

## Scenario 154

### MEDIA KILLINGS ALL OVER [2013-16]

#### CPJ's REPORT OF 2012-13:

'Committee to Protect Journalists' [CPJ]'s Robert Mahoney once identified the 10 countries where press freedom suffered the most in 2012. They included Syria, the world's deadliest country for the press; Russia, where repressive laws took effect; Brazil, where journalist murders soared; and Ethiopia, where terror laws were used to silence the press – then there was Pakistan, of course.

Thus Pakistan was the world's fifth deadliest nation for the press since 1992, CPJ research told. About 60 percent of the fatalities were targeted murders, with the rest coming during dangerous assignments.

With at least seven journalists killed in 2012, that was why the country was ranked one of the world's deadliest for the press. The strangest attack was of 27<sup>th</sup> August 2012; occurred in Gulshan e Iqbal Karachi, Zainul Abedin, Editor of *the News*, was beaten up by four men outside his home for watching TV and listening to music. The assailants who attacked the journalist were members of some extremist group – but could not be identified.

On 1<sup>st</sup> March 2013; unknown gunmen killed Mehmood Jan Afridi while he was headed to a local press club from his home in the city of Kalat. Afridi had worked for the Urdu-language print and online *The Daily Intekhab* for 20 years he was the head of the Kalat Press Club. It was not clear if Afridi had published any controversial stories before his death, but his colleague Sajidi said that he had often covered politics and crime and operated under the same pressures faced by other journalists in Balochistan.

Journalists in Balochistan were working in a dangerous climate, under pressure to report in line with the views of several elements, including pro-Taliban groups, security forces, Baloch separatists and anti-separatist militant groups. Afridi's colleagues told he had received threatening calls from a Baloch nationalist group. The CPJ held:

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*"The level of violence against journalists in Pakistan remains alarming. Authorities must work to reverse this trend and identify the motive behind the murder of Mehmood Jan Afridi. The perpetrators of this crime should be apprehended immediately."*

Two days ago, on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2013, senior journalist Malik Mumtaz was gunned down in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas along the border line with Afghanistan. At least three other Pakistani journalists had been killed in 2013, all of them at the site of a twin explosion in Quetta on 10<sup>th</sup> January the same year.

On 18<sup>th</sup> March 2013—Pakistan's interim government announced that they had apprehended a militant who was allegedly involved in the 2002 murder of WSJ reporter Daniel Pearl in Karachi. The fact remained that the killer might have been in the Police custody since months or years but the PPP government could not show guts to declare him arrested. Just after two days of the PPP's departure, the announcement appeared.

On 24<sup>th</sup> March 2013; Haji Razzaq Baloch was kidnapped when he was leaving his friend's house in the Lyari neighbourhood of Karachi. Razzaq was working as a copy editor for the news desk of the Urdu-language pro-Baloch nationalist newspaper *Daily Tawar*. He was also a member of the Baloch National Movement, a nationalist political organization. The paper was known for its coverage of the many conflicts between rival groups and the government.

Razzaq worked for the *Daily Tawar* since 2009, but left the newspaper after Rind's murder in 2011 – but again resumed his work at the paper in December 2012. *His dead body was found there in Karachi on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2013.*

On 10<sup>th</sup> May 2013; just a day before the general elections in Pakistan expelled NYT bureau chief *Declan Walsh* from the country; reasons not told. However, the paper claimed that:

*".....expulsion of Declan Walsh shows just how much the authorities fear independent media coverage. The vagueness and the late night delivery of the expulsion order smack of a need to intimidate foreign and local journalists on the eve of historic elections that could herald the growth of democracy in Pakistan.*

*Instead, Walsh's expulsion only mars the event, and undercuts hopes for a free press."*

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On 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2013-- the Committee to Protect Journalists [CPJ] calls on the incoming PML[N] government of Pakistan to urgently address the issue of violence against the press by bringing perpetrators of past crimes to justice. The report held:

*"Pakistan has one of the world's worst records of prosecuting anti-press violence, with authorities failing to convict a single suspect in 23 journalist murders over the past decade.*

*The situation is dire as journalists are targeted not only by militants, criminals, and warlords, but also by political and military operatives. These threats have gone completely unpunished over the past decade and have made the country one of the deadliest in the world for the press."*

The report, written by an independent journalist Elizabeth Rubin, exposed the intricate web of manipulation, intimidation, retribution, and impunity that led to a significant rise in journalist murders over the past five years. Criminal elements of political parties threatened and attacked the news media without fear of punishment.

