



## **Press Freedom in Pakistan 2022**

- **A flurry of cases, a high-profile murder and political rhetoric targeting the media**

## ● Press freedom in Pakistan: A year in review

In a country where the press routinely remains under threat and faces attacks from many fronts, the media in Pakistan operated on slippery grounds in 2022 with a flurry of cases against journalists, television channel closures, charged political rhetoric enabling attacks against the media, overreach by media regulatory bodies and the killing of two journalists, including the brutal murder of one journalist on foreign soil that shook the nation.

On October 24, news broke of senior journalist Arshad Sharif's death in Kenya. Initially there were varying accounts of what had taken place with the Kenyan media reporting that Sharif's death had occurred when he was shot dead in a car due to a case of "mistaken identity". An investigation into the death was launched and the fact-finding team in its report, shared in December, found that Sharif's death was a "case of planned targeted assassination".

While there is a lot further to be uncovered regarding Sharif's death and those responsible for it, the factors that led to his departure from Pakistan and his eventual murder establish a strong connection to his work. After cases were registered against him and there were reports of harassment by the FIA, Sharif in August left Pakistan. *ARY News* had decided to part ways with Sharif. He was in Kenya at the time of his murder.

Sharif's ordeal from the registration of cases and his eventual decision to leave Pakistan are reflective of the environment of fear that the media has operated in Pakistan. Journalists are made the subject of cases including sedition charges which not only poses a legal challenge but also impacts their employability with media houses who operate with caution so as to not upset those in power.

This method of harassing journalists is not new and has been employed previously as well against journalists resulting in removal from air, abductions, attacks and a general environment of fear and self-censorship.

In 2022, Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF) has recorded 2 deaths of journalists in connection to their work, at least 30 different instances of physical assault of media professionals, 2 raids at houses of media professionals and an attack on a press club, at least 12 instances of threats being issued as well as online attacks taking on a gendered nature with attacks on women journalists, at least 10 arrests in connection with their work and case registration against at least 9 different media professionals.

Beyond the direct attacks on media professionals, the role of the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) and the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has painted a picture of a media operating within strict and shrinking red lines.

Throughout the year, PEMRA issued directives banning entire topics of coverage which has deprived the public of vital information and made the work of journalists a lot more challenging.

This included a directive banning live speeches by former prime minister Imran Khan. PEMRA also temporarily suspended the broadcast of *ARY News* and *Bol News* in September.

The FIA has been at the heart of many of the cases registered against media professionals and also initiated inquiries against others. It was during the course of this year that the investigative agency was restrained by a high court to stop harassing a journalist Arshad Sharif, which is reflective of their overreach and the harassment journalists have faced at the hands of state bodies.

During 2022, political transition and a packed year of political developments appeared to impact the work of the media. Cases were registered and arrests of journalists took place. In one such instance, on July 5, then *Express News* anchorperson Imran Riaz Khan was arrested. According to his legal counsel, as many as 17 treason cases had been registered against Khan.

More directly related to the political upheaval, protests including the long march by the the political party Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), after their removal from the federal government, led to widespread acts of violence against media covering the event. At least six different instances of violence were recorded against the media during PTI rallies in May.

In the most heartbreaking was that a women journalist, Sadaf Naeem, a reporter of *Channel 5* television, was killed after she was run over by the container transporting PTI leader Imran Khan. This incident is a tragic reminder of the lack of safety procedures training provided to the media workers. It also serves as a reminder for the need for safety legislation to be implemented and made effective so that the basic safety of journalists while on the field can be safeguarded.

Political parties and their heads proved to be a source of instigating violence against the media. With the country at a peak of political polarization, rhetoric led by political parties made evident with the polarization of the media.

Imran Khan while still the prime minister labeled members of the media to be mafia and blackmailers. He continues to use defamatory language against the media and recently highlighted the sexist nature of attacks against women journalists when he implied Gharidah Farooqi was asking for harassment by entering male spaces.

Despite a new government at the helm of the Pakistan Democratic Movement led by the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz, little improvement has been seen in the state of press freedom. The new government came to power with big promises of accepting criticism and ensuring media freedom but the continued attacks on the media currently in Pakistan paint a different picture of the reality.

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- **Killing of journalists**

During 2022, PPF has recorded at least two cases -- Arshad Sharif and Sadaf Naeem -- where journalists were killed in what appeared to be in connection with their work.

The first instance of such a killing was the [tragic death](#) of *Channel 5* television channel reporter Sadaf Naeem. Naeem was killed in an accident while covering PTI chief Imran Khan's long march on October 30 near Sadhoke in Punjab.

Naeem was run over by the container in which Khan was traveling.

The death of the female reporter was an alarming reality check of the lack of safety training, equipment and measures in place for the safety of journalists. Naeem's death could have been prevented if the necessary measures were followed. This responsibility falls on media houses who are sending staff on the field, on the organizers of such events and ultimately on journalists to themselves ensure that they put their safety before the urgency to cover an incident.

With safety laws now in place for journalists that require employers to provide their staff with the necessary safety training, Naeem's death should be a reminder of the need for these requirements to be fulfilled in order to ensure that the physical safety of a journalist is not threatened while they are on the field.

An incident that shook the entire nation was the killing of senior journalist Arshad Sharif who was [shot dead](#) in Kenya on October 24.

