



## **Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF)**

### **Report on Attacks on Media in Pakistan January-October 2021**

#### **Executive Summary**

The space for free expression in Pakistan continues to shrink with the media facing attacks on all fronts.

Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF) has observed an alarming trend during 2021 where not only did physical attacks against the media continue with impunity but the state level push to restrict free expression also grew.

Methods of attacking, threatening and silencing journalists such as physical attacks continued resulting in deaths, injuries and professional and geographic relocation. While these methods of silencing the media continue to take place with impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators, there is an increasing effort to legislate against free expression in Pakistan.

PPF has noted the shrinking space for free expression across all media in Pakistan during the past year.

Increasingly, online spaces are becoming the new grounds for limiting free speech and creating red lines for the media to operate within.

On October 14, the information ministry issued amended social media rules 'Removal and Blocking of Unlawful Online Content (Procedure, Oversight and Safeguards) Rules, 2021.

In 2021, Pakistan saw at least two instances where journalists were killed — *Royal News TV* reporter Ajay Lalwani and *Metro 1* reporter Shahid Zehri. PPF is continuing to investigate these murders to determine that they were in connection to the journalists' professional work.

However, initial information from colleagues and family members of the slain journalists indicates a connection between the murders and the journalists' work.

PPF has recorded at least 27 incidents where media personnel were physically assaulted in connection to their work, including both armed attacks and beating of journalists.

In Islamabad, Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) former chairman Absar Alam was shot on April 20. Just a month later, on May 26, journalist and blogger Asad Ali Toor was attacked by three unidentified individuals at his apartment in the capital.

A trend to intimidate journalists through abductions and illegal detentions continued this year.

On August 7, two journalists — Ali Mir and Imran Shafqat — were detained by the Federal Investigative Agency (FIA) in Lahore. On September 22, senior journalist Waris Raza was taken by law enforcement agencies personnel from his home in the Sahafi Colony in Karachi. He was released in the evening of the same day.

In instances where physical attacks did not take place, threats for such attacks were issued. PPF has observed at least 19 instances where journalists were issued threats.

Additionally, social media has become another sphere for journalists to be threatened and intimidated. Women journalists in particular became the subject of smear campaigns online, sometimes initiated by the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party.

Meanwhile, a common trend of registering cases against journalists continued. This trend has also seen the content shared by the media online becoming the bases of cases.

While threats to the media continue and increase in online spaces, PEMRA has appeared increasingly overactive in its regulation of content. The regulatory body has issued directives banning the coverage of a range of topics from covering protests of the now proscribed Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) to advisories against hugging and other forms of affection in television dramas.

PEMRA appears to be following a similar pattern as it adopted in 2020 with multiple directives issuing a complete ban on topics. In one directive, the media regulatory body curtailed the media from criticizing the accountability watchdog, National Accountability Bureau (NAB). Furthermore, it accused the media coverage of NAB as an intent to malign the state institution.

On April 16, in a drastic development, Pakistan faced a complete blackout of social media platforms — including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Telegram and WhatsApp — which according to the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) was “in order to maintain public order and safety”. The move had come in the midst of days of protests by the TLP. This blanket ban on social media left citizens in the dark with little information about what was happening in the country.

In a positive development, on June 28, the provincial Sindh Assembly passed the landmark Sindh Protection of Journalists and Other Media Practitioners Bill 2021. Another Bill has been presented in the National Assembly but it is yet to be passed

As restrictions increase, PPF also noted an increased push to legislate against free expression.

On August 15, Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry said the government wanted to set up an authority for the regulation of mainstream and social media. The proposed Pakistan Media Development Authority (PMDA) will act as a muzzle on an already-restricted media.

Alongside these challenges to the media, COVID-19 brought along with it a new set of challenges — both in terms of safety of the media, often on the frontlines, as well as the challenge of covering the pandemic. Starting in 2020, the impact of the pandemic continued to be felt by the media in 2021. On April 29, journalist Khurram Baig died due to the virus.

## Timeline

### 1) Killing of media personnel

- **March 18:** *Royal News TV* reporter Ajay Lalwani was murdered in Sukkur city of Sindh province. A First Information Report (FIR) was registered against three unknown assailants.
- **October 10:** *Metro 1*, Shahid Zehri, was killed in an explosion in the industrial area of Hub. Banned Balochistan Liberation Army claimed responsibility for the attack.

