

His Excellency Narendra Modi
Honourable Prime Minister
Republic of India
New Delhi

20 October 2020

Sedition charges against journalists

Honourable Prime Minister,

The International Press Institute (IPI), a global network of editors, media executives and leading journalists for press freedom, and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), a global federation of national journalists' unions and associations, would like to express their grave concern over the increasing use of sedition charges against journalists in India.

Over the past few months, a number of journalists have been charged under Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), which punishes sedition with three years to life in prison. Section 124A states that those who by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards, the Government established by law in India could be punished with life imprisonment or for a period of three years in prison.

In the most recent case, on October 5 a Kerala-based journalist, Siddique Kappan, who was trying to reach the family of a rape victim in the Hathras district of Uttar Pradesh, was arrested and charged with sedition. On October 6, the Kerala Union of Working Journalists (KUWJ) filed a habeas corpus petition against the arrest of Mr. Kappan, who was the union's Delhi unit Secretary.

Similarly, in May, Dhaval Patel, editor and owner of a Gujarati news portal, 'Face of Nation', was charged with sedition and detained by the police for publishing a report that suggested that the political leadership in the state would change. He was also accused of spreading false panic under Section 54 of the Disaster Management Act (DMA). The Editors' Guild of India raised the issue in a statement on May 13, expressing concern over the misuse of special laws, besides sedition and IPC.

Chhattisgarh police filed a sedition case against Kamal Shukla, editor of Bhumkal Samachar, for sharing a cartoon on Facebook that referred to the Supreme Court's decision to reject petitions calling for an independent investigation into the mysterious death of special Central Bureau of Investigation judge Brijgopal Loya in 2014. The case was [brought to the attention](#) of the authorities by the NUJ (I) and IJU.

In another case, noted journalist Vinod Dua was charged with sedition by the Himachal Pradesh police. The police case was registered against Mr. Dua for his YouTube broadcast blaming the government for its COVID-19 preparedness and making personal allegations against Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

We find it extremely disturbing that governments in different states of India are attempting to stifle press freedom by filing cases against journalists under different sections of the Indian Penal Code, including Section 124A. The number of cases filed against journalists have increased enormously after the spread of the pandemic. The health crisis is being used as an excuse to silence those who have exposed shortcoming in the government's response to it, while on the contrary it is important for both citizens and the public authorities to have factual information about the situation in order to best respond to the pandemic. A free media is essential to a successful public health response.

As many as 55 journalists were targeted for covering the pandemic in India between 25 March, when lockdown was first imposed, and 31 May, a [report](#) by Rights and Risks Analysis Group (RRAG) has shown.

India ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1971, which sets forth internationally recognized standards for the protection of freedom of expression. However, the use of sedition laws to harass independent, critical journalists is not only a gross violation of the country's international commitments, it is also an attempt by the government to silence any criticism. Journalistic work cannot be equated to sedition or undermining security.

We believe that democracy in India can remain strong only when the media is free to report and shine a light on issues that need urgent attention of the government.

Honourable Prime Minister, we urge you to take immediate steps to ensure that journalists can work without any harassment and fear of reprisal from the government. We also call on you to direct the state governments to drop all charges against journalists, including those under the draconian sedition laws, that have been imposed on them for their work.

Yours sincerely



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