While Sharif's death has opened a Pandora's box of theories about what took place and the link between his death and his work is yet to be ascertained, the fact-finding team (FFT) comprising of officials of the Federal Investigation Agency and the Intelligence Bureau has concluded that it was a "planned targeted assassination," *Dawn* [reported](#).

The fact-finding report, [available online](#), in its key findings, states that there were "compelling reasons" to believe that Sharif left Pakistan due to the criminal cases registered against him.

The report finds that the version of the Kenyan Police claiming the death to be a case of mistaken identity was "full of contradictions" and found that the post-mortem indicates that the journalist had also been tortured.

They stated: "Both the members of the FFT have a considered understanding that it is a case of planned targeted assassination with transnational characters rather than a case of mistaken identity."

Sharif's murder and the ongoing investigation into it can be a landmark case for murder of journalists in Pakistan. While the case has not yet led to any progress in terms of action against the perpetrators, if the case is brought to its logical end, it can set a precedent to tackle the culture of impunity that surrounds the murder of journalists in Pakistan.

The circumstances that led to Sharif's death also paint a grim picture for the safety of journalists in Pakistan. It raised many questions about the factors that led to his decision to leave Pakistan.

Sharif was amongst journalists who left Pakistan as a result of the challenges they faced due to their work in the country. In August, it was reported that Sharif had [decided](#) to leave the country.

The fact-finding report into his murder states: "There were compelling reasons for Arshad Sharif to leave Pakistan because of criminal cases registered against him in different districts."

While his murder remains under investigation, this makes clear that his work resulted in Pakistan no longer being a safe country for him.

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### ● **Physical attacks**

While a murder or killing of a journalist is the ultimate price to pay for their work, in Pakistan, the media routinely face a range of physical attacks including manhandling, injuries, abductions, arrests, disappearances as well as threats of violence.

PPF has recorded at least 30 different incidents in which a journalist, media professional or a group of journalists were physically attacked in connection with their work. This includes instances of manhandling, shoving, injuring and roughing up the media while they are on the field or as a consequence of a story that they worked on.

On February 15, *Sar-e-Aam* host Iqrarul Hassan and his team were subjected to an [attack](#) by Intelligence Bureau officials after they had found an official "taking money during door to door NADRA verification in a sting operation in Karachi's Orangi area," *ARY News* had [reported](#).

According to Hassan, his team and him were "stripped naked, beaten up and electric shocks were inflicted on delicate parts of their bodies on the orders of Director IB Syed Rizwan".

In July, *Dunya News* senior analyst Ayaz Amir came under [attack](#) by a group of men as he left his office in Lahore. In pictures of the journalist following the attack, Amir bore visible signs of assault with his clothes torn.

During the year, in April, a vote of no confidence in the National Assembly, led to the removal of Prime Minister Imran Khan, and led to a transition of power with the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) taking the helm led by PML-N. The country now had a new prime minister, Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif.

In the midst of the political upheaval, name calling and uncertainty, the media was caught in the power struggle that played out in the country.

As Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) party held rallies around the country, journalists often came under attack at these protests. Widespread [acts of violence](#) against the media during the PTI long march.

Stones were pelted at the *Geo* television channel and *Jang* Group offices in Islamabad. According to *Geo*, some media workers were injured due to the attack, the windows of the newsroom were shattered and a DSNG van was damaged.

According to *Samaa TV*, their reporter ZamZam Saeed and a cameraperson were wounded after being attacked by PTI supporters at Numaish Chowrangi in Karachi. Additionally, reporter Yasir Hussain was injured when he was filming a mob setting a vehicle on fire. A *Samaa TV* team in Rawalpindi was also attacked, the report added.

According to *Aaj News*, a DSNG van for the network was attacked, a *Hum News* DSNG van, the windscreen of which was damaged and a Neo News Peshawar team was attacked and their DSNG van was hit, all in Islamabad. An *Aaj News* DSNG van was also attacked in Lahore.

*AFP* photographer Asif Hassan was also injured in Karachi.

Aside from violence against the media during such political party led protests, misbehavior and threats from political party representatives including both by the PTI and PML-N were recorded in 2022.

Such incidents and particularly in a year of political instability emphasize the importance of safety training for reporters and camera persons being sent on the field.

More importantly, they are a reflection of the importance political parties place on ensuring the safety of journalists. Political party heads must instill the importance of ensuring press freedom and reflect this in their own rhetoric rather than riling up their supporters. As Pakistan enters an election year in 2023, having a code of conduct for political parties and their dealings with the media has become increasingly important.

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- **Raids**

In at least two instances -- Mohsin Baig and Dr Arslan Khalid -- during 2022, the homes of media personalities were raided prior to their arrest or detention.

Following the ouster of Imran Khan as prime minister, PTI shared that the home of the former premier's digital focal person, Dr Arslan Khalid, was [raided](#) on April 10 and electronic devices were seized in Lahore.

"He has never abused anyone on social media and never attacked any institutions," the party

said, urging the FIA to look into the matter.

On April 13, Khaild tweeted that he was safely back home.

On Feb 16, 2022, an unauthorized raid was conducted by officials of the FIA at editor and analyst Mohsin Baig's house in Islamabad.

On December 15, a group of individuals [attacked](#) the Sadiqabad Press Club in response to news coverage of incidents of abduction from a sports club in Sadiqabad.

