



## **Pressure on journalists continues to grow**

It appears that increasing attacks by the Taliban and deterioration of security in Kabul has led to greater pressure and restrictions on the media. An example of this was the incident involving two reporters of Radio Azadi and a photographer from AP who were detained by national security guards while reporting on the shooting down of a US military helicopter by the Taliban in the eastern region. The three media persons were detained for 9 days before being released without any charges.

Prosecutors for Appeal court announced last month that the murderer of Shaima Rezai (a former presenter of Tolo TV) had been identified. The accused has fled and the police are searching for him.

Many reporters have experienced that in remote areas the securities agencies do not know their own roles, responsibilities and authority. However even employees of the Presidential office of administrative affairs seem unaware of the rights of media.

The national security guards of the office of administrative affairs of the President manhandled a Pajhwok reporter on 5<sup>th</sup> of July. The reporter was briefly detained for about 20 minutes in the security room, and the pictures deleted from his camera. Another journalist (Kamran Mirhazar, chief editor of Chaie Dagh weekly) was beaten up and cross-questioned by security guards in Zanbaq intersection while taking photographs. Media Watch contacted the office of administrative affairs. Ghafoor Liwal, head of cultural affairs in the office of administrative affairs, condemned and denounced the attack, but the head of the office Farooq Wardak declined to respond and said he was not aware of the case.

Pressure on media, particularly on TV stations, is increasing leading to self-censorship by TV channels. Reacting to this the Afghan Independent Journalist Association invited all journalists to protest about the government's neglect of this issue.

**Nai study:** A new study by Nai shows that 54% of Afghan radio journalists have been intimidated for reporting on the presidential elections. In a critical time for nascent democracy in Afghanistan, journalists continue to face increasing harassment. The study showed that 70% of threats and harassment were from warlords and local government authorities, forcing journalists to exercise self-censorship.

### **1. Security organizations are getting impatient with media**

The situation of journalists has changed within the last month with new pressures from security agencies in the provinces who are attempting to prevent journalists from reporting on some issues. In Kunar three newsmen, reporters Ruhullah Anwari and Shir Shah Hamdard from Radio Azadi and Dr. Shouab, an AP photographer, were arrested while reporting on the Taliban attack on the US military helicopter. The reporters were shifted to Kabul after three days of detention and were questioned by intelligence authorities. In protest the three went on a one-day hunger strike. They were detained for 9 days before being released.

Asadullah Wafa, the Governor of Kunar said in a radio interview that the security forces who had detained the newsmen were sent from Kabul. The journalists refused to talk to Media Watch citing organizational policies and saying they feared further harassment. Media Watch however managed to speak with Razaq Mamoon (Dari editor of Radio Azadi) who said “the detention of the journalists was unconstitutional, illegal and violated the journalists’ right to freedom of speech”. He said the security forces had been suspicious that the reporters may have been in possession of a video recording of the attack on the helicopter made by the Taliban. Mamoon however said that the newsmen did not possess the recording and this had been established after investigation by the security forces as well.

Mamoon said the reporters were kept in hot weather in a narrow room without food and said that it was “deplorable that the government did not apologize for detaining them without specific charges”. The National Security consultant Zalmai Rasool for the President has promised that the issue will be investigated, but there has been no information on this so far.

### **2. Murderer of Shaima Rezai identified**

According to Pajhwok news agency, the Prosecutors for Appeal court announced after comprehensive investigation that Shaima Rezai’s murderer had been identified. According to the court, she had been shot by Shah Mahmood (a currency exchanger). Police have declared that the murderer has fled.

### **3. Pajhwok reporter manhandled by security guards**

A reporter working for Pajhwok Afghan news agency was briefly detained and threatened by security guards of a government department while he was interviewing Sidiq Afghan, a renowned mathematician who had been on hunger strike in front of a government department to protest against the government refusal to publish his books.

Media Watch talked with the Pajhwok reporter Habiburrahman Ibrahimi who said that he was arrested by guards immediately after he took photographs of placards inscribed with slogans. He was detained in a room where he was asked how he had dared to come to the office.

Dr. Dadfar Spanta, advisor to President Hamid Karzai on political and foreign affairs, condemned the misbehavior of the security officials. 'Whoever attempts to prevent journalists from working in an independent manner is hurting democracy' said Dr Spanta.

#### **4. Kamran Mir Hazaar, writer and chief editor of Chaie Dagh Weekly was beaten up by security guards**

Kamran Mir Hazaar, poet and chief editor of Chaie Dagh weekly was arrested and beaten by security agents while taking photographs of a convoy of land cruisers which were driving on the wrong side of the road in Zanbaq intersection, one of the most crowded places in the city.

Mir Hazaar told Media Watch that the security guards posted there had threatened, insulted and beaten him up. They took Kamran inside the security room and questioned him for 40 minutes. The photographs he had taken earlier were deleted from his camera, and his ID card as well his mobile phone was confiscated.

According to Kamran the security guards who detained him, subsequently threatened him saying that if he complained they would hand him over to the US forces in Bagram. (Bagram is the military base of the Coalition Forces where arrested Al Qaeda and Taliban prisoners are kept and interrogated).

Mir Hazaar claimed that initially, when they thought he was a foreign journalist, the guards treated him well. As soon as they learnt of his identity however, they started misbehaving and passing personal remarks.