The body expected that the newly elected government led by Nawaz Sharif got an opportunity to stem the murderous silencing of the press by implementing security mechanisms for the media and delivering justice in the said killings.

The report examined the targeted killings of journalists Wali Khan Babar in Karachi and Mukarram Khan Aatif in the tribal area. Babar, a correspondent for GEO TV, was shot on a busy street in Karachi in January 2011. Police arrested several suspects affiliated with the MQM, a leading political party, but the case was derailed by threats, intimidation, and murders of key figures in the investigation.

*[Five witnesses or law enforcement officials connected to the case were also murdered, and two prosecutors were fired without explanation pursuing Babar's case.]*

Rubin's reporting alleged that Pakistani officials could be behind the targeted killing of Aatif of a reporter for Deewa Radio, the Pashto-language service of the US funded Voice of America but his media fellows were raising fingers towards Taliban. Aatif was murdered at a mosque north of Peshawar in January 2012.

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Pakistani authorities had pledged to address the utter lack of justice in press murders, but a weak civilian government of the PPP was unable or unwilling to stand up to the criminal political elements. Given this climate of fear and injustice, Pakistani journalists began taking measures as the UN plan had aimed.

CPJ's report called on the government to bring about successful prosecutions in the 23 unsolved cases of journalist murders over the past decade; to provide sufficient staffing and funding for police and prosecutors; and cooperate fully in the implementation of the UN plan.

CPJ's report, which was also made available in Urdu, included detailed recommendations to the new government of Pakistan and the country's news media. *An appendix provided details on each of the 42 journalists killed in Pakistan since 2003, including the 23 who were targeted and murdered during the past few years.*

On 16<sup>th</sup> August 2013; four armed men fired indiscriminately outside the entrance of the Express Media Group office in Karachi, injuring two members of staff, including a guard who went paralysed.

On 30<sup>th</sup> August 2013; Ali Chishti of *'The Friday Times'*, who writes on national security and counter-terrorism, was abducted and beaten and released the next morning. The international media roared saying:

*"The abduction by police and subsequent abuse of Ali Chishti must not go unpunished. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government should make every effort to bring the perpetrators to justice.*

*PM Sharif should make a priority of addressing the impunity with which attacks on journalists have taken place over the years.*

*Pakistan's record is abysmal in protecting its journalists from harassment, abduction, beatings and even death."*

On 11<sup>th</sup> October 2013; Ayub Khattak, a reporter for the Karak Times in Khyber PK southern Karak district, was shot dead outside his home. Eyewitness accounts said two unidentified assailants riding a motorcycle waited outside Khattak's home, fired at him when he appeared and fled the scene.

Khattak's colleagues said he had recently published a story on the sale of illegal drugs and a local gang of drug peddlers. Khattak had worked as a

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journalist since 2004, and had received threats in the past after his reports exposed criminal elements in the region.

A day earlier, three unidentified men used iron rods to attack Sardar Shafiq, another reporter for the Urdu local daily Ittehad and the former General Secretary of the Abbottabad Union of Journalists. The journalist was leaving his office in Abbottabad city on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2013 late night. Shafiq suffered injuries including his nose broken; motive of the attack was unclear.

Both attacks followed a statement by Minister of Information Pervaiz Rasheed at a meeting in Islamabad on 8<sup>th</sup> October instant. Rasheed expressed his support for the appointment of a special prosecutor to investigate attacks against journalists as part of the implementation of the larger UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and Issue of Impunity. The media community held:

*"We call on Minister Rasheed to match his words with actions by pressing his government to thoroughly investigate this latest murder and bring the perpetrators to justice. The minister should use these cases to underline his stated commitment to ending violence against journalists in Pakistan."*

On 13<sup>th</sup> November 2013; three journalists were injured during three consecutive explosions in Karachi. The first explosion occurred near a shrine in the Pahar Ganj area where Shias were gathering at night to commemorate the holy month of *Muharram*.

