



VIOLENCE, JOURNALISM and ELECTIONS

An overview of threats
against media in run up
to Elections 2018

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Foreword

The threats to media have taken many shapes and forms throughout our history, and yet, these elections have brought along a fresh wave of challenges. From attacks on journalists to attacks on business freedoms of media houses resulting in financial and commercial repercussions, from organized hate speech against journalists to the use of cybercrime and other laws to initiate legal action, the press in Pakistan seems to be operating in a very restrictive situation indeed.

The reasons for this situation are many.

The impunity that has existed for two decades now, has enabled and emboldened enemies of press freedom. The inability of the governments to stand by the media and the blame-the-victim approach has left the industry isolated. The media itself, due to large commercial and some political reasons has failed to stand ground as a united force and the fractures within the industry have weakened it and made it further vulnerable to negative actors.

And then, there is the 'establishment'. The term establishment is etched in the consciousness of every Pakistani as a force that eventually has a stake in the electoral process. The establishment thus becomes a much-discussed phenomenon in the run-up to elections. General elections 2018 are no different. All across the media, in political discussions elsewhere, the rift between the establishment and political institutions is a favorite topic of discussion. Often times this rift is blamed for the threats to journalistic freedoms in the country.

However, it is important to note that the threats to freedom of expression, in particular, journalistic freedoms are not unique to the election scenario. They are not isolated to areas in which this rift would or should have a direct impact. These threats are generalized, various and increasing.

This report is a simple documentation of the threats and attacks that have been directed at the media industry and practitioners in the few months before elections. Our work with journalist safety data has shown us that 2007 and 2012, the two years before the previous general elections were exceptionally bloody for journalists. This time, we have noticed the scale of the threats increasing and changing in nature.

This report deliberately limits itself to documenting and not analyzing the situation for, at this point, we feel that an unbiased archiving of the situation, as it is now, is important.