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### ● Threats

Acts of violence against the media are often preceded by threats of violence. In other instances, threats of violence are used as powerful tools to instill fear and intimidate journalists by a mere threat. These threats can be warnings about harm to the physical safety of a journalist including threats of being picked up and death threats.

Threats against the media in Pakistan take place both in physical and digital spaces.

In 2022, PPF recorded at least 12 instances where threats were issued to media persons.

In the most recent incident, on December 24, *Geo News* reporter Rasool Dawar was abused by and received [death threats](#) from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister For Relief, Rehabilitation and Settlement Iqbal Wazir in response to a request for comment on a story.

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### ● Disappearance/Abduction

On June 13, *Aaj News* Assignment Editor Nafees Naeem was [picked up](#) by plainclothes men from near his house in Karachi.

CCTV footage shows Naeem being ushered into a vehicle by three men. As per *Geo*, a criminal complaint (FIR) was registered at the Gulbahar Police Station on his brother's complaint.

Early the next morning, on June 14, *Aaj TV* Director News Kamal Siddiqi announced that Naeem had returned home safely.

This method of "picking up" a journalist without any sort of warrants for arrest is not a new strategy. In recent years, it is a method that has been used to intimidate journalists and to instill fear in the media community.

In another instance this year, *World Is One News (WION)* Bureau Chief for Pakistan Anas Mallick [went missing](#) in Kabul, Afghanistan.

Mallick was in Afghanistan to cover the first anniversary of the takeover by the Taliban of the country, *The News* reported, adding that he had reached Kabul on August 3. Prior to the incident, Mallick had reported on the killing of Al-Qaeda leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri in a US drone strike. For *WION*, Mallick had reported from the location that included a video clip of the safe house where Al-Zawahiri had been killed.

On August 5, Mallick's brother Hassaan Mallick shared that his brother had been missing for over 12 hours in Kabul. Hours later, Pakistan's Ambassador to Afghanistan and the FO confirmed that Mallick was safe.

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### ● Arrests

In 2022, PPF documented at least 10 arrests of journalists in connection with their work -- Sabir Hashmi, Saeed Bacha, Ammad Yousaf, Ilyas Samoo, Jameel Farooqi, Imran Riaz Khan, Zahid Jamro, Pir Muhammad Kakar, Nasrullah Gaddani and Mohsin Baig.

The past year was a year of arrests of high-profile journalists in Pakistan. While annually, the country has seen journalists being taken into custody, detained or arrested, this year, the brunt of this repressive tool was felt largely by journalists that were considered to be more aligned with the PTI political party.

The year started with an [unauthorized raid](#) conducted by officials of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) at the house of analyst Mohsin Baig on February 16.

Baig was arrested after he "allegedly shot at and roughed up members of the raiding team," [Dawn](#) reported.

As per the FIA, the raid had been conducted on the complaint of the then Federal Minister for Communications Murad Saaed. Baig had been part of an episode of *NewsOne* show G for Gharidah on February 11 where he had made a remark regarding the federal minister. PEMRA had issued a show-cause notice to the network.

In April, the IHC dismissed the case against Baig, [The Express Tribune](#) reported.

On July 5, senior anchorperson Imran Riaz Khan was [arrested](#) in Attock, a city in Punjab where a criminal complaint was registered against him. According to *Dawn*, Khan's counsel Mian Ali Ashfaq said that as many as 17 treason cases had been registered against the anchorperson in the Punjab province.



Khan [received bail](#) from the Lahore High Court (LHC) and was released on July 9.

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- **Registration of cases**

PPF has noted that in recent years often the news of the registration of a case against a journalist comes out after they are missing or have been taken under arrest. In other instances, the registration of cases acts as a standalone tool that works as both a threat and a tool encouraging self-censorship.

Cases are often registered against journalists for comments they made during their broadcasts or on social media platforms and often include sedition charges.

In 2022, PPF recorded at least nine instances where cases were registered against media persons in connection with their work -- Sami Ibrahim, Arshad Sharif, Sabir Shakir, Imran Riaz Khan, Iqar ul Hassan, Khawar Ghuman, Jameel Farooqi, Salman Iqbal and Waqar Satti.

Following the removal of Khan's party as the ruling party, journalists considered to be more pro PTI, felt the impact of this transition in power. A [flurry of cases](#) were registered against journalists and media persons falling into this demographic.

A criminal complaint was registered against *BoI News* anchorperson Sami Ibrahim for "making false allegations, attempting to seduce a security employee from his duty," *Dawn* reported on May 20.

This came after the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) on May 8 initiated an inquiry against the senior anchorperson for "transmission of anti-state videos and statements on various social media platforms".

Cases were also registered against *ARY News* journalists Arshad Sharif and Sabir Shakir and *Express News* host Imran Riaz Khan. As per *Dawn*, the cases against were registered for "allegedly criticizing state institutions and abetting mutiny".

These cases registered on sedition and defamation charges act as a way of intimidating journalists and can result in self censorship, decisions to leave the country and an overall environment of fear in the media. The registration of cases is not a new technique and was used under the PTI government as well in a similar manner toward journalists that were considered to be more pro opposition political parties at the time.

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- **Federal Investigations Agency overreach**

At the heart of many of the arrests of journalists and registration of cases against them has been the Federal Investigations Agency (FIA).

