

Journalism in the Philippines: A dangerous trade

Murderers of journalists remain unprosecuted

By **NICHOLAS MCLAUGHLIN**
Epoch Times Staff

Shot six times while buying cigarettes outside a karaoke bar on June 19, Nestor Bedolido became the third journalist killed in the Philippines in one week, highlighting the grave dangers that reporters continue to face in the country.

Bedolido, 50, worked for the The Kastigador weekly newspaper. He had reportedly written exposés against a politician in Davao del Sur province on the island of Mindanao during the elections in May.

Bedolido was the 137th journalist assassinated in the Philippines since 1986, according to the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines.

Less than five days before Bedolido's death, two Philippine radio reporters were assassinated in separate cases. Desiderio Camangyan and Joselito Agustin were both outspoken critics of local politics.

Reporting on government corruption is particularly dangerous in the Philippines.

"Many of the media personnel who have been murdered are well-known to have spoken out on or to have investigated corruption issues," Deborah Muir from the International Federation for Journalists (IFJ), told Australia's national ABC radio.

The Philippines is also well-known for impunity in cases of journalist homicide, Muir said.



Relatives of journalists killed in the Philippines display portraits of their loved ones during a rally in front of the Department of Justice office in Manila on April 21.

Murder charges have been filed in Camangyan's case against Vice Mayor Pacifico Velasco of Bacarra, a town in the northern Philippines. The mayor's bodyguard is believed to be the gunman responsible for Camangyan's death. So far no one has been arrested.

The Philippines' record for successful prosecutions in reporter death cases is shockingly low with only four since 1986, according to the IFJ.

"We deplore the killings of journalists and urge the Philippine authorities to move quickly to bring those responsible to justice. . . . Greater progress must be made to halt such killings," said U.S. State Department Assistant Secretary Philip J. Crowley in response to these most recent killings.

Reporters Without Borders sent a letter to newly elected Philippine

president, Benigno Aquino, on June 9 calling on him to break the barricade of impunity surrounding media killings that began during former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo's tenure.

One of the key witnesses to last November's politically motivated ambush massacre in which 32 journalists were killed was murdered last week.

According to local media, the witness, Suwaid Upham, applied last March for the Department of Justice's Witness Protection Program but his interview for the program never took place, despite two scheduled meetings.

Upham had admitted that he was one of the gunmen in the massacre, and had identified Andal Ampatuan Jr., son of the provincial governor, as one of the other gunmen.

Ampatuan was brought before

court, but the case was suspended in February, Muir said.

Murder charges have been filed against 197 persons allegedly involved in the massacre, but no other prosecutions are underway at this time.

The November massacre highlights "the inability and unwillingness of the state to ensure the protection and safety of journalists who are seeking to perform their duties," according to an investigation led by the IFJ and other journalist organizations.

In an interview with Al Jazeera television, Upham quoted Ampatuan as having said in regard to the case against him, "Nothing will happen to their case. Our money can buy all of them," according to the Philippine Star.

With additional reporting by Jasper Fakkert and June Kellum

Talks with the Taliban should start soon, says UK army chief

TALIBAN CONTINUED FROM P1
Panetta said that although progress is being made, "It's harder, it's slower than I think anyone anticipated."

He added that negotiations with moderate elements of the Taliban "are likely to form an important part of future coalition strategy."

General Stanley McChrystal,

terminated last week as commander of multinational forces in Afghanistan, said more contact should be made with those rebels whose main motivation was financial rather than ideological.

However, General Richards warned, "At the same time you have got to continue the work we are doing on both the military, governance, and development perspectives to make sure that they [the Taliban] don't think that we are giving up."

Illegal gold mining poisoning Nigerians

GOLD CONTINUED FROM P1
Lead poisoning can cause loss of appetite, brain and renal damage, and in more serious cases loss of consciousness, convulsions, and death.

MSF says mining practices such as these have been confirmed in two villages, with four others also suspected of contamination.

As many as 10,000 people may have been affected, the aid organization reported, with children 5 years and younger particularly vulnerable due to low body weight and that age being a crucial stage in a child's development.

"A continued coordinated, large-scale emergency response is needed to ensure that the contaminated villages are cleaned up," said Cooney. She said the emergency response must also ensure urgent treatment for the most vulnerable and that education was critical to stop further cases.

"There needs to be a concerted health education program aimed at behavioural change to also prevent recontamination at these sites."

She said anyone exposed to the soil and water wells where dust has spread can be affected, and international environment agencies are endeavouring to clean up the contamination.

"It really needs to happen quite quickly, but it's not that easy. That means removing all the contaminated soil from these areas and then eventually replacing it with clean soil or possibly cement on the floors of the houses," Cooney said.

MSF has set up a treatment centre safely away from the contaminated zone. A second treatment centre is also to be established to further help children and affected villagers along with information campaigns to inform the population of the risks of illegal gold extraction.

Electricity shortage frays tempers in southern Iraq

Police open fire on demonstrators

By **STEPHEN JONES**
Epoch Times Staff

Like millions of other Muslims, Sheikh Haider Ali Hassan is preparing to go one month without food and water during daylight hours for the month of Ramadan.

