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Freedom of the Press 2010 - Burma (Myanmar)

Status: Not Free

Legal Environment: 30

Political Environment: 38

Economic Environment: 27

Total Score: 95

- The new constitution approved in 2008 ostensibly provides for freedom of speech and the press, but the Burmese media environment remained one of the most tightly restricted in the world during 2009.
- Private periodicals are subject to prepublication censorship under the 1962 Printers and Publishers Registration Act, which requires that all content be approved by the authorities. As a result, coverage is limited to a small range of permissible topics, publications are sometimes required to carry government-produced articles, and most periodicals are forced to appear as weeklies or monthlies. Under censorship rules announced in 2005, media are ostensibly allowed to offer "constructive" criticism of government projects and report on natural disasters and poverty, provided the coverage does not affect the national interest. In practice, however, the government tolerates virtually no media independence. In September 2009, the Rangoon-based weekly *Phoenix* was shut down indefinitely over alleged violations of censorship laws. The paper had been temporarily shut down previously for straying from a directive that it publish only entertainment news.
- Those who publicly express or disseminate views or images that are critical of the regime are subject to harsh punishments, including lengthy prison sentences, as well as assault and intimidation. The comedian and blogger Zarganar, who was sentenced in late 2008 to a total of 59 years in prison on several charges, had his sentence reduced in 2009 to 35 years.
- At the beginning of the year an estimated 13 prominent journalists and writers remained in prison for expressing political views. Among those arrested in 2009 was Hla Hla Win, held in September for alleged violations of both the Electronic Act and the Export Import Act. She had supplied news information to the Oslo-based Democratic Voice of Burma radio station. Freelance journalist Zaw Tun was sentenced to two years in prison in June. He had been arrested close to opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi's home by a police officer who claimed the journalist had shown "hostility" toward him. Several journalists were released in September as part of a mass amnesty of 7,114 political prisoners.
- Both local and foreign journalists' ability to cover the news is restricted. Small numbers of foreign reporters are allowed to enter Burma on special visas; they

are generally subject to intense scrutiny while in the country and in past years have occasionally been deported.

- The government owns all broadcast media and daily newspapers and exercises tight control over a growing number of privately owned weekly and monthly publications.
- Authorities restrict the importation of foreign news periodicals.
- Although some people have access to international shortwave radio or satellite television, those caught accessing foreign broadcasts can be arrested. Nevertheless, as the only source of uncensored information, foreign radio programs produced by the Voice of America, Radio Free Asia, and Democratic Voice of Burma are very popular. The monthly subscription fees to access satellite channels are high, so most Burmese viewers install the receivers illegally.
- The internet operates in a limited fashion in cities and is accessible to less than 1 percent of the population, mainly through a growing number of internet cafes. Access is expensive, tightly regulated, and censored, with the government controlling all of the several dozen domestic internet-service providers. Blogger Win Zaw Naing was arrested in 2009 for posting pictures and reporting about a series of 2007 protests led by Buddhist monks. Naing faces up to 15 years in prison if convicted. With a number of other bloggers sentenced to prison terms of several dozen years, the Committee to Protect Journalists has designated Burma as the worst place in the world to become a blogger.

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