



Media safety and press freedom in Pakistan 2019-2020
Report by Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF)
To commemorate
The World Press Freedom Day

Between January 2019 and April 2020, journalists in Pakistan worked under increasing restrictions with little accountability of those who limit freedom of expression, continue to target journalists and aim to discredit the work of the media through a range of tools from attacking journalists to placing financial constraints on media outlets as a pressure tactic.

This year has brought a grave challenge for the media as it deals with covering the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, to the media in other countries, Pakistani media has had to adapt and find new ways of working as it covers the spread of the virus in the country.

The media has struggled to cope with the rising number of cases in the country and at least 38 media workers have tested positive for the coronavirus. The actual figures could be much higher as only a small fraction of media workers have been tested for the virus. Two journalists also passed away as a result of COVID-19.

The media is required to be at the frontlines and are often in situations where they are exposed to others who may have tested positive for the virus or interacted with those who have. The number of positive cases amongst media workers, however, is an alarming trend that reflects a lapse in the implementation of the necessary measures to ensure the safety of media workers and prevent their exposure to the virus. Media organisations as well as the government have not effectively ensured the timely provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) to media workers.

In addition to providing the protection of media workers, the coronavirus has also created new challenges for the media regarding: how to cover the pandemic, ensuring accurate information as fake news is circulated on social media platforms, making sense of data on the virus, countering government rhetoric that undermines media coverage as well as the financial setback created by the virus, which has send much of the world in some form of lockdown.

The first half of the 2019-20 Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF) report on media safety and press freedom in Pakistan examines the challenges that have been created for the media with the emergence of the coronavirus, both in terms of safety as well as press freedom. It discusses how the media has dealt with the challenges that have so far emerged and recommendations in order to best ensure the safety of media workers will be discussed.

The report also looks at factors surrounding press freedom and the safety of journalists in Pakistan during 2019-20 that has seen an increased muzzling of the freedom of expression in a country that has an already weak track record on press freedom.

Journalists have come under fire for their work in various arenas and have faced physical assault, including in two instances deaths of journalists due to their work. In at least one instance this year, a journalist was briefly abducted and harassed. In another instance, the house of a journalist was raided and a publishing house printing renowned writer Muhammad Hanif's book in Urdu was raided.

During this time period, Pakistani immigration authorities blocked the entry of Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) Asia Program Coordinator Steven Butler into the country which was a concerning development regarding the access to independent coverage and analysis of press freedom in Pakistan.

In addition to physical acts of violence and intimidations, journalists have faced threats, both in person and online. These threats have been issued by individuals in positions of power which leads to an increased pressure on the journalists and their media organisations and can lead to self-censorship. The threats and harassment journalists experience has extended online on social media platforms, where the media has been subjected to smear campaigns. Trends against the media are often trending on Twitter.

There have also been at least five arrests of journalists. The most high-profile case of a media personnel arrested is the arrest of the Jang and Geo Media Group Editor in Chief Mir Shakil ur Rehman on March 12, 2020. Rehman was arrested by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) irregularities in the purchase of his residential property 34 years earlier, however it raised concerns about press freedom and appeared to be an attempt to pressurise the largest media group in the country. Despite numerous local and international calls for his release, Rehman remains behind bars.

This already high-risk environment which journalists operate under has been further made difficult by the policies and rhetoric of the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government, which in 2019 likened critical media coverage to [treason](#). While Prime Minister Imran Khan dismissed curbs on press freedom in Pakistan as a "joke", the policies and proposals of the government including media courts and social media regulations, indicate a control over the autonomy of the media.

Meanwhile, Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) has on numerous instances provided “advice” to the media which creates controls on what the media can cover and what could be unacceptable.

During this time period, on numerous occasions, television channels or shows have been removed from air during interviews with opposition politicians including, former president Asif Ali Zardari and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Vice President Maryam Nawaz.

Between January 2019 and April 2020, there have been proposals to regulate social media content. This led to various social media companies threatening to leave Pakistan and creating a grim picture for the opportunity for free expression online.

An environment where journalists are the target of government and other officials’ scorn and are often threatened for their work — both verbally and physically — creates a bleak picture for press freedom and the safety of journalists in Pakistan.

Part I: Media safety during COVID-19 and emerging challenges

As of May 1, over 17,000 cases and over 400 deaths from COVID-19 have been reported in Pakistan. The media is operating in this new and difficult environment trying to provide minute by minute updates on the situation in the country as well as internationally while also being exposed to the risk of contracting the virus.

Media organisations need to ensure the safety of staff both working in newsrooms and on assignment from various locations including hospitals, quarantine facilities, government offices, mosques and other areas where a large number of people may have gathered making it difficult to effectively follow social distancing guidelines.

There has been an alarming number of cases of the coronavirus amongst media workers with at least 38 media workers have tested positive.

This number indicates that media organisations have largely been unable to ensure that staff are provided with the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) and have been unable to communicate the necessity of such measures to staff members who may not be following safety protocols.

Since the spread of the coronavirus in Pakistan, the virus has claimed the life of two journalists. On April 27, a senior journalist and former president of the Associated Press of Pakistan’s (APP) employees union, Zafar Rasheed Bhatti [passed away](#). Later in the week Muhammad Anwar, crime reporter at Daily *Khabrain*, died of COVID-19 in Sukkur on April 30.

According to an *Al Jazeera* [report](#) published on April 19, at least 12 journalists had tested positive for COVID-19 in Pakistan. The report added many journalists have complained that

they don't have the necessary protective equipment while reporting. Since then more cases have been confirmed.

On April 27, ARY CEO Salman Iqbal [said](#) as a precautionary measure, random testing for the coronavirus had been carried out at the media outlet's Islamabad office in which eight out of 20 had tested positive while two staffers had shown symptoms. Following this, he said that the Islamabad office was to be closed and all staff would be tested. He added that the office premises would be sanitised.

A few days later, Iqbal [shared](#) another update in which he said 119 tests were conducted of which 55 were negative and 12 were positive. The ARY CEO added that the office and transport fleet had been disinfected and PPEs had been procured for the staff.

In Peshawar, two brothers who worked as reporters for different news channels, Asif Shehzad of *GNN* and Wajid Shehzad of *Such TV*, [tested positive](#).

