Burma, Laos, and Cambodia, Status of Media in

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GLOSSARY

Burmese The main language spoken in Burma (Myanmar).

Khmer The main language spoken in Cambodia. Khmer; also spoken in some provinces in northeastern Thailand and in southern Vietnam.

Khmer Rouge French, "the Red Khmers"; ultra-radical Communists who fought against successive governments in Phnom Penh before they seized power in 1975. They ruled the country until the Vietnamese invasion in December 1978–January 1979. Nearly two million people were killed when they were in power.

Lao The main language spoken in Laos; related to Thai, the national language of Thailand, and to the various Tai/Shan dialects spoken in northeastern Burma, southern Yunnan (China), and northwestern Vietnam.

Pathet Lao Literally, "the Lao Country"; the most commonly used name for the pro-Communist resistance during the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s, although the official name was *Neo Lao Hak Xat* (the Lao Patriotic Front).

Tatmadaw Burmese Myanmar for "armed forces"; the main political power in the country since 1962.

The current media environment in Burma, Cambodia, and Laos varies as much as the background to the press and television in those three countries. Burma, with its long and solid intellectual tradition, had newspapers as early as the 1830s. During the 1870s, King Mindon introduced a law guaranteeing freedom of the press, and an outspoken media flourished even under British colonialism. In Cambodia, the first vernacular press was fiercely nationalistic and often polemic. In Laos, the media have always been much more tame, serving as a medium for whatever government has been in power to disseminate its official information. Today, Burma is ruled by one of the world's most repressive regimes, and the state of the country's contemporary media does not do justice to a long and proud tradition of professional journalism. The Lao media continue to be government controlled and noncontroversial, while a new, very outspoken, and hard-hitting press has re-emerged in Cambodia since the country was opened up following a United Nations-sponsored general election in 1993.

I. BURMA'S FIRST NEWSPAPERS

Burma was conquered by the British in stages during the 19th century. The First Anglo–Burman War lasted from 1824 to 1826 and resulted in the Arakan region in the west and Tenasserim in the southeast becoming British. Following the Second Anglo–Burman War in 1852, the British took over the territory between Arakan and Tenasserim in lower Burma, including Rangoon. What was left of the Burmese kingdom in upper Burma—including the then royal capital of Mandalay—fell to the British in a third war that ended in 1885. Burma was first made a province of British India but became a separate colony in 1937. It was under Japanese occupation from 1942 to 1945 and became an independent republic in 1948. The country was a parliamentary democracy until the military seized power in a coup d'etat in 1962. Despite several popular pro-democracy uprisings since then, the country remains under tight military rule.

Burma's first newspaper, the English-language *Maulmain Chronicle,* appeared in 1836 in the city of Moulmein in British-held Tenasserim. It was followed on January 5, 1853, by the *Rangoon Chronicle.* The

longest-lasting paper, the colonial *Rangoon Gazette,* was founded in 1861 and survived until the Japanese occupation in 1942. The first Burmese-language paper, *Yadana-bon Nay-pyi-daw* (with the heading of Mandalay Gazette in English on the masthead) was started in Mandalay in independent Burma in 1874 as the official organ of the kingdom. At an official meeting at the palace in Mandalay, the king bestowed immunity on the local press corps: "If I do wrong, write about me. If the queens do wrong, write about them. If my sons and daughters do wrong, write about them. If the judges and mayors do wrong, write about them. No one shall take action against the journalists for writing the truth. They shall go in and out of the palace freely" (quoted in U Thaung, *A Journalist, a General and an Army in Burma*, 1995, p. 3). Freedom of the press was guaranteed by the king in an act consisting of 17 articles. Article III of the act stated that the press was for "the benefit of the citizens to hear general news from Europe, India, China, and Siam for enriching the thoughts and improving their trade and communication."

During the colonial period, Burma had dozens of newspapers in Burmese, English, Chinese, and several Indian languages. Periodicals were also printed in Burma's own minority languages. The press lent support to the nationalist movement that began to gain momentum during the 1920s. Among the most outspoken newspapers were the Burmese-language *Thuriya* (the Sun), which was founded in 1911 by Ba Pe and later owned and edited solely by U Saw, the leader of the *Myochit* (Love of Country) party and a leading rightist politician, and the Burmese-language *Myanma Alin* (the New Light of Burma), which was set up in 1914 and for many years managed by U Tin, who became a minister in independent Burma's first government in 1948. There was also the *Liberty,* the *Modern Burma,* the *Bandoola Journal,* the *Observer,* the *New Burma,* the *Free Burma,* and the *Rangoon Mail* in English and a few others in Burmese, among them the *Deedok* (the name of a local bird) journal, edited by Ba Choe, and the *Dagon* (an early name for Rangoon) magazine. Ba Choe, who was a well-known journalist and the founder of the Fabian Society, almost certainly would have become a prominent political figure after Burma's independence had he not been assassinated in 1947.

The press also played a crucial role in radicalizing the nationalist movement. In 1936, a satirical piece titled "Hell Hound at Large" appeared in the *Oway* (mimicking the sound of the peacock: "Oway! Oway!") magazine, mocking the Rangoon University authorities. *Oway* was published by the Students Union, and its president, Aung San, was called to reveal the name of the author of the article. Aung San refused and was expelled from Rangoon University. This resulted in a nationwide student strike, followed by workers' and farmers' strikes, and eventually led to an armed rebellion when Aung San and some of his comrades made it to Japan in 1940 and 1941. Known popularly as "the Thirty Comrades," they returned with the invading Japanese army in 1942 and set up a puppet government in Rangoon. On March 27, 1945, the Burmese nationalists turned against the Japanese and joined the Allies. A few months later, Britain regained control of Burma and old institutions were reestablished. But the country was in turmoil, and in 1948 it gained independence from Britain.

The war years saw a clear polarization between the pro-Japanese Burmese nationalists and several of the ethnic minorities that remained loyal to the British. Both the Karens and the Kachins formed Allied-supported guerrilla forces that fought against the Japanese. Printed publications in those languages played a very important role in mobilizing the anti-Japanese resistance, for instance, the *Shi Laika Ningnan* (the New Newspaper) in the Kachin (Jinghpaw) language, which was printed in India and airdropped into the Kachin-inhabited areas of northern Burma. The Karens formed their own political organizations, which published material in their own language as well as in English.

In January 1947, Aung San traveled to London and managed to negotiate independence for Burma. In February, he traveled to the market town of Panglong in the Shan minority area, where he signed an agreement with leaders of the Shans, Kachins, and Chins, paving the way for their joining the proposed Union of Burma under a federal constitution. Everything appeared set for Burma's independence when an unexpected event occurred. On July 19, 1947, Aung San was assassinated along with *Deedok* editor Ba Choe and seven other state leaders. On the same day, the Rangoon police arrested U Saw, the editor of *Thuriya* and charged him with murder. He was convicted and hanged in May 1948. Deprived of most of its competent leadership, the country faced a difficult time when the British left and the Union of Burma was proclaimed on January 4, 1948. The first prime minister was U Nu, while the ceremonial post as union president was given to Sao Shwe Thaike, a Shan prince. But such attempts to placate the minorities failed, and within months of independence, the country was plunged into civil war as both the Communists and several of the ethnic minorities resorted to armed struggle, the former for political goals and the latter for separation from the union.

