

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Mongolia

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Freedoms of speech and of the press are protected by law in Mongolia, and the government generally respects these rights in practice. However, media freedom continued to be compromised somewhat in 2011 by legal harassment of journalists, political influence over news outlets, and financial difficulties faced by media workers. Censorship of public information is banned under the 1998 Media Freedom Law, but a 1995 state secrets law limits access to government information to a degree, as many archived records have been given classified status. After an eight-year campaign by activists, the parliament passed the Law on Information Transparency and Right to Information in June 2011, but the legislation did not take effect until December. The government routinely monitors broadcast and print media for compliance with restrictions on violent, pornographic, and alcohol-related content.

Officials frequently file criminal and civil defamation suits in response to critical articles, with a quarter of journalists reportedly affected. To avoid being sued for libel, many independent publications practice a degree of self-censorship. Although there is no direct government censorship, journalists frequently complain of harassment and intimidation as well as pressure from the authorities to reveal confidential sources. In November 2010, criminal charges were filed against a reporter from the newspaper *Zuuny Medee* over articles about human trafficking that implicated a notable businessman in the buying of virgin teenagers. However, the presiding judge dismissed the case in August 2011. In March 2011, Dolgor Chuluunbaatar, editor in chief of the *Ulaanbaatar Times*, was jailed on charges of illegally privatizing a newspaper, but he was released on medical grounds in July. His case was still pending as of the end of the year, and he faced 15 years in prison if convicted. In November, two journalists were convicted of “insulting the reputation” of Luimed Gansukh, the minister of nature, environment, and tourism. One of the journalists, Baviya Baatarkhuyag, had written an article in *Udriin Sonin* claiming that the minister had moved into a \$1 million house soon after the government signed a lucrative deal with a Canadian mining firm. The minister also filed criminal defamation charges against journalist Gantumut Uyanga, Baatarkhuyag’s wife, following a speech in which she mentioned his house. She is a member of the People’s Movement, an organization dedicated to pressuring the government to fulfill its campaign pledges. Baatarkhuyag and Uyanga were each ordered to pay over \$4,000 in compensation.

According to a local media freedom organization, Globe International, many journalists continue to face verbal threats or pressure against either themselves or their family members.

Although independent print media outlets are common and popular in cities, the main source of news in the vast countryside is Radio Mongolia. Under the 2005 Law on the Public Radio and Television, state-run radio and television broadcasting outlets like Radio Mongolia are transforming into public service broadcasters, but progress has been slow. Both state and public media still frequently experience political pressure, and most provincial media outlets continue to be controlled by local authorities. According to media watchdogs,

2012 SCORES

PRESS STATUS

Partly Free

PRESS FREEDOM SCORE

37

LEGAL ENVIRONMENT

13

POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

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ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

12

journalists often seek payments to cover or fabricate stories. Mongolians have access to local, privately owned television stations, English-language broadcasts of the British Broadcasting Corporation and Voice of America on private FM stations, and, in Ulaanbaatar, foreign television programming via cable and satellite systems.

Owing to widespread poverty in Mongolia, the internet has yet to serve as a significant source of information; only about 20 percent of the population used the internet on a regular basis in 2011.

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