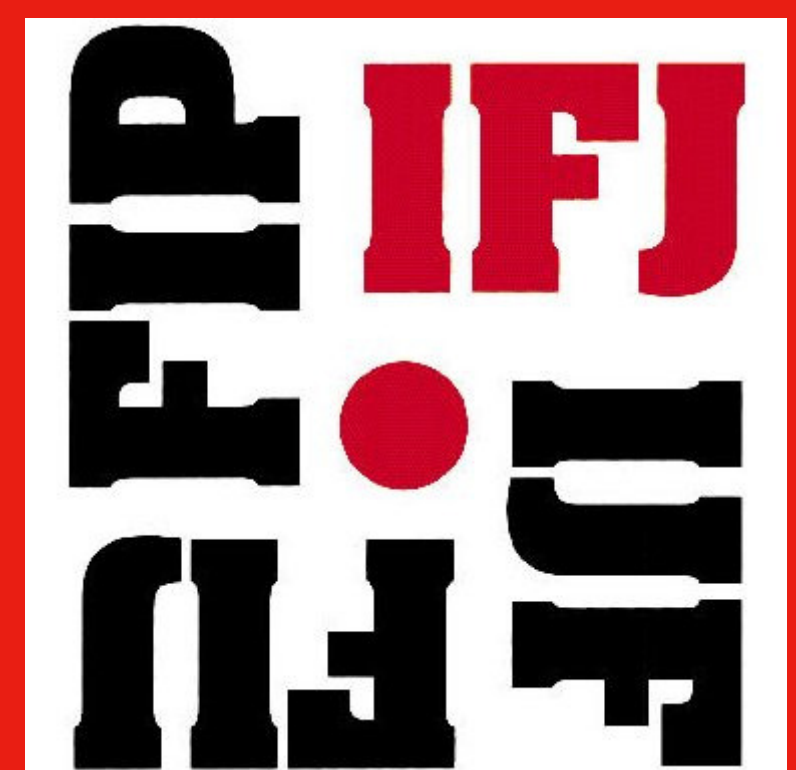


CLAMPDOWNS AND COURAGE: PAKISTAN



**SOUTH ASIA PRESS FREEDOM
REPORT 2017-18**



PAKISTAN



THREATS ON AND OFFLINE

In the new millennium, Pakistan has battled a tide of terrorism and violent extremism that has cost tens of thousands of lives and affected millions. A major victim has been the media. Dozens of online information practitioners, including bloggers and social media activists have also been killed, attacked, injured, harassed or faced legal cases for alleged blasphemy or treason in recent years. Between May 2017 and April 2018, at least five journalists were killed; dozens of others attacked, injured, harassed and intimidated and two kidnapped and remain missing.

According to data from the Freedom Network, of the 117 media practitioners killed in Pakistan since 2000, at least 72 were target-killed for their journalism while the rest died in the line of duty in terror attacks and bombings. These high levels of violence and victimisation have ensured that Pakistan has consistently been ranked as one of the ten worst countries in which to practice journalism. The country has one of the lowest indicators of freedom of expression and safe access to information over the past decade. An important indicator of Pakistan's poor rankings in categories of freedom of expression, safety of journalists and online information practitioners is the incredibly high level of impunity. The killers of only two (Wali Khan Babar and Daniel Pearl) of the 117 media practitioners killed have been identified, gone to trial and been convicted. This makes Pakistan also one of the worst countries in the world in terms of combating impunity for crimes against journalists and failing to provide them and their families justice, thereby ensuring that journalism and freedom of expression remain threatened.

ONGOING RISKS

Pakistan continues to have an environment that in general stifles freedom of expression and makes it difficult for the media and its practitioners, particularly journalists, from doing their job. In the period under review, at least five journalists were killed for their work and dozens of others were attacked, injured, harassed and intimidated into either self-censorship or looking out for themselves in an environment where impunity for crimes against them remains high and neither their employers nor the state offers much assistance.

The list of attacks against media practitioners in the period under review is long and the pool of perpetrators and threat actors grew to include, among others, government functionaries, political parties, security agencies, militant groups, religious factions, feudal and business classes and even the judiciary. No place is safe for journalists and media assistants – attacks happened in capital city Islamabad and in all four provinces of Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab and Sindh as well as in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Gilgit-Baltistan and even Pakistan-administered Kashmir. Crimes against journalists continue to go unpunished, adding to the entrenched impunity.