II. THE MEDIA IN COLONIAL CAMBODIA AND LAOS

A. Cambodia

The Kingdom of Cambodia became a French protectorate in 1863 and regained its independence in 1953. The first publications were government bulletins in French—*Bulletin Officiel du Cambodge* (1884), which superseded *Bulletin de L'Indochine,* and *Bulletin Administratif du Cambodge* (1921), which also carried a supplement called *L'Echo du Cambodge.* The first Khmer-language paper, the twice-weekly *Nagara Vatta* (Angkor Wat), appeared as late as in 1936 and was the main organ of Cambodia's early nationalist leaders Son Ngoc Thanh, Sim Var, and Pach Chhoeun, all young men in their 30s. The paper's circulation rose to more than 5000 but the paper did not dare go as far as to challenge the French authorities. Instead, it concentrated on criticizing the Vietnamese domination of the civil service, the influence of the Chinese business community, and similar issues that appealed to many Khmer nationalists.

The arrival of Japanese troops in Cambodia in May 1941 changed the tone of the *Nagara Vatta*. It became increasingly pro-Japanese and anti-colonial. However, the paper ceased publication in July 1942 when its editor, Pach Chhoeun, was arrested after having participated in an anti-French demonstration in Phnom Penh. Pach was sentenced to death but had the sentence commuted to life imprisonment. His colleague, Son Ngoc Thanh, launched a new nationalist paper in 1952, the *Khmer Krok* (Khmers Awake), which urged the population to wake up and compete with the Chinese and Vietnamese in business and commerce. Both the *Nagara Vatta* and *Khmer Krok* represented the policies of the Khmer nationalist movement and were propaganda organs rather than newspapers in the Western sense. A national news agency, the Agence Khmere de Presse (AKP), was set up in 1951, and a law promulgated in the same year gave everyone the right to print and publish in the Khmer language provided that notice was given to the Ministry of Information. The daily with the largest circulation in 1952 was the *Cong Thuong Pao,* a Chinese paper with fewer than 2000 subscribers. The Khmer-language biweekly organ of the Democratic party, *Pracheathipatay* (Democracy), had the largest circulation—9000 in 1952.

B. Laos

The various kingdoms and principalities of Laos became a French protectorate during the period from 1893 to 1895, and the first publication was a government gazette, *Bulletin Administratif du Laos,* which appeared in 1902. It was followed in 1924 by another government news sheet in French, *Bulletin Officiel Laotien,* but also in Lao, *Chot Mai Het Lao* (Lao Bulletins). There were also other news sheets in French and Vietnamese. Ethnic Vietnamese, who dominated the colonial administration, brought in newspapers from Saigon and Hanoi, while Laos remained the most backward and neglected part of French Indochina.

The first real newspapers in the Lao language, *Lao Nhay* (Lao Renovation), did not appear until January 1941 and then under the auspices of the Lao Renovation movement. Founded in the same year with the assistance of Charles Rochet, the French director of public education, the renovation movement sought to generate a Lao national identity, mainly to counteract Japanese war propaganda and the pan-Thai ideology of Thai strongman Field Marshall Plaek Phibunsongkhram. The Thai and Lao languages are mutually intelligible, and the Lao dialect is also spoken in northeastern Thailand where there are, in fact, more Lao speakers than in Laos itself. *Lao Nhay* soon got two sister publications, the French language *Le Nouveau Laos* and the Lao-language *Tin Lao* (Lao Land). In theory, Laos had a free press under the French, but information and communication were tightly controlled by the colonial authorities.

III. INDEPENDENCE AND CIVIL WAR

A. Burma

When Burma became independent in January 1948, there were 39 newspapers: 21 in Burmese, 7 in English, 5 in Chinese, 2 in Hindi, and 1 each in Gujarati, Urdu, Tamil, and Telugu. By political affiliation, there were three types of newspapers: pro-government, opposition leaning to the right, and opposition leaning to the left. Of the Chinese papers, the most influential was the Communist pro-Beijing *Freedom Daily.* The right-wing *Hanthawaddy* (the name of a township in lower Burma) daily was close to Prime Minister U Nu but did not hesitate to criticize him if it viewed him as too sympathetic to the left. The centrist English-language *Nation,* founded by editor Law Yone and first published in 1948, was often critical of the government but positive in its comments. Its circulation reached more than 20,000 during the mid-1950s, and its popularity was partly due to the dynamic Law Yone. Post-independent Burma's politics—and the

parliament—were dominated by the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL). In the absence of any real opposition to the AFPFL, the press functioned as a public watchdog, especially with its frequent interviews with the prime minister.

The first real confrontation between the press and the government was provoked by differences of opinion as to how the Communist and ethnic insurgency should be covered. At the height of the rebellion, in 1948 and 1949, censorship was imposed and the offices of four newspapers were raided by the police after they published stories considered detrimental to national security. But the censorship was eventually lifted, and the newspapers resumed reporting insurgent activities with a surprisingly unbiased point of view.

In August 1954, the U Nu government did try to limit the freedom of the press by tabling a bill aimed at making "defamatory allegations and charges" against public servants, including ministers, a criminal offense. The proposal caused an outcry among Burma's journalists, and their trade union organized a united protest that forced the government to drop the bill.

The freedom of the press was perceived as a threat by the military, which regarded journalists as potential troublemakers whose activities only exacerbated the already chaotic political situation in the country. As a result of the civil war, the army had also grown in strength and importance, from approximately 5000 at the time of independence to 40,000 in 1955 and 100,000 during the early 1960s. It was becoming a state within the state that developed its own ideology and ran its own businesses, including an English-language newspaper called the *Guardian*. Founded in 1955 by Colonel Aung Gyi and Maung Maung, a former army officer who had become a lawyer and historian, it also managed to employ Sein Win, one of Burma's leading and most respected journalists.

The press flourished during the 1950s, and in 1957 U Thaung, a leading newspaperman, founded the *Kyemon* (Mirror), which had a circulation of 55,000 and became the country's main Burmese-language publication. New technology was also introduced, and the *Kyemon* was the first newspaper to be printed on an offset press in Asia. In the following year, the military, led by the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, General Ne Win, set up a caretaker government to overcome a constitutional crisis. One of his first targets was *Kyemon,* which was closed on April 9, 1958. In February 1960, a general election was held and U Nu returned to power. The *Kyemon* also reappeared on March 20 as democracy was being restored following 2 years of emergency rule.

