

CLAMPDOWNS AND COURAGE: AFGHANISTAN



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



AFGHANISTAN



ROCKY ROAD TO DEMOCRACY

The war-torn country of Afghanistan remains one of the most dangerous places in the world for journalists, with an alarmingly high number of killings, attacks, threats, suicide bombings and widespread attacks that inevitably capture journalists in their wake.

April 30, 2018 was the deadliest day for journalists in Afghanistan that highlights the precarious situation of journalists in the war-torn country. Ten journalists were killed in a single day. Nine journalists, including a female journalist, lost their lives in the line of duty in capital city Kabul when a suicide bomber disguised as a journalist detonated himself among the reporters and camera crew gathered at a heavily fortified area of the city to cover an earlier suicide attack. Among those killed was AFP chief photographer Shah Marai. The Islamic State (also known as ISII or ISIL or Daesh) claimed responsibility for the horrific incident in which at least 50 other people were killed. On the same day, Ahmad Shah, a journalist with BBC Pashto service, was shot dead by unknown gunmen in Khost province. Shah, 29, was on his bicycle on his way to home when the gunmen killed him. This terrible day brought into sharp attention the condition of journalists in Afghanistan where the Taliban, and the Daesh frequently target media and journalists, in a situation where the state is unable to provide any security to them.

Since the withdrawal of the US and NATO forces in late 2014, militant groups – including the Taliban and the Islamic State (ISIS) – have become even more active around the country, including in capital Kabul, frequently targeting the media and journalists.

The National Unity Government, led by President Ashraf Ghani, nevertheless has remained in a stable position since coming to power three-and-half-years ago, but the pace of change on media safety has proved a sticking point for the industry.

While the government has repeatedly made promises and expressed its ongoing commitment to improve the security situation for media and investigate cases of murders of journalists to end impunity, it is hard to say there has been any substantial change in the situation on the ground for media workers. Afghanistan's media today remains dogged by problems on multiple fronts – namely economic, professional, safety and security - which continue to force too many journalists out of the industry and also out of the country as more journalists seek to get asylum abroad.

The continued threat of violence from various militant groups, and the state's lack of overall capacity to meaningfully improve the security situation of journalists threatens the independence and very existence of Afghanistan's media. Today, this includes 100 television and 302 FM radio stations, where approximately 12,000 journalists are employed. Afghanistan has a few hundred newspapers, 174 radio stations, 68 private TVs, 22 state-owned provincial channels (RTA) and 11 news agencies. In the period under review (May 2017 to April 2018), 12 journalists and media workers were killed, giving it the dubious distinction of being the country with the most number of journalists killed in South Asia.

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) in February, 2018 raised concerns that the Taliban had begun forcing media outlets in several provinces to pay arbitrary taxes to be allowed to continue operating. The targets included Ghaznavian, a privately-owned TV in Ghazni, Radio Killid and Radio Sama, all of whom refused to pay and sought state protection. Some media outlets reportedly paid the ransoms.

NEW CYBER CRIME LAW

On June 10, 2017, President Ashraf Ghani signed into law a bill targeting online crime and militancy amid concerns it could limit free speech. The Cyber Crime Law criminalises a range of online activities including hacking, spreading ethnic hatred, distribution of online defamatory speech, exposing government secrets and cyber-terrorism. But Media watchdog group Nai has warned that the law could have a detrimental effect on access to information and limit freedom of speech because vague wording could have multiple interpretations.

Access to the internet in Afghanistan has grown in the past decade to reach approximately 12 per cent of the population, a report by Internews in October 2017 stated.

While much of Afghanistan remains rural, over 8.5 million Afghans are using the internet in cities including Kabul, Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif. Social media penetration has followed the same course, challenging traditional media platforms and providing new platforms for public discourse. Facebook is the most popular social media platform with 95 per cent internet users using it while Instagram (10 per cent) and Twitter (6 per cent) are distant followers.

In October 2017, Afghanistan tried to block two popular internet messaging services – Telegram and WhatsApp – citing security concerns. The Afghan Telecommunications Regulatory Authority then sent a letter sent to internet service providers asking them to block the services for 20 days from November 1 on request of the security agencies.