Sadaf Khan

Co Founder / Director

Media Matters for Democracy

July 2018

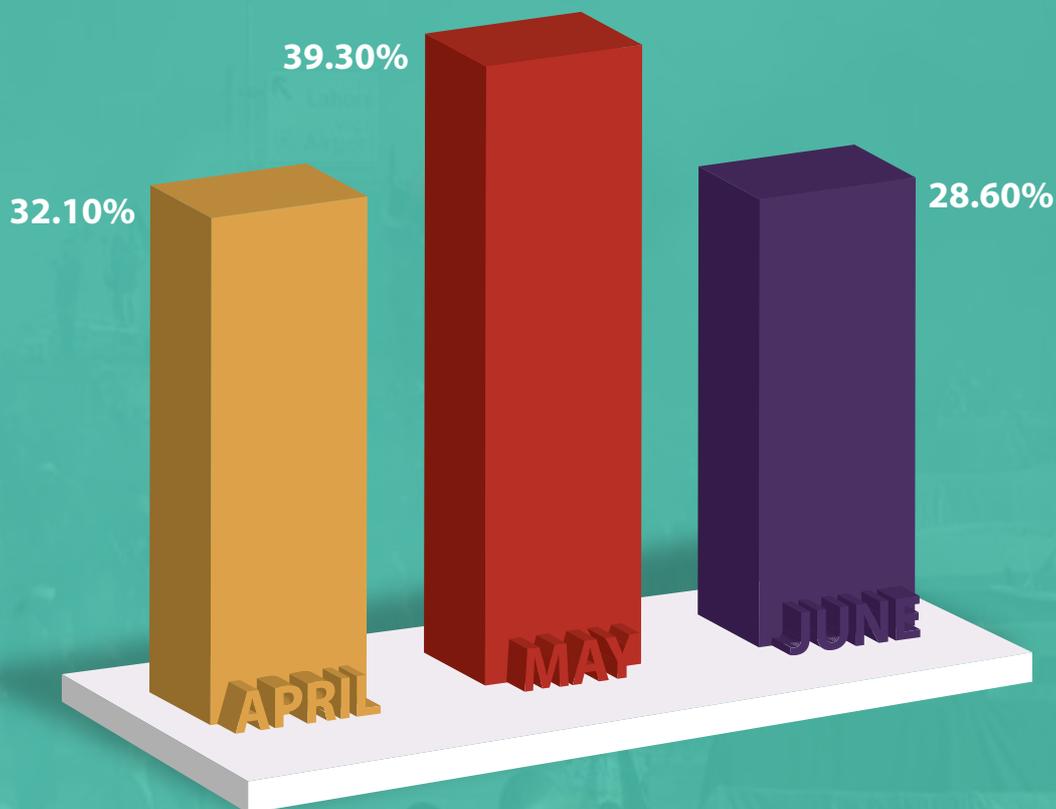
Violence, Journalism and Elections

An overview of threats against media in run up to Elections 2018

Pakistan has never been an easy country to practice journalism. Reporters without Borders¹ ranked it 139 out of 180 in the 2018 World Press Freedom Index. Deadly attacks against journalists continue to take place every year. According to Freedom Network Press Freedom Barometer 2018², over 150 cases of attacks and violence against journalists have been reported over the past year (May 01 2017 to April 01 2018). As the country moves towards General Elections 2018, the need to ensure press freedoms is vital. A free press is directly linked to the transparency and accountability of the electoral process.

Media Matters for Democracy conducted a desk research collecting data on reported cases of violent attacks and threats against the journalist community. Data has been gathered from April 01 2018 to June 30 2018, documenting the cases of violence against media and to curb the freedom of press. In the past three months, 28 cases of violence have been reported against journalists and press freedom in Pakistan. The violations reported include cases of physical attacks, abductions, acts of intimidation, censorship and legal actions have been documented targeting the media.

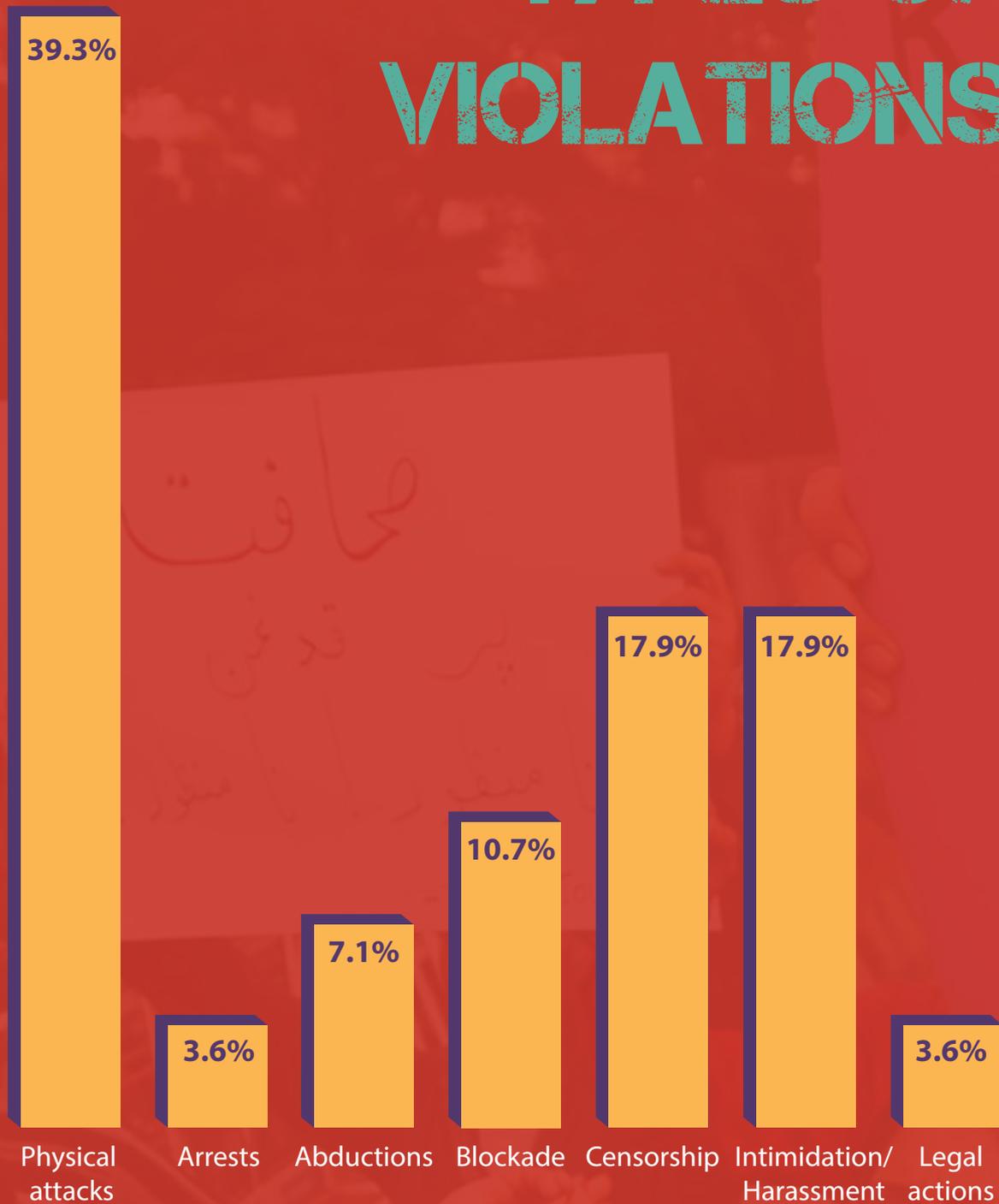
9 cases of violations have been reported in the month of April, 11 in May and 8 cases in June 2018.