Law enforcers, rescue workers, bomb disposal squads, and media personnel rushed to the scene after the explosion. An hour later, a second improvised explosive device exploded in the vicinity. The third explosion took place in North Karachi, where unidentified men hurled an IED outside a Shiite gathering hall, injuring two policemen. The CNBC reporter Khizrudin, CNBC photographer Syed Shariq Hussain, and Waqt TV reporter Raza Abdi were among those injured during the explosions; Taliban later claimed the responsibility.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2013; three people were injured when the Karachi office came under attack. Two hand grenades were hurled at the office building, while unknown assailants opened indiscriminate fire.

ATTACKS ON MEDIA IN 2014:

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On 17<sup>th</sup> January 2014; three people linked with *Express News* were killed when a van belonging to the channel came under attack near the Matric board office in Nazimabad area of Karachi. The TV van was parked near the Matric Board Office as part of routine field deployment when it came under attack. The attack left technician Waqas, driver Khalid and guard Ashraf injured. They were rushed to the hospital where they succumbed to their wounds.

Police told that there were four attackers on two motorbikes who leaned into the vehicle and fired seventeen bullets using 9mm pistols and suppressors. It was the third attack on *Express News* following firing by unknown men at the offices in August 2013, and an attack with crackers in December 2013. The attacks had left at least four people injured.

Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan [TTP]'s Ehsanullah Ehsan had accepted responsibility for that attack - the enraged TTP had decided to extend its war by declaring the country's media as *'party'* to the conflict.

For the first time since its inception in 2005, the banned militant outfit had not only issued a fatwa against the media but also prepared a media hit-list which was then communicated to selective media offices.

The 29-page fatwa accused the media of siding with *'disbelievers'*, against Muslims, in the *'war on Islam'* and inciting people against the *mujahideen* through propaganda as well as of propagating secularism. The fatwa defined three major categories for journalists: *"murjif, muqatil and Sa'ee bil fasad."* Sheikh Khalid Haqqani, Deputy Chief of the TTP and one of the main authors of this fatwa, explained:

*"Murjif is someone who engages in propaganda against Muslims during a war between Islam and disbelief; Muqatil is someone who incites disbelievers and their allies to act against Muslims while the third category, Sa'ee bil fasad, includes those who corrupt Muslim society through different means such as replacing the Islamic ideology with secular ideologies.*

*The media has continuously been lying about us and about our objectives. It has attributed to us some attacks which we did not carry out and it continues to lie about our objectives."*

The fatwa was issued in response to a question submitted to the TTP's religious committee by its former chief spokesman, Ehsanullah Ehsan who later told about back ground reasons:

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*"For a long time, we have been asking the media to be impartial. We are not forcing it to change beliefs. We are simply asking the media to be fair in coverage.*

*Despite the tall claims of truth and nothing but the truth, the media has been acting as propagandists."*

The initial hit-list prepared by the TTP named nearly two dozen journalists and publishers. It included names of a number of media-group owners, the news chiefs of various TV channels, prominent anchors, the editor of a leading English-language newspaper and even some field staff. No specific reason for those particular journalists given but the campaign was meant to frighten the country's media into surrender and compliance.

TTP's spokesman Ehsanullah Ehsan claimed that:

*"The job of a journalist is to be fair and tell all sides of a story but we know of journalists who are completely one-sided propagandists. We even know of journalists who work as spies for the police and other departments."*

Hasan Abdullah in his essay titled 'Media now in TTP crosshairs' appeared in daily 'Dawn' dated 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2014 claimed an insider information that:

*"Some people within the [TTP] organisation had initially opposed targeting the media on 'strategic grounds. But later on it was decided that the media was basically the institution driving this war and public opinion.*

*When it is already defaming us, we really don't have much to lose and may as well deal with the media as a party to this war."*

TTP's Ehsanullah Ehsan, however, asserted that:

*"Even at this stage the media could mend its ways and become a neutral entity. Otherwise, the media should not feel secure. A few barriers and security escorts will not help.*

*If we can get inside military installations, media offices should not be too much of a challenge."*

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On 28<sup>th</sup> March 2014; the Express Media Group came under a fifth attack. The repeated attacks thus raised serious questions about the government's ability to provide security to media houses in Pakistan.

Unidentified gunmen opened fire on the car of *Express News* anchor and analyst Raza Rumi in Lahore, injuring him and killing his driver. The attack took place just a few hundred yards away from the Express News office in Raja Market, which Raza Rumi had just left after hosting his programme '*Khabar Se Agay*'.