MEDIA

BLACKOUT
During November 2017, federal capital Islamabad and adjacent city Rawalpindi saw a protest sit-in at the main interchange between two cities by a religious group, the Labaik Ya Rasool Allah. In order to remove the sit-in, the government launched a crackdown on the protesters on November 25, 2017. Soon thereafter, the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), the electronic media watchdog, shut down the transmissions of all private news channels, accusing them of violating the code of conduct on live coverage.

PAKISTAN



A total media blackout left people in the dark about what was happening in major cities across the country, triggering all sorts of speculations. Following the media blackout, the country's internet and telecom regulator, the Pakistan Telecom Authority (PTA) ordered blocking of all social media networking websites such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter as well as popular communications apps such WhatsApp.

In the period under review, people faced shutdowns of cell phone networks and internet 17 times in various parts of the country. Cell phone networks were shut down on five occasions in Islamabad and Rawalpindi alone. In addition to these regular shutdowns, various parts of Balochistan province and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) have faced cellular and internet shutdowns on different occasions in the period under review.

In April 2018, the country's largest TV channel, Geo News, went off air from large swathes of the country and was available only intermittently for two weeks. While neither PEMRA, which is the sole authority with powers of suspending transmissions, nor the vast, licensed cable distribution network admitted that they had a hand in the blackout, privately the Geo administration admitted that the military was unhappy with its independently policy on content. It appeared that criticism of the military's role in politics, support for the beleaguered former prime minister Nawaz Sharif and his party in the run up to the elections and questioning of controversial judicial activism by the superior judiciary had made the military unhappy. The channel, as reported by Reuters, started coming back online only after striking a deal with the military on changing its contents policy. There was, however, no public or official confirmation of any deal.

CENSORSHIP OF SOCIAL MEDIA

In the aftermath of the issue of missing bloggers early in 2017, a petition was filed in February 2017 against the bloggers and their role in alleged online blasphemy in Pakistan. The petitioner Salman Shahid, prayed the court to direct the authorities to block all [allegedly] blasphemous pages on the social media besides taking action against those who had developed this content. Justice Shaukat Siddiqui of the Islamabad High Court, while admitting the petition, directed the authorities to block social media pages posting blasphemous and objectionable content. In March 2017, he ordered the authorities to place names of alleged blasphemers on the Exit Control List, initiate criminal cases against those committing blasphemy and form a joint investigation team (JIT) to look into the matter. The Court also directed Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) to set up teams to monitor and scrutinise social media for blasphemous material so that it may be removed. The Court further ordered the Federal Investigation Agency to bring back from abroad bloggers allegedly involved in online blasphemy to initiate proceedings under the law against them. After lengthy proceedings, in August 2017, the Court issued a detailed judgment and exonerated the alleged blasphemers but ordered PTA to identify any NGOs, bloggers and other journalists involved in circulating "blasphemous content" on social media and suggested that the Parliament make the blasphemy law tougher. The court also directed PTA to create a firewall to block unwanted and sacrilegious content in Pakistan.

Pakistan's official requests to Facebook, Twitter and Google for users' info, content removal grew in recent times.

PAKISTAN



Facebook: During the first half of 2017 Pakistan submitted a total of 1,050 requests to Facebook 'relating to criminal cases' for user data, referring to 1,540 Facebook accounts, according to Transparency International. During this period, Pakistan also made 399 'accounts data preservation' requests to Facebook in connection with official criminal investigations. Facebook also received 613 requests from Pakistan related to users/accounts. In the same period, Facebook restricted access to 177 places of content upon requests from the Pakistan Telecom Authority (PTA) and FIA. The content was allegedly in violation of local laws relating to blasphemy and national security.

Twitter: During the first half of 2017, Pakistan submitted seven information requests to Twitter concerning 60 Twitter accounts according to Transparency International. The authorities in Pakistan also submitted 24 content/account removal requests to Twitter during this period. The government of Pakistan also made two emergency disclosure requests to Twitter.

Google: Pakistani authorities submitted eight user data requests to Google, according to the Google Transparency Report 2017. Pakistan also made 12 user/account requests to Google. Under these requests, the authorities may seek information about multiple accounts. Since 2009, Google received a total of 69 content removal requests, concerning 896 items, from Pakistan. Out of these 69 requests, 14 were submitted to Google during the first six months of 2017. Through these 14 requests, Pakistan asked for the removal of 98 items. Ten out of 14 requests related to items of 'religious offence', two were about hate speech and one each about defamation and violence.