On April 25, the APP office in Islamabad was sealed till April 27 after an employee tested positive, *The Nation* [reported](#).

The Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) has [expressed concern](#) over the rising number of cases among media personnel. According to *The News*, PFUJ has warned media houses to "immediately put in place measures for the safety and security of working journalists and media workers, otherwise, they will be held responsible for the loss of lives of journalists due to the pandemic".

Government measures to ensure safety of media

In a statement, issued in March, the PFUJ had [demanded](#) safety measures for media workers. On multiple occasions, the government has [said](#) that they will provide media personnel with the necessary PPE.

On April 1, then Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Information and Broadcasting Firdous Ashiq Awan [said](#) the government would provide journalists visiting quarantine centres and ICUs to report on COVID-19 with kits of protective gear.

According to a *Dawn* report, Awan said journalists were "playing a front-line role" in the situation and "steps were being taken to ensure their safety and health". Further, she added that the government would launch an app called 'Care for Media', which would provide information if someone in the community tested positive and would also provide them assistance with treatment.

On April 3, *APP* [reported](#) that Prime Minister Imran Khan had formed a five-member committee on measures to protect the media industry and media workers in light of the situation created by

the coronavirus. As per the report, the committee was formed after the Pakistan Broadcasters Association (PBA) submitted a letter to the premier requesting government support.

However, the rising number of cases among journalists indicates that these pronouncement by government leaders have not been converted into concrete action or plans for safety of media workers.

There appears to be no clear cut guidelines issued by any media association such as the Pakistan Broadcasters Association , All Pakistan Newspaper Society (APNS), Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors (CPNE) that media organisations and workers should follow in order to ensure their own safety as well as that of others while covering the pandemic.

Both the media organisations and the government should ensure that the media is provided with the necessary equipment and are following the safety guidelines in place.

Setting the ground rules for covering the coronavirus

Pakistan confirmed its first case of the coronavirus on February 26. The case was reported in the Sindh province and was initially confirmed by the provincial health department after which Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Health Dr Zafar Mirza also [confirmed](#) the country's first two cases.

At this point, however, there appeared to be a lack of guidelines amongst the media about how to cover cases in terms of how much information to share. A document stating the name as well as other personal details of the country's first case were shared by various news channels.

The next day Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah, while addressing a press conference, said it was [important](#) to maintain the confidentiality of patients.

Before the first cases of COVID-19 were confirmed, the country was already dealing with the virus. The first stage involved managing the return of Pakistanis in China. On February 3, some Pakistanis who were stranded in China started [returning](#) to the country. Students in Wuhan were not repatriated to the country.

The next big challenge that presented itself was managing the return of pilgrims who had travelled to Iran. The policy to keep the pilgrims in quarantine facilities in the Pakistan-Iran border town of Taftan in Balochistan received [criticism](#) and the media covered the conditions of the camps.

According to *The Express Tribune*, the chief minister of the Balochistan province said that it was "unfortunate that some analysts on mainstream media are describing Taftan as the 'Wuhan' of Pakistan". Additionally, the [report](#) added that he said that "anchorpersons, politicians and analysts on TV talk shows were not taking the coronavirus situation seriously".

Additionally, both the provincial chief minister and Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development Sayed Zulfiqar Abbas Bukhari [tweeted](#) dismissing a [report](#) by *The Guardian* on the Taftan quarantine camps.

Data on COVID-19 cases emerging in Pakistan

One of the challenges while covering COVID-19 in Pakistan has been the data available on cases, deaths and recoveries. This is a challenge largely because both provincial governments as well as the federal government are providing information.

Authorities in Sindh have appeared at odds with the federal government and this has been reflected in the data being shared.

One such [instance](#) was seen when nine cases were confirmed in Karachi. The federal government official, Dr Mirza, said that these cases were contacts of an already confirmed case. Meanwhile, the provincial government said that eight of the cases had a recent travel history. Dr Mirza later deleted his tweet with the update.

In another instance, various news outlets including *Reuters* on March 17 [reported](#) that Pakistan had confirmed its first death based on an update on a government web portal. According to [The Express Tribune](#), however, the report of the death was denied by Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar who said the death had not taken place due to the coronavirus.

The next day a similar confusion emerged in Gilgit Baltistan. According to *Dawn.com*, shortly after confirming the death, the GB government backtracked. As per the [report](#), when Dr Mirza [clarified](#) the news, he “did not acknowledge miscommunication on the part of the government and instead put the blame on the media”.

Dr Mirza specifically called out *Geo* for the news and added: “I request media reporters that in rush to break the news first, please don’t misreport. Check your facts twice.”

Such discrepancies create a challenge for the media as they piece together contradictory sources of information from the different government authorities. Further, the backtracking by different government officials makes it difficult to report. Government officials have also blamed journalists in these situations, as discussed above, which wrongfully questions the credibility of a news outlet.

Currently, provincial authorities for the various provinces are providing daily updates on cases emerging, deaths as well as recoveries. In addition, the federal government has set up a [website](#) to provide a breakdown of numbers of cases per province/territory, daily updates in cases etc.

Spread of fake news/inaccurate information via social media

The spread of inaccurate, unverified and fake news via social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter and messaging platforms such as WhatsApp has created a problem for the mainstream media as it tries to report news accurately. In addition to covering the virus, an additional role the media is required to play is that of fact checking misinformation and dispelling rumors.

Recently a fake post using the template of *Dawn.com* was [circulated](#) online claiming that Pakistan's army chief was "possibly infected" with the coronavirus and was under self-quarantine. The news website has clarified that it is a doctored post and has contacted Facebook to remove the post.

There have been a few instances where the mainstream media has picked up news from unverified news sources and recirculated such misinformation.

DawnNewsTV [ran](#) the news that UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson had passed away due to the coronavirus and based this on a fake update by the BBC World Service. This, however, turned out to be false. They have since been [fined](#) by the media regulatory authority, Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA).

Access to cover COVID-19

Some provinces in the country have taken measures that have limited journalists' access to sources and information in order to cover the virus.

In the end of March, the Punjab government [stopped](#) "unauthorised health officials" from giving media statements. This was in an effort to counter the spread of fake news and misinformation, according to *The News*.