01 <https://dailytimes.com.pk/222461/geo-tv-off-air-in-various-parts-of-punjab/>

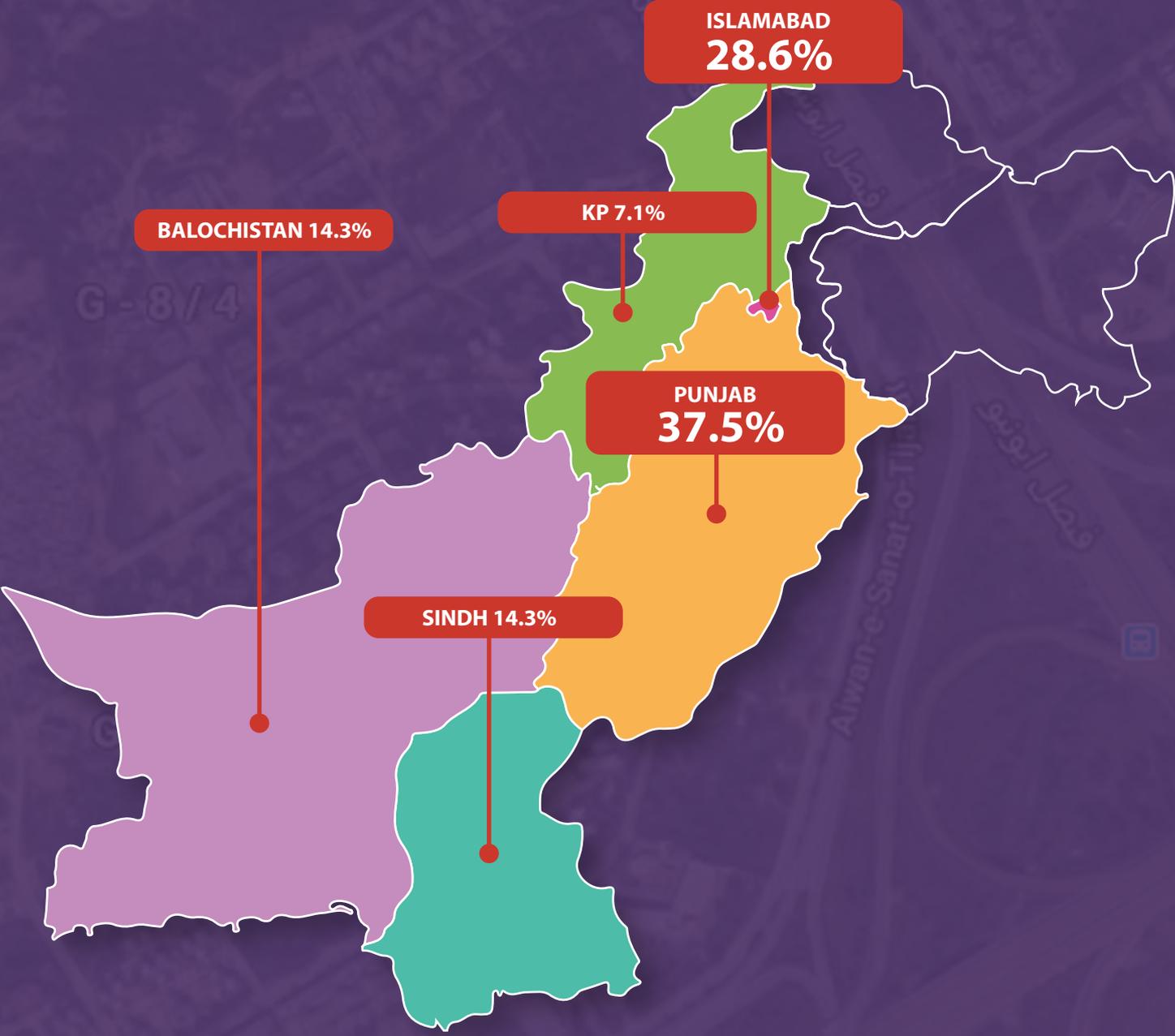
02 <http://www.fnpc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/FN-Chronicles-of-Shame-PDF-Version.pdf>