Journalists from the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) shout slogans during a demonstration in support of English daily Dawn, in Islamabad on May 3, 2017, World Press Freedom Day. The government had formed a committee to probe a October 6, 2016 story, which reported the details of a high-level civil-military meeting discussing the issue of banned militant outfits operating in Pakistan. Credit: Aamir Qureshi/AFP

PAKISTAN



ONLINE POLICING

In the past year, Pakistani authorities increasingly invoked the controversial Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), 2016, to restrict freedom of expression and dissent online by criminalising dissent. There were at least three occasions when the PECA was invoked against journalists, the first time since its inception. In June 2017, Zafarullah Achakzai, reporter at Qudrat Urdu daily, was arrested in Balochistan province by the paramilitary Frontiers Corps under PECA and handed over to the FIA in Quetta for criticising the military, the provincial chief and intelligence agencies for the poor law and order situation. He was released later but still faces criminal charges. In July 2017, Abdullah Zafar, a reporter for The Nation daily, was picked up outside his home in Karachi, Sindh by security personnel in plainclothes. He was freed after 20 hours in captivity and said that he was tortured and interrogated about his social media posts on “missing persons”. He was also formally booked under the PECA law. In August 2017, Jabbar Umrani, a correspondent for Waqt News channel, was booked in Quetta, Balochistan under the PECA law for violating its statutes banning criticism of security policies online. The FIA registered a case and is investigating Umrani’s social media comments that the authorities find disparaging.

On October 25, 2017, the federal Ministry of Interior announced a plan “to formulate a framework to monitor social media in order to prevent it from being used as a tool to malign national institutions and spread anarchy or extremism in the country.” The announcement said that social media was being “used as a deadly weapon to discredit and destroy leaderships and state institutions and promote conflicts through fake news,” and stressed that like the armed forces and the judiciary, the parliament was also a national institution. The interior minister stressed a need to formulate a framework of guidelines that “maintains democratic freedoms and ensures that no foreign hand or saboteur can use social media to create political chaos, spread extremism or carry out terrorism in Pakistan, or belittle national institutions.” The FIA was directed to formulate this framework for social media monitoring in consultation with all stakeholders including people in the information technology industry, bloggers and social media activists.

ABORTED LAWS

The Pakistan Print Media Regulatory Authority (PPMRA) Ordinance was proposed in June 2017 when news broke about the preparation of a new national level press/print media registration law. According to news reports in September 2017, the federal government was preparing a law on the pattern of the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) for the print media. Allegedly, the Federal Ministry of Information, Broadcasting and National Heritage tasked the Press Council of Pakistan (PCP) in March 2017 to prepare a draft of the bill. Media stakeholders, particularly media owners and journalists, strongly reacted to the reported bill, but the State Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Cultural Heritage expressed her ignorance about the preparation of the bill. She ordered an inquiry and immediately suspended an assistant director in her ministry. The committee held Nasir Jamal, the director general of the Internal Publicity Wing of the ministry, responsible for initiating the preparation of the draft bill apparently without the minister’s permission. Later, the government dropped the idea of bringing in the new print media law altogether.

The Sindh Press, Newspapers, News Agencies and Books Registration Act, 2017 According to news reports in September 2017, the Sindh provincial government had prepared a draft law to regulate registration of papers, printing presses, news agencies and books in the province. The Sindh government had reportedly prepared the draft in the wake of the Eighteenth Constitutional Amendment.

PAKISTAN



The draft law, as reported, was aimed at ensuring that every book or paper printed in the province would clearly mention the name of the printer and place of publication, along with the date. The proposed law required every publisher or owner of a newspaper to apply for a declaration [regulated prior permission] and submit an affidavit saying that he will pay salaries to employees as per the Wage Board Award. No further development has been reported.

NEW WAGE BOARD FOR PRINT MEDIA WORKERS

On April 18, 2018, the federal government of Pakistan constituted the Eighth Wage Board for Newspaper Employees. The last board was constituted in 2002 and it has taken 16 years instead of five to constitute the latest board. According to a notification issued by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, the board will remain in operation for six months, until October 2018, to complete its task. The 11-member board will be led by Shahid Mehmood Khokhar as the chairman and includes key personalities from the media sector including Hameed Haroon of Dawn media group; Rameeza Nizami of The Nation; Shoaib Uddin of Nawa-i-Waqt; Asif Zubairi of Business Recorder; Mujeeb Shami of Pakistan; Sarmad Ali of Jang; Sahibzada Zulfiqar of Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists; Shafiuddin Ashraf of All Pakistan Newspaper Employees Confederation; Bakhtzada Yousafzai of Aaeen and Nasir Chishti of the Jang Workers Union. The board will suggest a new set of basic minimum wages for journalists and media workers in the print media industry.