In the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the administration of Lady Reading Hospital banned media coverage at the hospital premises after a cameraperson tested positive, *Dawn* [reported](#) on April 23. According to the report, the cameraman was "reportedly covering Covid-19 patients".

The provincial government for KP has [approved](#) Rs1 million for journalists who die due to the virus, *Dawn* reported, adding that the government would bear treatment expenses if a journalist is affected by COVID-19.

Government rhetoric about media coverage of COVID-19

Prime Minister Imran Khan has held numerous media briefings over the past month in which he discussed various developments regarding the coronavirus.

In one such briefing on March 24, before asking the prime minister his question, one journalist said that they refrain from asking tough questions as they are then blacklisted from the next briefing. The journalist's question was regarding the criticism the government had received for the way it handled pilgrims arriving from Iran to the border town of Taftan in comparison to the approach used for Pakistanis in China. In addition to his question, the journalist commented that for the two months since January, it appeared that the prime minister was "angry at the media" and gave examples of such instances.

In response, the prime minister said that this occasion should be used so that people are informed about the coronavirus and added that panic should not spread.

Commenting on the media, the prime minister said he challenged the journalist to find an example of a Western democracy which has the kind of media freedom that Pakistan has. He added that if the type of allegations that are made in Pakistan were made in Western democracies, libel laws would lead to the closure of newspapers/channels.

This sentiment of avoiding the spread of the panic is one that the prime minister has reiterated on [numerous occasions](#). Additionally, as discussed earlier, when the government authorities have backtracked on information, they earlier disclosed themselves, they have urged the media to act responsibly. This places a pressure on media outlets to try and balance their information with the rhetoric of government officials.

Earlier this month, the SAPM on Information and Broadcasting, Awan said that the information ministry along with the director general of the Inter-services Public Relations would "coordinate and brief the media on the coronavirus situation", *Dawn.com* [reported](#).

"Media can become the right hand of the information ministry and the ISPR in defeating this pandemic. Together we will ensure that accurate information is provided to the people," she was quoted as saying.

While the media benefits from briefings by the prime minister as well as other government officials, the repeated emphasis on avoiding the spread of panic and working with the state, add a burden on the media to report in a certain way that is acceptable to the government.

Economic pressures

Like all businesses and industries, media organisations also have to deal with the economic impact of lockdowns and other consequences of the coronavirus. The media was already under severe financial crisis for the last two years that had resulted in layoffs of hundreds of media workers and the pandemic is expected to further exacerbate problems for them.

In a time where media outlets are struggling due to a reduction in ad revenue along with the government's decision to stop giving severecertain media outlets advertisements, the coronavirus adds greatly to the financial struggle of media houses and a steep fall in advertising revenue will be observed by the media.

Another such area where this economic impact can be seen is in the potential reduction in distribution of newspapers.

A [safety alert](#) for newspaper readers has been shared. The advertisement, which began by answering the question of whether the virus can be transmitted through newspapers with "absolutely not".

The APNS has asked newspaper distributors and sellers to be "especially mindful of their hygiene during the distribution progress". "Additionally, newspaper establishments have implemented strict sanitisation measures," reads the advertisement. They added that as an extra precaution, readers can wash their hands for 20 seconds after reading the newspaper.

While the APNS has provided the basic policies such as ensuring hygiene of distributors and suggesting readers wash their hands, this may not be effective in allaying the fears of readers who could choose to cancel their papers. The APNS should issue a detailed guideline about the measures that have been put in place to ensure hygiene at distribution facilities, measures taken to ensure safe delivery as well as what steps readers should be taking when receiving the paper.

Recommendations for media safety during COVID-19:

In order to minimise the risk to media professionals as they work during the spread of the coronavirus and in order to provide media outlets an avenue for survival in these challenging times, PPF recommends the following:

- Media bodies should develop a standard operating procedure for how to cover the coronavirus safely and monitor their implementation by their member organisations.
- The government should assist media houses and ensure that media workers who are often on the frontline are provided with the safety measures needed as well as the cost of treatment.
- All levels of government recognise the need for free flow of information during this time and respect the right to freedom of expression.
- Release journalists who have been arrested for their work.
- Media houses ensure all staff are provided with the necessary PPE and these safety measures are enforced for their safety as well as those with whom they interact.
- Media houses should provide health insurance to their staff particularly those who are at a greater risk of exposure.

- Media houses should offer counselling services for staff covering the pandemic.
- Provide job security to media workers while adapting to the changing landscape such as work from home.
- Freelancers, fixers and stringers should be provided with the necessary protection.

Part II: Media safety and press freedom b/ween January 2019- April 2020

Attacks on the media

Media personnel in Pakistan are often subjected to physical attacks for their work. In the past year, journalists have been killed for their work. They have also been made the target of assault and manhandling. Apart from the physical and emotional trauma that such attacks cause, they serve as a way to intimidate journalists and further shrink the space of critical coverage.

In this time period, PPF had documented at least two murders of journalists due to their work, 16 instances of physical assault of media persons, 17 incidents where they were threatened or harassed, one case of abduction and one case of a journalist going missing. One journalist's residence was raided while in one instance the offices of a publishing house were also raided. There was also an incident where protests were staged against a media house.

Journalists killed

From January 2019- April 2020, PPF has documented two instances where journalists appeared to have been killed due to their work.

On August 31, 92 News correspondent Mirza Waseem Baig was [shot dead](#) in Gujrat in Pakistan's most populous province, Punjab. According to the news channel, "unknown assailants" opened fire on him in front of his house and he suffered six bullet injuries. He was shifted to a hospital where he succumbed to his injuries.

Provincial Chief Minister Usman Buzdar had [taken notice](#) of the murder and sought a report from the Gujrat District Police Officer.

While it is still not conclusive to say that Baig was killed due to his work, various individuals who knew Baig as well as those investigating his death, have said that it was due to the nature of his reporting.

Before he was killed, Baig had been reporting on local gangs in the Sarai-e-Alamgir town in Gujrat.

A police officer in charge of the investigation into Baig's death, Ameer Abbas, told PPF that the journalist was killed as he was covering the activities of a criminal gang specializing in extortion. Abbas said that the slain journalist had done several reports about them that "annoyed them" and he had also informed the police about who was involved in the gang, so they killed him and fled from the scene.

