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than it used to be. Celebrities "who could well afford to go to their lawyers" now beat a path to its door on a weekly basis, she points out. It's a practice she is keen to encourage. "If you think something is going to be published that is inaccurate, get on the phone."

The PCC sent out dozens of "desist



Flying visit ... Bill Clinton greeting Laura Ling and Euna Lee in Pyongyang Photograph: Xinhua/Reuters

Journalism

Reporters matter - if they're western

The release last week of the investigative journalists Laura Ling and Euna Lee, following the intervention of Bill Clinton in North Korea, seemed to be the ultimate good news story. But it also raised questions about investigative journalism - and the manner in which Ling and Lee were freed.

I met Ling when she was nominated for an Emmy for her report *From Russia With Hate*, and I was working as a journalist for Current TV's UK channel. She heads the Vanguard journalism department at the organisation, producing investigative reports on a shoestring budget for the channel, which is owned by Al Gore, and has travelled to some of the world's most notorious danger zones, infiltrating drug gangs in Brazil and visiting slums in Haiti. Such frontline journalism

Quote of the week

'I am exactly the same height as Napoleon. Five foot six and a half'

Sir Martin Sorrell



is becoming less common in TV newsrooms, which increasingly appear to rely on newswire footage for international reports and rarely diverge from the main stories of the day. There is also the problem of resources - as a small channel, Current cannot afford the protection that larger outfits give their investigative teams.

Before Clinton stepped into the negotiation, there was little coverage of Ling and Lee's detention. And when he did, the pair's release provided a photo opportunity that benefited Kim Jong-Il. Captured western journalists, it seems, can be a valuable PR tool for hostile regimes.

"There's a clear indication that the pair were political pawns," says Tala Dowlatshahi, a senior adviser to Reporters Without Borders. "South Korean journalists get arrested on that border all the time. Elsewhere in the world, Iranian and Iraqi journalists are detained and tortured on a daily basis, yet British and US journalists get the most attention because of the value they have on the global media stage."

Helen Croydon

Media Monkey's Diary

The BBC suffered a blow on

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