B. Cambodia

The main political figure in Cambodia for several decades has been Norodom Sihanouk. Born in 1922, he ascended to the throne as king in 1941 and led Cambodia to independence from France on November 9, 1953. He abdicated in 1955 in favor of his father, Norodom Suramarit, but remained the strongman of the country in his capacity as prime minister and leader of the country's main political party during the 1950s and 1960s, the *Sangkum Reastr Niyum* (the People's Socialist Community). Suramarit died in April 1960, and Sihanouk became head of state once again, but now as prince instead of king, giving him more room to maneuver.

Independent Cambodia's first general election in 1955 saw a landslide victory for Sihanouk's *Sangkum,* and he began to consolidate his grip on power. In December 1956, following a few years of relative press freedom, the National Assembly approved a law requiring censorship of all publications not printed in Khmer. There were, however, 26 papers and journals in French, Khmer, Chinese, and Vietnamese, and some of them, such as the *Ekapheap* (Independence), were openly leftist. Another paper, the leftist French-language *L'Observateur,* was founded in 1959 by a Cambodian intellectual, Khieu Samphan, who had just returned from obtaining a doctorate at Sorbonne University in Paris. During the 1960s, when Sihanouk's secret police cracked down on leftist movements, Khieu Samphan went underground and join what the prince termed the *Khmer Rouge* (the Red Khmers), the country's fledgling Communist movement. Another editor, Nop Bophann of the weekly *Pracheachon* (the People), was assassinated in 1959, most likely by Sihanouk's secret police. During the early years of the *Pracheachon,* one of its columnists was a young French-educated man called Saloth Sar, who used the pseudonym "the original Khmer." During the 1970s, he became head of the Khmer Rouge and assumed the revolutionary name Pol Pot. A pro-government paper, *La Dépêche,* fell under the control of a former prime minister who opposed Sihanouk. The mercurial prince reacted by instructing a leftist, Chau Seng, to launch a new paper, *La Nouvelle Dépêche.* The two papers launched blistering attacks against each other.

In 1967, Sihanouk tried to put an end to the newspaper war by shutting down all private newspapers except the four journals that he edited himself and the government's own news agency. A few months later, some papers were allowed to recommence publication, but the press was not free, and many more dissidents had taken to the jungle to join the Khmer Rouge.

Sihanouk's main mouthpieces were *Etudes Cambodgiennes,* a journal that he edited, and a semipornographic magazine called *Phseng Phseng* (Different Things). A monthly pictorial magazine, the *Kambuja Illustrated Review,* showed the prince digging railway tracks and mingling with the people. The English-language publication was meant for a wider audience than just Cambodian readers (few of whom could read or speak English), and according to the magazine, K stood for Khmer, A for Asian, M for monastery, B for Buddhism, U for unique, J for journal, and A for Asia.

Sihanouk's fiercely nationalistic ideas and practices made enemies of the Americans (whom he had thrown out of the country in 1963), drove many intellectuals into the hands of the Khmer Rouge, and alienated the armed forces, which eventually turned against him. According to U.S. historian David Chandler in *A History of Cambodia* (1993, p. 200), "Like many of his ancestors, Sihanouk saw Cambodia as a personal possession, a family, or a theatrical troupe." The press was part of that "family," and according to Chandler, Sihanouk "found it inconceivable that his 'children' would oppose him because of genuine grievances connected with his policies." The outcome was a princely dictatorship in which there was no room for a free press.

C. Laos

Following Laos's independence from France on October 22, 1953, several new newspapers and periodicals were launched, but most of them with limited circulation, reflecting the small population of the country and a low literacy rate. Well into modern times, most information was disseminated by itinerant merchants, Buddhist monks, ballad singers, and drama troupes. Radio has always played a more important role than the printed media in Laos, where the reading population is confined to the capital Vientiane, the old royal capital Luang Prabang, and a few towns along the Mekong River. Radio broadcasts in Lao, and the Hmong language of the main group of highlanders, became increasingly important during the war in the 1960s and early 1970s between the royal government, supported by the United States, and the pro-Communist Pathet Lao, which was backed by North Vietnam. Many Hmong sided with the government and built up their own anti-Communist resistance army. Funded and equipped by the Central Intelligence Agency, the "secret" Hmong army, led by General Vang Pao, became the main force resisting the Communists because the United States was barred from sending its own troops under the 1962 Geneva Declaration, which supposedly guaranteed Laos's neutrality. Likewise, the Pathet Lao received massive support from North Vietnam and China, and it relied heavily on radio broadcasts in both Lao and Hmong to reach a largely illiterate population. The Communist radio was set up in 1960 with North Vietnamese assistance, but it played on nationalist sentiments rather than on ideology. Significantly, it did not mention the official name of the Communist organization—the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP)—until a few months before it seized power in Vientiane on December 2, 1975, abolishing the monarchy and the old semidemocratic system and replacing it with the Communist-ruled Lao People's Democratic Republic.

The few newspapers and periodicals that existed during the era of the independent Kingdom of Laos (1953–1975) were never entirely free. The new national constitution, as amended in 1956, deleted any direct mention of freedom of speech and the press. However, a new Press Law promulgated in 1957 guaranteed freedom of expression "provided that the subject matter does not jeopardize the king, the state religion, or the aims of peace, neutrality, democracy, and unity of the nation" (*Area Handbook for Laos*, U.S. Government, 1972, p. 132). This basically meant that the Lao authorities could ban publications when they saw fit. In 1962, the *Xat Lao* (the Lao Nation) was shut down temporarily, and in 1967, the *Lanxang Khaona* (Lanxang [an old name for Laos] Front-Page News) was banned. During the pre-Communist era, working for newspapers was never an attractive occupation. Salaries were so low that most Lao reporters had to supplement their incomes by working as compositors for Thai printing presses in Nong Khai across the Mekong.

Xat Lao, with a circulation of 5000 to 6000 in 1970, was the country's main Lao-language daily newspaper before the 1975 Communist takeover. It had an editorial staff of six, and the contents always followed the same pattern: domestic news on the front page, editorials and letters to the editor on the second page, commentaries on the third page, lovelorn columns to attract younger readers on the fourth page, serialized novels on the fifth page, and travel stories on the sixth page. The remaining two pages contained advertisements. Fully 95% of the readership were government, military, and police personnel.

Other publications during the pre-1975 era included *Lao Presse,* a four-page news sheet issued daily in French (and Lao as *Khao Pacham Van* [Daily News]) by the directorate of information; *Revue de Presse* in French; the daily *Siang Seri* (the Independent Voice) in Lao; *Vientiane News,* an English-language weekly; and the five-day-a-week *Viangchan Phot* (Vientiane Post).

