

YEMEN

Area: 527,970 sq.km.
Population: 21,620,000.
Language: Arabic.
Head of state: Ali Abdallah Saleh.

Independent and opposition journalists battled major restrictions and prosecution in 2007, with a dozen arrested and others physically attacked in the street.

Journalists in the capital, Sanaa, have renamed as “Freedom Square” an intersection near government buildings. Since the regime blocked access to several Internet websites in June 2007 and banned mobile phone news services, freedom of expression activists have met every Tuesday at the spot to protest. Several gatherings have been harshly repressed by police.

At least a dozen stringers for foreign satellite TV stations were banned from sending out material on social unrest and opposition activity in the last quarter of 2007. They included Hammud Munasser, of the Saudi station *Al-Arabiya*, who was arrested, had his videotapes seized and was interrogated for an hour on the road between Sanaa and Khamer, where about 18,000 people protested on 18 November about the government’s economic policies. A crew from the Qatari station *Al-Jazeera* was stopped on 10 December from travelling to the southern province of Lahj to cover an opposition rally.

JOURNALIST TARGETED BY THE REGIME

Abdulkarim al-Khaiwani, former editor of the weekly *Al-Shura* (suspended in 2005) was arrested in June and held for a month before being freed for health reasons. He was prosecuted before the state security court (which specialises in counter-terrorism) for “putting out news likely to undermine army morale” and faces the death

penalty if convicted. He is accused of having links with Shiite rebels in the north and has appeared in court with 14 others charged with terrorism. The last hearing, on 25 November, was adjourned and by 1 January 2008 a new date had not yet been set. Al-Khaiwani was questioned by a judge with little affection for journalists, about (unpublished) articles criticising top government figures.

After he was freed, he continued to string for independent and foreign media. Following a story about prison conditions he wrote in the weekly *Al-Nedaa*, he was briefly kidnapped on 27 August and beaten by heavily-armed men who were apparently state security agents.

VIOLENT INCIDENTS

A dozen armed men arrived in military vehicles at the offices of the weekly *Al-Sharaa* on 30 July and threatened to kill editor Naif Hassan, who was not there. The attack came two weeks after the defence ministry filed a suit against the paper after it printed articles about the fighting in the northern province of Saada. The paper was founded in June 2007.

Ali al-Assadi, editor of the weekly *Al-Adwaa*, was beaten unconscious in Sanaa on 12 December by thugs with sticks and pickaxes. He said his attackers wore army uniforms.