In terms of killings, PPF includes cases of the murder of media personnel that were confirmed to have occurred in connection to their work for the media. Though not confirmed, the cases for 2021 are suspected cases related to their work, and remain under investigation by PPF.

### 2) Abduction/Kidnapping

- **February 18:** Associated Press of Pakistan and Daily Islam correspondent Saifullah Jan kidnapped, tortured, and dragged to an office of ruling party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf in Charsadda.
- **September:** Veteran journalist Nadir Shah Adil kept captive for 18 days. Adil was told he needed to be taken to Karachi's Lyari area for COVID-19 treatment.
- **September 22:** Daily *Express* columnist Waris Raza who works on press freedom issues in Pakistan was taken by law enforcement agencies personnel from his home in Sahafi Colony in Karachi. Released in the evening.

### 3) Detentions/Arrests

- **January 23:** *Qaumi Lalkar* reporter Malik Ehtisham and cameraman Munawar Abbasi were detained in Bani Gali while distributing newspapers.
- **March 2:** Five journalists — *GNN TV* Sardar Naeem Chughtai, *Dunya News* reporter Syed Taqiul Hasan, daily *Awaz* reporter Hamza Kamal, daily *Country News* reporter Siddique Loon, *YJF Web TV* reporter Nawaz Dar — were detained by Muzaffarabad police.
- **March 30:** Daily *Riyasat* and *KNN* journalist Noor Islam was arrested by Mangho Pir Police in Karachi.
- **April 3:** Freelance journalist Shahid Aslam in the office of a senior member of the board of revenue when he went to document the review of Cooperative Department Secretary Babar Hayat Tarar, who was accused of wrongdoing.
- **August 7:** YouTube channel *Googly News TV* owner Amir Mir and *Tellings with Imran Shafqat* owner Imran Shafqat arrested by the Federal Investigative Agency (FIA) cybercrime cell in Lahore.
- **August 27:** Two Pakistani journalists — *Khyber News* reporter Matin Khan and cameraperson Muhammad Ali — arrested in Kandahar, Afghanistan while reporting for the channel.
- **September 13:** Daily *Ausaf* correspondent Amjad Hussain Barcha was arrested by police after he reported on the DIG allegedly harassing a female police officer at a Gilgit police training centre. Released after journalists' bodies protested; no FIR registration.

#### **4)Physical Assaults**

- **January 12:** Daily *Metro Watch* Editor Zahid Farooq Malik was stopped, shoved by traffic police while covering government employees' protest in Islamabad.
- **January 17:** *92 News* reporter Munawar Hussain and *Sindh TV* reporter Noman Memon were attacked while covering a cockfight in Mehrabpur.
- **January 18:** *Geo News* cameraperson Nasir Mughal was beaten by accused and their lawyers while covering Barrister Fahad Malik murder case at an anti-terrorism court in Islamabad.
- **February 8:** *Ary News* cameraperson Jahangir Baloch was attacked by lawyers protesting at the Islamabad High Court.
- **February 11:** *City 42* reporter Zain Madni Hussaini and cameraperson were manhandled by DSP while covering traffic problems in Lahore during cricket matches.
- **February 16:** *Bol News* cameraperson Muhammad Rehan was injured while covering by-elections in Karachi.
- **March 19:** Police attacked the vehicle of *7 News* Director News Amir Sohail in a protest after he aired footage of a fake police encounter.
- **April 3:** *Bol News* correspondent Kamran Minhas received minor injuries in an attack after he filed a report on the parking mafia.
- **April 13:** *92 News* correspondent Muhammad Asif beaten up by police in Multan while covering protests of the now proscribed Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP).
- **April 14:** *ARY News* reporter Qamar Butt beaten by TLP protesters in Faisalabad during their nationwide protests.