#### **5. Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism sent out official letters for ensuring journalists' security**

The Minister for Information, Culture and Tourism has sent out letters to the Governors and security commanders of provinces asking them to ensure journalist's safety. Pajhwok news agency has reported that Ahmad Zia Waziri, a member of the media commission on reformation of media law confirmed that journalists were facing pressures from security agencies.

Also according to AIJA some journalists have been threatened in Kabul, Herat, Jawzjan, Kunduz, Kunar and Takhar recently by security forces. Meanwhile Media Watch contacted Fazil Sangcharaki, the Deputy Minister for Information for a copy of the letters but was unable to obtain one.

#### **6. Pro-government cleric wounded in Khost explosion**

Daud Waqfi who runs a religious program on Khost Radio with the support of the provincial reconstruction team(PRT), the civilian construction team of the US-led Coalition Forces, was wounded in a bomb explosion at his doorstep.

Media Watch could not contact Daud Waqfi as he was under treatment at a nearby in health facility of the US-led coalition forces. However Zahir Hangaar, manager of Soli Paigham Radio quoted Daud Waqfi as saying that the explosion occurred in the morning when he opened the gate to go to his office. Taliban spokesman Mufti Latifullah Hakimi claimed responsibility for the attack on the pro-government cleric.

## **7. Pressure is increasing on Tolo TV**

Increasing pressures on Media from different sections are apparent with Tolo TV facing criticism from other media including State-run media. The TV stations' decision to telecast remarks of the Taliban spokesperson Lutfullah Hakimi was criticized by the government newspaper Anis. Anis said the decision to telecast Lutfullah Hakimi's statement was tantamount to helping the Taliban.

Tolo also came in for criticism from the independent weekly Watandar which criticized Tolo for telecasting musical programs. The weekly said the musical programs being telecast by Tolo were against the culture of Afghanistan. After facing these criticisms Tolo has banned the appearance of its women presenters and has also censored telecasts with dancing.

Saad Mohseni, director of Tolo TV also confirmed that the murder of Shaima Rezai had an impact on female presenters. He said Tolo was under pressure because of its musical programs from conservatives and religious sections and that the government was pressurizing Tolo because it had telecast Lutfullah Hakimi's interview. According to the law on mass media we contacted Independent Media commission which is authorized for responding the complaints of visual and audio media.

Esmatullahi, a member of this commission based in RTA said they had so far not received any complain related to the issue.

## **8. Independent media commission**

The Independent Media Commission has issued a code of conduct for cable network operators, independent TV stations and cinemas asking independent TV channels to telecast daily calls for prayer regularly. It has also said that women presenters should wear Islamic Hejab while presenting programs and that the sections of foreign movies which are found to be contrary to Islamic morality should be censored. The commission claimed that the code of conduct was based on suggestions from people and the discussions that the media commission had with independent TV stations, cable network operators and cinemas representatives.

However no specific norm and standard is mentioned in the code of conduct explaining what is Islamic and what is non-Islamic and neither is the decision making authority clear.

Sediq Ahamdzada of Tolo TV told Media Watch that Tolo did not recognize the code of conduct passed by the media commission, because the commission was not authorized to issue orders. He further said that since no one was invited from Tolo in the meeting at

which they passed this code of conduct, Tolo was not obliged to take it into consideration.

### **9. Media commission established in JEMB**

The Joint Electoral Management Board (JEMB), an independent body set up for the conduct of Parliamentary and provincial council elections stated in a press release that a media commission had been established for the Wolesi Jirga and provincial elections consisting of five members. The national members are Huria Mosadeq- journalist and defender of human rights, Dad Mohammad Onabi- journalist and ex-president of RTA and Mohammad Aref Gharwal- journalist, writer and member of Academy of Science. John Matisonn (director of electoral media commission) and Baqer Moin (deputy director of the electoral media commission) are the international members.

This commission is responsible for monitoring coverage of the candidates' electoral campaigns by mass media, receiving complaints on unfair and unbalanced reporting, news coverage of the political campaigns and providing schemes for the funded electoral announcements as well as monitoring these to ensure equal access for all candidates.

### **10. Establishment of reforming commission on mass media law**

The Ministry of Information and Culture has set up a commission to review the law on mass media. The mass media law was formulated in an emergency situation and the articles in it are general. In the absence of details different groups have been interpreting it in different ways.

### **10. A new independent TV channel established in Kabul**

Aryana, a private TV network started telecasting from Kabul, becoming the fourth independent TV station to begin telecasting in Afghanistan. It has started its telecasts simultaneously in the cities of Mazar, Herat and Kandahar.

### **11. Country-wide Radio Manager Seminar held in Internews**

A country wide local radio manager seminar was organized by Internews at the initiative of the electoral media commission with the financial support of the Asia Foundation, hosted by Nai- Internews Afghanistan.

This four-day seminar saw the participation of managers of 29 Internews-supported local radio stations. It discussed how to give equal rights for the Wolesi Jirga and provincial candidates and providing advertising space for candidates.

The participants also discussed about the challenges that exists for the practicing of freedom of speech and some other problems that independent media facing during their work.

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For any queries or information please contact:

Farid Khoroush, Media Analyst

Internews

Kabul

[Farid.Khoroush@internews.org](mailto:Farid.Khoroush@internews.org)

[afghanmedia@internews.org](mailto:afghanmedia@internews.org)

OR

Jawid Ahmad, Media Researcher,

Mobile: +93 79340831

[jawid.ahmad@internews.org](mailto:jawid.ahmad@internews.org)

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