After widespread criticism, acting minister for telecommunications, Shahzad Aryobee, posted a Facebook message claiming that the telecom regulator was merely upgrading its service with gradual blocks on the two services, citing complaints about inefficiency. “The government is committed to freedom of speech and knows that it is a basic civil right for our people,” he wrote. The announcement prompted the telecom regulator to claim the ban was needed to test and implement “a new kind of technology” to address citizens’ complaints.

Meanwhile, the revised Access to Information Act was approved by the Cabinet and will be adopted as a legislative decree. One of the major changes is the independence of the Oversight Commission on Access to Information (OCAI). Earlier, this commission had close ties with the Ministry of Information and Culture, but on the basis of the new law, a more independent commission would be set up.



Afghan media personnel stand inside a Shiite mosque after it was attacked by suicide bombers in Herat on August 2, 2017. Thirty worshippers were killed, including young children, and 64 others injured when suicide bombers throwing grenades stormed the Jawadya mosque in Herat city near the Iranian border on late August 1.

Credit: Hoshang Hashimi/AFP

AFGHANISTAN



IN THE LINE OF FIRE

Since 2000, 74 journalists and media workers have been killed in Afghanistan. In 2017 and early 2018, the majority of the journalists and media staff killed were victims of attacks on media houses or were among the casualties of large suicide attacks, claimed by the ISIS.

On May 7, 2017, Asadullah Kuhzad, a reporter for Peshkeswat newspaper who had previously worked for Radio France, was killed by unknown gunmen in a targeted attack while leaving his home in Pul-u-Khumri in Baghlan province. Kuhzad was also a civil society activist and a critic of the government.

Four media workers of the state-owned Radio and Television Afghanistan (RTA) died in Jalalabad, Nangrahar province, when its office was attacked by suicide bombers. Mohamad Amir Khan, Zinullah Khan, Abdul Latif and Ghani were killed and 17 other staff injured when the four attackers, including two suicide bombers, forced their way into the RTA station. Two of the attackers blew themselves up at the front gate, while the other two attackers entered the main building. It took the security forces more than three hours to end the assault.

On May 31, TOLO TV's Naweena, Press TV reporter Habibullah Hassanzada, Mohammad Omer Uruzgani of National Radio Television and BBC driver Mohammed Nazir were among victims of the explosion in the Zanbaq Square in Kabul, which killed at least 80 people and injured 350. Three more journalists of BBC Kabul and a reporter of TV1 channel were also injured in the gruesome attack near the office to the TV1 channel, which was forced to go off air for several hours following the attack.

On October 12, 2017, after five months of relative calm from the early spate of killings, there was an attempt to kill Shir Mohammad Jahish, the head of Tanweer TV. Despite injuries, he survived the attack but his guard lost his life. Jahish was on the way home from work when his car was attacked by unidentified gunmen near his residence in Pul-i-khumri, capital of Baghlan.

Staff were trapped inside, with some jumping out of windows and others escaping through a neighbouring building. After Afghan forces brought the situation under control, the network went back on air with an injured anchor. "

On November 7, 2017, Sayed Naqibullah, the security guard of Shamshad Television, was killed when a suicide bomber blew himself up at the network's front gate. Two other gunmen dressed as Afghan police went on to storm the TV station's offices in Kabul and climbed to the roof to fire at security personnel. Staff were trapped inside, with some jumping out of windows and others escaping through a neighbouring building. After Afghan forces brought the situation under control, the network went back on air with an injured anchor. "This is an attack on freedom of media but they cannot silence us," the station's news director Abid Ehsas said.

IN THE LINE OF FIRE

Nine days later, Husain Nazari, a cameraperson with Rah-e-Farda TV, was critically wounded in a suicide attack on a political gathering in Kabul outside the Qasr-E-Naween Hotel. He died from his injuries in hospital on November 17. His colleague, reporter Taqi Sadid was also injured in the attack. The explosion claimed the lives of 19 people, including eight policemen.

On December 28, 2017, Sayed Mehdi Hosaini, journalist with Jomhor News Agency, was among 40 people killed in the multiple blasts at a Shia cultural centre in Kabul. The blast also left 80 more people injured, including nine journalists - seven from the AVA News Agency and two from Shamshad TV.