The latter favored national reconciliation and a neutralist policy and became the *Viangchan Mai* (New Vientiane) on November 1, 1975, the only paper to survive the Communist takeover at least in name. *Vientiane News* ceased publication on May 5, 1975; *Siang Seri* on May 9; and *Xat Lao* on November 14 as the Communists were preparing to take over power.

In addition, there was a Chinese-language daily published in Vientiane, *Lao Hua* (the Lao Voice), which featured mainly commercial news of the capital's Chinese community. It also published news of the overseas Chinese but refrained from taking a pro-Beijing or pro-Taipei line. *Lao Hua* was a more neutral offspring of *Lao Samai* (Laos Today), which was "ordered by the American Embassy to suspend operations in the late-1960s because it had published a verbatim account of the My Lai massacre [in Vietnam]."

Laos had only one local newspaper before 1975, the *Voice of the People* (in Lao despite the name), which was published weekly in the southern town of Pakse. The paper started in 1949, but the publication frequency was very irregular. The paper was run by a colonel in the Royal Lao Army.

IV. BURMA POST-1962

On March 2, 1962, Ne Win and the army stepped in again, detained all former state leaders, abolished the old federal constitution, and set up a Revolutionary Council that ruled by decree. Burma's experiment with democracy was over. At first, the Revolutionary Council said it would honor the freedom of the press. However, step by step, that freedom was being revoked. On July 1, 1962, the military set up the Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP) and published several documents to be the guiding ideological basis for the new regime. Aware of the lobbying power of the press, it first moved against the *Nation,* an outspoken defender of press freedom, which was closed down in May 1963, and its editor, Law Yone, was arrested in August. In July, the government set up the News Agency Burma, and on October 1, the military launched its own daily newspaper, the *Loktha Pyithu Nezin* (the Working People's Daily) to compete with the still existing private newspapers. An English version, called the *Working People's Daily,* appeared soon afterward. At the same time, the military government formally took over the *Guardian,* already owned an organ of the army, and the left-wing *Vanguard* offered itself for nationalization.

The year 1964 was the last one of a free press in Burma. The *Kyemon* was nationalized on September 1, followed by the *Botataung* (A Thousand Officers or the Guardian in Burmese) newspaper on September 11. Smaller newspapers were also closed down, and several editors and journalists were arrested. In March of the same year, the military-controlled BSPP had been made the only legal political organization in the country, and all other parties were banned. Eventually, in December 1966, it was announced that private newspapers were to be banned altogether, and with immediate effect the government discontinued annual reregistration of all Chinese- and Indian-language newspapers. Printing, the government said, must henceforth be done only in Burmese or English. The right-wing *Hanthawaddy* and the *Myanma Alin* (the New Light of Burma), the oldest paper in the country, were nationalized in 1969. In the end, only six papers remained, all of them now owned and controlled by the military government: the *Loktha Pyithu Nezin,* the *Botataung,* the *Kyemon,* and the *Hanthawaddy* in Burmese and the *Guardian* and the *Working People's Daily* in English.

The News Agency Burma controlled the flow of news in and out of the country. All foreign correspondents, except those working for the Soviet *Tass* and the Chinese *Xinhua,* were expelled. Visits by foreign journalists were banned, although some journalists managed to sneak into the country disguised as tourists. The foreign news agencies were forced to appoint Burmese citizens as their correspondents and to have these appointments approved by the government. Through this unique arrangement, the military regime managed to get out its own version of the news from Burma under internationally respected by-lines such as Reuters, Associated Press, United Press International, Kyodo, Agence-France Presse, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), and the Voice of America (VOA). During recent years, the BBC and VOA have pulled out after being unable to appoint their own correspondents, but the arrangement remains in place for the wire services.

The government also maintained strict control over radio, which meant that many people turned to listening to the Burmese-language broadcasts of the BBC and VOA. Although their reporting from Burma remained bland, the BBC and VOA carried uncensored international news and other programs of interest to the public. The BBC's Burmese service especially became nearly a national institution to which everyone listened and which during the 1980s received the largest number of listeners' letters of any of the BBC's foreign-language services.

Burma got television much later than did any other Southeast Asian country. It was only on June 3, 1980, that the first television station opened with Japanese assistance, and even then transmission was limited to the capital Rangoon and surrounding townships.

However, by 1985, programs could be received even upcountry through a network of relay stations. But there was only one channel that featured news broadcasts, classical Burmese dramas, educational programs, and imported vintage films.

The abolition of democracy, the federal system, and press freedom drove thousands of political dissidents as well as activists from the country's many ethnic minorities into the jungle. The civil war flared anew, and China began supporting the Communist Party of Burma (CPB), which built up a strong rebel army that wrested control over a 20,000-square-kilometer "liberated area" along the Chinese frontier. At the same time, the army grew in strength from 100,000 at the time of the 1962 coup to more than 180,000 by the mid-1980s.

During the 1970s, the powerful CPB, backed by China, built up an extensive propaganda apparatus, but bulletins and theoretical journals were circulated almost exclusively among the party's own cadres. The main means of reaching the population in government-held areas was the party's broadcasting station, the People's Voice of Burma (PVOB). In April 1971, it began transmitting from across the border in Yunnan in southern China. Its daily broadcasts featured news from the civil war; party propaganda; and revolutionary music in Burmese, Shan, Kachin, Karen, Wa, and occasionally other tribal languages. In 1978, following policy changes in China after the death of Mao Zedong and the rise to power of Deng Xiaoping, the PVOB was forced to move its transmitters back across the border to party headquarters at Panghsang in the Wa Hills in northeastern Burma.

The ethnic rebels—Karens, Shans, Kachins, Palaungs, Pa-Os, Karennis, and Rohingya Muslims from Arakan State—also published their underground magazines and newsletters in their respective languages, but with limited circulation and seemingly without much effect on the political situation in the rest of the country. The Karen rebels, who were based along the Thai border, set up their own broadcasting station at the rebel base of Maw Po Kay in early 1983, but it was closed down in January 1984 due to heavy fighting in the area.

After years of military rule and socialism, the Burmese economy reached rock bottom during the late 1980s. In August 1988, millions of people took to the streets to demand an end to the dictatorship and a restoration of the democracy and the free market system that had existed before 1962. The demonstrations were met with unprecedented brutality. Thousands of people were gunned down by the army, but that did not put an end to the protests. In September, the military authorities withdrew their forces from the cities, and even more people took to the streets. For about a month, the creativity of the Burmese psyche flourished again after 26 years of silence. Within a week, Rangoon alone had nearly 40 independent newspapers and magazines full of political commentaries, biting satires, and witty cartoons ridiculing the BSPP and the ruling military elite. The new lively newspapers—some daily and others intermittent, some in Burmese and some in English—had fanciful names such as the *Light of Dawn,* the *Liberation Daily, Scoop,* the *New Victory,* and the *Newsletter.* Some were handwritten and photocopied or mimeographed, while others had access to professional printing presses, often free of charge because their owners wanted to show that they also supported the pro-democracy movement. Even the official newspapers, including the *Guardian* and the *Working People's Daily,* began publishing outspoken political articles. The authorities seemed to tolerate this, but significantly, the state-run radio and television stations remained unchanged.