*Express News*' driver Mustafa succumbed to his injuries later. Rumi himself received minor injuries from glass shards which flew at him when the windscreen of the car shattered. Eleven bullet casings were recovered from the crime scene.

A week earlier, a bomb was found outside the residence of *Express News* Bureau Chief in the Murshadabad area of Peshawar city.

Raza Rumi talked to his media fellows after the attack that:

*"We [journalists] will continue to speak the truth and not back down. Politicians will not benefit from remaining quiet while journalists are muzzled... these bullets will target them tomorrow if they do not take notice today. There will be no security or governance left in Pakistan."*

There was condemnation from the government and their agencies but much of it was standard fare of course. There was outrage [*but impotent*] at the usual suspects as well. And there were also calls, well-intentioned but idealistic, for the media to pull together and announce a boycott – but next day every thing fizzled out.

The fact remains that most of the Pakistani journalists and anchors did not show due care while writing or speaking. For instance; what difference was there between labelling one person a Taliban sympathiser and him labelling his opponents US agents? Prima facie, there wasn't much difference but actually the words mattered.

Calling the opponent anchor a '*traitorous paid agent*' would put him or her on a target list. Similarly, some were accused of being a terrorist just in routine and another of having committed blasphemy and then; one could wait and see who got arrested, who got killed and whose house was burnt – the answers were not far lost.



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On the other hand, speaking out against religious extremists did have many shots. Might be so, such was the poison that had seeped into media men's collective consciousness that many out there would think Raza Rumi asked for it, and that his driver was just unfortunate collateral damage - there might be some very real dragons in the depth.

Referring to an internet media report [[eturbonews.com/44502](http://eturbonews.com/44502)] dated 9<sup>th</sup> April 2014; after a lethal attack on TV anchor and journalist Raza Rumi that resulted in the murder of his driver, militants sent serious life threats to one of the most senior writers, journalists, and television anchors of Pakistan, Imtiaz Alam.

Imtiaz Alam is also an icon of peace throughout the media in South Asia, leading the *South Asia Free Media Association* [SAFMA]; he had been on the list of militants for a long time due to his resolve and outspoken behaviour for the tolerance of narratives expressing freedom of the press.

Attacks on media workers and groups had been escalating since the day the government of Pakistan began negotiating a peace plan with Pakistani Taliban [TTP]. *The security of journalists' right of freedom of expression was not on the agenda of these negotiations.*

Thus, a resolution was passed - here is the text of the resolution:

*"We, the journalists and representatives of the All Pakistan Newspapers Society [APNS], the Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors [CPNE], South Asian Free Media Association [SAFMA], South Asia Media Commission [SAMC], South Asian Women in Media [SAWM], Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists [PFUJ], Balochistan Union of Journalists [BUJ], Punjab Union of Journalists [PUJ], Rawalpindi - Islamabad Union of Journalists [RIUJ], the National Press Club, the Lahore Press Club, the Karachi Press Club, the Peshawar Press Club, and the Quetta Press Club express our deepest concerns about the reports of death threats on Imtiaz Alam, Editor of the quarterly South Asian Journal and Secretary General of SAFMA.*

*Intolerance for diverse points of views has a bearing on media freedom and quality journalism. But edicts and threats continue to be hurled at the media and media persons, among them Mr Alam, who also anchors a talk show on Express News TV.*

*The targeted attacks and death threats are meant to create fear among the democratic intelligentsia and the media persons. It is more disturbing that the state is failing in its responsibility to protect citizens and its writ.*

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*Despite UN Security Council Resolution 1738 on the safety of journalists and several international resolutions on the protection of journalists, lives continue to have been lost in Pakistan in the course of journalists doing their jobs.*

*Last year 10 journalists have been killed in connection with their work in Pakistan. Courtesy these killings; Pakistan made it to the shameful club of the world's five deadliest countries for the media.*

*We urge the media associations to take joint stand on acts of violation of and threats to media rights and freedom of expression. Attack on one should be taken as an attack on all.*

*It's time that the state and the government of Pakistan fulfilled their responsibility to their citizens protecting their fundamental rights of freedom of information and freedom of expression guaranteed in the Constitution."*

