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FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

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Mongolia

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Freedom of speech and freedom of the press are protected under Mongolian law, and the government generally respects both of these rights in practice. However, press freedom continued to be compromised in 2012 by legal harassment of journalists, political influence over news outlets, and financial difficulties faced by media workers.

Officials frequently file criminal and civil defamation suits in response to critical articles, with a quarter of journalists reportedly affected. In July 2012, criminal defamation charges were filed against a reporter from the *Uls Turiin Toim* daily newspaper over an article claiming the existence of a secret election plan by a member of the Mongolian government. The journalist was ordered to pay \$7,350 in compensation. In August 2011, criminal defamation charges were dismissed against reporter D. Bolormaa of the *Zuunii Medee* daily newspaper over articles that implicated a notable businessman in the trafficking of virgin teenagers. However, following an appeal by the claimant, the journalist was ordered to pay \$6,200 in compensation in October 2012. To avoid being sued for libel, many

independent publications are forced to practice some form of self-censorship.

Journalists are also susceptible to other forms of legal intimidation. In an unusual case, Dolgor Chuluunbaatar, editor in chief of the *Ulaanbaatar Times*, was jailed in 2011 on charges of illegally privatizing a newspaper. During his imprisonment, Chuluunbaatar faced intimidation and threats by investigators seeking to determine who else was involved in his alleged actions. In August 2012, Chuluunbaatar was convicted of causing “huge damage” to state property and the illegal purchasing of a newspaper and its offices, and was sentenced to a five-year prison term; he will have to spend two years in jail.

Censorship of public information is banned under the 1998 Media Freedom Law, but a 1995 state secrets law severely limits access to government information, as many archived records have been given classified status and can retain such status for an indefinite amount of time. After an eight-year campaign by activists, the parliament passed the Law on Information Transparency and Right to Information in June 2011, with the legislation taking effect in December 2011. The government routinely monitors broadcast and print media for compliance with restrictions on violent, pornographic, and alcohol-related content. Internet users remain concerned about a February 2011 regulation by the Communications Regulatory Commission (CRC) that restricts obscene and inappropriate content without explicitly defining it and requires popular websites to make their users' IP addresses publicly visible.

There is no official censorship by the government. However, journalists frequently complain of harassment and intimidation as well as pressure from the authorities to reveal confidential sources. 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. In January 2012, a local television reporter and cameraman were assaulted while attempting to cover a dispute at a mining company in the province of Bayankhongor. In July, several journalists were beaten at the office of Sky Television while airing parliamentary election results. The attacks were carried out by a disgruntled investor in the company, B. Ganzorig, and six others upset that the station's coverage was detrimental to Ganzorig's political campaign. The assailants were convicted in December and Ganzorig was sentenced to a prison term of three and half years.

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 remains slow. Both state and public media still frequently experience political pressure, and most provincial media outlets continue to be controlled by local authorities. Low wages for journalists have created a secondary market for purchasing coverage. 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. In October 2012, Bloomberg television launched Bloomberg TV Mongolia, the first international broadcast news organization headquartered in Mongolia, which intends to deliver international business and finance news alongside coverage of local Mongolian news. The launch of Bloomberg TV Mongolia coincides with a growing trend of more robust and diverse news coverage. Owing to widespread poverty in Mongolia, the internet has yet to serve as a significant source of news and information; only about 16 percent of the population accessed the medium in 2012.

2013 SCORES

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