On January 21, 2018, two journalists of RTA narrowly escaped an attack by an armed group. A vehicle carrying journalist Baz Shinwary and cameraperson Mohamad Rafiq came under attack in Batikot district of Nangrahar province when the group opened fire on the car. The driver was killed on the spot but the two journalists, who were shot on the upper part of their bodies, survived the attack.



An Afghan journalist is treated at a hospital after a suicide attack outside a wedding hall in Kabul on November 16, 2017. The blast, which killed at least nine people, was an apparent attempt to strike a political gathering under way inside. Credit: Shah Marai/AFP

ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS

On January 21, 2018, an unidentified armed group burnt down Radio Saday-e-Adalat, destroying all equipment as well as the building in capital Firuzkoh of Ghor province. As a result, the station was forced to shut down.

On June 8, 2017, Qadeer Ghafori, a journalist with Radio Azadi in Ghor province, was beaten and detained by officers of the National Directorate of Security (NDS). Ghafori was stopped by NDS staff in civilian clothes while he was returning home. The incident occurred after being asked for identification and was then taken to an NDS office in Ghor province and detained for two hours.

AFGHANISTAN



ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS

Five days later, security personnel of a private construction company assaulted Ziar Khan Yaad of TOLO News and Sabawoon Sahil of Maiwand TV for their critical reporting about the ongoing road construction in Surkhrud district of Nangrahar. They were also confined in a room for a few hours and harassed while they were on assignment to report on the delay in construction of the Nangrahar-Kabul road and late payments to the project's labourers.

On September 23, Dr Molladad Tobakar, a senior public health official in Helmand province, assaulted and abused journalist Sardar Mohammad Sarwari of Shamshad TV while he was working on a report about complaints that a local hospital did not receive its allocated budget. Dr Tobaghar refused to provide Sarwari any information regarding the hospital budget and instead threatened him via fake Facebook accounts prior to a physical assault.

THREATS TO JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA

Journalists in Afghanistan live under constant threat to their lives from the militant groups. They are also intimidated and subjected to abuse and harassment by state agencies for their questioning, reporting or attempts to film or report incidents where police or government officials are involved.

On May 25, the provincial governor of Baghlan, Abdul Hai Namati, cut off a television interview in objection to the reporters' questions. He was being interviewed for a program called 'Face to Face' on local Arezo TV. The four journalists for the interview were subsequently threatened and ordered to delete the footage. When they refused, they were blocked from leaving the governor's office premises. Ahmad Fawad Talash, Javid Saddat, Said Amin Jalali and Salam Fretat were held for two hours, only allowed to leave after intervention from media rights organisations.

On October, 2017, Ahmadullah Sarkand, the broadcast manager of Radio Killid, and Bismullah Watandust, a journalist with Radio Shyba, were detained by the provincial police, who alleged that their Facebook posts about arrested cricket player Samih Yousuf "provoked people against the government and police".

STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

Media rights organisations in Afghanistan, including the IFJ affiliate Afghan Independent Journalists Association (AIJA), continue to work to monitor and verify incidents of press freedom violations; mediate dialogues between journalists and other state or non-state actors; negotiate with militant groups in cases of threat and abduction of journalists; and advocate with the government to ensure a safe environment for journalism.

AIJA has been demanding justice for the 73 journalists and media workers killed in Afghanistan since 1994 and an end to impunity for crimes against journalists.

AFGHANISTAN



STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

The Afghan Ministry of Interior Affairs is currently investigating 172 cases of violation of journalists' rights after a committee constituted in 2015 to review 700 such cases since 2000 recommended investigation and follow-up of 427 cases. Yet, after two years of investigation, there has been no practical action for justice. The committee noted that among 427 cases of killings, attacks and abductions, in as many as 401 cases, security forces were responsible. AIJA and other media rights groups and unions are concerned that they delay of justice, will only encourage more crimes against the media.

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Media watchdog group Nai registered 190 cases of violence against journalists including killing, wounding, abducting, threatening, and intimidation of journalists and media workers in Afghanistan since 1982 as crimes against humanity or war crimes at the International Criminal Court (ICC). The Taliban, the ISIS and the Haqqani Network were named as the major perpetrators. The registered cases include 48 killings, 74 injuries, 15 abductions and 53 threats and harassment of journalists and media personnel.

