who target the media with violence do not distinguish between "good" or "bad" journalists; they hit out at those they can reach. All journalists have a stake in high standards and objective reporting, even if this alone will not guarantee safety.

The importance of safety

Safety is a positive quality, part of getting the job done well and quickly; an asset, not a liability. A good journalist cultivates safety awareness, just as he or she develops interviewing and investigation skills. Safety means thinking ahead, being prepared, observing what is happening and reflecting on its



meaning. A good driver reads the road; a fast driver reads the speedometer. The job of the journalist is to tell the story, not to become the story. A journalist who puts him or herself needlessly at risk is behaving in an unprofessional manner that could ultimately prevent the story being told or the pictures being seen. Some correspondents, photographers and camera operators in war zones embrace a macho culture and a competitive urge for danger. However, good journalism is about delivering reliably; it is not about a momentary surge of excitement. In any case, journalists who adopt an attitude of “death or glory” usually focus on the glory rather than on death, and hardly think about the serious injury that could end their careers. In the meantime, reckless journalists put at risk the lives of the fixers, drivers and interpreters who make it possible for them to work. Sometimes the risks can be for nothing. Getting closer to the action does not always make for better reporting or more compelling imagery.

Is any story or picture worth dying for? Even the best stories and pictures only have value when they are read or seen. Moreover, a journalist who is killed or injured cannot file a story or process a picture. A live journalist is infinitely more effective than a dead one. No one can remove all the danger from the profession, but journalists can do much to anticipate dangers, reduce risks and come through hazardous assignments safely. Journalists have an individual responsibility to anticipate and reduce dangers, and a collective responsibility through their professional organisations and trades unions to campaign for safer working conditions.

Journalists, their organisations and their employers all have a critical function in reducing the unacceptable rate of death and injury.

The role of governments

Governments are sometimes directly implicated in attacks on journalists and media institutions. More commonly, governments have an ambivalent attitude toward journalists, and do not regard it as a prime duty to protect them. Each year, press freedom groups and journalists rage over the lack of concern shown by governments when media staff are attacked. Few killings of journalists are properly investigated. Fewer still are the number of culprits brought to justice.

It often seems that killers target journalists and media with impunity. Democracy cannot function while journalists are in fear, but many politicians and state officials believe that a frightened journalist will be a submissive journalist. Even governments that pride themselves on their democratic

credentials put journalists at risk when they give the police or courts the right to seize material or pass laws requiring journalists to reveal sources or give up confidential information. Such laws can make journalists appear as quasi forces of the state, so that those involved in riot or civil disturbance believe that being seen by a journalist is equivalent to being observed by a police officer.

An important principle was set when the War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia subpoenaed a former reporter with The Washington Post, Jonathan Randal, to try to compel him to give evidence about an interview with Bosnian Serb Radoslav Brdjanin when he was on assignment in Bosnia. Randal refused to testify and appealed against the subpoena. In December 2002, the tribunal upheld his appeal and sharply restricted its own powers to compel journalists to testify, accepting that to do so could have "a significant impact upon their ability to obtain information". The court added, "If war correspondents were to be perceived as potential witnesses for the prosecution, they may have difficulties in gathering significant information because the interviewed persons may talk less freely with them, and may deny access to conflict zones. Second, war correspondents may shift from being observers of those committing human rights violations to being their targets, thereby putting their own lives at risk."

However, the tribunal did not rule out compelling journalists to testify in future. It said that this could be done if a journalist's evidence was "of important and direct value in determining a core issue in the case" and "cannot reasonably be obtained elsewhere". Most journalists would argue that they may choose to give evidence, but should never be forced to do so. Where this does happen, governments put journalists at risk and undermine their unique function as independent and neutral observers.

Toward an international safety code for journalists

In 1998, the IFJ and a group of like-minded supporters including the BBC, the National Union of Journalists (UK and Ireland) and the media staff union Media Entertainment International discussed setting up an international body to promote safety. The IFJ issued a Code of Practice for the Safe Conduct of Journalism. The Associated Press, the BBC, CNN, ITN and Reuters then developed their own safety codes.

The global media groups moved safety up the agenda, and set high standards for their own staff. But this welcome move has also underlined the gulf



between those who take safety seriously and provide training, insurance and equipment and those who do not or cannot afford to do so. Although the code has been taken up by some other broadcasting groups, few newspapers have signed up, and many media groups give the safety of their journalists a low priority. One journalist who works for a well-regarded title of a very wealthy global media empire summed up the preparation his employers gave him before they sent him to Afghanistan: "They told me to be careful."

The IFJ has campaigned for 20 years for improved safety for journalists, and arranged the first ever safety courses for journalists who were not working for big media groups. The IFJ is proposing several joint initiatives to train journalists and to ensure that they are protected. The IFJ Code of Practice for the Safe Conduct of Journalism stresses the responsibility of media organisations to provide equipment, risk-awareness training, social protection and medical cover not only for staff members but also for freelances.

In November 2002, the IFJ and the International Press Institute (IPI), with several other professional organisations, press freedom groups, international media and journalists' associations, agreed to establish the International News Safety Institute (INSI) to promote good practice in safety training, materials and assistance to journalists and media staff. The institute, which was launched in 2003 as a network for safety in journalism, now focuses on sharing information and materials and covers all categories of journalists – freelances and staff. It has been progressively seeking to include regional media networks and national-level journalism bodies in a core group of sponsors.

CHAPTER

▶ **2**

Preparing to work in hostile environments

The most obvious risks to journalists come during a war when working within range of guns, bombs, mines, rockets or artillery. But hostile environments exist on broader fronts than battlefields. Physical risks to journalists are probably greater when covering riots and civil disturbance than in a traditional war between regular armies. A journalist working away from base without his or her usual support may also be at risk from the following:

- ◆ Illness.
- ◆ Traffic and other accidents.
- ◆ Violence, including targeted attacks on media.
- ◆ Exposure.
- ◆ Exhaustion.
- ◆ Emotional distress and low morale.

More journalists are laid low by illness or traffic accidents than are killed or injured in war, and a journalist who is sick with fever or food poisoning cannot function or file copy.