**85 MEDIA MEN KILLED IN PAKISTAN:**

Here is a list - names, dates, associations with and places, in descending order, for 85 Journalists and media men killed since 1994 in Pakistan:-

Khurram Zaki, LUBP site; May 08, 2016, in Karachi.  
Aftab Alam, Geo TV & Samaa; Sep 09, 2015, in Karachi.  
Arshad Ali Jaffri, Engr Geo TV; Sep 08, 2015, in Karachi  
Zafarullah Jatak, daily Intekhab; June 28, 2015, in Quetta.  
S Wahidur Rahman, Journalist; April 29, 2015, in Karachi  
Shehzad Iqbal, Sama TV; April 23, 2014, in Mianwali.  
Waqas Aziz Khan, Express TV; January 17, 2014, in Karachi.  
Mohammad Khalid, Express TV; January 17, 2014, in Karachi.  
Ashraf Arain, Express TV; January 17, 2014, in Karachi.  
Shan Dahar, Abb Takk Television; January 01, 2014, in Larkana.  
Ayub Khattak, Karak Times; October 11, 2013, in Karak District.  
Sardar Shafiq, daily Ittehad; October 10, 2013, in Abbotabad.  
Aslam Durrani, Daily Pakistan; April 16, 2013, in Peshawar.  
Mirza Iqbal Hussain, NNI; January 10, 2013, in Quetta.  
Saif ur Rehman, Samaa TV; January 10, 2013, in Quetta.  
Imran Shaikh, Samaa TV; January 10, 2013, in Quetta.  
Haji Razaq, Daily Tawar; March 24, 2013, in Lyari – Karachi.  
Mehmood Jan Afridi, Daily Intekhab; March 01, 2013 Kalat.  
Malik Mumtaz, APP and AFP; February 27, 2013, in FATA  
Saqib Khan, Ummat; November 22, 2012, in Karachi.  
Rehmatullah Abid, Dunya News TV; Nov 18, 2012, in Panjgur.  
Mushtaq Khand, Dharti TV Network; October 7, 2012, in Khairpur.

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Mohammad Amir , ARY TV; September 21, 2012, in Peshawar.  
Abdul Haq Baloch, ARY TV; September 29, 2012, in Khuzdar.  
Abdul Qadir Hajizai, WASH TV; May 28, 2012, in Quetta.  
Razzaq Gul, Express News TV; May 19, 2012, in Turbat.  
Aurangzeb Tunio, Kawaish TV; May 10, 2012, in Lalu Ranwak.  
Mukarram Khan Aatif, Freelance; January 17, 2012, in Shabqadar.  
Javed Naseer Rind, Daily Tawar; November 2011, in Khuzdar.  
Faisal Qureshi, The London Post; October 7, 2011, in Lahore.  
Muneer Shakir, Sabzbaat TV; August 14, 2011, in Khuzdar.  
Shafiullah Khan, The News; June 17, 2011, in Wah Cantt.  
Asfandyar Khan, Akhbar-e-Khyber; June 11, 2011, in Peshawar.  
Saleem Shahzad, Asia Times; May 30, 2011, in Mandi Bahauddin.  
Nasrullah Afridi, PTV & Mashriq; May 10, 2011, in Peshawar.  
Zaman Ibrahim, Daily Extra News; April 2, 2011, in Karachi.  
Abdost Rind, freelance; February 18, 2011, in Turbat. Wali Khan Babar, Geo TV; January 13, 2011, in Karachi.  
Ilyas Nizzar, Darwanth; January 3, 2011, in Pidarak.  
Mehmood Chandio, Awaz; December 6, 2010, in Mirpur Khas  
Pervez Khan, Waqt TV; December 6, 2010, in Ghalanai.  
Abdul Wahab, Express News; December 6, 2010, in Ghalanai.  
Lala Hameed Baloch, Daily Intikhab; Nov 18, 2010, in Turbat.  
Misri Khan, Ausaf & Mashriq; September 14, 2010, in Hangu.  
Ejaz Raisani, Samaa TV; September 6, 2010, in Quetta.  
Mohammad Sarwar, Aaj TV; September 3, 2010, in Quetta.  
Ejazul Haq, City-42 TV; May 28, 2010, in Lahore.  
G Rasool Birhamani, Daily Sindhu; May 10, 2010, in Wahi Pandhi.  
Azamat Ali Bangash, Samaa TV; April 17, 2010, in Orakzai.  
Malik Arif, Samaa TV; April 16, 2010, in Quetta.  
Mian Iqbal, Peshawar Press; December 22, 2009, in Peshawar.  
Janullah Hashimzada, freelance; August 24, 2009, in Jamrud.  
Siddique Bacha Khan, Aaj TV; August 14, 2009, in Mardan.  
Wasi Ahmad Qureshi, Daily Azadi; April 16, 2009, in Khuzdar.  
Raja Assad Hameed, The Nation; March 26, 2009, in Rawalpindi  
Musa Khankhel, Geo TV & The News; February 18, 2009, in Swat.  
Tahir Awan, freelance; January 4, 2009, in Dera Ismail Khan  
Mohammad Imran, Express TV; January 4, 2009, D I Khan  
Abdul Razzak Johra, Royal TV; November 3, 2008, in Punjab.  
Abdul Aziz Shaheen, Azadi; August 29, 2008, in Swat.  
Mohammed Ibrahim, Express TV; May 22, 2008, in Khar.  
Khadim Hussain Sh, Sindh TV & Khabrein; April 14, 2008, in Hub.  
Siraj Uddin, The Nation; February 29, 2008, in Mingora.  
Chishti Mujahid, Akhbar-e-Jehan; February 9, 2008, in Quetta.  
Zubair Mujahid, Jang; November 23, 2007, in Mirpur Khas.  
Muhammad Arif, ARY Television; October 19, 2007, in Karachi.  
Javed Khan, DM Digital TV; July 3, 2007, in Islamabad.

