



Journalism Freedom Report v.12

Media Watch Afghanistan

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As days pass by, afghan journalists face more and more obstacles while performing their professional duties; reporting becomes more difficult. When the new Afghan parliament came into existence, it was expected that journalist would be treated according to the law and there would be less chances to deprive them from their professional right, but conversely, the conditions have worsened. A most extreme example is an incident where a member of parliament beat up a journalist inside the parliament hall without any provocation.

In addition to this, we have recorded other disappointing news from journalists and media outlets which are presented in detail in this newsletter. Our headlines for this month are:

- Tolo TV reporter beaten by a parliamentarian inside parliament hall while covering a parliamentary debate.
- Ayena TV reporter was beaten by guards of the vice-president in Kabul city.
- Aryana TV was stormed by violent rioters and had property torched during the May 29 riots in Kabul city.
- Mirwais Amini editor in chief of Zuwan Zuwak monthly magazine was threatened by the governor of Khost province.

On a more positive note:

- World Press Freedom day was celebrated in Kabul city.
- Afghanistan Independent Radio association established.

1. Cameraman of Tolo TV was beaten up by a member of the parliament.

On 7th May 2006, as parliament was debating the Budget for Afghanistan for the solar calendar year of 1385, Malalai Joya (representing Farah province) changed the focus of the debate by denouncing the atrocities committed by the Mujahideens, resulting in violence and physical attacks in the parliamentary hall.

Joya's opponents started throwing bottles of water at her and threatening her. As Omid Yakmanish was filming the dispute for Tolo TV, he suddenly got attacked by Khyal Mohammad Husaini, the representative of Ghazni province. "When I was filming the parliamentary debates, I was suddenly attacked by a parliamentarian and later I was forced out of the national assembly hall", said Omid Yakmanish.

Khyal Mohammad Husaini, in an interview with Media Watch, rejected the accusation of physical violence against Omid Yakmanish and said: "I only advised him not to film debates", but what Tolo TV aired showed that Khyal Mohammad had slapped Yakmanish. Salam Watandar reporter, Dauod Shah Mal, witnessed the scene and stated "Khyal Mohammad slapped Yakmanish so hard that I heard it from a 50 meter distance".

Shir Aziz Kamawal, the General Director of the National Assembly of Security Affairs, said "to put an end to the dispute, the security guards evicted the reporter from the hall for a while. After the dispute the session stopped, all parliamentarians and journalists left the hall. While there is no session, no one is allowed to enter the hall, including the journalists", he added.

After this incident, the National Assembly put increased pressure on journalists and almost 200 parliament press cards were canceled. When Media Watch investigated these pressures, a national assembly press office worker said "as the number of reporters holding parliament press cards increased, we decided to decrease them. The card issue is not related to the violence committed by Khyal Mohammad against the cameraman of Tolo TV".

The management of Tolo TV in an interview with Media Watch condemned the assault on their cameraman and called it an illegal act, breaching the law and parliamentary regulations. They added that they formally addressed this concern to the Attorney General Office and the Media Commission for Investigating Media Related Offences, and that they will follow up the case judicially. According to them, no action against Khyal Mohammad Husaini has been taken by the Attorney General Office so far.

On 9th May, 2006 The Afghanistan National Journalists Association (ANJA) also condemned the action of the parliamentarian in a gathering held in the International Press Center with the participation of a number of journalists. Ahmad Ghaus Zalmi, director of ANJA, said the reporters should unite to better perform their jobs, and added "if we are not like a single body when we were slapped today, we will be kicked tomorrow and our problem will increase day by day".

On 12th of May, 2006 a number of journalists in front of the Human Rights Regional office in Balkh province in a gathering condemned this event and called for more investigation on this issue.

2. Ayna TV reporters beaten up by vice-president security officers belonging to the 10th national security department of Kabul:

A three-member crew of the independent Ayna TV was physically beaten by vice-president security officers belonging to the 10th national security department of Kabul, on the 27th of May 2006 in Kabul city.

Nasir Ahmadi, one of the reporters who got his hand broken, told Media Watch “on Saturday, when we were on our way from our office in Wazir Akbar Khan to the Parliament to cover the session, as we got close to Uzma palace, the road was blocked to let the second vice-president convoy pass, vehicles were later allowed to go through, but the Ayna TV car was stopped by the security guards. When the security realized that we were working for Ayna TV, they started arguing with us and beating us, and they broke my hand”. During this dispute, Bashir Asem, the cameraman, and Rafee Osooq, the other reporter of Ayna TV, were also injured.

Hamayoun Khairi, the head of Ayna TV, condemned the incident in a conference, saying it was a shameful action and asked for further investigation of this issue.

One of the national security officers, who asked for his identity to remain confidential, told Media Watch “on the 27th of May, as the convoy of the second vice-president of Afghanistan was passing, it was filmed by the reporter of Ayna crew. This is a prohibited act and our security prevented them from filming. Our security officers have not broken the hand of Naser Ahmadi”, he added, “he has wrapped his hand to make people believe it is broken”.

On the 28th of May, 2006, in a session which was held by Ayna TV in Maiwand Hall with a number of journalists, the heads of Journalists Associations and the lecturers of the journalism faculty condemned the act of the security guards and called for more investigation. Dr Esmatullahi, a lecturer of the journalism faculty said “this was not the first time and will not be the last, since media outlets have started their work in the country, they have faced various problems”.

Esmatullahi proposed two options to prevent violence against journalists. The first is to issue statements addressed separately to the President of Afghanistan, the National Assembly and judicial organs, and to publicize them via media outlets. The second is to revise the media law to ensure the safety of journalists.