Additionally, the former president of the Gujrat Press Club and a senior journalist in Gujrat said that the reason behind Baig's murder was his coverage of the criminal gang.

Baig's daughter Ghania Malik told PPF that in July 2019, her father had told her: "My life is in danger."

Recalling his death, she said that they were all home, when her father went outside to park a car and they suddenly heard the sound of firing. They ran outside and saw three people escaping from the site of the incident, with her father lying on the ground. She said that a police van was approximately one kilometre away from their house but reached the scene 45 minutes later.

Malik said that she was not completely satisfied with the investigation into her father's murder.

Baig's wife, Safia Waseem, also confirmed the same to [Reporters Without Borders](#). She said that her family and herself had been forced to move to a safer location after receiving threats in the wake of Baig's murder.

The second case is the murder of Aziz Memon, a journalist associated with *KTN* news channel and Sindhi language daily *Kawish*, in February of 2020.

Memon's body was found in a water channel in Mehrabpur in Naushahro Firoze district in Sindh on February 16, 2020. Quoting sources, daily *Dawn* reported that Memon had asked a cameraman he worked with to drop him at a location where he was to attend a ceremony. Villagers had later spotted his body in the canal.

According to the report, the journalist had "often received threats of dire consequences during his 30-year-long career". One such threat was from a Member of the National Assembly, after which he left his hometown and moved to Islamabad for a while, the report said.

According to reports about a year before his death, the journalist had released a video in which he said that officials from the ruling party in Sindh province, Pakistan People's Party (PPP), along with local police had threatened him for his reporting. Memon's report had included the allegation that people were paid to attend the PPP chairperson Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's [train march](#).

In the wake of Memon's death, federal minister Fawad Chaudhry had [requested](#) the Chief Justice of Pakistan to "take notice of the mysterious death" of the journalist.

Meanwhile, Bilawal had also condemned the murder and added that journalists should work with their allies, *Dawn* [reported](#).

Following Memon's death, a joint investigation team (JIT) was [set up](#) by the provincial government.

Earlier this month, Memon's [DNA report](#) was released, which according to *Dawn*, had "found traces of some other human DNA". A [meeting](#) of the JIT, however, said that this did not prove that he was murdered.

Acquittal of suspects in the Daniel Pearl murder case

On April 2, 2020, the Sindh High Court (SHC) overturned the death penalty handed to the main accused, Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh, in the Daniel Pearl murder case. The high court also set aside the life terms handed down to three co-accused, *Dawn* [reported](#).

Pearl was an American journalist with *The Wall Street Journal* who was kidnapped and beheaded in Karachi, Pakistan in 2002.

The United States condemned the decision. In a [tweet](#), Chief US diplomat for South Asian affairs, Alice Wells, said that overturning the conviction of those responsible for Pearl's murder was "an affront to victims of terrorism everywhere". They also welcomed Pakistan's decision to appeal the verdict.

A day after the acquittal, all the accused in the case were [rearrested](#).

On April 22, the Sindh government [challenged](#) the SHC's decision in the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

Physical assault of media workers

Media personnel are routinely subjected to physical assault in Pakistan. PPF has documented at least 16 instances of physical assault or manhandling of journalists between January 2019 and April 2020.

Some of these are discussed below and show that journalists are targeted by elected government officials, political party workers, lawyers and other individuals who are in a position of authority.

On March 20, 2019, Shiraz Gardezi, a cameraperson for *Geo News*, was [assaulted](#) by supporters of the opposition political party, Pakistan People's Party (PPP) outside the National

Accountability Bureau (NAB) office in Islamabad. Gardezi told PPF that he was taking pictures of the NAB building when he was suddenly slapped by a PPP party worker and then a group of workers started to beat him up for no reason. According to *Dawn*, the [clashes](#) between the political party workers and the police took place outside the NAB office where former president Asif Ali Zardari and PPP co-chairperson Bilawal Bhutto Zardari had been called in for questioning.

On April 27, Shaukat Korai, reporter for *News One TV* was assaulted by Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) officers on the premises of the Sindh High Court (SHC) in Karachi. Korai was at the court for routine coverage when CTD officers brought some suspects to Anti-Terrorism Court administrative judge Justice Abdul Malik. Korai was making a video of the suspects and a CTD officer told him to delete the footage, saying that he was not permitted to make the video. Korai replied that the SHC allows journalists to cover developments on the court premises. Later, his mobile phone was snatched by CTD officers and he was thrashed. The issue was settled with the intervention of the registrar and after CTD personnel apologised verbally.

On June 21, a leader of the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf Sindh, Masoor Siyal, physically attacked President of the Karachi Press Club Imtiaz Khan Faran during the taping of a talk show. [Video footage](#) of the incident shows Siyal physically attacking Khan after which the two engaged in a physical altercation.

Following the incident, PTI issued a [show cause notice](#) to Siyal. Additionally, the Karachi and Lahore press clubs placed a temporary ban on the entry of PTI leaders, *Dawn* reported.

Siyal is not the only PTI leader who has been accused of assaulting a journalist. During the January 2019 to April 2020, Federal Minister for Science and Technology Fawad Chaudhry has been accused of physical altercations with two anchorpersons.

In July 2019, journalist Sami Ibrahim had submitted a complaint with police that Chaudhry slapped and cursed at him without provocation, *Dawn* [reported](#). In response to the allegation, the federal minister had said that it should not be treated as “clash between two institutions but as a conflict between two individuals,” the report added.

Chaudhry was once again in the headlines in 2020, this time for a scuffle with anchorperson Mubashir Luqman.

According to *Dawn*, the minister [admitted](#) that the scuffle had taken place. The report added that the altercation was allegedly due to videos uploaded on YouTube in which Luqman and another anchorperson discussed TikTok stars and videos allegedly involving Chaudhry and the Punjab information minister.

On July 23, two reporters and a cameraman — Muhammad Tayyab of *Channel 41*, Ali Raza of *Channel 24* and Waqas Ahmed of *Channel 24* — were [beaten up](#) by lawyers of the Supreme Bar Council, including Bar Secretary Shahid Munir in Faisalabad. The journalists were

interviewing the Faisalabad Superintendent of Police Muaz Zafar at his office. As they stepped out of the office, a group of lawyers surrounded them and started hitting them. Raza was severely injured in the incident while Tayyab and Ahmed were taken to an undisclosed location where they were further physically assaulted, until eventually being rescued by the media and the police.