The Afghan Journalists Safety Committee in its annual report, said that 2017 was the bloodiest year for journalists and media workers in Afghanistan's history with a significant increase in the violence against journalists. The Committee documented 169 cases of violence and threats against journalists in 2017, a 67 per cent increase compared to 2016.

Afghanistan is likely to hold parliamentary and district elections on October 20, 2018, after more than a three-year delay due to security threats and disagreement within the government itself. There are still doubts that the elections will be held in the wake of increased violence by the militant groups. The country is also scheduled to hold presidential and provincial council elections in 2019. During the elections, not only are the roles and responsibilities of media and journalists important for democracy, the media become vulnerable to threats and attacks from all sides. Violence against journalists is at a peak, and the media is facing challenges due to financial constraints, and high security threats due to extremism. If the Afghanistan government fails to effectively tackle the situation, democracy in the country will be endangered due to lack of independent media and critical voices. Unless firm steps are taken, by the government and media owners, the Afghan media could witness another black year.

AFGHANISTAN



ENHANCING SAFETY, REDUCING IMPUNITY STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

The Federation of Journalist and Media Institutions, which was launched as the Federation of Afghan Journalists in 2012, now has 15 affiliated membership organisations with the mandate of securing and protecting journalists and media. The Federation prepared the first draft of the 'Journalists and Media Security and Safeguarding Procedures' in December 2015 which was approved by the cabinet of the National Unity Government. Several structures were proposed, including a Coordination Committee to liaise between the Ministry of Interior and Provincial Police Headquarters, and tasked with coordinating mechanisms to enhance the security of the journalists and the media; a Committee to Support the Journalists and Media at the National Directorate of Security (NDS) and NDS in the provinces tasked with eliminating threats of terrorist groups against journalists and the media; and the Joint Committee of Media and Government to insure the implementation of abovementioned Safeguarding Procedures in the capital and all provinces.

PROSECUTING CASES

By mid-2016, these structures were in place and the activities undertaken by a sub-committee include follow up of cases of attacks on journalists, from 2001 onwards. The latest subcommittee report shows that they have reviewed around 700 cases out of which 172 cases were considered to be prosecuted. Of these, 56 cases have been completed and sent to the prosecutor's office. According to the prosecutor's report, more than 40 cases, including some cases of murder of journalists, have been completed and submitted to the courts. More than 10 lawsuits have been handed down by courts and criminal sentences have been issued against the perpetrators of cases. Based on the Subcommittee report in 60 cases which mostly were insulting of journalists, they have withdrawn their cases.

The Subcommittee's investigations showed that of the 172 cases, perpetrators in 24 cases are from the NDS; in nine cases are governors' guards; in seven cases MPs; in three cases are presidential guards; in six cases judges and prosecutors and nine cases of foreign forces. There are also three cases of Afghan journalists killed outside the country. All these cases were sent by Joint Committee of Media and Government to the related organisation for farther investigation.

Of the 172 cases, only one case was not completed due to lack of sufficient documents. Since the creation of the Joint Committee in summer 2016 to December 2017, more than 50 cases of violence have been registered with the Committee, of which 29 cases have been examined by the Subcommittee and have been submitted to justice institutions. Fourteen of these cases were completed and submitted to courts and others are under prosecution. Another 21 cases were resolved by traditional means.

AFGHANISTAN



PROSECUTING CASES

The only cases of violence against journalists and media workers that still need to be tracked are cases that have occurred since the formation of the National Unity Government in 2014 until the creation of the Joint Committee in the summer of 2016.

According to the report of the Subcommittee, these cases currently number more than 160 and investigations have recently begun.

JOURNALIST PROTECTION

Given the increasing threats against journalists and the media, one of the major efforts of the Joint Committee has been to provide security and immunity to journalists and media that face direct and indirect threats. The NDS and the Interior Ministry have taken special security arrangements to at least 10 media outlets under serious threat. Licenses had been issued for the handling and use of weapons to a number of media outlets, media directors and managers, journalists and support institutions for journalists and the media.

The Ministry of National Defence, the Ministry of the Interior and the National Directorate of Security, in cases where journalists and media workers have been exposed to dangers in insecure provinces, moved journalists to safe areas, or even neighbouring provinces and Kabul, to temporarily protect them until they returned to normal or serious risks were at least minimised. These cases included the fall of Kunduz province at the hands of the Taliban in the northeast and the Taliban's protracted invasion and Helmand province in the south, both in 2016.