Focus on the main risks

Violence often comes from unexpected directions, as a demonstration turns violent, or aggrieved members of the public take out frustrations on the media. It makes sense for journalists covering a wide range of stories and in a variety of situations to prepare for a hostile environment and for the pressures that exist outside the normal routine. A journalist needs to be mentally prepared, physically prepared and properly equipped. The aim is for the journalist to become aware of risks, to take what precautions he or she can, and to retain as much control of the situation as possible, rather than trusting to luck. A journalist is almost never completely in control, and there is no such thing as zero risk, but every journalist can assess the risks and become more aware of the dangers.

Even situations which do not seem especially dangerous can be hazardous for the unprepared reporter or camera crew, while even the most dangerous situations can be made safer through risk assessment and good preparation. Good planning is not only likely to get you there and back safely, but also helps to identify the key

elements of a news report, gives background information about the situation and environment, and makes you a more knowledgeable and more effective gatherer of news or pictures.

Before departing on an assignment:

a) Ensure you are physically fit for the assignment

Most journalists are reluctant to turn down what appear to be career-enhancing assignments, even when they are dangerous. However, every journalist needs to be honest with themselves. Are you physically fit to a reasonable level? Could you walk all night if you had to, or run for safety? Will you function away from comfortable hotels? Fitness may be important and you should be capable of physical exertion when needed.

b) Improve your knowledge of the local situation

What do you know about the political and social situation you are entering? Who are the main players? Are you sufficiently briefed on recent developments? What are people's attitudes likely to be toward the media in general and toward you and your media institution or title in particular? Does your ethnicity put you at extra risk? Do any groups have a history of violence toward journalists or a history of atrocities against civilians? Where are the key borders you need to know about? Are there any "no-go" areas? What permissions do you need and from whom? Will these carry weight once you are on the road?

These issues are relevant even for nationally based journalists who enter a region with which they are not familiar, where a different dialect or language is spoken, or where certain powerful local groups have hostile ideas and attitudes toward the media in general or towards particular media organisations. In general, journalists and camera operators who treat people with respect win more cooperation from a local community, and also have better protection against potentially threatening situations.

Preparing for hazardous assignments

In doubt? Ask a journalist

Contact local journalists when travelling to an unfamiliar area. Listen to what they say about the source of local risks.

Put yourself on the map

If you do not know the area well, make sure you have a good-quality up-to-date map.

How are you regarded by the subjects of your reports?

How will the main protagonists see you? What is their attitude to journalists? Is there



hostility toward your media institution? Could you be seen as “representing” one or the other side in a conflict or a dispute?

Knowledge of languages is a valuable asset. If you are going to be working in a place for some time, learn at least the basics. Journalists are often sent at short notice to cover stories where their own language is not understood, or where it may be regarded with hostility. You cannot learn a language overnight. However, people are usually responsive if you greet them in their own language. Learn key phrases such as “I am a journalist,” “Can you help me?” or “I need a doctor.”

If this is your first time in a country or region, there is a lot you will not know. Good journalists do not know everything but ask good questions and are quick learners. A reporter who has “been there and done that” (i.e., had a wide range of experiences) can give you essential information and share experiences that will help you to learn quickly. However, some experienced journalists become reservoirs of cynicism, a corrosive impediment to fresh thinking. Cultivate media professionals who retain a basic respect for the people among whom they work. Journalists who routinely describe the places and people on whom they are reporting in insulting and derogatory terms are unlikely to help you to gain an insight into the local situation.

Know your rights

Many journalists travel with little or no knowledge of the region or of the application of local or international law, and without an awareness of their own rights as independent neutral observers. Few staff are able to quote the relevant protocols of the Geneva Conventions and humanitarian law that define the rights of non-combatants. Journalists should be briefed on the political and legal conditions of the region. They should know about the role of the International Committee of the Red Cross, United Nations agencies and regional political bodies before they leave home.

The Geneva Conventions define the murder or ill-treatment of journalists in times of war as a crime. The conventions give journalists the same rights as civilians in armed conflicts, whether between nations or in civil war situations. The conventions do not cover cases of civil disturbances, including riots. However, journalists could engage in a campaign to achieve the same standards of protection in any situation involving the potential for violence.

Even so, a piece of paper cannot stop someone with a gun who is determined to kill, although war criminals are increasingly being brought to justice and soldiers and militia all over the world are familiar with the concept of a war crime. Journalists must build on this knowledge. Remember, however, that journalists lose their status as civilian non-combatants if they take part in a conflict, carry a firearm or act as



Photojournalists lay down their cameras on the premises of the Jatiya Press Club, Dhaka, in protest against the assault on A.S.M. Gorky, a senior member of the fraternity, by personnel of the Rapid Action Battalion. Dhaka, May 25, 2006.

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spies. The same rules and strictures apply to situations of civil unrest too, where journalists are expected to adhere strictly to a canon of neutrality to merit the protection due to them.

Social protection

What if something goes wrong? What insurance do you have and what will happen to your family? The most immediate need may be medical care and rehabilitation. There may also be a longer term need for rehabilitation from physical injury or psychological scars. Journalists need to know that their income will continue undiminished if they are unable to work, and that their families will be provided for if they are killed. Media groups may plead that they do not have the resources for this kind of insurance, but someone has to carry the cost and it should not be the individual. Journalists' organisations need to ensure that this essential demand is met. Insurance and medical cover should apply equally to freelance journalists and staff members and cover the whole team.

Clarify lines of communication with your news desk

When away from your office, communication with the news desk or producer may be problematic. People who manage news gatherers in the field are often frustrated if they cannot reach their staff day and night. Remember also that you are at risk in many situations if no one knows where you are and what you are doing. In all dangerous situations journalists should ensure that they keep a responsible person fully informed of their movements. Agree a time frame when you will call in and explore with the news desk the problems that are likely to arise. Those who are waiting for your imagery or copy to arrive have their own frustrations and may forget how long it can take to get even simple things done in the field. There is a depressing tendency for those in the office to ignore what they are being offered by their own reporters or camera crews in favour of what has been put out by the opposition or international agencies.

Too often, news desks forget that diversity of news implies variety of news. So one piece of advice for news desk staff is to trust what is received from your own reporters and camera people on the ground. It is absurd for a journalist to put him or herself and crew at risk to get a story that a rival outlet has already shown, and that may be weaker than the report or images that they have already filed.