TYPES OF VIOLATIONS



28 cases of violations have been documented in the past three months (April-June). These cases of violations against media and journalists include 11 cases of physical attacks, 1 arrest, 2 cases of abductions, 3 cases of ban/block, 5 cases of censorship, 5 cases of harassment/intimidation and 1 case of legal action.

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF INCIDENTS



TIMELINE OF ATTACKS

APRIL 2018



Geo TV channel went off-air in various parts of Punjab as journalists and users over the Social Media platforms protest against the channel's black-out from the cable and demand its recovery. The network's five channels have reportedly been suspended illegally by cable operators in some areas of major cities, such as Karachi, Lahore, and Multan, since March 30.

However, PEMRA has ordered restoration of all Geo TV channels on their actual position within 24 hours, according to a press statement by the regulatory body issued on 02 April.³



Raza Ahmad Rumi 
@Razarumi



It is unfair, undemocratic and plain illegal to close down a TV channel. But it's happening with #GeoNews - reportedly cable operators have been asked to comply. Whoever is doing this is only harming Pakistan & public interest. Will other media houses stand up and resist?

9:04 PM - Apr 1, 2018



297  209 people are talking about this



ISLAMABAD

Unidentified persons attempted to break into Geo News anchorperson Saleem Safi's home in the afternoon. When a guard, Suhbat Khan, deployed at Safi's home in Islamabad stopped the two armed motorcyclists from entering the anchorperson's house they attacked him with a brick and sharp-edged weapon.

The attack was reported to Shalimar Police Station. Investigations into the incident are underway, said the SHO.⁴



PUNJAB

The Rawalpindi-Islamabad Union of Journalists (RIUJ) condemned the illegal arrest of senior reporter Malik Abdul Jabbar of Capital TV and called for his immediate release.

The union said in a statement that Jabbar was picked up from his home in Wah Cantt by Sialkot Police. It did not say anything about the charges against the journalist.

Afzal Butt, President of Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), and Mubarak Zeb Khan, who heads RIUJ, has called on the interior minister to order the journalists release and take notice of this illegal police action.⁵



04 <https://dailytimes.com.pk/222461/geo-tv-off-air-in-various-parts-of-punjab/>

05 <https://www.geo.tv/latest/189501-unknown-persons-attempt-to-enter-geo-anchorperson-saleem-safis-house-injure-guard>



PUNJAB

RIUJ strongly condemned the harassment committed against The News reporter, Khalid Iqbal. Khalid was heading home in Rawalpindi when he has been harassed on the gunpoint by 4 men on the motorcycles.⁶

TAXILA

A court sentenced a journalist to one year jail and fined Rs. 50,000 for publishing defamatory news against three people, including one former bureaucrat.

Meer Asim Mehmood, the editor of an Urdu newspaper, had published a report in May 2015 over alleged tampering of land record and illegal occupation of land by three people. Meer Asim was jailed after the three people filed a petition in court against him.⁷

BALOCHISTAN

Asad Khan Betini alleged that he was beaten up by a group of people at the behest of provincial Agriculture Minister Jaffar Khan Mandokhail because the latter wanted him to stop writing on corruption.

