

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/mauritius-journalist-jailed-and-media-21-10-2011,41264.html>

Africa - Mauritius

Judicial setback

Journalist jailed and media outlets fined for contempt of court

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Press freedom in Mauritius has suffered a serious setback with the announcement on 17 October that a journalist has been sentenced to three months' imprisonment and two news organizations have been heavily fined for contempt of court. "This trial once again highlights the fragility of the current situation which is heading in the direction of a media crackdown on certain politically sensitive topics," Reporters Without Borders said.

"We deeply regret the ruling by Judges Keshoe Parsad Matadeen and Asraf Caunhye and call for the release of the journalist, and for leniency in the appeals that are pending," the press freedom organization said. **Dharmanand Dooharika**, editor of the weekly *Samedi Plus*, was convicted in a case brought by the Director of Public Prosecutions. He was found guilty of publicly scandalizing the Supreme Court and of bringing the administration of justice into disrepute with an editorial, articles and an interview in the 14 August edition of the newspaper.

Under the headline "Barclays Leasing scandal – Dev Hurnam demands imprisonment of Chief Justice" the newspaper published several articles reporting on a lawsuit brought by Paradise Rentals against Barclays Leasing, with lawyer Dev Hurnam acting for the plaintiffs before Supreme Court Chief Justice Bernard Sik Yuen.

An editorial and an interview with Hurnam, who was later disbarred as a result of the trial, and a letter sent by him to the president of Mauritius calling for members of the judiciary to be investigated for misconduct, provoked the wrath of the bench.

Dooharika was taken ill while the verdict was being read out and spent two days in the Apollo Bramwell Hospital before being transferred to Beau-Bassin prison on 20 October. His lawyer Ravi Rutnah has lodged an appeal.

Goindamal Saminata Chetty, head of the firm *Contact Press* which owns *Samedi Plus*, received a fine of 300,000 rupees.

The radio station *Radio Plus* and its chief executive **Eshan Khodabux** were fined 200,000 rupees in a parallel trial. The station also covered the event by broadcasting extracts from statements made by Hurnam on 29 July.

Both organizations have decided to appeal.

Photo of Dharmanand Dooharika (Le Mauricien Journal)