- **April 14:** Police thrashed photojournalists Sadaqat Mughal and Amjad Hussain who were covering a police operation against the TLP.
- **April 20:** Former Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority Chairman Absar Alam shot by an unidentified man as he was taking an evening stroll near his house in Islamabad.
- **May 1:** *TNN* journalist Rafiullah assaulted by staff at Seedo Shareef Hospital in Swat where he went to cover complaints of lack of performance by staff.
- **May 24:** *DawnNewsTV* correspondent Syed Wasim beaten by SHO Saudabad Rana Haseeb and other police officials in Karachi when he went to seek some information.
- **May 24:** *ARY News* reporter Afzal Pervez, DSNG operator Umar, cameraman Nadeem and driver Mujeeb assaulted by restaurant employees while covering COVID-19 SOP violations in Karachi.
- **May 26:** Journalist and blogger Asad Ali Toor suffered an armed attack in the capital. Toor was attacked by three unidentified individuals at his apartment in Islamabad.
- **May 28:** Samaa TV cameraman manhandled by Haripur Police for filming a video of the police.
- **May 28:** *Awaz TV* correspondent Latif Veesar, *Times News* correspondent Barkat Mirani and *Awaz TV* cameraman were tortured by Mirpur Mathello Police.
- **June 5:** Punjab Police tortured *Bol News* correspondent Ahmed Nawaz after he reported on embezzlement in government development projects and cases were rejected in Rampur, Rajanpur district
- **June 27:** *24NewsHD* correspondent Sameen Nawaz and cameraman were harassed by the administration of the Karachi Expo for covering the COVID-19 vaccination facilitation centre.
- **July 4:** Bhong Press Club Asfghar Ali Jaffery was tortured in custody by Rahim Yar Khan Police allegedly due to the pressure of a local individual of influence to arrest the journalist in a false case.
- **July 4:** Photojournalist Sultan Bashir was injured while covering a students' protest outside the Higher Education Commission in Islamabad.
- **July 16:** *GTV News* correspondent Abdul Rehman and cameraman Ashfaq Hussain were beaten up by a group of shopkeepers in Peshawar.
- **August 20:** Web channel *Vision 47 News* journalist Muhammad Imran was attacked by local businessmen Raza Ahmed Noori and Zahid Shah in Taxila at a court for posting news against saying they were involved in an illegal profit based business.
- **August 30:** Police misbehaved with *Geo News* correspondent Tariq Hassan and *BBC* correspondent Muhammad Nabeel outside Governor House in Karachi while covering a protest for missing persons.
- **September 10:** Sindh TV journalist Zain Sarki was tortured by Crime Investigation Agency Incharge Ali Hassan Mehar and his two personal guards while making footage of 'suspicious activities' in the CIA office.
- **October 22:** *Aaj News* correspondent Rana Usman and *24NewsHD* correspondent Nafees Arain were attacked by Islamabad Police while covering TLP protests.

## 5) Threats

- **January 21:** *Geo News* crime reporter Ahmed Faraz received life threats from the superintendent of police after covering news of a tweet by his wife, another superintendent.
- **February 23:** *Koh-e-Noor TV* reporters Muhammad Faisal Mirza and Malik Junaid were threatened after airing story regarding PTI social media activist.
- **February 25:** *Geo News* cameraperson Sheraz Gardezi was threatened by Azad Kashmir's DG local government after reporting on Bagh's underdeveloped areas.
- **March 8:** Two journalists — Tahir Naseer and Farhan Hussain — in Rawalpindi received a letter with a death threat for doing a show on investment companies and money changers on their YouTube channel *Watch Time*.
- **March 24:** *92 News* anchorperson and Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists Rana Azeem was threatened by theatre actor Iftikhar Bhola following a story on the theatre industry.
- **March 31:** *Daily Ash Sharq* crime reporter Ali Abbasi received threats to his life.
- **April 3:** *News 7* correspondent Shahid Khan was threatened verbally for his report against nurses not attending to patients in Dera Ghazi Khan district in Punjab.
- **April 6:** *Takmeel* Editor Arsalan Haider received a call from an unknown number that threatened him for carrying a report about the Punjab Higher Education Commission in Lahore.
- **April 11:** Rawalpindi local newspaper *Daily Sarkar* Deputy Editor Saleem Bukari was issued a life threat by the in-charge of the Survey Department in Chaklala after local residents' grievances against him were published in the paper.
- **April 25:** Chief Municipal Officer Badin Maqsood Ahmed Mallah threatened journalist Ata Muhammad Chandio in a phone call.
- **May 11:** *Roznama Aftab* correspondent Chaudhry Rizwan was threatened by a local shopkeeper while covering COVID-19 SOP violations.
- **May 30:** *Daily Samaa* Bureau Chief Raja Waheed Jangua was threatened by the Senate Housing Society Rawalpindi General Secretary Sher Ali for publishing stories of corruption against the society.
- **June 17:** *Nawai-e-Waqt* correspondent Javed Siddiqui in Dera Ghazi Khan received a threatening call from the head of the Laadi gang.
- **July 11:** *Express* newspaper correspondent Baktullah Jan Hasrat received life threats.
- **July 18:** Villagers threatened Mehrab Shah Afridi, a journalist from Khyber District, and attacked him inside the Landi Kotal Press Club.
- **September 2:** Focal person for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister MPA Muhammad Asif Khan issued verbal threats to journalist Musarratullah Jan for his post about low standard of construction work in the formers' constituency.
- **September 14:** *Samaa News* journalist Manzar Shigri threatened by police after he shared a post against them on his Facebook page.
- **September 17:** *Dunya News* journalist Saleem Mughal received death threats from a Sukkur Electric Power Company lineman after publishing news about corruption cases by the FIA against the latter.