The "Rangoon spring" came to an abrupt end when the military stepped in and seized direct control of state power on September 18, 1988. The formation of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) was announced, and many more people were gunned down in the streets of Rangoon and other cities and towns across the country. But to the surprise of many, the SLORC pledged to hold free and fair elections and, according to what junta spokesman Brigadier General (now Lieutenant General) Khin Nyunt said at the time, to "hand over power to the party that wins." Thousands of dissidents fled to the Thai border area to take up arms against the new military regime, while others remained behind inside the country, where they formed the National League for Democracy (NLD), led by Aung San Suu Kyi, the daughter of Burma's independence hero Aung San.

Immediately after the formation of the SLORC, all newspapers were banned except the *Loktha Pyithu Nezin* and its English equivalent, the *Working People's Daily.* Strict censorship was imposed, and many journalists were arrested, including Win Tin, the erstwhile editor of *Hanthawaddy* daily who had become a prominent pro-democracy activist in 1988. At first, foreign journalists were allowed into the country, but when their reporting turned out to be more critical than the government had expected, those visits were curtailed as well. During recent years, only a selected few foreign journalists have been given press visas. But over the years, many foreign correspondents have sneaked into the country posing as tourists or businessmen, thus enabling a steady stream of news to come out of the country despite severe official restrictions.

An exception was made in May 1990, when the government held its promised general election—and dozens of foreign journalists descended on Rangoon. The outcome was another propaganda disaster for the SLORC. Suu Kyi had been placed under house arrest in July 1989, but even so, her party (the NLD) won 385 out of 492 contested seats in the parliament. However, in July, the SLORC declared that it was not a parliament that had been elected but rather a constituent assembly, which had to draw up a new constitution and include more members than those who had been elected.

In July 1995, Suu Kyi (who had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991) was released from her house arrest, and foreign journalists were once again allowed to visit the country. After a few months, the government clamped down again and stopped issuing press visas, and Suu Kyi was soon back under virtual house arrest once again, with her movements being severely restricted. Many members of parliament elected from her party were also arrested, while others fled to Thailand and India. The military remains in charge and is more deeply entrenched in power than ever before. By 1999, the strength of Burma's armed forces had also increased to 450,000, more than double the 1988 figure.

In an attempt to polish up its image—and in line with new free market economic policies that were implemented after 1988—the government changed the name of the *Loktha Pyithu Nezin* (the Working People's Daily) in April 1993. It was given the name of a paper that the military had banned in 1969: the *Myanma Alin* (the New Light of Myanmar). The paper even added "Established 1914" at the top of the front page. During the mid-1990s, the Office of the Mayor of Rangoon launched its own paper, which borrowed its name from another old publication: *Kyemon* (the Mirror).

Although the daily papers, radio, and television remain owned and controlled by the government, there are also very large numbers of privately owned monthly magazines and, by the late 1990s, weekly news sheets (called *gya-neh* [journals]). But all magazines and periodicals have to be submitted to the Press Scrutiny Board (PSB), which has the power to forbid their distribution. This, however, is done after the publications have been printed. According to Anna Allott, a British expert on Burmese literature and media, in *Inked Over, Ripped Out: Burmese Storytellers and the Censors* (1993, pp. 16–17),

> *Any story, poem, cartoon, passage, or word not allowed by the PSB has to be eliminated before the work can go on sale. This is done by ripping out pages, by gluing them together, by inking over with silver paint, or by sticking opaque tape over the offending item. This ripping and blanking out is carried out by the publisher, following the instructions of the PSB. . . . The losses that can be incurred by the publishers are clearly very great, so there is immense pressure on editors to select only such contributions as will be acceptable. The resulting frustration and offense felt by writers has led many to cease trying to write anything of a controversial nature; those who find they cannot write without being controversial are effectively banned.*

Most Burmese continue to rely on the BBC's and VOA's Burmese-language services for news. In February 1997, Radio Free Asia, which is financed by U.S. government funds, started a Burmese-language service, which is overtaking both the BBC and VOA in popularity. A similar, pro-democracy broadcasting station, the Norway-based Democratic Voice of Burma, has been broadcasting to Burma since 1992, but the reception inside Burma is poor.

Unlike Cambodia and even Laos, satellite TV is not common in Burma, and it is forbidden to possess "unauthorized" satellite dishes. Burma's national television has been supplemented with Myawady television, which is owned by the Ministry of Defense but tends to have more popular music programs than the channel run by the Ministry of Information. The emphasis on the national television is on announcements of the government's achievements, army men who sing patriotic songs, and heavily censored news. It does carry excerpts from CNN, but always at a later date to give the censors ample time to screen the programs.

Table I provides a listing of the current major media in Burma.

V. CAMBODIA POST-1970

On March 18, 1970, General Lon Nol staged a coup, overthrew Sihanouk, and proclaimed a republic. Sihanouk set up a government in exile in Beijing and allied himself with the Khmer Rouge guerrillas, who grew in strength mainly because of the backing from the prince. The United States supported the new republican regime and began to bomb Vietcong and North Vietnamese sanctuaries in eastern and northeastern Cambodia. The country was thrown into an extremely bloody civil war, which lasted for five years. Lon Nol's republican government placed the country under martial law and imposed censorship on all media, domestic as well as foreign. Officially, those measures were lifted in August 1970, but in reality the control was not eased. At first, the country's three main dailies—*Nokor Thom* (the Big

TABLE I
Major Media in Burma

Newspapers and Magazines:
Myanmar Alin (New Light of Myanmar)
Publication frequency: Daily
Languages: Burmese (*Myanmar Alin*) and English (New Light of Myanmar)
Circulation: 174,700 (Burmese); 23,500 (English)
Publisher: Ministry of Information
Kyemon
Publication frequency: Daily
Language: Burmese
Circulation: 179,200
Publisher: Ministry of Information
Yangon City News
Publication frequency: Monday through Saturday
Language: Burmese
Circulation: not available
Publisher: Office of the Mayor of Rangoon
Yadanabon News
Publication frequency: Daily
Language: Burmese
Circulation: 20,000
Publisher: Office of the Mayor of Mandalay
Mian Dien Hua Bao (Burmese Morning Post)
Publication frequency: Weekly
Language: Chinese
Circulation: 5000
Publisher: privately owned Chinese-language newsweekly published in Rangoon
Dana
Publication frequency: Monthly
Language: Burmese
Circulation: 28,000
Publisher: privately owned business magazine
Myanmar Dana
Publication frequency: Monthly
Language: Burmese
Circulation: 16,000
Publisher: privately owned business magazine
State-Owned News Agency:
News Agency Myanmar
Radio and Television (State Owned):
Myanmar Radio and Television (Ministry of Information)
Myawady Television (Ministry of Defense)

City), *Khmer Ekareach* (the Independent Khmer), and *Koh Santepheap* (Island of Peace)—obeyed the rules, but by 1972, some papers began to publish reports of how the economy had become devastated by the war and how rampant corruption had exacerbated the situation. Several newspapers were closed down, and journalists were persecuted. The main source of information remained the state-controlled AKP, which also published the French-language *Journal Officiel*. There were also two French dailies, *Le Républicain* and *Le Courrier Phnompenhois,* as well as two Chinese dailies, *Sroch Srang Cheat* and *Ching-chi Jih-pao,* and one English-language newspaper, the *Republican News*. The average Cambodian newspaper had four pages, and the total circulation of all papers never exceeded 60,000, with more than half in Phnom Penh.