On February 8, 2020, a reporter with *Vsh News* Sajjad Noor and cameraperson Rehan Bizenjo suffered minor injuries in a knife attack in Pasni of the Balochistan province.

Talking to the PPF, Noor who is also the Bureau Chief of an Urdu newspaper *Daily Intikhab* and president of the Pasni Press Club said that the man who attacked them, Rahim Jan, is an employee of the Pasni Fish Harbour Authority (PFHA).

Noor believed that they were attacked by the PFHA because they ran an investigative story that it received Rs800 million from Japan to invest in the authority, but it misappropriated the funds. He added that Jan also gave them life threats.

He added that the incident took place when Bizenjo and himself were buying goods at a bakery.

Noor lamented that many journalists are attacked when they publish investigative pieces, but no action is taken against the culprits.

A FIR was registered against Jan at the Pasni police station. On February 9 he was arrested.

Pasni police station Sub-Inspector Abid Baloch confirmed the arrest of Jan.

“According to an initial probe, Rahim Jan is a local and a drug addict. He is not an employee of PFHA. At present, he is in a judicial lock-up and further investigation in being carried out,” he stated.

Hazara Democratic Party Chairman Abdul Khaliq, Hazara Public Accounts Committee Chairman Akhtar Hussain, opposition leader Malik Sikander, Advocate Senator Naseebullah, Speaker Balochistan Mir Abdul Qadoos Bizenjo also condemned the incident.

Journalists threatened and harrassed

A way to intimidate and silence journalists is to threaten them. These journalists operate in a constant state of fear. In other instances, while they may not be issued a verbal threat, journalists are harassed both online and in person. Between January 2019 and April 2020, PPF has recorded at least 17 instances where media persons were threatened or harassed due to their work.

Some of these are discussed below:

On June 12, 2019, senior *Dawn* correspondent, Baqir Sajjad said that he was “encountered by hostile low-level intel operatives” after a meeting with diplomats from the British High Commission.

“The guys wanted to take me along afterwards, I resisted. One of them in fact pulled out keys from my car’s ignition,” he wrote in a [post](#) on Twitter.

Amnesty International South Asia had [condemned](#) the incident and said: “Journalism is not a crime, and journalists should not be treated like criminals. Pakistani journalists must be allowed to do their work freely and without fear. The threats, intimidation and violence against journalists must stop.”

Journalists have also been subjected to threats and harassment online such as the threats against anchorperson Gharida Farooqi (See section on online threats to journalists for details).

Instances of threats against journalists in 2019 included threats from police officials, medical staff, terrorist outfits as well as in some instances, by unidentified individuals.

In a similar vein, the first four months of 2020 have seen numerous reported incidents of journalists being threatened.

A reporter of an internet news agency based in Peshawar, *Tribal News Network*, Mehrab Shah Afridi received threatening phone calls by an unknown individual for his reports on social media in his hometown of Landi Kotal.

As per reports, Afridi covered a sit-in where ethnic rights group Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM) leader and Member of the National Assembly (MNA) Ali Wazir addressed the crowd. As soon as Afridi uploaded the video of the speech on social media, he received a first phone call from Malaysia, warning him of dire consequences.

Speaking to PPF, Afridi said that he had received five phone calls from a number and was asked why he had uploaded the video of Wazir.

“I also received death threats,” he said, adding that the caller had used abusive language against him. Afridi registered a first information report (FIR) against the caller at the Landi Kotal police station.

A Station House Office (SHO) at the station, Amjad Khan, said that the case was being investigated and the phone number has been sent to Peshawar, in order to trace the caller.

On April 28, Head Morer of Landi Kotal station, Ayaz told PPF that they had traced that the call was coming from Malaysia but couldn’t investigate further about who was threatening Afridi and why, due to a lack of resources. They said that for further investigation, the journalist should contact the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA).

On February 11, *Geo News* reporter Asif Ali Bhatti received threatening calls from Afghanistan. This was condemned by the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) and the National Press Club. He again received death threats in March. In the threats, Bhatti was asked to stop writing reports against the state and religious scholars, otherwise his family would be killed. He added that he was also being traced and was told that he is *wajib-ul-qatal* (deserving of death).

Speaking to PPF, PFUJ President Shezada Zulfikhar condemned the case and said that Bhatti had been receiving threats for four to five months and no one was taking action. He said that due to this, Bhatti and his family had shifted to Lahore, but then his family was being threatened so he came back to Islamabad.

Talking to the PPF, *Geo* Director News Rana Jawad, said that Bhatti receives threats due to his columns. He said that the case has been reported and they are trying to determine who is issuing these threats. He said that they have asked the employee to take a leave or given him the option to work from another station besides Islamabad. Jawad added that they had discussed the case with some religious parties but did not specify with whom.

Raiding journalists' residences

During 2019, there was one instance where a journalist's residence was raided.

On May 23, police led by Station House Officer Sub-Inspector Ahsan Kiyani of the Banni police station in Rawalpindi raided the house of a staff reporter for the daily *Jang*, Shahid Sultan. According to [The News](#), Sultan's house was raided at 2:30am and the police "took the whole family hostage, threatened and humiliated them at gun point".

As per the report, the raiding party realised they made a mistake and left without an apology.

After the incident, the Rawalpindi Police Chief Faisal Rana had suspended two policemen and ordered an inquiry into the incident.

Publisher raided

On January 6, 2020, Pakistani writer Mohammed Hanif said that "some people claiming to be from the ISI" had "barged into" the offices of his Urdu publisher Maktaba Daniyal and confiscated copies of the Urdu translation for his book, *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*. In a second tweet, Hanif [added](#) that a week before this incident they had received a defamation notice from former military dictator General Ziaul Haq's son.

The raid was "deplored" by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, *Dawn* [reported](#).

Threatening protests against media house

During 2019, there was one incident where intimidating and threatening protests were held outside the office of a media outlet. On December 2, dozens of unidentified individuals [protested](#) outside the *Dawn* offices in Islamabad. The protests came after a publication of a news report in which the paper had discussed the ethnicity of the individual behind the London Bridge attack.

