

## Sudan media slam the return of censorship

KHARTOUM, Sudan: Media censorship and repression have made a comeback in Sudan since the re-election in April of President Omar al-Bashir, opposition and independent papers say.

"During the electoral period there was no censorship... but now it is back," said Annur Ahmed Annur, editor-in-chief of the independent daily *Al-Sahafa*.

Last September, Bashir announced the lifting of press censorship, ending a system under which newspapers were screened by censors every night to purge sensitive articles before publication.

But newspapers were also informed of red lines that should not be crossed, including matters of national security and articles sensitive to public morality in the conservative Muslim-majority country.

During the election period Sudanese journalists covered the country's first multi-party polls in two decades without having their articles screened by intelligence services beforehand.

### Newspaper closed, journalists harassed

But since the return to power of Bashir, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity in the western region of Darfur, the old practices seem to have returned.

The authorities shut down *Rai al-Shaab* (The Opinion of the People), the newspaper of Islamist opposition leader Hassan al-Turabi, saying it had falsely reported that engineers from Iran's Revolutionary Guards were working in Sudan.

The trial of four of the newspaper's journalists, accused of spying and terrorism, began on Wednesday at the North Khartoum criminal court behind closed doors and amid a heavy police presence, AFP said.

Intelligence services visited two evening papers last month to remove several articles deemed hostile before their publication, and last week state censors in Khartoum made the rounds of several opposition and independent papers, while pro-government newspapers were left alone.

### US critical of developments

"This censorship brings fear among the media so the media end up (in) self-censorship," Annur added.

"We have decided not to publish the paper this week," said Fayez al-Sillik, editor-in-chief of *Ajras al-Hurri*, which is considered close to the ex-rebel Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) and was also targeted by state censors last week.

Sillik believes the new measures are here to stay.

"It's a new policy... They want to control everything like at the beginning of Inqaz," the name given to the 1989 coup that brought Bashir to power, Sillik said.

Since the elections, "there has been a great setback on liberties and freedoms," said Yasser Arman,

Bashir's main presidential rival in the April elections.

"There have been arrests of political leaders, medical doctors and journalists," Arman, an SPLM leader, said.

On Tuesday, the United States voiced new criticism of Sudan for increased repression and a "deteriorating environment."

State Department spokesman Philip Crowley said a number of incidents in recent weeks have increased U.S. concern, including the arrest of opposition leaders, censoring opposition newspapers and violence against their employees.

Nine journalists working for south Sudan radio and television, detained for not having covered the inauguration of south Sudan leader Salva Kiir in May, were released on Monday.

Sudan boasts around 30 newspapers and periodicals in English and Arabic, published daily to represent a range of persuasions, from pro-government to Islamist and communist, and showcase the country's multi-faceted political make-up.

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