The arrests of journalists including Mohsin Baig and Sabir Hashmi were conducted by the FIA. The FIA has also launched investigations against journalists such as Sami Ibrahim during the year.

On May 12, the Islamabad High Court (IHC) had told the FIA to consult the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) on the standard operating procedures for taking actions against journalists, [APP](#) reported.

The court had earlier on April 28 told the investigation agency and Islamabad police to stop harassing journalists such as Arshad Sharif, [Dawn](#) reported.

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- **Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA)**

The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) is responsible for the monitoring of content aired on the broadcast media. However, in what has become a pattern annually, PEMRA appears to be in an overdrive when it comes to issuing directives for restricting or banning certain content.

As with the years prior, in 2022, PPF found that on numerous occasions the directives issued by PEMRA resulted in a lack of information being provided to the public via broadcast. While the regulatory body has a pivotal role in ensuring the nature of content shared on broadcast media is within guidelines, there appears to be political motives in the nature of these restrictions.

In 2020, the regulatory body had [issued](#) a ban on speeches by absconders which included addresses by former prime minister Nawaz Sharif. This year, the regulatory body took a similar step by banning the live broadcast of speeches by former prime minister Imran Khan.

In a notification, dated August 20, PEMRA stated that Khan “in his speeches/statements is continuously alleging state institutions by leveling baseless allegations and spreading hate speech through his provocative statements against state institutions and officers which is prejudicial to the maintenance of law and order and is likely to disturb public peace and tranquility”.

In another order, the regulatory body also banned the broadcast or rebroadcast of speeches, press conferences or media coverage of PTI leader Azam Swati.

While PEMRA is within its jurisdiction to take action against content that is considered to be undermining the law, it is also imperative that the regulatory body works to ensure public access to information and to ensure that the public is informed about major political, social or other developments in the country.

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- **Channels blocked**

Aside from directives banning certain areas of coverage, PEMRA also issues show-cause notices and on occasion stops the transmission of a television channel. In 2022, at least two television channels were temporarily removed off-air.

In August, there were reports of *Bol News* and *ARY News* transmission being inaccessible in parts of the country.

On August 9, [reports](#) of the removal of *ARY News* from broadcast were shared. The network said that the channel had been removed on the instructions of the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) to cable operators.

As per the channel, transmission was suspended in Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Sialkot, Hyderabad, Faisalabad as well as other cities, additionally in areas of Rawalpindi, the location of the channel had been changed, and continues to be disrupted in a number of cities.

As per [Bol News](#), their transmission had been disrupted in Shikarpur, Jhang, Sargodha, Jhelum, Hafizabad and Khushab.

On September 5, PEMRA had announced that they were shutting down *Bol News* and *Bol Entertainment* due to a “failure to secure security clearance from the interior ministry,” *Dawn* [reported](#). Just two days later, on September 7, the Sindh High Court (SHC) [ordered](#) the restoration of the network.

On September 15, PEMRA once again [suspended](#) the transmission of *Bol News* and *ARY News* for three days due to broadcast without a delay mechanism.

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- **Movie bans**

During 2022, in Pakistan, a ban on the screening of certain movies continued. The prime example of this came with the bans on the film *Joyland*, Pakistan’s official submission to the Academy Awards.

The film was [banned](#) by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting after it had previously received clearance from the censor board.

In a notification dated November 11 the ministry stated that the film had earlier been presented to the Central Board of Film Censors (CBFC) Islamabad for certification, which it had been granted. However, the ban was imposed after a “comprehensive inquiry” was conducted and it was declared to be uncertified for all of Pakistan in cinemas which fall under the jurisdiction of the CBFC.

Joyland Director Saim Sadiq shared that the film had been seen and approved by all three censor boards — the Sindh, Punjab and central censor boards — in August 2022.

A high level committee was constituted to assess Joyland and review the ban. On November 16, Joyland was cleared for release by the Censor Board review committee formed at the direction of Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif.

However, the film was then [banned](#) from screening in the Punjab province. While the censor board is tasked with ensuring films meet standards set for screening in Pakistan, there is a need for more clarity in the process of banning films. In the case of Joyland, the ban was imposed after it had previously been cleared. While the matter was resolved, it led to the eventual ban of the film in Punjab.

It is a discouraging prospect for creatives including filmmakers to work on products that are initially cleared and then suddenly no longer considered suitable for screening. It is also financially challenging to do so.

Other instances where films were banned from screening in Pakistan during the past year include [Javed Iqbal: The Untold Story of a Serial Killer](#) and [I'll Meet You There](#).

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- **Online attacks and women journalists**

With the growth of digital media and the increasing role of social media as platforms for the dissemination of information and as sources of information, these have also become the grounds for attacks on the media.

While trends and trolling of journalists happens across the board in Pakistan, online attacks against women journalists take on a gendered nature and often involve personal attacks against women journalists. Political parties and their members are also often either actively behind such attacks or encourage them through their rhetoric.

On August 18, an [abusive trend](#) started on Twitter against *NewsOne* anchorperson Gharidah Farooqi. It became the top trend on Twitter in Pakistan.

It was unclear who started the trend against the journalist, however, Farooqi [said](#) that after the Digital Rights Foundation and Farooqi had reported the trend to Twitter, it had been taken down.