Occasional conflicts between journalists and security forces during news coverage of war and incidents of terror often results in violence against journalists. To overcome this problem, a subcommittee has worked on creating guidelines for coverage of terrorist incidents and warfare. The guide's purpose is to ensure that journalists and security forces consider their competencies and responsibilities in the course of violent incidents and war fronts, and that one side does not disrupt the other's task. This is an effort in effect to prevent both sides from engaging direct action and, ultimately, to reduce the possibility of the use of violence by security forces against journalists.

FINANCIAL PROBLEMS

Several media outlets have financial debts to government-related institutions. Some media have not paid their taxes, a number of media have delayed them and face a tax penalty. A mechanism has been worked out in order to waive some of the arrears and also allow media outlets to pay pending taxes in instalments. In August, 2017, President Ashraf Ghani issued a presidential order to waive penalties on taxes to be paid by the media; and payment of due taxes in monthly instalments but this had addressed just a part of media outlets.

AFGHANISTAN



FINANCIAL PROBLEMS

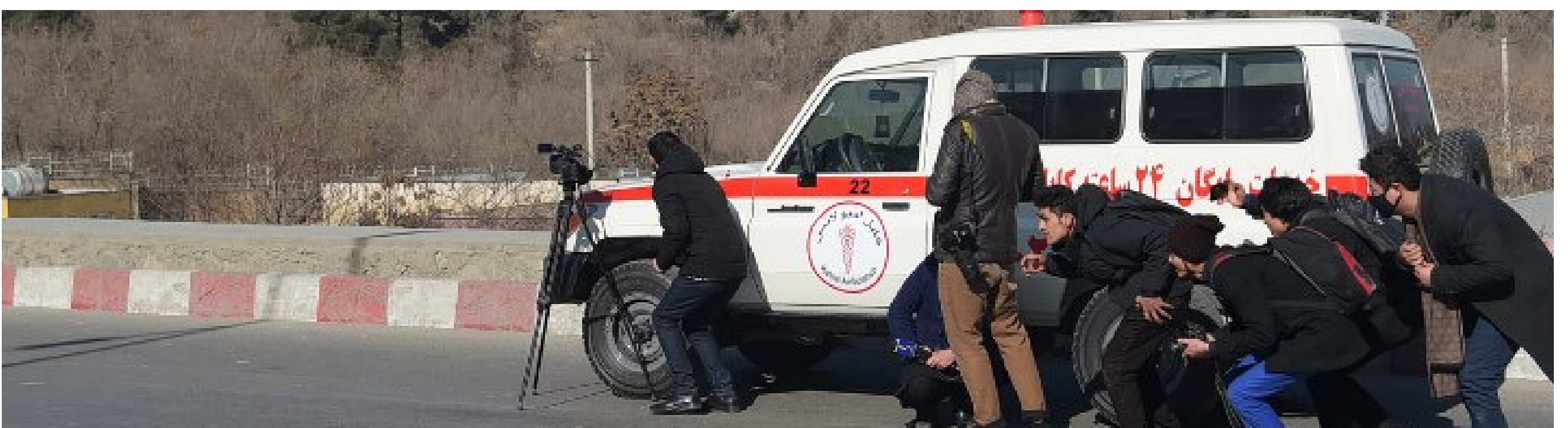
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In a meeting with president all other financial debts of media such electricity bills and fees for use of frequency and taxes of other media outlets were discussed. President ordered a subcommittee to review all these problems and come up with a package of suggestions to deal with. According to reports from the subcommittee, media outlets owe more than 600 million Afghanis (USD 8.5 million).

JOURNALIST SUPPORT FUND

About seven years ago, a structure was established under the name of the Financial Fund for Journalists, which, in order to achieve its goals, gained some financial assistance from a number of political and capital personalities, and provided part of this money as a contribution to several journalists are in need. With more journalists and media workers having lost their lives or been injured, following discussions, the Joint Committee made it possible to make procedures for using the fund more accessible and effective in order to help media workers genuinely in need. In a meeting with president he promised to help the Federation with fundraising. Now it is seeking another meeting with president to provide all prepared documents to ensure the prosperity of the fund activities and to commence fundraising.