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Noor Hakim Khan, Daily Pakistan; June 2, 2007, in Bajaur.  
Mehboob Khan, freelance; April 28, 2007, in Charsadda.  
Mohammad Ismail, PPI; November 1, 2006, in Islamabad.  
Hayatullah Khan, freelance; June 16, 2006, in Miran Shah.  
Munir Ahmed Sangi, Kawish TV; May 29, 2006, in Larkana.  
Allah Noor, Khyber TV; February 7, 2005, in Wana.  
Amir Nowab, Frontier Post; February 7, 2005, in Wana.  
Sajid Tanoli, Shumal; January 29, 2004, in Mansehra.  
Fazal Wahab, freelance; January 21, 2003, in Mingora.  
Shahid Soomro, Kawish; October 20, 2002, in Kandhkot.  
Daniel Pearl, The WSJ; February 02, 2002, in Karachi.  
Asadullah, Freelancer; September 1, 2001, in Karachi.  
Sufi Mohammad Khan, Ummat; May 2, 2000, in Badin.  
Nawaz Zulfiqar, The Nation; December 3, 1999, in Islamabad.  
Carlos Mavroleon, Freelancer; August 27, 1998, in Peshawar.  
Z.A. Shahid, Khabrain; January 18, 1997, in Lahore.  
M Samdani Warsi, Parcham; December 6, 1994, in Karachi.  
Mohammed Salahuddin, Takbeer; December 4, 1994, in Karachi.

The above list has been tabulated from the press news sources available at hand; thus some names might be missing.

Some of these cases have been mentioned in detail in various scenarios of this volume but most names are only listed here.

*GEO's HAMID MIR ATTACKED:*

On 19<sup>th</sup> April 2014; four unknown assailants on two motorcycles shot at senior journalist Hamid Mir, an anchor and the host of a talk show on Geo TV, *Capital Talk*, leaving him severely injured. He was transported to a hospital for treatment. A guard at the scene fired back at the assailants, but they fled; Mir was shot at thrice.

Aga Khan University told that after an operation lasting 150 minutes, Mir was stable but was kept under observation overnight. He was on his way to his office from Jinnah International Airport when the incident happened on main Shahrah-e-Faisal, under a bridge near the airport.

Soon there was rumour in the city and journalist circles that Mir was attacked by agency's sponsored men. The Inter-Services Public Relations [ISPR] spokesperson held that an independent inquiry must immediately be carried out to ascertain facts. The ISPR added that allegations against ISI or its head without any basis were highly regrettable and misleading.

