

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/maldives-opposition-tv-station-sabotaged-as-09-08-2012,43189.html>

---

Asia - Maldives

Political tension

## Opposition TV station sabotaged as political rivalry centres on media

9 August 2012

---

Reporters Without Borders firmly condemns the break-in two days ago at the opposition television station *Raajje TV* by intruders who forced it off the air by cutting essential cables. It has yet to resume broadcasting.

"This targeted and well-prepared operation was the foreseeable culmination of the new government's escalating verbal attacks on *Raajje TV*," Reporters Without Borders said. "How the authorities respond will be seen as a test of their commitment to media pluralism.

"Unfortunately, it seems [we were right to express](#) concern about the implications for media freedom when Mohamed Nasheed was ousted as president on 7 February by Mohamed Waheed Hassan, his successor. The growing media polarization between 'pro-Nasheed' and 'pro-Hassan' camps has reached a toxic level and the right to receive and impart news and information is the first victim."

Many journalists have been arrested, attacked or threatened in recent months during demonstrations organized by Nasheed's supporters to press their call for early elections. While appealing to all sides to calm down and reflect on the role they should play in a democratic debate, Reporters Without Borders condemns these repeated attacks on journalists by the authorities.

"The government and police have played a leading role in the deterioration of the situation," Reporters Without Borders said. Instead of trying to create a healthy environment that would assist the development of a free and pluralistic press, they have exacerbated the rivalry and used the media for political ends.

"We call on the authorities to moderate their criticism of *Raajje TV*, to ensure that the sabotage of the station is fully and impartially investigated, and to make sure that journalists are not subjected to further attacks. At the same time, we urge *Raajje TV*'s journalists to make a clear distinction between their political involvement and their professional work."

### **Raajje TV silenced**

The break-in at *Raajje TV* was carried out between 7 and 8 a.m. on 7 August. *Raajje TV* deputy CEO **Abdulla Yamin** said the intruders must have known the station well. The building's electronic security system was neutralized in advance.

The cables needed to replace those that were severed are expensive and have to be imported. Yamin nonetheless insisted that every effort would be made to resume broadcasting within the next 24 hours.



### **Under constant attack from the authorities**

*Raajje TV*, which supports the ousted president's Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), has of late been the target of many hostile statements by the police and government officials.

Home minister Mohamed Jameel described *Raajje TV* and the MDP as "enemies of the state" at a news conference on 24 July. He also accused the station of making "baseless allegations" of police violence against demonstrators during the protests since [President Nasheed's ouster](#) in February. Police superintendent Abdulla Riyaz added that what *Raajje TV* did was "not responsible journalism."

Riyaz went on to claim that the sole aim of the previous day's *Raajje TV* report about an alleged theft of fuel from a motorcycle by police officers was to defame the police. Linking *Raajje TV*'s coverage to the [murder of a police officer](#) on 22 July, the police announced that they would not protect the station's reporters during the police officer's funeral in reprisal for its "defamatory" claims.

*Raajje TV* meanwhile [maintains](#) that it has been the target of both police harassment and discrimination as regards access to official sources of information since February.

### **Pressure on independent regulatory bodies**

The government attacks on *Raajje TV* have been accompanied by government threats against regulatory bodies, which are accused of being too lax towards the opposition and the MDP. The main targets have been the Elections Commission and the Maldives Broadcasting Commission (MBC).

Attorney General Azima Shukoor told *Television Maldives* two weeks ago that the MDP's alleged calls for violence were "a fact." She said: "The failure of independent oversight institutions to take action has put the democratic process in the Maldives in jeopardy. Institutions that must take responsibility are not doing their job. [We have] to take action against them."

Shukoor added that the government would refer the issue to the parliament (Majlis). "The

executive will conduct necessary legal work to take such action. We will submit this case to the Majlis."

Fuad Thawfeeq of the Elections Commission responded that the commission could not restrict the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of assembly and speech and would not "yield to threats and intimidation." The MBC, for its part, asked *Raajje TV* to apologize for its report about the alleged theft of fuel by police officers.

### **Indiscriminate violence during protests**

The way political rivalry is expressed is not just verbal. Last month's demonstrations in Malé for early elections were accompanied by police attacks on both journalists and protesters.

A reporter who covered the protests told Reporters Without Borders that the police threatened representatives of the pro-MDP media while demonstrators targeted media that support the current government. Demonstrators also used press cards to access areas that had been cordoned off by the police.

At the same time, groups were paid to create disturbances during the protests in order to give the police grounds for intervening. Whether they were covering the demonstrations or participating in them, journalists were caught in a trap and often found themselves receiving baton blows or pepper spray.

**Asward Ibrahim Waheed** of *Raajje TV* and **Ali Naseer** of *Cable News Maldives* (CNM) were arrested while filming police overpowering a demonstrator on 9 July and were held for several hours. **Mohamed Ameeth**, reporter for *DhiTV*, a TV station that has usually opposed the MDP, was accosted by demonstrators.

*Minivan Daily* reporter **Ahmed Haisam** and *Raajje TV* cameraman **Ahmed Shanoon** were attacked by police on 11 July, while **Murshid Abdul Hakeem** of the *Sun Online* news website was rushed unconscious to hospital after being struck on the head by missile thrown by a demonstrator.

In view of the chaotic nature of the protests and the confusion between those responsible for violence and the victims, the Maldives Journalists Association (MJA) has urged media personnel not to participate.

According to the MJA, journalists become "political activists" by participating in demonstrations and, in so doing, violate media ethics. The MJA has also cautioned against party use of the media as "political tools" and has asked the government to guarantee an environment that favours independent journalism.

The situation is extremely tense [six months after Nasheed's ouster](#). In mid-July, the former president was accused of arresting a judge illegally while he was in office. Former home minister Hassan Mahir was arrested on 24 July on a charge of inciting violence against the police during a speech at an MDP rally in Usfasgandu.

On 2 August, Nasheed was interrogated after the police released a recording of a 29 May conversation between him and MDP parliamentarian Mariya Ahmed Didi that allegedly proved his and his party's involvement in inciting violence against the police. The MDP responded by accusing the authorities of fabricating evidence in a bid to prevent Nasheed from running in the next election.

Maldives is ranked 73rd out of 179 countries in [the 2011-2012 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#), which was released before last February's events. The media situation has deteriorated dramatically since then.

Photo: AFP PHOTO/STR

---

You can download those documents on our website :

- , (JPEG - 71.1 kb)
-