“Social media forums need to work on emergency basis for online safety,” she added.

On April 16, analyst and lawyer Reema Omer had commented on a violent attack against the deputy speaker of Punjab Assembly during a session to elect a new provincial chief minister.

In a [tweet](#), Omer said: “PTI leaders incited and threatened violence against dissidents for weeks and now are openly condoning and justifying assault on Punjab’s Deputy Speaker. In doing so, they are accepting PTI is a lynch mob – not a political party bound by the Constitution or the rule of law.”

In response, former human rights minister Shireen Mazari said: “Your petty hatred for PTI knows no bounds! But luckily u(sic) don’t speak for majority of Pakistanis, just for your foreign NGO! We have had enough of pontification and arrogance! Now go cry to your NGO.”

Omer is a South Asia legal advisor for the International Commission of Jurists.

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#### ● PECA

During the past year, steps were taken to further embolden the already draconian Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act, 2016 (PECA). While the law, in its original form, is already considered to be repressive, this year, under the PTI government, steps were taken to make it even more stringent.

On February 20, President Arif Alvi [promulgated](#) an ordinance to amend PECA. The amendments led to an increased jail term and expanded the definition of “person” among other steps.

This ordinance was widely criticized by the media fraternity and the matter was taken to court.

On April 8, the Islamabad High Court (IHC) [struck down](#) the PECA (Amendment) Ordinance, 2022 and stated that its promulgation was “unconstitutional, invalid beyond reasonable doubt”.

While doing so, the IHC had also struck down Section 20 of PECA, 2016 to the extent of the expression “or harms the reputation”. In February, the IHC had already prohibited the government from making arrests under this section of PECA, 2016.

The IHC’s order came around the time when the PTI led government was replaced by the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) coalition with Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) at the helm.

On April 19, Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb had [said](#) that the government would review PECA, 2016 in consultation with stakeholders.

However, on May 7, the FIA [challenged](#) the IHC order suspending Section 20 of the law in the Supreme Court, *The Express Tribune* reported.

Aurangzeb then [announced](#) that this petition had been withdrawn as it was “squarely against the government’s stated policy and principle of standing for and ensuring freedom of expression”.

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- **Political rhetoric and misbehavior with journalists**

Political rhetoric in recent years has often led to instigating attacks against the media or at least in justifying the abuse, disrespect or even the assault of media professionals. This approach of talking about and dealing with the media in terms of labels was led by PTI chief Imran Khan.

While still the premier of the country, Khan [said](#) that in the name of the freedom of the press in Pakistan there were “mafias sitting here and blackmailing [us]”. Appearing to accuse the media, he said that their agendas are “something else”, adding that there are also journalists who are being paid to spread this filth and blackmail them.

These sort of remarks without any basis or evidence are dangerous allegations that were leveled by the head of the state against an entire segment of the media. This mannerism of labeling the media and writing of an entire segment of the media which may be more critical of him is something Khan has continued to do even after removal as the prime minister.

On November 3, a gun attack on PTI’s long march at Wazirabad’s Allah Wallah Chowk in Punjab had left seven injured and one killed. The attack was seen as an assassination attempt on the former prime minister.

In an [address](#) on November 6, Khan said that following the incident, before the criminal complaint or First Information Report (FIR) was even registered, some people had started issuing statements that he had committed blasphemy.

“The people who are affiliated with other parties, they instantly start tweeting. Right now there is no investigation and they all say an extremist has done it.”

He then mentioned the timings of tweets by Waqar Satti, Murtaza Solangi, Hamid Mir and by *Geo News* and *Samaa News*.

Appearing in an interview with *CNN*'s Becky Anderson, Khan named Waqar Satti, who he labeled as being "linked with these agencies", as having made a video in which the journalist stated that Khan had offended religious sentiments.

Such irresponsible claims are not only defamatory but dangerous.

In another instance, highlighting the sexist nature of attacks on women journalists, Khan while speaking to a delegation of the National Press Club and Rawalpindi Islamabad Union of Journalists on October 18 in Islamabad, [implied](#) that Gharidah Farooqi was asking for the attacks on her by entering male dominated spaces.

In a tweet, Farooqi shared that during the meeting, during a question regarding the trolling and attacks on journalists, Khan replied: "If Gharidah Farooqi shoves herself with men then this will happen."

As per *The News*, in response to a complaint about the harassment of women journalists during rallies of the political party, Khan said that "he would issue strict directions to his party workers in this regard".

Additionally, Khan referenced Farooqi and said: "Gharidah Farooqi enters the crowd and then complaints of harassment."

During the year, after the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz took over the federal government, they came with many promises of press freedom.

Addressing a press conference, Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb on April 19 announced a list of steps the new government would take with regards to the media including:

- Disbanding the Pakistan Media Development Authority
- Forming a joint action committee of stakeholders to discuss issues faced by the media
- The joint action committee will work out a "consultative solution" for laws regarding the media.
- Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar will review the Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) ordinance from 2016. Stakeholders will be consulted for this.
- The issue of fake news needs to be dealt with.
- The Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Bill 2021 will be made implementable.
- The commission for the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Bill 2021 will be formed "soon".
- The new government will "do its best to undo the damage" done by the PTI government regarding censorship, laying off of journalists etc, regarding social media campaigns against journalists. She said strict action will be taken against anyone who tries to "besiege" homes of journalists. The FIA and police will take action.
- Will wholeheartedly accept criticism by the media.