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In 2012, Mir had escaped an assassination bid when police defused a bomb planted under his car in Islamabad. Mir told GEO that:

*"It's a message to me as well as Geo and the journalist community in Pakistan. They want to stop us from speaking the truth but I want to tell them that we will not be deterred."*

More than a hundred bouquets were lined in the lobby of a private ward of Aga Khan Hospital. Outside, dozens of policemen with bullet-proof vests and automatic weapons looked at every visitor suspiciously as a high-profile journalist was hit in Karachi. However, it is a matter of record that the largest bouquet in the lobby was from the Karachi Police tagged as:

*"Get well Hamid Mir; we may not be able to protect you but we know where to order the best flowers."*

Mir was hit by six bullets – in the ribs, thigh, stomach and across his hand – in an assassination attempt as he came out of the airport to present a special broadcast on GEO TV news channel. Mir had warned about a possible assassination; he had also named his would-be killers. That's what his brother claimed; what his colleagues and managers at the channel said. Geo, just after the attack, broadcasted the allegation and flashed the picture of the ISI's Chief Lt Gen Zaheerul Islam.

One modest bouquet wishing Mir a full and speedy recovery was from Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who had visited him in the hospital earlier but after announcing a judicial inquiry. Going by the history of judicial inquiries in Pakistan, one could translate PM Sharif's sarcastic smile as if saying:

*"Look Hamid, we want you to get well but don't really expect us to find out who tried to kill you. Who is going to go and ask a working General? Meanwhile, here are three senior judges who will help you get over the whole thing."*

[‘the guardian’ dated 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2014 is referred]

Of course, it was a deliberate effort to bring a globally reputed national institution, the ISI, into disrepute. There was no evidence or even solid indication for GEO TV's apparently irresponsible conduct.

Geo's president – a former newspaper editor named Imran Aslam – became wistful when defending his channel's coverage after the assassination attempt on Mir, while saying that:

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*"There was a time that if they didn't like what you wrote they censored you. They cut out a word or a line. If they got really angry they got your editor fired. Now they just shoot you."*

*'A bullet in the head is the new form of censorship in Pakistan,'* the editor held – but these were all dialogues to achieve cheap applause through sentimental phrases because Geo's most skilful team of investigative journalists could not dig out the real story or the suspects till the last day of year 2016 at least.

While Hamid Mir was still in the hospital, the probability theories had taken flight up in the air. There was one voice that Hamid Mir was shot because of his calls to respect the human rights of Balochis, because he stood with Mama Qadeer in the VMBP's Long March.

No, it was because he didn't give enough space to the Taliban's viewpoint.

No, silly, it's because a distraction was needed from the non-stop coverage of Gen Musharraf in Karachi. Now, under the cover of this distraction, the former president would safely fly the coop – and that was right. Another intelligent guy wrote:

*'Don't be ridiculous; he staged the attack on himself for ratings / sympathy etc. I mean, just look at that single, blurred, frame I saw of the car. Where's the blood? Surely that's proof positive?'*

*I even wrote a blog about it after spending 15 minutes googling gunshot victims. Open your eyes, people. I'm an expert.'*

Then, of course, there were the *'fastest finger first'* condemnation bolts - who could time the politicians racing to get to the hospital first, because nothing spelled real concern like a timely photo on tiny screens.

Then there's the 'stay safe' crowd; well-meaning, and when you really have nothing more to say - it was all about what's being said, to whom and for what reason. Because clearly, there were those – more happier when the media as a whole just finally caught another 'breaking news'.

*However, the media could not be silenced; their voice could not be muzzled - not by one bullet or a hundred.*

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It was reassuring that, despite threats, attacks and murders, the media somehow continued to speak out against injustice, criminal gangs, terrorist organisations, out of control state agencies and so on.

But that's just wishful thinking; there's no point in recalling or evoking to the Gen Zia-era repression and pointing out the stalwarts who stood up to it. It was not another country; one in which your life wasn't worth a few thousand dollars at the most. The media would continue to be muzzled; also had grown silent simply because there was no security, no justice - not just for journalists, but for anyone at all.

*On 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2014; while the blame politics was being sported amongst the top stakeholders over Mir's health wishes, one Shehzad Iqbal, a reporter for SAMA TV, was shot dead in Mianwali – there was no BIG in that town to blame ISI like sensitive institution.*

Thus, despite the high casualty rate, little was known of the dangerous conditions in which journalists used to operate in Pakistan, the risks they were taking and the often steep price they paid to be the guardians of the public interest.