The journalist, who works for a private television channel, said he had been receiving threats for the last couple of months, but added that he could not stop writing against corruption. Mr. Betini said he was taken to the district hospital in Zhob where doctors treated him for his injuries and later referred him to the hospital in Quetta.⁸



06 <https://e.jang.com.pk/04-06-2018/pindi/pic.asp?picname=412.png>

07 https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailNews.php?StoryText=06_04_2018_153_003

08 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1400490>

DETAINED



SHEIKHUPURA

A Dawn News TV reporter who had gone to cover the alleged use of substandard materials in a sewerage project in Sheikhupura was allegedly subjected to torture and illegally detained in an office by a local general councillor.

A first information report of the incident has been registered, but police have yet to arrest any suspects.⁹



Geo Television and several other channels on Tuesday muted parts of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's speech at a seminar in Islamabad to comply with a Lahore High Court order.

The court on Monday directed electronic media regulator PEMRA to enforce its regulations to prevent the airing of anti-judiciary content by Sharif and his daughter Maryam Nawaz and decide on all complaints against them within 15 days.¹⁰



 **Syed Talat Hussain** 
@TalatHussain12 

Geo and other channels mute parts (in fact half of it) of Nawaz's speech. This sums up the state of media in Pakistan now— and months ahead. This is censorship without regret, remorse or apology.

7:12 PM - Apr 17, 2018

 2,769  1,809 people are talking about this

09 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1401173/local-councillor-accused-of-torturing-detaining-dawnnews-reporter-in-sheikhupura>

10 <http://www.journalismpakistan.com/geo-others-mute-parts-of-nawaz-sharifs-speech>



ISLAMABAD

The News had not published his column after he refused to make changes suggested by the editorial staff.

According to Talat, who hosts the program Naya Pakistan on Geo News, his article was about, among other things, a thickening web of systematic censorship and manipulation in Pakistan.”

Talat also posted his rejected column along with his tweet.¹¹



MAY 2018



RAWALPINDI

Irshad Qureshi, a reporter for Geo News narrowly escaped when two gunmen opened firing at him as he reached near his home at Bhabhra Bazar from office Monday late night. The police reached the scene and cordoned off the area but couldn't trace the shooters. Qureshi told this correspondent that two gunmen intercepted him with a gun fire when he entered in his street. He rushed to his home but they followed him and kept shooting. He, however, entered his house and saved his life.¹²

11 <https://twitter.com/talathussain12/status/990660877992022016?lang=en>

12 <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/311326-geo-reported-escapes-gun-attack>



ISLAMABAD

Last month, several regular English-language columnists were informed by editors that their columns would not be published.

For the first time in the 10 years he has written for The News, Mosharraf Zaidi's article was not published by the newspaper.¹³



For the first time in over a decade, @thenews_intl has refused to publish my column.

This unnecessary muzzling of debate is not healthy.

Strong nations cultivate robust debate. Weak ones fear it.

Pakistan is stronger than it is being allowed to be.



ISLAMABAD

Islamabad Police on Thursday used force to stop the protesting journalists from marching towards parliament.

The journalists belonging to local and foreign media outlets were participating in a rally to mark the World Press Freedom Day. According to media reports, the police stopped the rally at D-Chowk, which was followed by a "clash" between the police and journalists. The journalists were marching towards the parliament to present their charter of demands.¹⁴

13 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1405304>

14 <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2018/05/03/islamabad-police-thrash-journalists-on-press-freedom-day/>



QUETTA

Haalhawal.com, an online Urdu newspaper launched in Quetta in 2016, has abruptly become inaccessible.

Publisher and Editor Shabbir Rakhshani told JournalismPakistan.com that the website was blocked, reportedly by the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority three days ago. Users trying to access the website get to see the following message: "This website is not accessible. The site you are trying to access contains content that is prohibited for viewership from within Pakistan."¹⁵



KUMB (DISTRICT KHAIRPUR)

Two journalist brothers Himat Ali and Ali Madad Timrani were attacked by armed men with sticks and bricks. Ali Madad Timrani was badly injured. He was then admitted to Tehsil Hospital.¹⁶

15 <http://www.journalismpakistan.com/online-newspaper-haalhawal-blocked>

16 https://www.express.com.pk/epaper/PoPupwindow.aspx?newsID=1105289922&Issue=NP_SUK&Date=20180508



BAHAWALNAGAR

Members of the local press club on Tuesday staged a protest rally against a policeman for allegedly thrashing a journalist and holding him hostage.