While these were welcome decisions by the new government, in December, little implementation of these policies are visible. Under the current government, physical attacks, case registration and threats to journalists continue.

On December 6, Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif was quoted saying: “My government believes that no journalist or human rights activist should be called out in the line of duty.”

Sharif had also said that he would “proactively” facilitate the implementation of the journalists’ safety law, [The Express Tribune](#) reported.

The implementation of the journalists’ safety law is still awaited with the very first step of the Commission being formed still pending.

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### ● **Journalists’ safety laws**

While 2021 proved to be a landmark year for the passage of safety legislation specifically catering to journalists and media professionals, the last year saw a lack of progress in the implementation of the laws.

The [Sindh Protection of Journalists and Other Media Practitioners Act 2021](#) became the first such law, passed at the provincial level, in the Sindh Assembly on May 28, 2021.

On November 8, the National Assembly passed the [Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act, 2021](#) bringing the first federal level law specifically pertaining to journalist’s safety.

These laws provide a legal recourse for journalists when they come under attack and set a pathway for tackling the impunity that plagues crimes against the media. However, until the legislation is made effective, it is of little use.

At the heart of these laws, is a Commission, that is tasked with looking into, investigating and providing answers to attacks on the media. However, there has been a long delay in the creation of these commissions.

The Sindh Commission for the Protection of Journalists and other Media Practitioners was [formed](#) on November 17.

It comprises: Chairperson Retired Justice Rasheed A Rizvi, Secretary Information Department Sindh, Secretary Home Department Sindh, Secretary Law Department Sindh, Secretary Human Rights Department Sindh, Faheem Siddiqui Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists, Kazi Asad Abid All Pakistan Newspapers Society, Jabbar Khattak Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors, Muhammad Athar Kazmi Pakistan Broadcasters Association, Ayaz Hussain Tunio Sindh Bar



Council, Professor Touseef Ahmed Khan Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Shazia Umar MPA Sindh, Syeda Marvi Faseeh MPA Sindh, and Ghulam Fariduddin APNEC.

The Commission under the federal level law is yet to be formed despite a year passing since the bill was passed by the National Assembly to become law.

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## ● 2022 Timeline

### **JANUARY**

- January 4: Audio leaked of an alleged phone call between Maryam Nawaz and Pervez Rasheed discussing media personalities.
- January 14: PEMRA issues notice to *Neo TV* for airing news regarding LPG and money laundering.
- January 17: FIA approaches PEMRA with a request to stop TV channels from airing interviews of former chief Bashir Memon in a case involving an international fugitive.
- January 22: Indian government blocks 35 YouTube channels and two websites based in Pakistan.
- January 24: *Rohi 24* reporter Malik Abdul Rasheed and cameraman of daily Azad Safar Multan Asif Khokar beaten in assistant commissioners office in Haripur, Bahawalpur.
- January 28: Release of film *Untold Story of a Serial Killer* stopped by Punjab government.
- January 31: *Jang* Group Editor in Chief Mir Shakilur Rehman acquitted in property case.
- January 31: PTI MPA Aqibullah Khan allegedly misbehaves with journalists.

### **FEBRUARY**

- February 4: A *GTV* team including female journalist Aftab Jahan and cameraperson Rizwan Ali were harassed outside the Federal Government Polyclinic Hospital in Islamabad.
- February 11: PEMRA issues a show-cause notice to *News One* for comments made on an episode of *G for Gharidah*.
- February 14: FIA arrests journalist Sabr Hashmi for running trends against the prime minister on social media.
- February 15: *ARY News* host Iqrarul Hassan and team attacked by Intelligence Bureau officials.
- February 16: FIA raids analyst Mohsin Baig's house and arrests him in Islamabad.
- February 19: Then Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry says federal cabinet grants approval for PECA amendment.
- February 20: President Arif Alvi promulgates ordinance to amend PECA.
- February 23: IHC prohibits the government from arresting people under Section 20 of

PECA.

- February 24: Land mafia issues threats to senior journalist from Chakwal, Sajid Baloch.
- February 25: PEMRA bans ads of unapproved, under process and illegal housing schemes in Lahore.
- February 28: Imran Khan labels media in Pakistan as mafias and blackmailers.

## **MARCH**

- March 1: *Dawn* crime reporter Munawar Azeem receives threatening calls.
- March 2: PBA, APNS, AEMEND, CPNE move Islamabad High Court against PECA ordinance.
- March 3: Landikotal Assistant Commissioner Akber Iftikhar misbehaves with local journalists.
- March 8: Senior journalist Hamid Mir back on air after nine months.
- March 11: *Such TV* anchorperson Batool Rajput harassed and detained by MNA Kanwal Shauzab.
- March 14: ATC grants post-arrest bail to Mohsin Baig.
- March 21: PEMRA issues show-cause notice to head of *Dunya News*.
- March 27: Private media barred from covering PTI rally in capital.
- March 29: *KTN* reporter Zahid Jamro arrested by Babarloi Police.