The authority to make difficult calls on day-to-day operational decisions involving your own and others' safety rests with people in the field. Never be bullied by over-enthusiastic news desks into taking foolish risks. By the same token, news desks and producers will rightly want an agreement that there are certain things (e.g. crossing a border, or going with an insurgent or underground force to conduct an interview)



that require prior approval. Reporters, photographers and camera crews should make such agreements and stick to them.

All field staff should be involved in a discussion resulting in agreements on risks and decision-making. These agreements should be recorded and, if a conflict or hazardous situation is likely to continue for some time, be updated in the light of experience in the field. This will gradually become a useful diary of experience. As protocols are updated, information about contacts, special areas of risk and sources of help should be recorded or shared. Journalists must be willing to share information that could save lives. Journalists returning from the field should debrief so that the information kept in the office is as up to date as possible. An important part of these protocols is an agreement on what will happen if a journalist or crew has not been in touch for a specified period of time. If a journalist knows what steps his or her organisation will take, it will help them to make decisions if they are detained or in trouble. Every protocol should cover plans for evacuation in case of injury, illness or deteriorating conditions.

Take the right equipment

There is almost no limit to the equipment that might be useful. How much equipment you can take will depend on where you are and your resources. But the most important equipment is perhaps the least difficult to carry: it is the press card.

A press card clearly identifies you and carries your photograph. It can be distributed by your professional organisation or trade union or by your employer.

All governments have rules of accreditation for journalists. However, these rules sometimes are difficult to meet for younger professionals, and for journalists working in provincial locations and remote areas.

Professional organisations at the national, provincial and district levels should think about issuing press cards on the basis of strictly defined and rigorous – but transparent – criteria. The strength of an “industry standard” card issued by a professional organisation is that it reinforces the concept that journalists belong to a collective profession.

The card of a specific news organisation may help or hinder, depending on its reputation among participants in a conflict. You may also carry letters or passes signed by military or police officers accepting you as a journalist and asking their personnel to give you reasonable cooperation. You need to weigh up the value of such material against the possible dangers.

Another piece of equipment is a list of emergency numbers. Carry a list of emergency telephone numbers with a note of who is to be called in the event of injury. And then, to protect yourself against theft, carry a dummy wallet.

Your money and essential documents should be tucked away safely out of sight. However, you need easy access to small sums of money and something to hand over if you are robbed. Carry a spare wallet with modest amounts of money and some old credit cards. If you are being robbed, hand this over. Keep your money safe.

Being targeted as a journalist

The presence of journalists, and especially a camera, influences events and combatants. Be alert to signs of hostility. If you have witnessed murder or another act of violence by rioters or police forces or military personnel, or have seen evidence of an atrocity, then appear calm and natural, hide your film and keep your camera covered. Rioters and others who breach the law, including security personnel who violate their codes of behaviour, are increasingly aware that media reports, particular visual evidence produced by the media, could be taken as credible evidence for their prosecution. If they feel compromised by the presence of journalists in troubled areas, they may want to get rid of all evidence. In extreme cases this may mean witnesses, especially those with cameras and recording devices. Give the impression in such situations, that you have seen nothing and move away as quickly and as discretely as possible.

Dealing with kidnapping and hostage-taking

Hostage-taking is still a relatively rare, though dramatic and traumatic, event. Most abductions are short term, lasting only a few hours, and most people who are taken hostage survive the experience. Being taken hostage is a frightening and highly dangerous event, in which you lose control of your person and your future. Once someone has taken you hostage they can physically do with you what they will. About 80 per cent of hostages are released unharmed, but as a hostage you are likely to be marginal to the negotiating process and depend on others to ensure that you are released safely. The level of violence following abductions is probably increasing.

Hostages are taken because

- ◆ They are believed to be a political commodity.
- ◆ They are believed to be an economic commodity.
- ◆ For revenge.

- ◆ As an insurance policy.

- ◆ Of mistaken identity.

Hostage-taking often follows a pattern. You need to ask yourself the following questions to assess how far you may be at risk.

- ◆ Is the area where you are working one where hostage-taking is practised?

- ◆ Is there a history of journalists being taken hostage?

Ask yourself, and check with others, whether you have a high or medium risk of being a target as a potential hostage. You are at greater risk if you work for a well-known media organisation or one identified with a government that the potential abductors do not like.

When making a risk assessment, look at the situation from the point of view of the hostage-takers. Your news organisation may have no influence over government policy or access to large sums of cash, but do potential abductors know that? Many people have an instinct to “shoot the messenger” and blame the media for events they dislike. An individual journalist may also become a target because of the work he or she has done, but this is a rare event. In most cases the journalist is held as a symbol of what they are believed to represent.

Once you have a risk assessment in hand, take measures to reduce risks, including the following.

- ◆ Avoid routine and predictable behaviour.

- ◆ Assess risks before unusual assignments.

- ◆ Lock doors in vehicles. Be aware of risk situations on the road.

- ◆ Think about settings for meetings.

- ◆ Inform colleagues of your movements and plans.

Abduction is usually sudden. You must make a rapid assessment of what is going on and act quickly. If an abductor is armed you may have no alternative but to do what you are told. If an abductor is not armed you may decide to make a lot of noise, scream and draw attention to yourself. Some people advocate pretending to faint, to make it more difficult for the abductor to get you into a car. In a surprise attack an

abductor depends on their target being bewildered and unprepared. Shouting will raise your adrenaline level and this makes it easier to resist. There is obvious risk in resisting, but the risk to your person does not decrease once you have been taken.

If you have been abducted, you will be frightened and unsure whether you will survive the next minute, hour or day. Remind yourself that most people survive the experience and return safely. The experience of those who have survived being a hostage suggests there are some things you can do to help your chances of survival and to allow you to endure the intervening period.

You have lost physical but not mental control. You need to prepare to endure a period of mental and physical stress. To survive this you will need a positive mental attitude. As far as possible, try not to show your emotions. Use your feelings positively to plan how you will act. There are things that you should do both in the short term and in the longer term.

