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Journalists in Cairo faced assaults, detentions, and threats; reporter dies from earlier shooting

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AP photographer Khalil Hamra is injured in Tahrir Square on Thursday. (AP Photo/Mohammed Abed)New York, February 4, 2011–Journalists in Cairo faced assaults, detentions, and threats again today as supporters of President Hosni Mubarak continued their efforts to obstruct news coverage of protests demanding the Egyptian leader's ouster. While the extent of attacks lessened after a peak on Thursday, ongoing anti-press activities remain at an alarming level that must be halted, the Committee to Protect Journalists said today. In addition, a journalist shot a week ago while filming a demonstration died today, a state newspaper reported, and Al-Jazeera reported that security agents detained the network's Cairo bureau chief along with another journalist.

"It is stupefying that the government continues to send out thugs and plainclothes police to attack journalists and to ransack media bureaus," said Mohamed Abdel Dayem, CPJ's Middle East and North Africa program coordinator. "This is doubly outrageous after the embattled president, vice president, and prime minister all expressed various degrees of regret for the unprecedented attacks on the media on Wednesday and Thursday. They vowed to the Egyptian people in public statements and to the press in interviews that such assaults would not be allowed to take place again."

Ahmad Mohamed Mahmoud, a journalist working for the newspaper *Al-Ta'awun*, published by the state-owned Al-Ahram Foundation, died today from gunshot wounds sustained on January 28, Al-Jazeera and the semi-official *Al-Ahram* reported today. Mahmoud was shot by what the newspaper described as sniper fire while filming confrontations between security forces and demonstrators in central Cairo's Qasr al-Aini area, which is adjacent to Tahrir Square. The death is the first reported media fatality during the uprising.

"As the unprecedented campaign against media continues, the Egyptian government has made its intentions abundantly clear: Silence as many journalists as possible no matter the political cost," said Abdel Dayem. "We call on the Egyptian government to immediately release Al-Jazeera's Adbel Fatah Fayed, Ahmed Youssif, and all other detained journalists. We call on governments around the world to forcefully condemn this latest abuse."

In the last 24 hours, CPJ documented another 10 anti-press assaults, 10 detentions, two attacks on newsrooms, and the hacking of a major news website. In all, CPJ has documented at least 101 direct attacks on journalists and news facilities this week, and it's investigating

numerous other reports.

Here is a round-up of new attacks on the press:

- Egyptian security agents have detained Al-Jazeera Cairo Bureau Chief Abdel Fatah Fayed and journalist Ahmad Youssif, who was with him at the time, according to Al-Jazeera's website.

- Peter Beaumont, foreign affairs editor at the U.K. *Observer*, and Jack Shenker, a *Guardian* reporter, were stopped today while trying to enter Tahrir Square, the *Guardian* reported. The paper said they were intercepted by government forces, forced to kneel facing a wall, and interrogated. Beaumont was quoted by the *Guardian* as saying: "Although the square itself is calm, things around the periphery are very different. We were taken at a checkpoint and led to the Ministry of the Interior … We were held for two hours … and we were both warned that if we came anywhere near the square again, things wouldn't go so nicely for us."

- Al-Hurra's Cairo bureau was targeted on Thursday, the U.S. government-funded station told CPJ in an e-mail. Men stormed its offices and "threatened to kill Al-Hurra's two on-air journalists–Akram Khuzam and Tarek El Shamy–if they didn't leave the building," the station said in a statement. The bureau was immediately closed.

- Two correspondents for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Robert Tait and Abdelilah Nuaimi, were detained in Cairo, the U.S.-government funded station reported. "We call on the Egyptian authorities to release our correspondents and their equipment immediately," RFE/RL News Director Jay Tolson said.

- Andrew Henderson, a photographer working for UAE-based daily *The National*, was attacked on Thursday by a group of young men who broke his camera equipment, *National* reporter Hugh Naylor told CPJ in an e-mail. "Were it not for a bit of help from the military, he would likely have been mauled to death by an angry mob," he told CPJ. Naylor himself was punched several times in the head "by some angry, plainclothes youth standing near the foreign ministry yesterday," he said. "I will credit one apparent Mubarak loyalist for essentially saving my life. While pretending to be angry at me and taking my passport, he walked me away from the crowd and back safely to my hotel."

- Al-Jazeera's Arabic website was hacked today, the station reported on the air. According to a statement from the station, "For two hours this morning (from 6.30 am-8.30am Doha time), a banner advertisement was taken over and replaced with the slogan of 'Together for the collapse of Egypt,' which linked to a page criticizing Al-Jazeera." A spokesman for Al-Jazeera said that engineers "moved quickly to solve the problem," *The Guardian* reported.

- Al-Jazeera's Cairo office was stormed today by Mubarak supporters, the station reported on the air. Its office was vandalized and it equipment was set afire.

- Prominent Egyptian Blogger Wael Abbas tweeted today that he was detained and later released by military forces. He said he has been "getting stopped by every single checkpoint."

- Al-Jazeera English producer Abdullah Mussa tweeted today that he had been attacked. He wrote: "Released from street checkpoint. Three machetes to my neck and angry mob. Foreign journalists are being accused if inflaming situation."

- Eric Feijten, a reporter for Dutch news broadcaster *Nederlande Omroep Stichting* (NOS), was arrested and released at least twice in the past two days. NOS released a statement after his first arrest saying that Feijten had been beaten and threatened. "Finally after 17 hours without drinking or eating, he was released in a small hotel near the airport," NOS wrote. He left Egypt today and tweeted: "At the airport and there was even a ticket. Kicked out, so i am not happy because i failed to do my job."

- NPR reporter Lourdes Garcia-Navarro was attacked on Wednesday, the station reported. Garcia-Navarro was preparing a piece about the impact of demonstrations on the daily lives of Egyptians when she and her colleague, Ashraf Khalil, were surrounded by dozens of men. "We were asked if we were Israeli spies, or employees of the Arabic news network Al-Jazeera, who have been a particular target of the authorities here. It began to get heated and they wouldn't let us leave," Garcia-Navarro said. She added that Khalil was punched repeatedly in the face.

- Andrew Butters of *Time* magazine was attacked on Thursday. "I was grabbed by a young guy with a club who hauled me over to an improvised checkpoint," NPR quoted him as saying. He said it was clear that the actions were being coordinated by police and security agents.

- Radio-Canada cameraman Sylvain Castonguay and Radio-Canada producer Jean-Francois Lepine were badly beaten by pro-government supporters near Cairo's airport on Wednesday after their crew's interpreter was assaulted, CBC reported.

- A group of Chinese journalists were briefly detained on Thursday after customs officials discovered bulletproof vests, satellite phones, and walkie-talkies in their luggage, according to news reports. They were released but part of their equipment was confiscated.

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