GATHERING POLITICAL WILL

While the constitution of the new Wage Board is a small step forward in ensuring better working conditions for journalists, the same cannot be said in the arena of securing their physical safety. In the context of indicator 16.10.1 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Number of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates in the previous 12 months), there is no dedicated policy in place or any specific procedural, legislative or structural/institutional mechanism at either the federal level or anywhere in the provinces that addresses the issue of combating impunity for crimes against journalists in Pakistan. However, commitment exists. In 2012, the United Nations developed the UN Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists and Issues of Impunity aimed at helping states improve an enabling and safer environment for journalists and journalism. Pakistan was selected as one of the five pilot countries for its implementation. Pakistan endorsed the Plan in 2013 and committed itself to, among other things, legislate for the safety of journalists and other information practitioners and improve the state's capacity to combat impunity and provide special mechanisms for safety of journalists.

While provincial governments, legislatures and political parties have, in general, expressed commitments to enacting special laws on safety of journalists and to, therein, provide effective and responsive mechanisms to combat impunity of crimes against journalists and other information practitioners, a critical mass or a demand for a special provincial law on safety of journalists and information practitioners is missing. Detailed and comprehensive empirical data and analysis on the scale of threats and attacks against journalists, particularly in the context of tracking impunity in the justice system is missing, as is adequate documentation on the process of access to justice for key cases of attacks against journalists and information practitioners in the provinces. Data collected against representative cases on the issue of impunity – with the help, perhaps, of a specialised impunity index – can help provide a gap analysis of the justice system for attacks against media practitioners. This empirical-based analysis can hugely facilitate increased accountability in Pakistan and help protect freedom of expression in the provinces.

PAKISTAN



MEDIA VIOLATIONS: MAY 2017 - APRIL 2018

Killings of journalists: 5 (Male: 5, Female: 0)

Threats against the lives of journalists: 28 (Male: 28, Female: 0)

Other threats to journalists: 0 – None recorded

Non-fatal attacks on journalists: 53 (Male: 52, Female: 1)

Threats against media institutions: 1

Attacks on media institutions: 0 – None recorded

Killings of Journalists

May 17, 2017: Punjab Armed robbers gunned down Abdul Razzaq, a Chunian correspondent of ARY News television in an attempted robbery in Pattoki, Kasur in Punjab. Razzaq was killed when assailants opened fire on him and Muqadar Hussain after stopping their car. Hussain was taken to hospital and survived but Razzaq died at the scene.

June 11, 2017: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bakshish Elahi, the Bureau Chief of K-2 Times, an Urdu daily newspaper in Haripur, was shot dead by unknown motorbike-borne gunmen near his home at Lora Chowk, Haripur district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The gunmen fled the scene after firing five shots at Elahi, one of which hit him in the head and others in the chest and stomach.

October 12, 2017: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haroon Khan, journalist with Sach TV and a stringer for Mashriq TV channel, was gunned down outside his home by unidentified assailants in an apparently targeted killing. Khan had returned home when his killers opened fire, hitting him several times before fleeing the scene, according to police sources. He was taken to hospital and declared dead on arrival.

March 1, 2018: Punjab Anjum Muneer Raja, 40, sub-editor with Islamabad-based Urdu daily Qaumi Pukaar was shot dead just before midnight on Bank Road, the high-security area near the Pakistan Army's national headquarters, in Rawalpindi, Pakistan while he was returning home after work. The motorcycle-borne assailants intercepted Raja's motorcycle and fired six bullets, killing him on the spot.

March 27, 2018: Punjab Zeeshan Ashraf Butt 29, with Urdu daily Nawa-i-Waqt and former chairperson of the Sambrial Press Club, was shot dead by Imran Cheema, chair of the Begowala Union Council, in Begowala, when the journalist inquired about taxes levied on shop owners. After Cheema threatened him, Butt called District Council chairperson to complain and Cheema shot him during the telephone call.

Threats against the lives of journalists

June 2, 2017: Islamabad Azaz Syed, a senior journalist with Geo TV, was intercepted by a masked motorcycle-borne individual at Park Road in the capital city while he was returning home. A car with the suspected kidnappers was following him closely and the suspects asked him to come out of the car but he sped into a nearby police station to take shelter.

June 9, 2017: Islamabad Journalist Rana Tanveer, who had reportedly received death threats for writing about religious minorities in Express Tribune daily, was run over by a car. Tanveer survived the murder attempt with an injured left leg. Tanveer had moved to a safe house after his residence door was painted with a death threat a few days earlier.