The government's broadcasting service, *Radiodiffusion Nationale Khmere,* had a network of 11 transmitters, and with more than a million receivers all over the country, radio played a much more important role than did newspapers as a source of information. The first television station was set up with Japanese assistance in 1961, and during the Lon Nol regime programs consisted mainly of newsreels and documentary films donated by the French and other diplomatic missions. From transmitters in China, Sihanouk's resistance broadcast daily attacks on the Lon Nol government and the United States. Sihanouk's Beijing-based *Gouvernement Royal d'Union Nationale de Kampuchéa* (GRUNK) and its front organization, *Front Uni Nationale de Kampuchéa*, also published bulletins and propaganda brochures. There were heavy penalties for listening to GRUNK broadcasts and distributing printed material from the resistance. Many Khmers also listened to foreign broadcasts. The BBC and VOA had extensive programs covering Southeast Asia. Although programs were mainly in English, the BBC also had a Chinese-language service and the VOA carried a three-hour daily program in Khmer.

Foreign journalists were allowed to operate in Cambodia during Lon Nol's regime, but many were killed in the line of duty. A total of 8 foreign correspondents were confirmed killed in action or captured by the resistance and executed, while 17 were listed as missing. The few reporters who were released from resistance captivity were able to report that the die-hard Cambodian Communists, the Khmer Rouge, were taking over the struggle from both Sihanouk's followers and their North Vietnamese advisers.

On April 17, 1975, the Khmer Rouge marched into Phnom Penh and proclaimed a new state, Democratic Kampuchea. Sihanouk returned form his exile in Beijing and served as head of state for a year before he was replaced by Khieu Samphan of the Khmer Rouge. The strongman, however, was Pol Pot alias Saloth Sar, who instituted a reign of terror. The prince remained under

virtual house arrest in his palace in Phnom Penh while the capital and all other cities and towns across the country were evacuated, and the people marched into the countryside. Schools, banks, markets, newspapers, and even money were abolished as the new rulers began an experiment with an extreme form of communism. At least 1.8 million people perished through executions, starvation, and disease before the Vietnamese invaded the country in late December 1978 and early January 1979 and drove the Khmer Rouge from power in Phnom Penh.

During the Khmer Rouge's years in power from April 1975 to January 1979, only one publication appeared: an intermittent propaganda journal called *Tung Padevat* (the Flag of the Revolution), which featured articles about the achievement of the new regime and a few theoretical articles. The journal was not distributed to the public but rather was meant for state and party leaders. The first issue of *Tung Padevat* appeared in 1976, and no more than 20 issues—in Khmer, with some translated into French for international consumption—were published before the Vietnamese invasion.

While restricting the distribution of printed material, the Khmer Rouge depended heavily on its radio broadcasts to disseminate information and propaganda. Radio Phnom Penh broadcast every day between 6 and 7 AM, 11 AM and 12 noon, and 8 and 9 PM local time, time slots that had been carefully selected so as not to interfere with the work in the fields. Broadcasts carefully specified the exact length, width, and depth of canals that had been dug, or dams and dikes that had been built, and encouraged people to work harder to achieve the aims of the revolution.

In January 1979, the Vietnamese installed a new regime, the People's Republic of Kampuchea, headed by pro-Hanoi and pro-Moscow ex-Khmer Rouge Communists who formed the Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party (KPRP). People were allowed to return to the cities and towns, and markets began to flourish once again. Newspapers and periodicals reappeared, but the state monopolized the media industry. The main organ of the new regime, the Khmer-language weekly *Kampuchea,* "competed" with another Communist Party-controlled weekly, *Phnom Penh*. The KPRP also ran a biweekly journal, *Pracheachon* (The People), which expressed the party's stand on domestic and international affairs. All news, both local and foreign, was channeled through the state news agency, *Sarpordamean Kampuchea* (SPK), which was modeled after its Vietnamese and Soviet equivalents. Although Western journalists were allowed to visit the country, only Eastern Bloc news agencies and *Nihon Denpa News* (owned by the Japanese Communist Party) had their own bureaus in Phnom Penh.

Along the Thai border, the remnants of the Khmer Rouge established an alliance with forces loyal to Sihanouk (who had been flown out of the country just before the Vietnamese marched into Phnom Penh) and a non-Communist force led by Son Sann, a former prime minister. Called "the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea" (CGDK), they had their own broadcasting station, and the respective components of the alliance published their own bulletins, mostly from their offices in Bangkok, Thailand.

The civil war between the Vietnamese-backed government in Phnom Penh and the CGDK, which received diplomatic and material support from China, the United States, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (then composed of Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Brunei), formally ended when a peace accord was signed in Paris in October 1991, paving the way for free elections supervised by the United Nations. The UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) arrived, and the country was promised a free press. Numerous radio stations were launched, including UNTAC's own, and an abundance of newspapers appeared.

Among the 30 or so papers that were published daily, weekly, or whenever the publishers had enough newsprint and money to put out issues, the Khmer-language *Rasmei Kampuchea* (Light of Cambodia) emerged as the most popular. With front-page stories and pictures of grisly traffic accidents and murders, the paper soon reached a circulation of 15,000 a day. Backed by Teng Boonma, a controversial Thai–Chinese–Cambodian business tycoon, the paper moved closer to Hun Sen, the strongman of the Hanoi-backed pre-UNTAC regime.