Ahmad Ghaus Zalmai, director of the Afghanistan National Journalists Association, asked in his speech for the security organs to inform their personnel on journalists’ rights and teach them how to behave with journalists.

Sediq Afghan, the head of the International Center for Mathematical Philosophy, was also invited to this gathering. In his speech, he announced that he would start a hunger strike for 24 hours in order to draw the attention of the authorities to this issue and so that such incident will not take place in the future.

3. Mirwais Amini, chief editor of the Zuwan Zuwak monthly magazine, was threatened by the governor of Khost province:

Mirwias Amini, chief editor of the Zuwan Zuwak monthly in Khost, told Media Watch in the beginning of his interview “a suspect was arrested by the security in charge. His face was blackened and he was shown to the people around the city as an example. He was hit with rotten fruits and tomatoes, insulted and humiliated by the people.”

Mirwais added “I considered this action contrary to the Afghan constitution and other effective laws in the country, so I sent out one of our magazine reporter to the police department to cover the story. The person in charge of the police department told our reporter that they had done this following the order of the Khost governor, Merajuddin Patan. I later went to the governors house for an interview. The Governor accepted to be interview without making any trouble”.

Mirwais recounted his interview with the Govenor: “I asked him “*according to which law have you ordered to blacken the face of the suspect?*” He said: “*We do this according to the region traditions and customs.*” My second question was: “*According to the article 25th of the Afghanistan Constitution, an accused is considered innocent until convicted by a final decision of an authorized court. Don’t you think you have violated this article of the Law?*” The governor suddenly started insulting and threatening me. The Govenor said “*if you air this, we will charge you for complicity with this suspect and we will put you in jail*”.”

Media Watch interviewed the governor of Khost, Paten, about this issue over the phone. The governor said that a few moths ago, they blackened the face of a man accused of child rape and showed him to the public to make an example for others. Patan said that they have only done this one time. The governor stated he believed Mirwais was involved with “robbers and thieves” and said “I did not threaten him with jail”.

The governor added that the reporter was only a reporter by name, and that he did not actually have a good personality. Patan said “I have spent 25 years in America, I know the ground rules for democracy and liberalism, and I have always supported media outlets financially and encouraged them; I would never do anything to limit the activity of the media outlets in Khost province.”

3. Aryana TV under attack in the Kabul riots:

On 29th May 2006, the private TV station Aryana suffered great financial loss in the riot after the fatal traffic crash involving a US army truck in Sara-e-Shamali. According to Abdul Ghani Modaqiq, one of the Aryana TV managers, the damages amount to about 500,000 USD.

According to Modaqiq and staff from the neighbouring Internews office, the protestors set fire to four new vehicles which were parked in front of the TV station, while another one of their vehicles was seriously damaged in the area of Sara-e-Shamali, and one of their cameraman was beaten up and had his camera broken. The security stand wall which was in front of the Aryana TV was also destroyed by the protestors, as they tried to storm the building.

Abdul Ghani Modaqiq accuses national security agencies of not performing their job on time. He states “when the angry mob stormed the station, we repeatedly called the

security agencies for help in our station broadcast, but security agencies like the police and National Forces didn't help us and the protestors looted and destroyed the property of our station. When the angry mob wanted to force their way into our offices, they were pushed back by the personnel of the TV station."

Aryanna TV continued to broadcast live while under attack, showing the riots to Afghans across the nation.

The office of the spokesperson of the interior ministry accepted there were delays on the part of the security agencies in getting to the area. He said the reason was the problems encountered on the way to Aryana TV.

A majority of experts and governmental authorities confirmed that the security agencies did not fulfill their duty properly in the 29th of March.

Protestors have set fire and destroyed several governmental and non-governmental organizations' buildings and properties, as well as stores, shops, restaurants, hotels and some other private and public properties. Over 18 civilians died in the event.

5. Ten Afghan journalists awarded on World Press Freedom day:

On the 3rd May, 2006, World Press Freedom Day was celebrated with the sponsorship of Nai - *Supporting Afghanistan Open Media*, Internews Network, Internews Europe, UNESCO, USAID, UNDP and the EC in the Carwan Sarae Guest house in Kabul.

The Acting Minister of Information and Youth, Saeed Makhdom Raheen, in his remarks said media has achieved a great deal in the last four years, and the momentum should be kept up. Carlotta Gall of the New York Times said despite the fact that many reporters have difficulties in accessing information, they should try their best to provide accurate, effective and interesting reports.

Attending the celebration were the Acting Minister for Information, Culture, Tourism and Youth, Deputy Ministers, and almost 200 journalists from foreign and national media.

"On World Press Freedom Day, let us recognize that national and global media not only report on improvements, but is itself agents of improvements. We should all be grateful for the work and imagination of the press. I trust old and new media alike will be able to continue their work, unencumbered by threats, fear or other constraint", said the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, in a statement read UNDP Media Relations Dominic Medley.

Reporters Noorullah Noori, from Bakhtar Information Agency in Qandahar province, Habibullah Ebrahimi, from Pajhwok Afghan News in Kabul, and Ajmal Khaliqyar, from Radio Salam Watandar in Herat, gave testimonials of their reporting experiences.

The event ended with the awards ceremony in which 10 Afghan journalists were given USD100, and appreciation letters as follow:

1. Ezatullah Zawab – Pajhwok Afghan News Agency
2. Ajmal Khaliqyar – Salaam Watandar National radio program

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