The journalists demanded that District Police Officer Attaur Rahman should take action against Saddar police ASI Ismail Mohal for beating up their colleague and taking him hostage. They threatened larger protests if their demand was not met.¹⁷

MARDAN

Mohammad Riaz Mayar, general secretary of Mardan Press Club, told the media that he dropped his children at their school and was coming to the Press Club when a white double-cabin vehicle (No BD-8422-Peshawar) stopped in front of his car on Mardan-Malakand road near The Punjab Regiment Centre.

He added that two unidentified people, one speaking Pashto and the other Urdu, came to him and said the vehicle was of an ISI colonel. The journalist said that for more than 15 minutes, the two men harassed and abused him on the road. He said that when he asked the name of the colonel, they refused to disclose the name.¹⁸

QUETTA

VOA Journalist tortured by hospital guards in Quetta. He was reporting on a job scandal at the hospital according to the news report.¹⁹

17 https://epaper.dawn.com/print-textview.php?StoryImage=11_04_2018_178_007

18 <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/317046-mardan-journalist-complains-of-harassment>

19 <http://www.bexpress.com.pk/2018/05/journalist-protests-torture-against-colleague-by-hospital-security-guards-in-quetta/>



BALOCHISTAN

A local English Daily, Dawn, has reportedly “vanished” from the circulation in certain areas of Balochistan, locals claimed.

According to reports, the distributors informed the locals that they were “told not to distribute the newspaper because it ran Nawaz’s controversial statement and was ‘pro-Nawaz’”.²⁰



ISLAMABAD

The inside story of Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi’s news conference has revealed that the data of his speech was deleted from PTV record while the whole process took place in the supervision of Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb.²¹

The news conference was held after the meeting of National Security Committee (NSC) following the controversial remarks of PML-N supreme leader Nawaz Sharif about the 2008 Mumbai attacks. PM also met Sharif prior to the conference.

20 <https://gulfnnews.com/news/asia/pakistan/watchdog-condemns-disruption-in-distribution-of-pakistan-s-dawn-newspaper-1.2224077>

21 <https://dunyanews.tv/en/Pakistan/439657-PM-Abbasi-news-conference-data-deleted-PTV-record>



PESHAWAR

The main roads leading to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly building turned into a battlefield after JUI-F workers, who were protesting against the merger of FATA with KP, clashed with police.

Several policemen, media persons and protestors sustained injuries during clashes with the police as JUI-F workers besieged the Assembly building.²²

JUNE 2018



KARACHI



The Awami Workers Party (AWP) condemned the armed attack on the office of Vash TV channel in Karachi.

In a joint statement, AWP senior vice-President Yousufmasti Khan, general secretary Akhtar Hussain Advocate and spokesperson Farooq Tariq expressed deep concerns at frequent attacks on the Balochi language channel 'Vaash' by armed men and termed it an attempt to silence the voices of dissent.²³

22 https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailNews.php?StoryText=28_05_2018_007_005

23 <https://www.pakistanpressfoundation.org/awp-condemns-attack-on-private-tv-channel-office/>



Media Matters for Democracy expresses grave concern on the blocking of Awami Worker's Party official website weeks ahead of General Elections 2018 and condemns this attempt to disrupt the communications of a political party.

The website was blocked on June 3rd, 2018 and independent tests using tools by Open Observatory of Network Interference [OONI] confirmed that it was inaccessible.²⁴



ACCESS
DENIED

24 <http://mediamatters.pk/we-condemn-the-blocking-of-access-to-the-awami-workers-partys-website-weeks-ahead-of-general-elections-2018-and-call-upon-relevant-authorities-including-the-election-commission-of-pakistan-to-take/>



LAHORE

According to sources, Bukhari was on her way to the Waqt TV studio on the Fatimah Jinnah Road (Queen's Road) for a talk show when the vehicle she was travelling in was intercepted by unknown persons. She was subsequently abducted on Sherpao Bridge in Lahore's Cantonment area. Her family had reported her missing to the police.²⁵



LAHORE

Broadcast journalist Asad Kharal was beaten by masked men in Lahore on Tuesday, police said.