“The charged mob, carrying banners and chanting slogans against the newspaper, remained outside the office building for nearly three hours, besieging the premises and making the staffers hostage,” *Dawn* reported.

Just days later, once again on December 6, protesters [surrounded](#) the offices in Islamabad.

The International Press Institute (IPI) issued a [statement](#) on the incident, in which they expressed concern over the deaths threats against *Dawn* editor Zaffar Abbas and *Dawn* CEO Hamid Haroon.

Journalists abducted

In November, a reporter for *Ary News* TV channel, Rana Ghulam Mustafa, and his cameraman were locked in an office and assaulted by rice mill owners in Daska, Punjab, *The Nation* reported.

As per the FIR, the crew were at the mills to get the millers version on the shortage of flour in the area. However, the mill owner “became infuriated” seeing them and calling some employees, locked them. According to *The Nation*, the reporter and cameraman were held for an hour and threatened with “dire consequences”. Their camera and mobile phones were also broken.

The media personnel were later rescued by the police, the report added. Speaking to PPF, Mustafa said that they asked the rice mill staff for an apology and the issue was resolved between the concerned parties. This was reiterated by the Daska police station and Daska Press Club.

Arrests and imprisonment of media personnel

In the past year, the arrest of media personnel has been used as a way to intimidate them and to exert the writ of the state. PPF has documented at least five arrests of journalists during the time period covered in this report. Additionally, one journalist was sent to prison and then released and Editor-in-Chief of the Jang Geo Media Group, Mir Shakilur Rahman was arrested raising concern for press freedom.

On February 9, 2019, senior Lahore based journalist, social media activists and anchor of the show Dada Pota on *Din News*, Rizwan Razi, was arrested by the Federal Investigation Agency's (FIA) cybercrime cell for "allegedly uploading defamatory and obnoxious posts against the judiciary, government institutions and intelligence agencies," *Dawn* [reported](#).

According to a FIR, an inquiry was initiated against Razi for "uploading defamatory and obnoxious posts through a social media account of Twitter against the judiciary, government institutions and intelligence agencies".

Following Razi's arrest, Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) President Afzal Butt told Pakistan Press Foundation that they had called on government and law enforcement agencies to immediately look into the matter and release Razi, otherwise they would hold countrywide protests.

On February 10, Razi was [released](#) on bail.

On May 27, a reporter for *Khyber News* television channel, Gohar Wazir, was [arrested](#) for interviewing Member of the National Assembly Mohsin Dawar. Wazir was amongst at least 22 individuals who were detained in Bannu in a police and administration operation after workers of the ethnic rights movement Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM) and Awami National Party (ANP) demonstrated against an incident in North Waziristan, *Dawn* [reported](#).

Following Wazir's detention, the Committee to Protect Journalists had [called](#) for his immediate release.

Wazir was [released](#) on May 29 after confirming that he was covering the protest as a journalist and was not amongst the protestors.

While in some cases journalists were temporarily detained or arrested and granted bail, in the case Nasrullah Chaudhry, a journalist was awarded a five-year long imprisonment sentence.

On December 30, 2019, he was given five-years of imprisonment in a "case pertaining to possessing literature against the state and spreading religious hatred," *Dawn* [reported](#).

Chaudhry, a district news desk editor at the Urdu language daily *Nai Baat*, was arrested in Karachi on November 11, 2018 for allegedly carrying journals and booklets about Afghan Jihad and the Punjabi Taliban.

In April 2020, however, the Sindh High Court [acquitted](#) Chaudhry and ordered his release, *Samaa* reported.

In January of this year, *Dawn* [reported](#) that a journalist who has been associated with *Channel Five* and daily newspaper *Khabrain*, was arrested by the FIA and an FIR was registered against him

Dawn.com quoted the FIR as stating: “It had been learnt during scrutiny of social that anti-state and defamatory material against the public functionaries and state departments is being uploaded through a Facebook ID”.

A day after his arrest, the FIA was granted physical remand of Wahid. On January 29, a court in Lahore [rejected](#) his plea for bail.

Mir Shakilur Rahman arrested

Perhaps the most high profile case of a media personnel arrested in the past year was the [arrest](#) of the Jang and Geo Media Group Editor in Chief Mir Shakilur Rehman on March 12, 2020. Rehman was arrested by the National Accountability Bureau in connection with a purchase of a 54-kanal piece of land, *Dawn* [reported](#).

In a statement shared by *Geo*, the spokesperson for the media group said that prior to Rehman’s arrest, NAB had sent “our reporters, producers and editors -- directly and indirectly -- over a dozen notices, threatening a shutdown of our channels (via PEMRA) due to our reporting and our programmes on NAB.”

While Rehman’s arrest was in relation to a property case, it raised concern about press freedom in Pakistan and was seen as an attempt to silence the largest media network in the country.

Shortly after a government press conference on Rehman’s arrest, cable operators [received instructions](#) to either stop the broadcast of *Geo TV* or to shift it to last numbers. This is a tactic that has been used against *Geo TV* previously as well and works to reduce accessibility of the channel, creating financial pressures for the media outlet.

Despite various calls for his release from international as well as local bodies, politicians and activists, Rehman remains in custody, over a month after his arrest. On April 28, he was [sent](#) to jail on judicial remand.

Asia Program Coordinator of Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) denied entry into Pakistan

In October 2019, CPJ Asia program coordinator Steven Butler was [denied entry](#) by Pakistan immigration authorities at the Lahore airport, who according to the press freedom advocacy organisation, cited a blacklist by the interior ministry as the reason.

According to CPJ, the airport authorities confiscated Butler's passport and he was forced onto a flight to Doha, from where he was placed on a flight to Washington DC.

Freedom of expression online and social media restrictions

While social media provides a platform for expression that extends beyond the mainstream media, it has also come under the increased scrutiny of government authorities and become a platform to threaten journalists. In Pakistan, the state has attempted to set rules and regulations for social media that limit the space for free expression.

In addition to this, according to a transparency report, the highest number of requests for content restriction on Facebook came from Pakistan between January-July 2019, [Dawn reported](#).