- ◆ Make it difficult for your captors to treat you inhumanely. If you can develop a relationship, you may reduce the risk of being physically harmed. Talk about your family. Do as you are told. Behave politely and do not antagonise your captors.
- ◆ Adopt a positive routine. Seek improvements in your conditions.
- ◆ Talk to someone in your mind. Make plans with them.
- ◆ And do not believe promises of release, until it happens.

Do not attempt to appease your captors. Even if you are sympathetic to a cause, you are not “on their side”; you are their captive. If you are able to talk to your captors, your key message should be that as a journalist you are a non-combatant in their conflict, but that journalists have a key role to play in ensuring that all sides get a fair hearing.

Should you try to escape? If your captors are competent, they will take great pains with your security. Any escape attempt on your part is likely to fail unless there are outside factors or you have an element of surprise. The question of whether you try to escape depends on your physical condition, your mental strength and the circumstances. If you are held captive and you are in reasonable physical shape you should always be looking out for failures of security in your incarceration. A failed escape attempt could leave you worse off. However, if you feel that your life is in serious jeopardy, then you have nothing to lose. Signs that you are at extra peril could include the following.



- ◆ Other hostages, perhaps employed by different organisations, are being released, but there are no signs that your release is imminent.
- ◆ Your guards adopt a different attitude to you, treating you more harshly and “dehumanising” you.
- ◆ Your captors cease to feed you and your physical conditions deteriorate.

The Geneva Conventions

The Geneva Conventions demand respect for human beings in times of armed conflict, and that includes respect for the human rights of journalists, who are classified as civilians entitled to protection from violence, threats, murder, imprisonment and torture.

These legally binding treaties date from 1949 and have been ratified or acceded to by most countries. They form part of international humanitarian law. Violation makes a soldier or militia member guilty of a war crime.

Journalists need to know and to assert these rights.

Summary

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) says that States must:

- ◆ Care for friends and enemies alike.
- ◆ Respect every human being, his or her honour, family rights, religious convictions and the special rights of the child.
- ◆ Prohibit inhuman or degrading treatment, the taking of hostages, mass extermination, torture, summary executions, deportations, pillage and wanton destruction of property.
- ◆ Protect wounded combatants, prisoners of war and civilians.

The first two among the Geneva Conventions cover the treatment of wounded and sick members of the armed forces and medical personnel on the battlefield and at sea. The Third Convention covers prisoners of war. All three refer to journalists only in the case of accredited war correspondents.

The fourth Geneva Convention covers the rights of civilians in enemy or occupied territory. Of most significance is Article 3, which applies to all the Conventions, and says:

Persons taking no active part in the hostilities, including members of armed forces who have laid down their arms and those placed hors de combat by sickness, wounds, detention, or any other cause, shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction founded on race, colour, religion or faith, sex, birth or wealth, or any other similar criteria.

The following acts are prohibited at any time and in any place with respect to the above-mentioned persons:

- a) Violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture.
- b) Taking of hostages.
- c) Outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment.
- d) The passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted court, affording all the judicial guarantees which are recognised as indispensable.
- e) The wounded and sick shall be collected and cared for.

Protocol 1 to the Geneva Conventions, which came into force in 1978, says in Article 79:

1. Journalists engaged in dangerous professional missions in areas of armed conflict shall be considered as civilians.
2. They shall be protected as such under the Conventions and this Protocol, provided that they take no action adversely affecting their status as civilians, and without prejudice to the right of war correspondents accredited to the armed forces to the status provided for them under the convention.
3. They may obtain an identity card similar to the model (annexed to the Protocol). This card, which shall be issued by the government of the State of which the journalist is a national or in whose territory he/she resides or in which the news medium employing him/her is located shall attest to his/her status as a journalist.

Conventions cover civil war but not riots and civil unrest.

Protocol 2 extends the Geneva Conventions to internal armed conflicts between the armed forces of a State and dissident armed forces or other organised armed groups



on its territory. It effectively extends the Conventions to large-scale civil conflicts. However, it specifically excludes from the Conventions "situations of internal disturbances and tensions, such as riots, isolated and sporadic acts of violence and other acts of a similar nature, as not being armed conflicts".

How civilians must, and must not, be treated

Article 4 of Protocol 2 describes how parties must extend humane treatment to civilians.

1. All persons who do not take a direct part or who have ceased to take part in hostilities, whether or not their liberty has been restricted, are entitled to respect for their person, honour and convictions and religious practices. They shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction. It is prohibited to order that there shall be no survivors.
2. The following acts against these persons are and shall remain prohibited at any time and in any place whatsoever:
 - a) Violence to the life, health and physical or mental well-being of persons, in particular murder as well as cruel treatment such as torture, mutilation or any corporal punishment.
 - b) Collective punishments.
 - c) Taking of hostages.
 - d) Acts of terrorism.
 - e) Outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment, rape, enforced prostitution and any form of indecent assault.
 - f) Slavery and the slave trade in all their forms.
 - g) Pillage.
 - h) Threats to commit any of the foregoing acts.

CHAPTER



3

Riots and civil disorder

Riots, violent civil unrest and even demonstrations in your local town centre can be as dangerous as a battle zone. Some events are unpredictable, the dangers are unseen and the situation can escalate at frightening speed. Even non-violent crowds can become dangerous when people become frightened or angry. Peaceful demonstrations can quickly become dangerous riots. Where there is ethnic conflict or a divided community, journalists need to know about safe and unsafe areas, and about safe and unsafe behaviour patterns.

Terror campaigns often include civilian targets, and in some countries target media and journalists. Camera crews, reporters and photographers who cover terrorist attacks need to be aware of the risk of revenge or secondary attacks at the scene immediately afterwards.

The aim of a journalist is the same in these situations as in war zones - to achieve good coverage at minimal risk. The same principles of planning ahead and retaining control apply. The greatest risk is to news teams that are sent into situations where they are unaware of safe and unsafe areas, the pattern of previous risks and the extent to which they may become targets. Journalists may be at extra risk if their media organisation is, in the minds of those involved in civil disturbance, identified with one party to the conflict or other. Journalists, or media teams, may consider removing any stickers or logos that identify their media company.