AFGHANISTAN



MEDIA VIOLATIONS: MAY 2017 - APRIL 2018

Killings of journalists: 22 (Journalists: 15, Media staff: 7; Male: 21, Female: 1)

Threats against the lives of journalists: None recorded

Other threats to journalists: 1 (Male: 1 Female: 0)

Non-fatal attacks on journalists: 6 (Male: 6, Female: 0)

Threats against media institutions: 0 – None recorded

Attacks on media institutions: 3

Killings of Journalists

May 7, 2017: Baghlan Asadullah Kuhzad, reporter for Peshkeswat newspaper was killed by unknown gunmen in a targeted attack in Pul-u-Khumri in Baghlan province.

May 17, 2017: Nangrahar Mohamad Amir Khan, Zinullah Khan, Abdul Latif and Ghani, four media workers for the Afghan Public Radio and Television (RTA) in Jalalabad in Nangrahar province were killed in a suicide attack on the RTA. 17 other staff members were injured in the attack. Media reports said that four attackers forced their way into the RTA station at around 9:30 am. Two suicide bombers blew themselves up at the front gate and outside the main building while other attackers entered the main building. It took the security forces more than three hours to end the assault.

May 31, 2017: Kabul TOLO TV staff member Aziz Naweena, Press TV reporter Habibullah Hassanzada, Mohammad Omer Uruzgani who worked for National Radio Television and BBC Afghanistan driver in Kabul Mohammed Nazir were among victims of the explosion in the Zandab Square in Afghanistan capital, which killed at least 80 people and injured 350. Three more journalists of BBC Kabul and a reporter of TV1 channel were also injured.

November 7, 2017: Kabul Naqibullah, the security guard of Shamshad Television was killed when gunmen stormed the TV station's offices in Kabul. Naqibullah was killed as he patrolled the front gates to the building.

November 17, 2017: Kabul Husain Nazari, cameraperson with Rah-e-Farda TV was critically wounded in a suicide attack at a political gathering in Kabul on November 16 and succumbed to his injuries a day later. His colleague reporter Taqi Sadid was also injured in the attack. The explosion outside the Qasr-E-Naweena Hotel in Kabul claimed the lives of 19 people including eight policemen. Daesh (also known as ISIS) reportedly claimed responsibility for the attack.

December 28, 2017: Kabul Sayed Mehdi Hosaini, a journalist who worked for Jomhor News Agency, was among those killed in multiple blasts at a Shia cultural centre in Kabul. According to Afghan media reports, the blast claimed the lives of at least 40 people and left over 80 more injured. The so-called Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack.

January 21, 2018: Nangrahar A vehicle carrying a team from Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA) was attacked in Batikot district of Nangrahar province in eastern Afghanistan. The driver was killed while journalist Baz Shinwary and cameraperson Mohamad Rafiq were seriously injured when an armed group opened fire on their car. The driver received several bullets and died on the spot.

April 25, 2018: Kandahar Two unknown gunmen shot dead Kabul News TV journalist Abdul Manan Arghand, 31, at Yarana Market in the outskirts of Kandahar city, Afghanistan. Arghand, who had worked as a journalist for 13 years, was driving to work when the gunmen on a motorbike intercepted his car and opened fire, killing him on the spot.

April 30, 2018: Kabul Nine journalists, including a female journalist, were killed in back-to-back suicide attacks. The journalists were killed when the attacker disguised as a journalist detonated himself amid journalists gathered to cover an earlier suicide attack. Those killed were senior photojournalist Shah Marai of AFP, Tolo News cameraman Yar Mohammad Tokhi, Radio Azadi journalists Abadullah Hananzai, Moharram Durrani and Sabawoon Kakar, 1TV reporter Ghazi Rasooli and cameraman Nowroz Ali Rajabi, Mashal TV reporter Salim Talash and cameraman Ali Salimi.

April 30, 2018: Khost Unknown gunmen killed Ahmad Shah, 29, a Pashto reporter with BBC Afghan Service, in Khost, eastern Afghanistan. Two armed men on a motorcycle shot Shah dead while he was on the way to home at around 4 PM.