Government policy to control social media

In February 2020, the government [approved rules](#) to regulate social media in Pakistan. According to *Dawn*, under the rules, social media companies "will be obliged to disclose any information or data to a designated agency, when sought, and failure to abide by any of the provision will entail a fine of up to Rs500 million".

The policy received [backlash](#) after which it was [reported](#) that Prime Minister Imran Khan would take all stakeholders on board before implementing the rules. Petitions against the policy were also submitted in courts including the [Islamabad High Court](#) and the [Lahore High Court](#).

In response to the regulations, the social media companies including Facebook, Google and Twitter threatened to leave the country, *New York Times* [reported](#).

On February 28, a committee was [formed](#) to review the rules. As of March, the implementation of the Citizens Protection(Against Online Harm) Rules 2020 had been [suspended](#).

These rules and their approval by the government are likely to have a chilling effect on free expression on social media platforms as users fear sharing of their information and data. It is a drastic step taken by the government, in order to limit the space available online to share opinions. In addition to potentially reducing access to social media platforms in Pakistan, it is likely to lead to growing self-censorship online.

It is concerning that the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf government is pushing for rules that undermine free expression online.

According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, in 2019, Pakistan's internet freedom ranking has declined due to "problematic cybercrime law, internet shutdowns, and cyber-attacks against political dissidents, justified on the grounds of national security".

Online threats to journalists

Journalists are often the target of online smear campaigns and are subjected to threats on social media platforms. These work to discredit journalists and often create a threat to their lives.

On March 22, 2019, the Coalition For Women In Journalism expressed alarm about a "persistent online campaign" against anchorperson Gharidah Farooqi, *The Nation* [reported](#).

According to the report, Farooqi had received abuse for a tweet about the shooter in the New Zealand Christchurch attack.

Speaking to *Dawn*, Farooqi said first she was bullied online but this eventually "turned serious".

"I faced immense sexual harassment, curses, crude allegations and character assassination, but probably the worst was that I was threatened with violence and murder."

In another [instance](#) of online threats, in April 2019, it was reported that smear campaigns were being used against numerous journalists in the country.

According to a *Dawn* report, Marvi Sirmed, Mubashir Zaidi and Umar Cheema were targeted in "malicious hashtag campaigns" on Twitter. Additionally, seven other journalists were also "subjected to abuse and defamatory content".

Earlier this year, in February, the Coalition For Women In Journalism [condemned](#) the targeting of female journalists ahead of the annual women's day march, the Aurat March. In a statement, they said that "several women journalists became a target of extreme trolling and harassment, both offline and online".

Government rhetoric on press freedom

On a visit to the United States in July, Prime Minister Imran Khan was asked about press freedom in Pakistan. According to a *Dawn* [report](#), the prime minister said that it was a joke to talk about curbs on press freedom in the country.

While the prime minister believed that curbs on press freedom in Pakistan are a joke, certain decisions and policies by his government have reduced the space for free expression.

Critical media coverage linked to treason

In July 2019, the ruling PTI had [linked](#) critical media coverage to treason. According to *Geo*, after sharing the initial tweet, the hashtag #JournalismNotAgenda was also shared with multiple tweets.

Government plan to form media courts

In September 2019, the federal cabinet [approved](#) a plan to form media courts. This plan raised alarm about press freedom and received criticism. According to *Dawn*, the courts are a way to “seek speedy disposal of media-related cases”.

The APNS [said](#): “The media is already braving strong pressures in the of press advice and measures of intimidation from ruling quarters which tantamount to undeclared censorship – the proposed media courts would be an added and institutionalized lever for arm-twisting of the media and [the measure] reflects the mindset of the present center of power that intends to curb voices of dissent by all means.

CPJ said that they were [deeply concerned](#) by the plan.

PEMRA and regulation of media content

The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) is the regulatory body for electronic media in Pakistan. Between January 2019 and April 2020, the country has seen various proposals and steps that increase the authority of the regulatory body.

Pemra has also issued show-cause notices to media channels and anchor persons and offered advice to the media on what/how they should be covering in their broadcasts.

PEMRA bans programs, issues show cause notice

On January 1, PEMRA imposed a 30-day ban on the broadcast of a programs by Orya Maqbool Jan on *Neo TV* titled Harf-i-Raz, *Dawn* [reported](#).

On January 30, the regulatory body banned anchor Dr Danish from appearing on any television channel for 30 days for “levelling false and unfounded allegations” against senior officials of the Oil and Gas Development Company Limited on a talk show of his, *Dawn* [reported](#).

In April, PEMRA issued a show-cause notice to *ARY News* and *Bol News* for news regarding a cabinet reshuffle, according to a *Daily Times* [report](#).

On May 24, *News One* was issued a show cause notice for news regarding National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Chairman Javed Iqbal. According to a *Dawn* [report](#), the show cause notice was issued for “defamatory” news items and clips in which Iqbal was shown conversing with a woman.

In October, an analyst, Hafeezullah Niazi was banned from appearing on television for 30 days for allegedly defamatory remarks against a federal minister Azam Swati, *Dawn* [reported](#).

2020 has also seen PEMRA block the broadcast of shows. *ARY News* anchor Kashif Abbasi was banned for 60 days after a federal minister pulled out a boot (presumably as a symbol of the military) and placed it on the table during a broadcast of Abbasi’s show. According to [The News](#), Abbasi was banned for “acting unprofessionally” and “not intervening” when the Faisal Vawda had placed the boot on the table.

In February, PEMRA fined *Channel 92* Rs1 million for airing defamatory content against the prime minister’s special assistant Zulikfar Bukari in October of the previous year, *Dawn* [reported](#).

Advice offered by PEMRA

As the electronic media regulatory authority, PEMRA has on multiple occasions during the past year, offered advice to media channels. This advice creates a guideline on what the channels are permitted to cover and what they should, according to PEMRA, avoid covering.

Below some such instances of advice offered by the regulatory body are discussed:

In June 2019, Pemra [advised](#) television channels not to “demean individuals representing various political parties and law enforcement agencies through caricatures, animated characters, photo-shopped images and funny memes,” according to *Dawn*.

In its report, *Dawn* added: “Although the main sufferers of such portrayal in the electronic media are the PPP and the PML-N, these parties maintain that such advisories should not be used to muzzle the media.”