July 9, 2017: Sindh People in plainclothes picked up The Nation reporter Abdullah Zafar from his residence in Karachi. He returned home after 20 hours and said that he was taken away in Police armoured vehicle and subjected to torture for his comments on social media about "missing persons."

July 17, 2017: Kharan Banned militant group Baloch Liberation Army issued a list of 17 journalists in Balochistan asking them to stop reporting negatively against them or be ready to face action.

July 20, 2017: Islamabad Reporters Saba Bajeer and Malik Irfan of Channel 24 and Eitzaz Hussain of Dawn News channel were harassed and threatened by officials of the Federal Investigation Agency as at a hospital in Islamabad where the FIA officials had brought a senior government official facing corruption charges for treatment. The cameras of the journalists were also snatched.

August 18, 2017: Islamabad Reporters Babar Anwar and Hafiz Haseeb of Mubaligh daily received threatening calls from unknown persons for publishing a story on alleged consumption of liquor by officials of the Kashmir House, the Islamabad secretariat of the government of Pakistan-administered Kashmir.

PAKISTAN



December 23, 2018: Islamabad Naeem Asghar, reporter for Express News, received a threatening letter in Islamabad from the banned Hizbut Tahrir religious group, which seeks to overthrow the government and establish a pan-Islamic caliphate.

January 10, 2018: Islamabad Taha Siddiqui, the Pakistan bureau chief of India-based World Is One News (WION) television news network and a regular contributor to international media including the New York Times and France 24, escaped an abduction attempt in Islamabad, Pakistan. He was intercepted by around a dozen gunmen while he was in a taxi on the expressway to the airport. The gunmen pulled him out of the taxi, threatened to kill him and beat him up before pushing him into a vehicle. He managed to escape by jumping out of the moving vehicle, crossed the expressway and hailed a taxi to the nearest police station.

Non-fatal attacks on journalists

May 8, 2017: Chaman Akhter Gulfam, reporter, and Habib Khan, cameraman, of ARY News channel were in Balochistan beaten up by paramilitary Frontier Corps personnel for filming and reporting on clashes between Afghan and Pakistani border forces in Chaman. The personnel also deleted the footage recorded on Khan's camera.

May 11, 2017: Karachi Amin Yousef, the resident editor of Nawa-i-Waqt daily was targeted in a day-light robbery. Yousef, the former general secretary of the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists was on his way to his office with his daughter, when gunmen on a motor-bike intercepted his car, stealing his mobile phone and cash at gunpoint. Neither Amin nor his daughter was injured in the attack.

May 17, 2017: Kasur Muqadar Hussain, correspondent for ARY News channel, was shot and injured in Punjab by highwaymen who saw him filming one of their robberies in real-time on his mobile phone. Hussain was injured by a bullet in his arm.

May 19, 2017: Islamabad Akbar Yousafzai, reporter for Geo News channel, was attacked and injured by Capital Development Authority (CDA) officials in Islamabad investigating an allegedly illegal occupation of government land in F7 sector by some CDA officials.

June 2, 2017: Islamabad Two unidentified men attacked Zeeshan Ali, an Iranian photojournalist, working for the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) in Islamabad. He was taking shots depicting the observance of Ramazan in Pakistan, in Islamabad's G-8 sector when armed men assaulted him and taken away his equipment at gunpoint.

June 11, 2017: Karachi Zubair Ashraf, reporter at Express Tribune daily, who was riding a motorcycle, was attacked in Sindh and injured by the guards of Pakistan Muslim League-F leader Yasir Shah. The attack came after Shah's motorcade failed to shoo aside motorcyclists to ensure a brisk passage for him. One of the guards pointed a gun at Ashraf after he resisted.

June 19, 2017: Faisalabad A group of nine reporters and camerapersons of various TV channels, including Samaa News, NewsOne, Dunya News, Channel 24 and ARY News, were attacked and injured by security guards of Faisalabad Agriculture University in Punjab while interviewing on campus six students who the university administration had expelled for adverse opinions on social media. Yousaf Cheema, reporter for Samaa TV, sustained serious injuries.

June 20, 2017: Quetta Shahbaz Ahmed, cameraman for Dunya News channel, was attacked and injured in Balochistan by members of Pakistan People's Party in Balochistan as he attempted to get close to the politician Chairman Bilawal Bhutto at a party meeting in Quetta for better footage.