- September 20: YouTube channel *EconomyNewz Rana Abrar Khalid* Rana Abrar Khalid says officials from the Intelligence Bureau of Pakistan asking economy journalists about him.
- **October 10:** *Awami Awaz* journalist Maqsood Ahmed was threatened by a local land grabber after he reported on illegal land grabbing on the historical land of Bhambore in Dhabeji.

## **6) Raids and Attacks**

- **February 21:** Geo and Jang Media Group offices in Karachi attacked by protesters.
- **April 24:** Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (Fazl) supporters attacked Karachi Press Club employees after they refused entry to armed guards of Maulana Umar Sadiq.
- **October 12:** Peshawar Press Club raided by DSP Cantonment Ihsan Shah to stop members of the transgender community from holding a press conference.

## **7) Legal action and registration of cases**

- **March 11:** Case registered against journalist Ghulam Akbar Marwat in Lakki Marwat following a story on corrupt practices in the food department.
- **March 15:** Case registered against four journalists in Sukkur while covering a sit-in.
- **March 21:** FIA summons former PEMRA chairman Absar Alam.
- **April 28:** FIA sends notice to TV anchor Nadeem Malik in connection with information he shared on an episode of his talk show Nadeem Malik Live on *Samaa TV*.
- **May 18:** Case registered against six journalists — *PTV* correspondent Ali Murad Dal, *Daily Phenji* and *Times News* correspondent in Umerkot Awi Goswami, journalist Allah Jorio Soomro, Umerkot Press Club Secretary General Mushtaq Qumbahar, Sindh Express News correspondent Dilbar Bhaiya and Mehran TV correspondent Niaz Rajha — by a health department officer when journalists posted about shortages of COVID-19 vaccines on social media.
- **July 19:** Shikarpur Police registered a case against *Abb Tak* correspondent Sultan Raind.
- **September 1:** Swat Police booked *Daily Chand* journalist Hayat Muhammad Kalami in two cases.
- **September 29:** Journalist Tanveer Awan was arrested by Police from Islamabad in a blasphemy case.
- **October 2:** Case registered against *Samaa TV* reporter Daniyal Umer for reporting on a fake COVID-19 vaccine entry for late Kulsoom Nawaz in Lahore.

## **8) Restrictions on the Internet**

- **March 11:** PTA blocks Tik Tok following orders of the Peshawar High Court.
- **April 16:** Countrywide blackout on social media as PTA temporarily blocks sites to maintain public order and safety.
- **April 24:** NACTA says over 19,000 accounts taken down for inciting hate and spreading terrorism.
- **July 21:** Tik Tok blocked by the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority.

- **October 20-24:** Mobile internet suspended in areas of Lahore including Samanabad and Iqbal Town on the basis of notification issued by the interior ministry.

#### **9) PEMRA directives**

- January 25: PEMRA suspended the license of *Bol TV* and imposed a Rs1 million fine.
- February 23: *TV One* sent notification regarding content aired in the drama *Dil Naumeed to Nahi*.
- March 1: PEMRA served show-cause notices to 14 channels for airing “fake news” regarding increase in prices of petroleum products.
- March 24: PEMRA advised TV channels not to air unsubstantiated remarks about the National Accountability Bureau (NAB).
- April 12: PEMRA issued notice to *Express News* for airing irresponsible words on the programme *Khabardar*.
- April 16: PEMRA banned coverage of TLP.
- April 28: PEMRA asked TV channels to rely on information from the information minister or other cabinet members regarding decisions of cabinet meetings.
- October 21: PEMRA issues advice regarding caress/hug scenes dramas.
- October 28: PEMRA banned media coverage of TLP.