Security forces and police often claim that the presence of cameras induces or escalates riots, and therefore try to prevent cameras recording their activities. Journalists can become a target of rioters or security personnel if either believes that coverage will identify them as perpetrators of violence. Photographers and camera operators are at extra risk if those involved in a riot believe that film will be handed over to the police.

Survival tips

- ◆ Carry press ID, but only show it when safe.
- ◆ Set your cell-phone to rapid dial to an emergency number.
- ◆ Stay upwind of tear gas.
- ◆ Take wet towel, water, and some citrus fruit.
- ◆ Consider wearing goggles.
- ◆ Consider protective clothing if firearms may be used.
- ◆ Carry first-aid kits, and learn how to use them.
- ◆ Wear loose clothing, made of natural fibres.
- ◆ Cover arms, legs and neck.
- ◆ Carry a day's food and water.

People in a crowd who are expecting to be filmed and fear being identified may wear balaclavas or motorcycle helmets to cover their faces. Special police or military forces that are prepared for a riot also wear helmets and face masks and may remove numbers that can lead to their identification. There is evidence that once people believe they cannot be identified, they have a low level of accountability for their actions and are more likely to use violence.

Violence may begin because of anger within a crowd. At other times it may begin because police decide to disperse a crowd by force. Neither side is likely to give much warning. Security forces may quickly escalate their response from batons and shields to tear gas and rubber bullets, and even live rounds. If you get caught in a large mass of people it may be difficult to reach colleagues and a place of safety quickly.

The riot got out of hand ... It started to get difficult to breathe ...

Ram Ramgopal was the producer of a television crew reporting riots in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India, in March 2002. He learnt valuable lessons about how to prepare for problems.

"At 10.30pm we received a call that a riot had broken out in Gomtipur. Four of us - camera, producer, correspondent and sound - went in the car wearing body armour and military style helmets. The police and the state police were there, including the Rapid Action Force.

"We set up in the middle of a little area close to the police and fire station. There were a lot of alley ways. As long as we were together we felt pretty safe. The riot was in front of us and behind us was a town square. The real problem was when the riot got out of hand and the police began to use tear gas. It started to get pretty difficult to breathe.

"We had left our towels and water back in the car and I said I would go back one kilometre and get them. There were no lights. There were police posts every 50 metres. The police were there in a patrol car but they were being pelted with stones and they moved away. I realised I was moving too slowly and I came out and made a dash for it. I was struck by a stone or a rock. I had a superficial wound.

"I was cut and swollen. I told the driver to go in but he was very reluctant. There were acid bottles being thrown. We pushed in with the car and met up with the others.

"In retrospect I would definitely have had all of us take our medical kits with us. We needed to carry water to deal with tear gas so that we did not need to split up. The correspondent was really retching.

"As a new father I found myself thinking 'Is it worth it?'

When covering a planned event such as a demonstration, gather intelligence in advance about the likely crowd movements, flash points and safety routes. Reconnoitre the scene in advance to select vantage points and alternative ways out. Knowing where people belonging to different ethnic or religious communities live may determine your travel routes in and out of an area.

If your team is separating, pre-arrange contact points and times and try to have a direct means of communication. Carry press identification. However, if you think that this may attract unwanted attention, conceal it. Carry a cell phone with an emergency number pre-loaded on the speed-dial facility in case of emergencies.

If tear gas is a possibility try to position yourself upwind, and have a wet towel and water available to cover your face. If you cannot carry a gas mask, then

citrus fruit such as a lime or lemon, squeezed over the affected area, will help to neutralise the effects of irritants. Eye protection should be considered. Swimming goggles or industrial eye protection should be sufficient.

You also need a means of extinguishing flames if you are splashed with petrol from a Molotov cocktail.

If firearms are likely to be used, wear the same protective clothing as in war zones.

Carry first-aid kits and know how to use this equipment.

Wear loose natural fabric clothing as this will not burn as readily as synthetic material. Wear long sleeves, long trousers and a high collar. This will expose as little of your body as possible to the effects of tear gas.

Carry a small backpack with sufficient food, water and materials to last you for at least a day in case the unrest spreads and you have difficulty in getting back to your office.

Improvise

- ◆ A magazine or newspaper can be inserted under a jumper as a makeshift anti-stab vest.
- ◆ A hardened hat can protect your head.

Positioning

Think about how to position cameras and reporters to get an overall view of the scene. Higher up is better. There should be more than one way to leave a position. If you are filming, it can be a positive disadvantage to get into the crowd and be too close to the action. If you are a reporter who is not filming or taking pictures you do not need to be in the crowd, as long as you have a clear line of sight and can catch the sounds. You can do interviews with participants before and afterwards, but at the time you need an overview of what is happening.

During the event

If you are part of a team, work with the team. Stay together or withdraw together. Withdraw too early rather than too late. If you are working as an individual, ensure that you have good means of communication with



someone who can get help if necessary. Set up your phone so that “last number redial” is to a source of instant help.

Try to keep a mental map of the main exit routes, prominent locations, security force locations and the nearest hospital facility, and occasionally stop and check that they are still clear.

If you fear reporting devices will be seized, carry a dummy camera flash card, an old tape recorder or exposed film or tape, and hide your used materials such as a flash card or film as soon as you take it from the camera. In high-risk situations, team up with another photographer so that you can look out for each other. You may be rivals, but you are also colleagues.

If you are working alone, either as a reporter or a photographer, try to remain aware of when you are becoming the focus of a crowd, rather than just part of it. You may be at risk even if the crowd is not hostile. Do not be tempted into taking unreasonable risks just to obtain the same imagery that someone else has already shown.

After the event

Debrief in the newsroom so that lessons are learned for the next occasion. Protect the integrity of your material. What is the law in your country about the right of security forces to demand flash cards, film and video material?

You must understand the legal implications for you as a journalist working within the area, region or country in which you are operating. What is the policy of your news organisation?

If it is not possible to protect material within the country, is it possible to set up a system so that images of civil disturbance can be sent quickly out of the country? Remember that your ability to do your job safely is adversely affected if police are given access to your material after demonstrations and civil unrest. You are put at serious risk if those taking part in a riot see you as part of the evidence-gathering process.