June 20, 2017: Islamabad Students of the Madressah Haqqania beat up Din News employees and broke their camera. The TV channel staff claimed that they were reporting on alleged electricity theft by the management. During the incident, cameraman Rashid Azeem was beaten badly.

August 10, 2017: Rawalpindi Reporters Safdar Klasra, Naila Afsar and Benazir Mehdi of Bol News channel were physically assaulted and injured in Punjab by apparently workers the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-N party whose protest in Rawalpindi they were covering. Klasra had to be hospitalised.

September 12, 2017: Islamabad Supporters of religious group Labaik Ya Rasool Allah attacked TV crew of Neo channel. Reporter Usman, cameramen Ali Raza and Ameer Hamza were attacked with sticks and stones. The supporters also damaged the channel's DSNG van. The attackers, according to channel's bureau chief Ayaz Shujah, were "angry" at not getting "due coverage."

September 21, 2017: Multan Wajih Ahsan, reporter, and Aslam Baig, cameraman, of Samaa News channel were detained and thrashed by police personnel in Punjab for filming the chaotic area around the Mumtazabad Police Station. Their footage was impounded before they were set free.

PAKISTAN



September 24, 2017: Islamabad Matiullah Jan, anchorperson for Waqt News channel and columnist for Nawa-i-Waqt daily, was attacked by unknown persons with bricks hurled at his car as he was travelled home in Islamabad.

September 26, 2017: Islamabad Reporters Amir Saeed Abbasi of Dunya News, Shah Khalid Hamdani of 92 News and Saad bin Altaf of Neo News channels were attacked and injured by security personnel in plain clothes in Islamabad for getting too close to former prime minister Nawaz Sharif as he arrived at a corruption hearing against him at the local accountability court. Abbasi fainted and required hospitalisation.

October 1, 2017: Dera Ismail Khan Hasnain Qureshi, cameraman for Geo News channel, was stopped by police in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as he arrived to cover a public protest in Dera Ismail Khan city. Upon resistance, the security personnel beat up Qureshi.

October 4, 2017: Lahore Tauseef Akram, cameraman for the Associated Press of Pakistan news agency, was beaten up in Punjab by the unruly workers of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-N when he arrived at a party convention in Lahore and insisted on entering the conference venue.

October 24, 2017: Islamabad Hussain Qayyum, cameraman for Express News channel, was attacked and injured by the staff of the National Database and Registration Authority in Islamabad as he started filming a dispute that broke out at the office among the officials. His camera was also broken.

October 27, 2017: Islamabad Unknown motorcyclists stopped senior reporter Ahmed Noorani of The News daily in Islamabad at Zero Point and beat him up. He was dragged out and savagely attacked with knives, sustaining serious injuries, including several to his head, that required several weeks of hospital care.

November 22, 2017: Islamabad The protesters attacked two senior photojournalists as they covered the clash with the police. Muhammad Asim of Dawn and Jahangir Chaudhry from Jang sustained minor injuries as a crowd with staffs attacked them.

November 25, 2017: Rawalpindi, Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi Several journalists were injured, including some sustaining rubber bullet and baton injuries, as they covered a government crackdown against the religious group Labaik Ya Rasool Allah, which had been blocking a key entryway into Islamabad for over two weeks. The crackdown was against the group in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Lahore and Karachi cities. Among those injured included reporters Qamar Munawar of Dunya News, Saddam Mangat of Channel 24, Tariq Hassan, Talha Hashmi and Ahmed Faraz of Geo News, Yasin Hashmi of Business Plus channel,

June 2, 2017: Islamabad (CONT.)

Faisal Awan of Waqt News; photojournalists Tanveer Shahzad of Dawn newspaper, Pervaiz Asi of Metro Watch daily, Shahzad Gill of Daily Sun and Irfan Haider of Nia Mahaz daily; and cameramen Zulfiqar Zulfi and Sultan Shah of Abtak channel, and Shiraz Gardezi of Geo News. The injuries were sustained by actions of both the religious group and the security agencies. The DSNG vans of Samaa News, Abtak News and Geo News channels were also attacked and damaged.

November 28, 2017: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Aleem Haider Zaidi of Such TV channel survived an attack on his life in Kohat district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province when unidentified gunmen opened fire.

December 9, 2017: Sukkur Reporter Usama Talat of Geo News and photographer Salman Ansari of Jang daily were attacked and injured by the colleagues of a drunken policeman in Sindh as the journalists filmed him performing a dance on the road.

December 23, 2017: Multan The house of Imran Chaudhry, the reporter for Geo News channel, in Punjab came under attack from unidentified masked men who fired several rounds of gunfire at his residence in Multan.