In October, PEMRA asked TV channels not to invite a former senator from the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) political party, Hafiz Hamdullah as a guest, *Geo* [reported](#). The PEMRA notification stated that the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) had cancelled Hamdullah's citizenship. A few days later, this decision was [suspended](#) by the IHC.

The same month, PEMRA imposed a ban on coverage of JUI-F chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman's press conference, according to the [Pakistan Media Watch](#). The Peshawar High Court then ruled that this was [illegal](#).

Also in October, PEMRA banned TV anchors from giving their opinion during talk shows and asked them to limit their role to that of moderators, according to a *Dawn* [report](#). As per the report, PEMRA said that anchors hosting shows regularly should "not appear as experts" in shows other than their own.

This directive was put on hold by the Lahore High Court, *The Express Tribune* [reported](#).

In April, Pemra said that television channels should seek clearance from the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) before inviting retired military officers on news and current affairs programmes, *Dawn* reported.

In an advisory regarding the annual Women's Day march, the Aurat March held on March 8, 2020, PEMRA "warned TV channels against airing "unethical slogans, play cards with objectionable content," *Dawn* [reported](#).

PEMRA proposal to regulate online content

In January 2020, PEMRA proposed regulations of web TV and over-the-top (OTT) content services. According to *Dawn*, 19 organisations and 36 prominent individuals [rejected](#) this proposal.

Disruption of transmission

During the year, there have also been numerous instances where TV channels and programs have been taken off air without a proper explanation. This removal of programming has been seen during media coverage of opposition politicians. A reason for these steps, however, has not been clearly provided, which raises questions about who is controlling media content and deciding what content is acceptable to be aired and what isn't.

On July 2, 2019, an interview with former president Asif Ali Zardari being aired on *Geo News* was pulled shortly after starting, *Dawn* [reported](#).

On July 7, PEMRA issued a notice to 21 television for what was reported to be the “unedited live telecast” of vice president of opposition party PML-N, Maryam Nawaz, in which she said that an accountability court judge had been pressurised to convict her father, former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, in a corruption reference, *Dawn* [reported](#).

A day later, three news channels — *Abbtakk News*, *24 News HD* and *Capital TV* — were taken off the air after they screened a press conference by Nawaz, *Dawn* [reported](#). According to [CPJ](#), *Capital TV* had shared a notice which stated that the transmission had been disrupted by PEMRA. The regulatory authority, however, did not issue a statement about the matter.

On July 9 it was reported that the federal cabinet led by Prime Minister Imran Khan had “decided to block media coverage and interviews of politicians who are convicts or under-trial prisoners”. Additionally, PEMRA was directed to discourage such content from airing

Just a few days later, on July 12, an interview with Nawaz was taken off air, *Dawn* [reported](#) quoting a tweet by the host of the show on *Hum News*, Nadeem Malik.

In what proved to be a month of many disruptions of news broadcasts, *Geo News* was “forced off the air or had its channel number abruptly changed in many parts of the country,” CPJ [wrote](#) in an update on the development. According to the advocacy group, the move had come hours before Prime Minister Imran Khan’s visit to Washington DC.

Defamation cases against journalists

PPF documented at least three cases of defamation suits filed against media persons between January 2019 and April 2020.

On August 4, 2019, a court in Islamabad issued a notice to anchorperson Najam Sethi in a defamation suit that Prime Minister Imran Khan had filed against Sethi for passing derogatory remarks against him(Khan), *Dawn* [reported](#).

Just days after this, CPJ [quoting](#) Sethi, said that on August 6, *Channel 24 HD* cancelled the Najam Sethi Show “after the broadcaster’s management received a phone call from an unidentified individual demanding the show be dropped”.

On December 6, *The News* [reported](#) that a judge in Karachi issued non-bailable arrest warrants for four people for “defaming the JS Bank through a concerted fake propaganda campaign and not appearing before the court”. The four included an anchor and owner of a private television channel.

On January 25 of this year, PTI stalwart Jahangir Tareen sent [defamation notices](#) to anchorpersons Shahzeb Khanzada of *Geo News* and Waseem Badami of *ARY News* Rs1 billion each. According to *Dawn*, the defamation notices were for making “false imputations in

their news programmes that have or are likely to cause serious harm and injury to his reputation”. The PTI leader demanded that the two “withdraw their defamatory imputations, tender a proper public apology in their respective programmes as well as publish a contradiction of the said defamatory statements(s)”. Khanzada said that he stood by his show, *Dawn* [reported](#).

Economic pressures on media outlets and job security of staff

Restricting advertising for media houses

An effective way to silence a media outlet is to financially cripple it. This is an approach the government has used against certain media outlets such as *Dawn* and *Geo*, which are considered to be outlets critical of the current government.

In May 2019, the federal government imposed a ban on advertisements to the Dawn Media Group, a [move](#) which was criticized by various advocacy groups. The CPNE had expressed concern and [called it](#) a “move against freedom of expression”.

This year once again, the same strategy was used by the federal government as well as PTI led governments in the provinces of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The APNS said that the move to stop ads to the Dawn and Jang media groups is a “violation of the principles of press freedom”, *Dawn* [reported](#).

The Dawn media group has also [challenged](#) this move by the government in the Sindh High Court.

Cartoonist fired

In September 2019, a cartoonist for the newspaper *The Nation* was informed by the paper’s management that they would no longer be printing his cartoons. According to [RFE/RL’s Gandhara](#), the move came after he drew a sketch of Prime Minister Imran Khan which received criticism from some government officials.

Closure of media outlets

The last year has seen at least three media outlets in Pakistan close their doors.

In July 2019, *The Herald*, a monthly politics and current affairs magazine under the Dawn Media group, published its final issue before suspending publication. In the final issue, they [wrote](#): “In the end, we were about 20 issues shy of reaching 600. The Herald, which published its first issue in January 1970, has suspended its publication with this issue, thus bringing to an end an

illustrious career spent covering the biggest stories in Pakistan. Oftentimes the Herald was the only publication to cover issues others dare not or care not to.”

In December 2019, another monthly magazine, *Newsline*, also [stopped](#) publication.

In April 2020, business tycoon Malik Riaz had closed *Aap News* over “unavoidable legal and technical reasons,” *Dawn* [reported](#).