Terrorist attacks

Journalists face the same risks as all civilians from terrorist attacks and face extra risks when media offices and staff become targets for bombs or shootings.

Attending the scene of a killing or a bombing also carries risks. Grieving crowds may turn on photographers and camera operators because they believe them to be callous, or to try to prevent whoever carried out the attack gaining publicity.



TV news cameramen, surrounded by military and police jackboots, choose a unique angle to shoot a political demonstration, Russel Square, Dhaka, 2006.
© Abir Abdullah



Sometimes an initial incident is set up so that police or military forces can be ambushed when they arrive. One bomb may be set off to draw emergency services to the scene, and then a bigger bomb is detonated. All those who operate behind police cordons, whether police officers, paramedics or journalists, are at risk of being killed or injured by secondary bombs.

In one example, freelance photographer Juan Castillo received a blow and had camera equipment taken by riot police officers while covering a protest in Mexico City in December 1999. Students were demanding the release of demonstrators arrested during World Trade Organisation meetings in Seattle in the United States. Rocks and rockets flew from the crowd, setting off a clash with riot police. At least three photographers were injured by rocks or by police and 40 people were detained.

Everything stopped around me ... then the car blew up 10 metres in front of us

Suhasini Haidar, a Delhi-based freelance reporter working for CNN, travelled to Srinagar in Kashmir, India, in August 2000. She arrived one day after a ceasefire had fallen apart.

"My car was at a traffic light when I heard a huge bang and I asked the driver to go towards the sound. We came to a narrow lane off a main market street. Someone had thrown a grenade into a car in the ditch. There were four other correspondents as well as me. We looked at the remains of the grenade. Slowly police started to arrive - the local police and the army bomb squad. The car door was unlocked so it was suspicious, but we thought the danger had passed. The police moved us back about 20 metres from the car.

"I went with other journalists to try to get a quote from the police. Everything stopped around me. I tried to say 'hey' and the car blew up 10 metres in front of us.

"The cop pushed me down and said 'stay down' - there was silence and then a volley of glass and incredible heat. Gas cylinders had exploded in the boot of the car. I saw the guy to my right go down.

"There were 19 people killed and you could see the blood. Most of it is cloudy in my mind.



"The next thing was we heard bullets go off and the cops started to fire all over the place. Me and the stringer got up and I realised that I was hit. I could not use my arm to get up. I had a few cuts in my head. I called my cameraman and told him I was going to get treatment. I went to the army base where I was treated. I had a severely dislocated arm - it came right out of its socket.

"You need to do your homework. Double bombs are quite common - the first one draws the police and a crowd; then the second one goes off. I should have moved back from the car. If I had not been moved back I would definitely have died.

"I am more jumpy now, and I am a little more anxious around parked cars. I go to places of danger if it is an assignment, but not because I like to go to dangerous places.

"Bombs are things you cannot predict."

CHAPTER

▶ **4**

Emergency medical aid and post-traumatic stress

Journalists working away from their bases or in hazardous areas need to know when and how to provide emergency aid to a colleague who is ill or injured. Journalists need to know how to deliver emergency aid rather than first-aid.

First-aid is designed to maintain a patient until he or she gets to a hospital or clinic, on the assumption that these are available reasonably quickly. In hostile environments, a place of safety may be many hours away. Journalists should aim to provide emergency care that can help a casualty to survive for several hours, and perhaps longer. The overall aim is to stabilise a casualty's condition until they receive medical aid from trained staff.

Such knowledge requires more than can be learned from a manual. A first-aid or medical emergency course allows a journalist to practise placing splints, bandages and tourniquets and to learn procedures about clearing airways, resuscitation techniques and placing someone in a recovery position.

For your own safety you should not only insist that you learn these skills, but that all journalists working in the field are sent on medical aid courses and refresher courses. The more journalists there are who know what to do in an emergency, the better. Your ability to help will also depend on the quality of the emergency medical equipment that you carry. Journalists on potentially hazardous assignments should carry a good medical kit and know how to use it. Journalists should also know how to improvise in the absence of splints or stretchers.

The most likely conditions that may put a journalist at risk in a hostile region are illnesses, food poisoning or the effects of climate-related stress. Part of the preparation for an assignment should be to become familiar with the most common infectious diseases in the region and those that can be passed on through insect bites, or through infected water or food. Take with you the right medicines for the most common conditions.

Local units of the Red Cross or Red Crescent in various countries offer free first-aid and emergency aid courses for interested groups. This can be made, through appropriate levels of campaigning, a necessary part of the professional training of journalists. An emergency aid course should, at a minimum, deal with the following.



A journalist attacked and severely injured after an argument over access at an international sporting event at the Chittagong Cricket Ground.

© Mir Farid

- ◆ Traumatic injuries such as those caused by gunshots or explosions.
- ◆ Heavy bleeding.
- ◆ Fractures.
- ◆ Burns.

Dealing with post-traumatic stress

Those who live through horrific events are inevitably affected in some way. Journalists may photograph, film or report on events where people are wounded or killed, and where they are helpless to save them. None of us is unaffected by seeing other human beings terrorised, wounded or killed.

Moreover, journalists may be put at personal risk and made to feel afraid. Most people “deal with” the issues that arise, and recover. Some have short-term reactions, such as a heightened awareness of danger or hyper-sensitivity to

sudden noise. Others may be desensitised, and become callous about death and suffering. Some are left with long-term problems which damage their lives.

Journalists who report on wars and conflicts may be distanced by the fact that they have a job to do, and by individual skills in dealing with issues. However, they are also expected to focus on the horror.

Photographers and camera operators may spend time analysing the best angles from which to photograph or film people in fear or who are dead or dying. No one who reports on wars and conflicts can be entirely unaffected. This is also true of those who report on vehicle accidents, gruesome killings or long murder trials. At times of war, journalists who cannot leave a conflict area because they are reporting on their own communities are especially likely to be affected.

While support networks have long been in place for police officers or fire-fighters, several factors make it more difficult for journalists to recognise and deal with trauma. Too often, a macho culture encourages journalists to believe that they can cope with any disaster and that personal feelings should not get in the way of the job.

Journalists are also reluctant to shift the focus of attention from people whose lives are ended or torn apart by conflict, to those who report on them. Journalists and camera operators want to report on events, and do not want to see themselves as part of the story, or as victims.