December 24, 2017: Karachi Arshad Baig, reporter for Express News channel, was attacked and injured by lawyers in Sindh for recording footage of an alleged criminal trying to run away from the premises of city courts in Karachi. His footage was destroyed and he was detained for a few hours before being freed.

Threats against media institutions

October 4, 2017: Balochistan Banned insurgent group Baloch Liberation Front (BLF) issued a 20-day ultimatum to media in Balochistan to either start publishing press statements of banned insurgent groups or “face attacks”. The Balochistan government had prevented local media offices from publishing the statements of these groups. The banned BLF ultimatum ended on October 24 and from the next day media boycott started in the Baloch belt of Balochistan. Subsequently, on October 25, a hand-grenade was hurled at the Hub Press Club wounding six journalists. Next day, Pak-News Agency, a news distribution agency, was attacked in Turbat and a vehicle transporting newspapers was attacked in Awaran district.

PAKISTAN



Other notable incidents / developments

Arrest/Detention

June 30, 2017: Balochistan Zafarullah Achakzai, 21, chief reporter of Qudrat daily, was arrested by the paramilitary Frontiers Corps under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016 and handed over to the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) in Quetta, Balochistan for criticising the FIA on social media.

July 11, 2017: Lahore Dr Sheikh Wali, the editor of daily Jahan-e-Pakistan, was booked in Punjab for hate speech for authoring and printing an article on Ali, the grandson of Prophet Mohammed, which allegedly hurt the sentiments of Shia Muslims. While the police later stopped raiding his offices, the case against him stands.

August 5, 2015: Balochistan Jabbar Umrani, a correspondent for Waqt News channel, was booked in Quetta, Balochistan under the PECA law for violating its statutes banning criticism of security policies online. The FIA registered a case and is investigating Umrani's social media comments that the authorities find disparaging.

September 17, 2017: Lahore Ashraf Nankanvi, drone camera operator, and Mohammed Mohsin, DSNV van driver, of Geo News channel were taken into custody in Punjab by military personnel for operating a drone camera without prior permission outside the office of Provincial Election Commissioner in Lahore. They were later released after agreeing not to film the premises with drone cameras.

October 7, 2017: Islamabad Shabbir Seham, reporter for Daily Times newspaper, was booked under Anti-Terrorism Act, and summoned by the Gilgit Baltistan Anti-Terrorist Court for defaming without proof some ruling party legislators in Gilgit Baltistan for alleged involvement in human trafficking. The journalist is based in Islamabad and the National Press Club and Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists resisted an attempt by the Gilgit Baltistan government to arrest Seham.

October 15, 2017: Peshawar Shah Nawaz Tarakzai, reporter for Mashaal Radio, and Islam Gul, reporter for Waziristan Times, were picked up by security agencies' personnel in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and kept incommunicado for over 24. After being freed they said they had been interrogated for alleged links with an 'anti-military' online newspaper, denying any such links.

November 5, 2017: Islamabad Hamid Mir, senior journalist for Geo News channel and Jang newspaper, was, under orders of the Islamabad High Court, booked for alleged conspiracy to kill a former intelligence operative Khalid Khawaja, who was killed in April 2010 in the tribal areas by allegedly the banned Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan group. The widow of Khawaja moved the court to seek the arrest of Mir for her husband's kidnapping and subsequent execution. Earlier, the Lahore High Court had declared Mir innocent in the case.

November 24, 2017: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Paramilitary forces detained five tribal journalists and a press club employee after a magnetic bomb was discovered beneath the car they were riding in Landikotal town in Khyber district bordering Peshawar. Four journalists were freed after 12 hours while the owner of the car – Khalil Afridi – was still detained and grilled, according to the Freedom Network Pakistan. The detained journalists were Khalil Afridi of Khyber News channel, Farhad Shinwari of Mashaal Radio, Mehrab Shah Afridi of Tribal News Network, Umar Shinwari of Pakistan Television and Imran Khattak of Khabran newspaper.

December 19, 2017: Karachi Shabbir Usmani, reporter for Express News channel, was booked for harassment by the Karachi police in Sindh on the complaint of a local religious seminary. The police registration was preceded by several threats that Usmani said he received from the seminary.

January 5, 2018: Karachi Reporter Fawad Hasan, reporter for Express Tribune newspaper, was picked up in Sindh by paramilitary Rangers personnel while covering condolence reference of late Dr Hasan Zafar, a leader of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM-London) at the Karachi University. Hasan was interrogated about his interview of MQM leader Altaf Hussain whose speeches and comments have been banned in Pakistani media by the Lahore High Court. Hasan was freed after a few hours.