AFGHANISTAN



MEDIA VIOLATIONS: MAY 2017 - APRIL 2018

Non-fatal attacks on journalists

June 8, 2018: Ghor Qadeer Ghafori, a journalist for Radio Azadi in Ghor province, was beaten and detained by National Directorate of Security (NDS) officers. Ghafori was stopped by an unknown person in civilian clothes while he was returning home. He was beaten after asking for the person's identification and was then taken to one of NDS offices in Ghor province and was detained there for two hours.

June 13, 2017: Nangrahar Security personnel of a private construction company assaulted Ziar Khan Yaad of TOLO News and Sabawoon Sahil of Maiwand TV for their critical reporting about the ongoing road construction in Surkhrud district of Nangrahar province in eastern Afghanistan. They were also confined in a room for a few hours and harassed. The journalists were reporting on the delay in construction of the Nangrahar-Kabul road and late payments to the labourers.

September 23, 2017: Helmand Sardar Mohammad Sarwari of Shamshad TV was abused and assaulted by Dr. Molladad Tobakar, the head of presidency public health in Helmand province, while the journalist was working on a report about complaints that a local hospital did not receive its allocated budget. The doctor refused to provide Sarwari any information regarding the hospital budget and instead threatened him via fake Facebook accounts prior to the physical assault.

October 12, 2017: Baghlan Shir Mohammad Jahish head of Tanweer TV was on the way home from work when his car was attacked by unidentified gunmen near his residence in Pul-i-khumri, capital of Baghlan Province in north-eastern Afghanistan. Jahish's guard, Amanullah Haqiar was killed in the attack while Jahish sustained injuries on his face and body.

Other threats to journalists

May 25, 2017: Baghlan Abdul Hai Namati, provincial governor of Baghlan, cut off a television interview stating that he didn't like the questions. He was being interviewed for a program called 'Face to Face' on Arezo TV. There were four journalists present at the interview, who were subsequently threatened and ordered to delete the footage. Ahmad Fawad Talash, Javid Saddat, Said Amin Jalali and Salam Fretat were held for two hours and were only allowed to leave after intervention from media rights organisations.

Attacks on media institutions

May 17, 2017: Nangrahar Four media workers including a technician and a producer at the RTA were killed and 17 others injured when four attackers, including two suicide bombers, forced their way into the RTA station at around 9:30 am. The two suicide bombers blew themselves up at the front gate and outside the main building while other attackers entered the main building. It took the security forces more than three hours to end the assault. It was not immediately clear if RTA journalists and staff were among those injured, but many of the journalists were trapped inside the building during the attack. The station building was partly damaged in the attack.

Attacks on media institutions

November 7, 2017: Kabul Two armed men with guns, explosive materials, and suicide jackets stormed into Shamshad Television in Kabul, killing a front gate guard and injuring 22 media workers and journalists. The condition of six injured is serious. Shamshad TV's security guards engaged the attackers at the main building entrance and opened backdoor as safe exit for majority of employees. Afghan Special Forces helped the television guards killed both attackers to end the attack in less than three hours. The channel's live broadcasting resumed two hours later with presenters with injured hand describing the attack. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as ISIS) has reportedly claimed responsibility for the attack.

January 21, 2018: Ghor Unidentified armed group burnt down Radio Saday-e-Adalat destroying all equipment and the building in Firuzkoh, capital of Ghor province, central Afghanistan.

Other notable incidents / developments

Arrest/Detention

October 25, 2017: Kabul Ahmadullah Sarkand, broadcast manager of Radio Killid, and Bismullah Watandust, a journalist with Radio Shyba, were detained by the National Directorate of Security (NDS). Provincial police claimed that Watandust was detained for his Facebook post about arrested cricket player Samih Yousuf that allegedly 'provoked people against the government and police'.

Regulations

July 10, 2017: Kabul Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani signed into law a cybercrime bill targeting online crime and militancy by groups such as the Taliban and Islamic State amid concerns that it could limit free speech. The Cyber Crime Law criminalises a range of online activities including hacking, spreading ethnic hatred, distribution of online defamatory speech, exposing government secrets, and cyber-terrorism.

Internet shutdowns

November 1, 2017: Afghanistan The Afghanistan Telecommunication Regulatory Authority directed internet service providers to block Telegram and WhatsApp services. It was not fully implemented.