When it's all over, there's more trouble ...

People who live through horrific events are all affected in some way - including journalists.

Many have short-term reactions, which ease as they talk through issues with colleagues or families.

Some need more help, especially where feelings of helplessness and fear are suppressed.

About a quarter of journalists with extensive experience of conflict and war reporting suffer symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Photojournalists seek an elevated angle – an often risky business, Dhaka, January 2005.
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ସାମୋହର - ୨୭୫
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A macho culture that encourages journalists to try to cope alone must change.

Journalists should routinely debrief after hazardous assignments.

There should be voluntary access to independent and knowledgeable counselling.

Journalists with symptoms need an easy route to treatment.

Journalists must be confident they will not suffer loss of position, opportunity or prestige.

Local and freelance journalists are at risk of being left without support.

Most journalists who report on conflict do not suffer from PTSD, but all journalists are affected to a greater or lesser extent. The first step must be to encourage journalists to talk about their experiences as a routine procedure after returning from a harrowing assignment. Journalists need to recognise that owning up to feelings of depression or sadness is not an expression of weakness. These feelings are part of the body's coping mechanism.

The best way to come to terms with a traumatic experience will vary from journalist to journalist. Some may be able to talk to families and loved ones. Others only feel comfortable talking to people who have shared their experiences.

Support can be given through schemes such as the free external counselling made available to all staff at the BBC. However, there is evidence that some journalists remain reluctant to use such a service because they fear damage to their careers. Any journalist who goes through counselling must be sure they will not lose their job, miss out on key assignments or suffer loss of prestige because they admit to depression or nightmares. Any counselling system for staff must therefore be confidential and should allow journalists to refer themselves without having to go through a management structure.

However, there may be a case for a more directed service when journalists are clearly suffering. It is important also that journalists learn to recognise symptoms in each other, so that they can offer support and suggest intervention. Journalists' organisations should press managements to ensure that all journalists are offered an opportunity for confidential counselling after



traumatic assignments. Journalists' organisations should also consider setting up self-help groups where journalists who have covered conflict can talk through their experiences. Such groups must create a feeling of safety where what is said in a meeting does not become the subject of gossip outside.

The evidence is that there will be personal breakdowns or near breakdowns after a prolonged conflict. Employers must provide for “no-stigma” treatment for journalists with prolonged symptoms. Treating the mental wounds left by reporting on such issues should be no different from ensuring that a reporter who is shot in the arm receives medical treatment before returning to work.

The people most likely to miss out on any treatment on offer are freelances. Journalists' organisations have a specific role to play in ensuring that managements extend the same facilities to freelance journalists and stringers after traumatic assignments as they provide for staff. A service set up by a large media organisation could also be made available to freelance journalists at no charge to them, with the costs covered by media groups jointly, or by journalists' organisations.

CHAPTER

▶ **5**

Fighting back – what the IFJ and journalists' organisations can do

When ruthless and determined enemies of press freedom set out to do harm to journalists, there is often little to stop them. Each year scores of journalists are targeted, assaulted and murdered. But this does not mean that journalists, their unions and media organisations are powerless to defend themselves. Far from it.

Over the past 15 years a sophisticated and increasingly effective resistance movement has evolved to minimise the risks to media staff, to isolate killers and those directly responsible for attacks on media, and to hold governments to account when they neglect their responsibilities to protect media or when they create political conditions that endanger the work of journalists. This chapter looks at what is being done, what more journalists can do and what developments are taking place to put safety of journalists at the top of the media agenda.

Simple acts of solidarity are often the most effective antidote to the persecution of reporters. Take the case of Viokan Ristic, a freelance journalist from Serbia. In 1999 Ristic was covering the conflict in Kosovo for several clients, including BETA News Agency, Danas and Deutsche Welle Radio. As an independent Serbian journalist, he was targeted by the regime of Slobodan Milosevic, and when NATO bombing began he was arrested and jailed. After 30 days he was released. His jailers gave him a message from Aidan White, IFJ General Secretary. It was a copy of a telegram that had been sent to then President Milosevic calling for Ristic to be freed.

Ristic has no doubt that international pressure played its part in securing his release. It made those who had arrested him and imprisoned him without trial realise that there were people outside the country who knew he was in detention and who were taking an interest in his welfare.

The telegram was part of routine campaigning practised by the IFJ, by individual journalists' trade unions and by a network of press freedom organisations, including the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), the International Press Institute (IPI), Reporters sans Frontières (RSF), Article 19 and others.

Each week, faxes, emails and letters are sent to leaders around the world asking for assurances about the safety of a journalist who has been detained, demanding the release of those who have been imprisoned, or asking for a high-level investigation into an attack on a journalist. These acts of solidarity remind

imprisoned journalists, or those who have been attacked, that they are not forgotten.

Journalists' organisations around the world actively seek ways to protect journalists from intimidation and violence. Where a local union or association cannot make its voice heard on its own behalf, international organisations such as the IFJ must speak for them. The IFJ is the world's largest organisation of journalists, representing 600,000 reporters, editors, photojournalists and broadcasters in 120 countries, and has been campaigning for 20 years for improved safety standards. The IFJ is part of the global International Freedom of Expression eXchange (IFEX) network, and can also take action at the level of the United Nations (UN) to remind governments of their duties to promote media freedom and to protect journalists.

In recognition of its expertise in representing journalists, UNESCO has granted the IFJ the status of Associate Relations, the highest level of accreditation for a non-government organisation. The IFJ has called on the UN to condemn murders of media workers and to insist that governments end impunity, by giving details of attacks and intimidation and taking steps to apprehend and bring to account the perpetrators of violence against journalists and media institutions.

Sharing know-how and experience

The IFJ advises its affiliate organisations to adopt a standard approach to assist any journalist who gets into trouble or experiences hostile interference. The IFJ recommends that each of its affiliates designates an officer to coordinate human rights and safety work and to prepare in three important ways.

- ◆ To increase members' awareness of the problems and dangers.
- ◆ To make advance arrangements with relevant ministries on procedures to be adopted in emergencies.
- ◆ To make arrangements with employers covering who will be responsible for what in a crisis.