## **APRIL**

- April 4: Journalist Saeed Bacha arrested in Mardan after court cancels bail before arrest.
- April 5: PTA asks YouTube to restore Dr Israr Ahmed's YouTube channel after it was suspended on allegations of carrying anti-semitic remarks.
- April 5: India blocks 4 Pakistan YouTube channels amongst 22.
- April 8: PECA ordinance struck down by the Islamabad High Court.
- April 10: Raid at the home of former prime minister Imran Khan's focal person on digital Dr Arslan Khalid.
- April 12: PTI workers harass *Neo TV* journalist Nasrullah Malik.
- April 13: Seven reporters and camera persons received minor injuries at a PTI rally in Peshawar.
- April 16: Man arrested in Peshawar for a viral video in which he asked PTI workers to kill journalists and anchor persons who were critical of Imran Khan.
- April 16: Journalists targeted at a PTI rally in Karachi.
- April 19: Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb says that PMDA is being disbanded.
- April 21: PTI workers attack *92 News* reporter Khawar Mughal.
- April 23: PEMRA issues a show-cause notice to *ARY News* for airing "fake/unverified news" on informal sources.
- April 23: A joint action committee (JAC) of the media and Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb agree to "enact legislation for curbing fake news".
- April 25: Shahbaz Gill harasses former RIUJ vice president Aun Shirazi.

- April 28: FIA denies harassing Arshad Sharif.
- April 28: IHC orders FIA to stop harassing Arshad Sharif and other journalists.
- April 30: PML-N activists torture *ARY News* reporter Chand Nawab and attack DSNG van in Karachi.

## MAY

- May 1: *DawnNews TV* anchor Adil Shahzeb receives death threats on social media.
- May 7: FIA submits petition against IHC order suspending Section 20 of PECA in Supreme Court.
- May 7: FIA petition against IHC order suspending Section 20 of PECA withdrawn, says Marriyum Aurangzeb.
- May 8: FIA initiates inquiry against Sami Ibrahim.
- May 9: PEMRA issues directive to broadcast media to refrain from airing content against state institutions.
- May 10: IHC asks the FIA for an explanation about the press release against Sami Ibrahim.
- May 16: PEMRA issues directive warning TV channels to refrain from airing content which “ridicules” state institutions.
- May 20: Criminal complaint registered against Sami Ibrahim.
- May 21: FIR registered against Arshad Sharif in Hyderabad.
- May 21: Case registered against Sabir Shakir in Mirpurkhas.
- May 22: FIR registered against Imran Riaz Khan.
- May 25: Acts of violence against media during PTI’s long march recorded.

## JUNE

- June 2: PEMRA prohibits broadcast, rebroadcast of remarks by Imran Khan on Sami Ibrahim’s show.
- June 7: FIR registered against Iqrar ul Hassan by Sindh government.
- June 8: *Naya Daur* YouTube channel hacked.
- June 12: Journalist Yasir Hussain attacked by PTI workers in the Chichawatni district.
- June 19: *Naya Kal* reporter Zamin Hussain receives death threats from a citizen.
- June 30: Three cases registered against Imran Riaz Khan.

## JULY

- July 1: *GNN News* reporter Idrees Abbasi harassed by guards of former NA deputy speaker Qasim Suri.
- July 1: *Dunya News* senior analyst Ayaz Amir violently attacked while leaving his office in Lahore.
- July 5: *Express News* anchorperson Imran Riaz Khan arrested in Attock.
- July 7: *Dunya News* correspondent Pir Muhammad Kakar arrested in Loralai district.
- July 9: Imran Riaz Khan granted bail by the Lahore High Court.
- July 13: *Aaj News* assignment editor Nafis Naeem abducted by unidentified individuals in Karachi.
- July 16: Social activist Nazar Baloch attacked by relatives of the education minister.

- July 19: *ARY News* reporter Hassan Hafeez verbally assaulted by Lahore CCPO.
- July 19: *GTV News* reporter Haider Sherazi attacked by unidentified people during a seminar on press freedom in Islamabad.
- July 20: *Neo News* reporter Haneef Baloch harassed and beaten by locals in Rajanpur.
- July 27: *Neo News* reporter Sheraz Ahmed Sherazi and cameraman Javed Aslam stopped from covering a PTI event.

## **AUGUST**

- August 4: Photojournalist Faisal Khan injured while covering a protest in Rawalpindi.
- August 5: *WION* Bureau Chief for Pakistan Anas Mallick goes missing in Kabul.
- August 8: PEMRA issues show-cause notice to *ARY*.
- August 9: *ARY News* head Ammad Yousaf arrested in Karachi.
- August 9: Reports of removal of *ARY News* transmission.
- August 10: *ARY* CEO Salman Iqbal and anchor persons Arshad Sharif and Khawar Ghuman have cases registered including sedition charges.
- August 10: Arshad Sharif leaves Pakistan.
- August 10: PTI supporters “rough up” journalists outside Imran Khan’s residence in Bani Gala.
- August 12: *Express News* journalist Rizwan Ghilzai assaulted by police outside court while covering Shabaz Gill’s trial.
- August 13: *ARY News* team kicked out from PML-N party session.
- August 15: Imran Riaz Khan not allowed to go on air by *Express News*.
- August 18: Abusive trend shared on Twitter against Gharidah Farooqi.
- August 19: *Awami Awaz* reporter Ilyas Samoo arrested in Thatta.
- August 19: *K21* senior reporter Mansoor Mani threatened.
- August 20: PEMRA prohibits live broadcast of speeches by Imran Khan.
- August 21: *Bol News* transmission blocked in parts of the country.
- August 21: Disruptions on access to YouTube during Imran Khan’s rally.
- August 22: *Bol TV* anchor person Jameel Farooqi arrested.
- August 23: Senior journalist Arif Hameed Bhatti taken off air on *GNN News* in Lahore.
- August 24: Case registered against journalist Waqar Satti.
- August 27: *Daily Aaj* reporter Waqar Ali receives death threats.
- August 28: IHC suspends PEMRA directive to ban live broadcast of Imran Khan’s speeches.
- August 30: *Koh e Noor* anchorperson Anwarul Haq verbally threatened by two motorcyclists.
- August 31: *ARY News* parts ways with Arshad Sharif.