SP Bilal Zaffar Cantonment Division confirmed the attack on Bol TV anchor Kharal, whose car was intercepted by masked men who physically assaulted him.²⁶



25 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1412220>
26 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1412385>



LAHORE

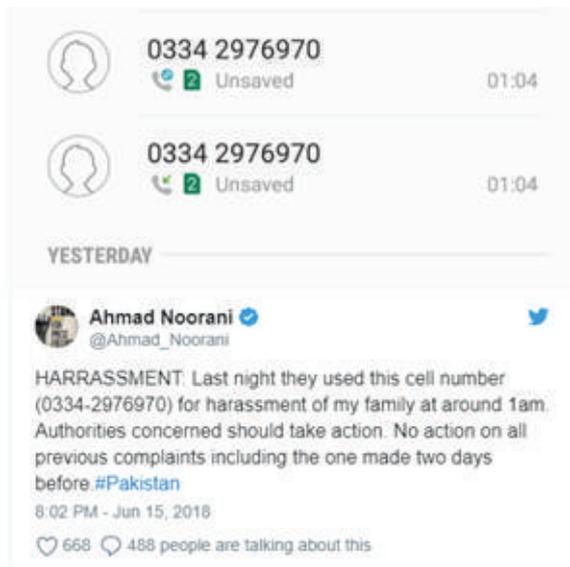
Colleagues of a senior journalist have reported of his disappearance here in Lahore after work hours late Friday night.

Owner and editor of daily Mubasreen’s Gulzar Chaudhry’s co-workers have alleged that he remains unreachable as of filing of this report. Some of his colleagues in the media industry believe that his disappearance can be a part of campaign against the journalists.²⁷



LAHORE

A case of harassment was reported by journalist Ahmad Noorani in his tweet. “Last night they used this cell number (0334-2976970) for harassment of my family at around 1am. Authorities concerned should take action. No action on all previous complaints including the one made two days before.”²⁸



27 <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2018/06/09/journalist-disappeared-after-his-office-time/>
28 https://twitter.com/Ahmad_Noorani/status/1007639446387380225



ISLAMABAD

Journalist and activist Marvi Sirmed's laptops and other valuables have been burgled from her home in Islamabad, her husband reported on Thursday.

Manzoor Sirmed reported on Twitter that the family had found their home ransacked upon returning from Lahore after Eid. He said that laptops and other valuables present in the house were taken away.²⁹



Raza Ahmad Rumi @Razarumi

Extremely disturbing. @dailytimespak correspondent & staff writer @marvisirmed's home in #Islamabad was ransacked while she & her hubby @sirmedmanzoor were away for Eid holidays. Everything scanned but only laptops, 1 smartphone & travel docs taken by the 'thieves'. #ruleoflaw

1:35 AM - Jun 22, 2018

634 918 people are talking about this



LAHORE

Chinese journalist of Daily Pakistan was sexually harassed by the Punjab police on June 28. The incident occurred near Packages Mall between 3:00-4:00 pm, while she was walking towards her residence.

According to Fanli Meng – Chinese correspondent of Daily Pakistan – her Careem driver dropped her near Packages Mall. She was alone and walking towards her home when an Elite Police Force (EPF) van stopped near her and asked her to hop in. There were two members of EPF sitting in the van – driver, and passenger. Unaware of Pakistan's laws, Ms. Meng obliged and hopped on to the passenger seat.³⁰

29 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1415427>

30 <https://en.dailypakistan.com.pk/pakistan/chinese-journalist-of-daily-pakistan-sexually-harassed-by-punjab-police/>

About Media Matters for Democracy

Media Matters for Democracy works to defend the freedom of expression, media, Internet, and communications in Pakistan. The main premise of our work is to push for a truly independent and inclusive media and cyberspace where the citizens in general, and journalists in specific, can exercise their fundamental rights and professional duties safely and without the fear of persecution or physical harm.

We undertake various initiatives including but not limited to training, policy research, advocacy, movement building and strategic litigation to further our organizational goals. We also work on acceptance and integration of digital media and journalism technologies and towards creating sustainable 'media-tech' initiatives in the country.

MMfD recognises diversity and inclusion as a core value of democracy and thus all our programs have a strong focus on fostering values and skills that enable and empower women, minority communities, and other marginalized groups.

Our Digital Rights Monitor initiative provides an alternative source of news reporting on Pakistan's state of digital rights. You can visit mediamatters.pk and digitalrightsmonitor.pk for more details.

 [mmfd_pak](https://twitter.com/mmfd_pak)
 [mediamattersfordemocracy](https://www.facebook.com/mediamattersfordemocracy)
 digitalrightsmonitor.pk

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