However, he can no longer count on his meagre air conditioning for respite from the 50 degree Celsius temperatures, owing to the local government rationing electricity that has hit hard in the southern Iraqi city of Basra.

Hassan said that the Shi'ite community in Basra had suffered enough under Saddam Hussein's Sunni government, and deserved better under the country's Shia-led coalition.

"The people of Basra suffered a lot under the previous regime," he told AFP.

"The electricity comes on for one hour in five and the temperature is more than 50 degrees in Basra—is that fair of the local or central government?"

Hassan was but one of the thousands of Basra residents who protested outside provincial offices over the power rationing on Saturday.

As the intense midday sun began to fray tempers, stones were thrown at the local government building and every window was broken, a spokesman for the provincial council said. But it was after police intervened that the situation began to spiral out of control.

One demonstrator was killed and two others wounded after police opened fire with live rounds in a bid to disperse the frenzied crowd, according to media reports.

Fearing a crisis, officials hurriedly issued statements assuring residents that the situation would be tackled. A statement by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki said that a delegation had been dispatched to Basra to address the problem.

"The prime minister ordered that the fuel share given to private generator owners be increased by 33



Dozens of Iraqis demonstrate in Baghdad on June 19 against power rationing. Temperatures in the city reach over 120 degrees Celsius and thousands of Basra residents came out to protest the rationing. ALI AL-SAAD/AF/GETTY IMAGES

percent, to allow the production of electricity to be increased," the statement said.

'The people of Basra ask the authorities to provide services for citizens.'

—Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki

Nuri al-Maliki also "ordered to punish all officials in the ministry of electricity who did not respect their commitments and promises to increase power in Baghdad and Iraq's other provinces to nine hours a day in June."

Seven years after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, the country is still grappling with electricity shortages, and power outages are common across the country.

Hashim al-Louaibi, a spokesman for the Basra Provincial Council, said

residents of the southern city receive around two hours of electricity for every five hours that it is turned off.

That is in contrast to the capital, Baghdad, where residents receive six hours of electricity on a daily basis.

But even there, residents are fuming over the rationing. A smaller protest against the cuts was held in the capital on Saturday, which passed without incident.

In Basra, the country's oil hub, residents carried placards that read, "We don't want oil or medicine, we want water and electricity." Another read, "The people of Basra ask the authorities to provide services for citizens."

Protesters told news agencies that there was doubt over claims from officials that there was insufficient generator capacity for the whole country.

Hassan said that his patience was wearing thin, and the same was true with thousands like him. "This demonstration is peaceful, but if our demands aren't met, we will take unexpected action," he told AFP.

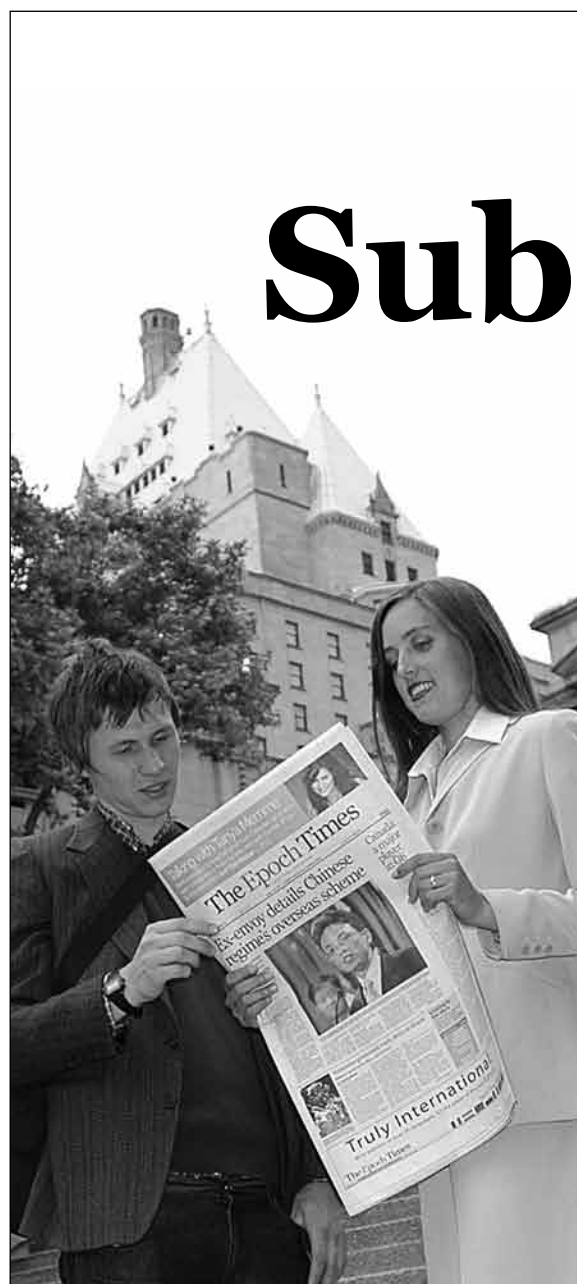
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