## **SEPTEMBER**

- September 7: *Awami Awaz* reporter Nasrullah Gaddani arrested from his residence for coverage of Hindu flood victims’ rights.
- September 9: *Bol* unblocked under a Sindh High Court order.
- September 15: Digital rights activist Nighat Dad takes legal action after online attacks on her.

- September 15: PEMRA suspends broadcast of *ARY News* and *Bol News* for three days due to broadcast without time delay mechanism.
- September 17: IHC orders PEMRA to restore *ARY News*.
- September 24: *7 News* Bureau Chief Mian Munawar Iqbal assaulted in Faisalabad.
- September 29: *Aaj News* senior cameraperson Malik Adil and Kashan Awan threatened by hospital administration in Peshawar.

## **OCTOBER**

- October 5: PTI chairman's guard deliberately pushes Matiullah Jan.
- October 6: IHC urges PEMRA to restore *ARY News*.
- October 6: PEMRA issues show-cause notice to *ARY News*.
- October 9: *Nawai Waqt* correspondent Bakhtzada Khan seriously threatened by a drug dealer in Haripur.
- October 16: *Daily Wahadat* reporter Aatish Mehsud assaulted and threatened in South Waziristan.
- October 18: Imran Khan makes sexist remarks regarding *News One* anchorperson Gharidah Farooqi.
- October 20: CPJ Senior Program Consultant Steven Butler detained by FIA upon arrival in Lahore.
- October 23: Arshad Sharif killed in Kenya.
- October 24: *92 News* senior photojournalist Sohail Shahzad pushed by security guards of Imran Khan.
- October 30: *Channel 5* reporter Sadaf Naeem killed in an accident while covering Imran Khan's long march near Sadhoke in Punjab.

## **NOVEMBER**

- November 3: PEMRA bans coverage of a video address by Asad Umar.
- November 5: *Bol News* photojournalist Farman Kareem harassed by nursing staff of hospital near Gilgit Press Club.
- November 5: Government tells PEMRA to reverse ban on broadcast/rebroadcast of Imran Khan's speeches.
- November 11: Information Ministry issues notification banning film Joyland.
- November 14: Government announces formation of a high level committee to review the ban on Joyland.
- November 16: Joyland cleared for release by Censor Board review committee.
- November 17: Sindh government forms Commission for the Protection of Journalists and Media Practitioners.
- November 19: *Geo News* crime reporter Rasool Dawar and team threatened for airing news package against police in Peshawar.
- November 23: PTI MPA Deedar Khan and Abdul Ghaffar Shah threaten freelance journalist Saifullah Khan during a press conference in Kohistan.
- November 26: DHQ Hospital in Bajaur staff attack *Khyber News* reporter Zahid Jan.
- November 26: *Khyber TV* reporter Esar ul Haq Qadri manhandled by a PTI member in Hangu.

- November 26: PEMRA prohibits broadcast of speeches, press conferences, media coverage of Azam Swati.

## **DECEMBER**

- December 6: Islamabad police register FIR in Arshad Sharif's murder case.
  - December 6: Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif says he will proactively facilitate implementation of the journalists' safety law.
  - December 7: Fact finding mission finds Arshad Sharif's murder was a "planned targeted assassination".
  - December 12: PEMRA requires private housing societies to obtain NOC before running ads.
  - December 15: Group of individuals attack Sadiqabad Press Club.
  - December 16: Daily *Sada-e-Watan* Bureau Chief Naseer Ghumman violently attacked in Sialkot.
  - December 24: Geo News reporter Rasool Dawar receives threatening call from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister For Relief, Rehabilitation and Settlement Iqbal Wazir.
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### **● About Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF)**

Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF) is an independent media documentation and training center, non-governmental organization committed to promoting and defending freedom of expression.

PPF was established in 1967 as a non-profit organization and has since been involved in assisting the development of independent media in Pakistan by conducting training programs for journalists, carrying out projects in research and documentation and campaigning to defend and promote freedom of the press.

The aim of PPF is to establish an effective network of media and journalists throughout Pakistan to gather and document information concerning violations against the press in order to monitor and defend freedom of expression.

PPF has helped empower the media by raising the standard of journalism in Pakistan and to promoting and defending freedom of expression in Pakistan and greater awareness of social and development issues and to encourage research on mass communication in Pakistan.

PPF organizes media training programs and seminars in rural centers as well as in the cities on issues faced by Pakistani media. The organization has worked for the improvement of professional skills, and in helping to raise journalists' awareness on professional, social, political and human-rights issues as well as those related to the environment.

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