Other papers tended to be organs through which the respective editors expressed their opinions rather than disseminators of news. The elections in May 1993 resulted in an uneasy coalition government between Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party (formerly the KPRP) and a Royalist faction led by Sihanouk's son, Prince Norodom Ranariddh (and Sihanouk reinstated as king of the country). The Khmer Rouge boycotted the election and became marginalized. As a result of the new "openness," the Khmer-language press became even more polemic. Harish C. Mehta, an India-born journalist, wrote in his book *Cambodia Silenced: The Press under Six Regimes:*

> *The Cambodian Press went too far. It crossed the bounds of decency. A cartoon carried by one local paper showed the wife of Second Prime Minister Hun*

Sen with a pig's head. Another ebullient newspaper, Samleng Reas Khmer (Voice of Khmer People), described First Prime Minister Prince Norodom Ranariddh as "the prince of evil" and Hun Sen as a "rat." The Udom Ka te Khmer ("Khmer Ideal") newspaper used the word "dog" to describe the two co-premiers heading the two-party coalition. Profanity gave way to allegation. Weekend editions of Samleng Yuvachun Khmer (Voice of Khmer Yout") ran a cartoon of Ranariddh carrying a bag of money on his head, implying that he was corrupt. The Serei Pheap Thmei (New Liberty News) carried a cartoon of Hun Sen pointing a gun at Ranariddh's head to make him sign documents. Next, on February 6, 1995, the same paper ran an article alleging "the whole of Cambodia was a country of thieves, and Hun Sen was the head of thieves."

A foreign-language press also emerged in Cambodia in the wake of the UNTAC intervention. In July 1992, an English-language fortnightly, the *Phnom Penh Post,* was launched, followed by the weekly *Cambodia Times.* Later, the *Cambodia Daily* appeared in English, Khmer, and Japanese. The first paper was a private initiative launched by Michael and Kathleen Hayes, an American couple. The *Cambodia Times* was backed by Malaysian interests, and the *Cambodia Daily* was a private project initiated by a former *Newsweek* correspondent, Bernard Krisher. Two French-language papers also appeared: *Lé Mekong* and *La Voix du Cambodge.* With the sole exception of the *Cambodia Times,* which functioned as a government mouthpiece, the foreign-language press tended to be more responsible in their reporting than did their Khmer counterparts. The *Phnom Penh Post* especially developed into a main source of information about current events as well as history and culture, and consequently it managed to get a large number of subscribers overseas.

The rapid changes after UNTAC's intervention, and the emergence of a free but largely irresponsible press made journalism perhaps the most dangerous profession in Cambodia. Scores of newspaper editors and journalists have been killed, and not a single case has been solved. The Khmer Journalists Association, formed in the wake of the changes during the early 1990s, has protested against the killings, and in September 1995, Human Rights Watch Asia published a strongly worded report titled "Cambodia: The War against Free Speech." It stated,

Over the last year, the Royal Cambodian Government has waged a campaign to silence its critics, targeting independent newspapers and political figures for prosecution and harassment. On more than a dozen occasions, it has suspended, shut [down], or confiscated newspapers or brought criminal charges against journalists. A controversial new press law is unlikely to halt these abuses as it allows confiscations, closures, and criminal prosecutions to continue.

The fragile coalition between Hun Sen and Ranariddh fell apart in July 1997, when the former led a coup against the latter. Hun Sen's superior troops drove out Ranariddh's supporters and began what human rights workers alleged was a purge of Ranariddh loyalists. Between 40 and 60 of the deposed first prime minister's supporters, including several senior government officers, were killed. Many fled the country, including several leading newspapermen. Among them were Pin Samkhon, president of the Khmer Journalists Association, and Ou Sovann, the editor of *Samleng Yuvachun Khmer.* Ou Sovann was the fourth editor of that paper. Its founder, Keo Phokka, resigned after receiving several death threats, and his successor, Noun Chan, was assassinated in September 1994. The third editor, Yim Sokha, was arrested in 1996 for publishing an article critical of Hun Sen and the Cambodian People's Party.

A second general election was held in July 1998, resulting in a victory for Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party. Following international pressure, Ranariddh and his followers were allowed to return to Cambodia, and a new coalition, headed by Hun Sen, was formed. But the political uncertainty-and instability-continues. Some newspapers have resumed publication, while others such as the *Cambodia Times* have gone out of business. Fear, rather than official restrictions, seem to be the main reason why Cambodia's surviving papers have become much more timid than they were during the era before the July 1997 coup.

Table II provides a listing of the current major media in Cambodia.

VI. LAOS POST-1975

Following the proclamation of the Lao People's Democratic Republic on December 2, 1975, only two daily papers were allowed to be published: *Pasason* (the People), the organ of the Central Committee of the ruling LPRP, and Vientiane Mai, which is published by the LPRP Committee for the Municipality of Vientiane. In addition, there are two weeklies and a half-dozen monthly journals. But one of the most popular, the cultural magazine *Vannasin* (Literature and the Arts), ran out of funds and had to discontinue publication during the mid-1990s. A theoretical quarterly, *Aloun Mai* (New Dawn), publishes speeches by state and party leaders as well as articles about socialist

TABLE II
Major Media in Cambodia

Newspapers and Magazines:
- *Rasmei Kampuchea* (Light of Cambodia)
  - Publication frequency: Daily
  - Language: Khmer
  - Circulation: 27,000
  - Publisher: Teng Boonma (private)
- *Chakraval* (Universe)
  - Publication frequency: Daily
  - Language: Khmer
  - Circulation: 12,000
  - Publisher: Keo Sophon (private)
- *Koh Santepheap* (Island of Peace)
  - Publication frequency: Daily
  - Language: Khmer
  - Circulation: 16,000
  - Publisher: Thong Uy Pang (private)
- *Cambodia Daily*
  - Publication frequency: Monday through Saturday
  - Language: English, Khmer, and Japanese
  - Circulation: 3200
  - Publisher: Bernard Krisher (private)
- *Phnom Penh Post*
  - Publication frequency: Twice monthly
  - Language: English
  - Circulation: 5000
  - Publisher: Michael Hayes (private)

State-Owned News Agency:
- Agence Khmere de Presse

Radio and Television (State-Owned):
- National Radio Cambodia
- Radio FM 90
- Television of Khmer
- Television of Cambodia

ideology and culture. All newspapers and journals are tightly controlled by the party and its mass organizations, and the officially stated role of the mass media in Laos is to provide a link among the party, the state, and the people. Thai newspapers are not allowed in Laos, but many Lao read fashion magazines, movie and music journals, and other popular publications from Thailand. The official news agency, *Khaosan Pathet Lao* (Lao News Agency), publishes a daily cyclostated bulletin in Lao, English, and French, with mostly local news about development projects and the activities of various government ministers and officials. There are no opposition or underground publications, although U.S. government-sponsored Radio Free Asia has Lao-language broadcasts that present a more critical view of the party and its performance.

On April 1, 1994, a new English-language paper was launched by the Ministry of Information and Culture, the weekly *Vientiane Times*. From December 4, 1996, it has been published twice a week, and with a circulation of 5400, it reaches most foreigners living and working in Laos and many Lao overseas (there are large communities of Lao emigrés in Australia, France, and the United States). The editor of the *Vientiane Times,* Somsanouk Mixay, ran the *Vientiane News* during the 1970s, then worked for Lao National Radio, and is one of Laos's most experienced media personalities. The 20-page paper contains local and foreign news; articles on culture, the economy, and the environment; quizzes for general knowledge; and photo essays. It generally avoids controversial subjects, and there is no criticism of the government and its policies.