To support journalists in difficult situations, it is essential to obtain accurate information without minimising problems or exaggerating them (exaggerated claims cause unnecessary fear and undermine future protests). The first hours of a crisis are hectic and it is important to establish accurate facts to reduce the risks of misunderstanding.



The IFJ has a standard system for gathering information and reporting on each case. The first step is gathering facts. Once these are known, the board of the union or its representative can take a decision on initiating practical support for the member in trouble. Experience shows that governments are sensitive about incidents involving journalists, and are concerned to avoid adverse media exposure. The media therefore can put pressure on those who abuse press freedom and journalists. However, there are risks if media protests are seen as special pleading, or as exaggerating risks. Once international organisations become involved, governments may try to present the issue as an attack on the country by outsiders, so it is important to present facts accurately.

The IFJ Action Plan is divided into a graduated series of responses, starting with behind-the-scenes contact within the country concerned. This work is initially carried out by a union or association within the country. The action can be followed up with non-public contact and pressure at an international level, for example by involving the IFJ officially, in a non-public manner. This can escalate into a formal protest, still without publicity. Where this does not have the desired effect, or is not appropriate because of the seriousness of the case, public protests are made by the IFJ and other press freedom groups.

Where there is a consistent disregard for press freedom or threats against journalists, the IFJ commonly carries out fact-finding missions, bringing in outside representatives to take evidence from those within the country and to publish a report. In the most serious cases, the IFJ tries to coordinate diplomatic action via bodies such as the European Union, the Commonwealth or other appropriate bodies.

The IFJ provides member unions with the addresses of other affiliates and organisations which can help, and supplies examples of letters that can be sent. The IFJ Safety Fund is available to provide assistance to journalists who are prevented, either technically or physically, from carrying out their normal professional work and who are threatened by, or suffer from, official action on account of their professional journalism.

Safety training for in-country journalists

The IFJ plays a leading role, in partnership with a variety of organisations, in providing hands-on training for in-country journalists who do not have access to the safety training routinely offered to international war reporters. The training includes shorter courses which can be repeated over several days in order to reach as many journalists as possible. The courses can be adapted to address specific problems in covering different conflicts.





News photographers attempting to take pictures are blocked by under-trial prisoners at a police station in Rajshahi district, January 2007.
© Iqbal Ahmed/**Drik**NEWS

The first IFJ course was held in Ohrid, Macedonia, in September 2000 for 23 journalists in the region. It was organised with the Macedonia Press Centre with funding from the Council of Europe. In 2007, the IFJ organised two news safety training courses involving a total of 40 journalist participants in Kabul, Afghanistan. The IFJ's local associates, the Afghan Independent Journalists' Association (AIJA) and the Committee to Protect Afghan Journalists (CPAJ), provided local organisational support while the International News Safety Institute (INSI) provided technical inputs and expertise.

The training courses typically cover a wide range of topics including weapons and their effects, emergency medical training, relationships between security personnel and media representatives, public disorder, mines and booby-traps, and personal protection.

A worldwide protection program

The rapid expansion in safety training prompted the IFJ to press for the creation of an international body to provide information, training and assistance to journalists and media organisations. The IFJ was concerned about journalists without access to courses run by international media corporations, and about the failure of print media to follow the lead of broadcasters.

In May 2000, the IFJ approached IPI and together they identified four problems.

- ◆ Safety training and equipment is very expensive.
- ◆ Many journalists most in need are freelances.
- ◆ Most victims of violence are local, and have no opportunity to receive basic training on safety issues in their own languages.
- ◆ There is very little information about how to set up a health and safety program for media staff, embracing risk awareness, stress and trauma counselling.

The IFJ proposed that professional organisations, employers and trade unions together establish an independent institution to do the following.

- ◆ Publish information in relevant languages on health and safety issues for journalists and media staff.
- ◆ Promote training programs for journalists and media staff.



- ◆ Create a rapid-response unit that could set up a safety unit for journalists and media staff in any region where conflict arises, working with national and intergovernmental institutions and appropriate security personnel.
- ◆ Provide access to materials such as medical kits, flak jackets and helmets for distribution at the local level.
- ◆ Campaign within the international community (the International Labour Organization, UNESCO, the Red Cross, etc.) for action on media safety and protection.

In November 2002, a coalition of professional organisations, press freedom groups, international media and journalists' associations agreed to establish INSI. The institute formally came into existence in 2003.

The role of national organisations

Most campaign work is done by local journalists' unions and associations in their own countries as part of their everyday work. A local union or association plays a critical role in defending journalists. Across the world there are many inspiring examples of solidarity actions by journalists compelling those in authority to act on their demands for safety and security for journalists and media institutions. Modes of solidarity action vary, from general strikes and mass street demonstrations to mass mail-outs, press conferences and behind-the-scenes advocacy. The choice of an optimum strategy, of course, depends on the specific contingency facing journalists at any given time and the seriousness of the threat. And there is always the strategic possibility of beginning actions on a low key and then escalating a campaign rapidly.

There is evidence that whenever journalists get together and act collectively they are able to make a difference. Acts of solidarity increase the self-confidence of journalists, and this helps them to work professionally. Even simple acts of collective solidarity, such as fundraising for the families of journalists who have been killed, injured or detained, bring people together and help them to see their strengths.

Organisations in many countries work for the unity that makes this work possible. However, this understanding has not been reached everywhere. The ability of journalists to campaign is more difficult if their organisations are divided and do not work together. Journalists who campaign together, despite political or ethnic differences, can construct a shield of solidarity that will help to protect them all.

Journalists in Bangladesh face several challenges. Threats to safety and security are identified as emanating directly and indirectly from a lack of respect for journalists and the role of a free media in society; interlocking of media interests with other business interests; political bias; and commercial pressures. In terms of strategic responses, the fundamentals of ensuring the safety and protection of all journalists include the following.

- ◆ Do not put life and liberty at risk.
- ◆ Do not endanger job security.
- ◆ Agree on organisational principles such as a code of conduct and professional ethics.
- ◆ Above all, organise

Unity and solidarity: These are simple words, but achieving them is a complex task. This task is the challenge to be met by the journalists of Bangladesh.