February 15, 2018: Tando Bago Razaqat Ali Jarwar, reporter for daily Koshish, was arrested and jailed by police in Sindh and booked for alleged terrorism and robbery. Deputy Inspector General Hyderabad Police Javed Alam later alleged at a press conference that the police had busted 'a gang of Indian agents,' which allegedly included Razaqat. Nasrullah Jarwar, the brother of Razaqat, alleged that the police arrested his brother to "teach me a lesson" for writing stories on an allegedly unholy 'sugarcane nexus' between local sugar mill owners and politicians.

PAKISTAN



Censorship

November 2, 2017: Orakzai Paramilitary Frontier Corps officials in Orakzai tribal district in FATA imposed a ban on local journalists to report on official matters.

November 25, 2017: Islamabad The Pakistani authorities ordered the take-down of all television news channels and blocked access to some social media platforms following a political demonstration in Islamabad. The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) issued a directive prohibiting live coverage of the operation to end the Faizabad sit-in protest. The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) also directed the blocking of Facebook, YouTube, DailyMotion, Twitter and Instagram in some parts of the country on the Interior Ministry's orders. Internet services in Faizabad, Rawalpindi where the protests were happening, were also suspended. The directives stood for nearly 28 hours until they were withdrawn.

January 19, 2018: Islamabad The federal government forcibly shut down operations of Europe-managed international broadcaster Radio Mashaal in Pakistan. A notification issued by the Ministry of Interior alleged that as per an intelligence report, the radio was airing programs "found against the interests of Pakistan and in line with hostile intelligence agency's agenda." The Prague-based broadcaster denied the allegations.

April 16, 2018: Lahore A full-bench of the Lahore High Court in Punjab ordered the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) to order all TV channels in the country to ban all criticism of the country's judiciary by former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, his daughter Maryam Nawaz and all ministers of their ruling Pakistan Muslim League-N party. Several of the ministers are facing contempt of court charges for criticising various recent controversial judgments of the country's superior judiciary which have seen Sharif sacked as prime minister, unseated as president of his party and barred from politics for life. In July 2017, the Lahore High Court had banned all TV channels in the country from airing the views of self-exiled Pakistani politician Altaf Hussain. The censorship still stands.

Enforced Disappearance

August 5, 2017: Jamshoro Ghulam Rasool Burfat, reporter for Sindh Express daily, was kidnapped from outside his residence in Sindh. Police has since been unable to track Burfat or been able to identify and prosecute their abductors.

August 9, 2017: Jamshoro Badal Nohani, the secretary-general of Jamshoro Press Club, was abducted in Sindh from the press club premises by masked people who arrived in some vehicles. Police has since been unable to track him down or identify and prosecute his abductors.

Harassment

July 12, 2017: Islamabad Raja Mudassar, photographer for Express daily, was abused and prevented entry to the residence of Pakistan Tehrik-i-Insaf Chairman Imran Khan in Islamabad by his guards as he arrived to cover his press conference.

July 12, 2017: Islamabad Shahid Mattila, reporter for ARY News channel, was abused and insulted by Muhammad Safdar, the son-in-law of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, as he filmed him at the Federal Judicial Academy in Islamabad where he had appeared for a hearing.

Regulations

January 19, 2018: Islamabad Pakistan's Interior Ministry ordered the shutdown of the office and the operations of Radio Mashaal, a Pashto language broadcaster linked to the US-funded Radio Free Europe (RFE), on recommendations of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). The ministry said that as per an ISI report, the radio airs programs "against the interests of Pakistan and in line with hostile intelligence agency's agenda".

Internet shutdowns

September 29, 2017: Pakistan Between September 29 to October 1, most cities in Pakistan remained without mobile and Internet services as a part of the security measures for Ashura, during which there are major religious processions across Pakistan. The Sindh Home Department issued a formal notification of network disconnection across eight cities including Karachi while mobile and internet services were reported suspended in Punjab including Faisalabad, Baluchistan including Quetta and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa including Peshawar without formal notice. The suspension notification by the Government of Sindh's, Home Department stated that the suspension was being carried out on request of law enforcement agencies 'as there are apprehensions of coordination of criminal activity by miscreants/criminals through the use of Noorancellular phones/internet'.

Several regions in Pakistan saw intermittent shutdowns. For a full listing, see chapter on Internet Shutdowns.