Lao National Television and Lao National Radio are both owned by the state and have several regional stations that telecast and broadcast in Lao as well as local tribal languages. The emphasis on the programming is on basic education, health, agriculture, "healthy" entertainment, and the government's view on current events. However, Thai television—the only foreign telecasts that most Lao can understand and that can be received by ordinary antennas in most Mekong valley towns—is extremely popular in Laos. Thai soap opera actors, singers, and entertainers are as well known in Laos as they are in Thailand. Posters of Thai actors and singers, Thai music cassettes, and Thai CDs can be found all over Laos. Many Lao also watch the news on Thai television because their own television station tends to be biased and unreliable.

During the height of the Asian boom in the early 1990s, several Thai television and telecommunications companies planned to expand to Laos, but these plans have been shelved because of the economic crisis that struck the region in mid-1997. At first, the Thai cable TV company IBC set up a joint venture with Lao Television Channel 3, called IBC Lao, to bring cable TV to Laos. But the arrangement did not work out to the satisfaction of either the Lao or the Thai side, and although the name IBC Lao still exists, it is no longer a joint partnership with Thai interests.

In October 1996, before the crisis hit the region, IBC's parent company, the Shinawatra Group of Thailand, scored an exclusive deal in Laos to develop and coinvest in the country's telecommunications service, barring satellite communication. The agreement

required Shinawatra to develop a telecommunications service in Laos and to establish a joint venture called Lao Telecommunications Company (LTC) with the Lao government to operate both domestic and international telecommunications services. The Lao government held 51% of the shares in this joint venture, and Shinawatra International held the remaining 49%. The agreement caused consternation among French and Japanese companies, which thought they would benefit from the aid to develop the Lao telecommunications sector that both the French and Japanese governments had given to Laos prior to the deal with Shinawatra. But since the crisis began, it has become uncertain whether Shinawatra can fulfill its part of the deal, which requires an investment on the order of U.S. $400 million. Part of the original deal was also to install Internet services in Laos.

Laos now has Internet access. An ISP license was granted by MCTPC to LTC in 1997; however, the company did not use its license because the company made more money from the international calls people had to make to Thailand to connect to the Internet. In September 1998 the Lao News Agency (KPL), in partnership with a private company called GlobeNet, setup the first ISP in Laos, called LaoNet. At that point, LTC was compelled to start a local ISP, which began a year later. While the two ISPs were starting up their operations, the prime minister's office setup the Internet Committee, which was meant to sort out the mess of LaoNet, which was not licensed, and LTC, which was licensed but not operational. The committee had representatives from MIC, MCTPC, STENO, MFA, and MI. The Internet Committee basically removed the two current ISPs and in February 2000 issued licenses to two new ISPs: LawNet and PlaNet Computers. Officially, the Internet is subject to censorship but in practice this has not been implemented on any scale noticeable to most users. However, this could be due to that 85% of the customers are tourists, who may not be interested in "sensitive" information. The remaining customer base is made up of 5% expatriates, and 10% Lao nationals.

A similarly shaky deal was signed during the mid-1990s between the Lao government and the Asia Broadcast and Communications Network (ABCN), a subsidiary of Thai media entrepreneur Sondhi Limthongkul's M Group. According to the U.S. $800 million project, Sondhi was going to launch a Lao satellite, called L-Star, for ABCN and the Lao government for use in the Asia–Pacific region. However, the M Group was one of the first Thai companies to be affected by the current crisis. Its media flagship, the daily regional newspaper *Asia Times,* collapsed in late June 1997, followed by the monthly *Asia Inc.* and the weekly *Manager* magazine. By September, Sondhi announced that he was ready to sell his M Group's stakes in three telecommunications companies so as to sustain the publishing arm, Manager Media International. In October, it was reported that the United Communication Industry Public Company had taken over the shares previously held by the M Group and that the troubled L-Star project would be saved. The satellite would be launched in early 1998, the reports said, but in the end nothing materialized. But with or without L-Star, satellite dishes are not an uncommon sight in Laos, in the capital Vientiane, or upcountry. The issue at stake are illegal antenna suppliers, who sell pirated equipment to anyone who wants to buy it. Policing the market for illegal antennas would be extremely difficult in Laos.

Table III provides a listing of the current major media in Laos.

TABLE III
Major Media in Laos

Newspapers and Magazines:
- *Pasason* (the People)
  - Publication frequency: Daily
  - Language: Lao
  - Circulation: 10,200
  - Publisher: Lao People's Revolutionary Party
- *Vientiane Mai* (New Vientiane)
  - Publication frequency: Daily
  - Language: Lao
  - Circulation: 4400
  - Publisher: Lao People's Revolutionary Party, Committee for the Municipality of Vientiane
- *KPL* (Khaosan Pathet Lao) *News Bulletin*
  - Publication frequency: Daily (cyclostated news bulletin)
  - Languages: Lao, English, and French
  - Circulation: 540
  - Publisher: state-owned news agency, *Khaosan Pathet Lao*
- *Vientiane Times*
  - Publication frequency: Twice weekly
  - Language: English
  - Circulation: 5400
  - Publisher: Ministry of Information

Radio and Television (State Owned):
- Lao National Radio
- Lao National Television
- Lao Channel 3

VII. CONCLUSION

The current chaos and political uncertainty seem likely to continue in Cambodia, which means that the country's free-wheeling media tradition will remain more or less unchanged. Given the country's heavy dependence on foreign aid and goodwill, the government might not crack down on the media despite the largely irresponsible nature of many of the papers. Burma's political system is unlikely to change within the foreseeable future, and existing repressive measures will remain in place so long as the military rules the country. Burma is much less dependent on aid than is Cambodia—most foreign countries cut their aid in the wake of the 1988 massacres—and its only close foreign allies are China, Malaysia, and Singapore, three countries that are unlikely to attempt to persuade the government to liberalize its policies. The government of Laos has shed much of its old socialist economic policies and has begun to promote more open free market practices. But the ruling party (the LPRP) remains firmly in charge, the political system remains strictly authoritarian, and there is no political opposition inside the country that is pressing for changes. Thus, the media may become somewhat more popular in their coverage of entertainment and business, and more satellite TV may be added, but the papers will continue to avoid writing about any controversial political subjects.

See Also the Following Articles

CHINA, STATUS OF MEDIA IN • FREEDOM OF THE PRESS IN ASIA • HONG KONG, STATUS OF MEDIA IN • JAPAN, STATUS OF MEDIA IN • KOREA (NORTH AND SOUTH), STATUS OF MEDIA IN • SINGAPORE, STATUS OF MEDIA IN • TAIWAN, STATUS OF MEDIA IN • THAILAND, STATUS OF MEDIA IN • VIETNAM, STATUS OF MEDIA IN

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