#### IMPUNITY AGAINST JOURNALISTS:

UN Plan: In early 2014 perhaps, Pakistan was selected as one of five pilot countries of the world for implementation of a UN Plan of Action on *Impunity Against Journalists* because the country was considered one of the most dangerous countries of the world to practice journalism. Nearly 70 journalists had been killed since PPP's government had sworn in 2008 in Pakistan at an average of one every month – the worst average for any country of the world for that period.

In a country where everyone was at risk of being killed, the deaths of journalists perhaps could not attract larger attention of successive political hierarchy. The attack on journalists was an attack not just on individuals but an attack on freedom of expression, and therefore an attack on civil society and the very state itself.

See the pattern; about 90 journalists had been killed since 2000 and over 2,000 injured, assaulted, kidnapped, arrested, tortured and intimidated in various ways. That's a high percentage when considering that in a country of 200 million people there were only 18,000 journalists.

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In a multi-national, multi-linguist, multi-sectarian, multi-religious, multi-ethnic state it was important that journalists could feel safe so that all the said political pluralisms could be heard and asserted their stake-holding in the fragile state. Without a safe media and safer journalists, it's not just the media at threat but the entire society.

Since 2001's Nine Eleven war, the Pakistani journalists remained in double jeopardy – they not only operated in a violent environment in Pakistan, by the very nature of their work, they made enemies and made themselves more vulnerable than any other section of society. Pakistani journalists lived dangerously by not having a consensus strategy to counter the risks they experienced.

The Pakistani media itself had a contradictory stance in protecting its interests. The rambling and disorderly reactions by various media houses to the recent attacks against Hamid Mir, Imtiaz Alam and Raza Rumi had shown that journalists were easy targets and vulnerable precisely because they were not united.

There was no safety strategy developed by neither the journalists representatives such as the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists, nor by associations of the media sector such as the All Pakistan Newspaper Society, Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors or Pakistan Broadcasters Association and others.

On 31<sup>st</sup> December 2014; the International Federation of Journalists Brussels [IFJ] termed Pakistan the most dangerous country for media, with 14 journalists killed in the country during 2014 alone. The overall number of journalists who died in targeted killings, bomb attacks or shootings around the world rose to 118 in 2014 from 105 the year before [2013].

Another 17 died in accidents or natural disasters while on assignment, according to the said organisation, which calls itself the world's largest journalists' body. Pakistan was followed by Syria, where 12 journalists were killed. Nine killings each occurred in Afghanistan and the Palestinian territories. Eight journalists each were killed in Iraq and Ukraine.

Among those killed were American journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff. Both were beheaded by Islamic State militants, who had seized parts of Syria and Iraq. The IFJ held its figures were a reminder of the growing threats to journalists, and it called on respective governments to make protecting members of the media a priority while saying:



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*"It is time for action in the face of unprecedented threats to journalists who are targeted not only to restrict the free flow of information, but increasingly as leverage to secure huge ransoms and political concessions through sheer violence."*

As a result, some media organisations were scared of sending reporters to war zones out of fear for their safety, even of using material gathered by freelancers in those areas. Failure to improve media safety had adverse impacts on the coverage of war - poorer in quality for lack of independent witnesses.

A report titled, '*State of Media in Pakistan*', compiled and released on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2015 by Freedom Network on Pakistan also told that the year 2014 was the worst ever in the history of the country for the media. It told that 14 people related to media including journalists, media assistants and bloggers were killed for their work and scores were injured, kidnapped and intimidated in 2014.

Freedom Network [FN], a Pakistani media rights watchdog and an independent advocacy, research and training organisation carried nine articles with in-depth look at issues of media security, impunity against journalists, worsening media ethics and crisis of credibility, outdated media laws, digital freedoms and privacy protections, social media and digitalisation of news sources, media ratings and profit motives, and mainstreaming of citizen journalism in the country. Further it said:

*"For several years now, Pakistan has consistently figured as the most dangerous country for journalists when it comes to the debate around freedom of expression internationally. A lot needs to be done to reduce the risk to human rights defenders."*

Each of the nine key media issues discussed by other experts on the subject ranging from seasoned journalists, dealing with these issues on daily basis, to activists who kept a close eye on media developments, each suggesting changes and reforms needed to promote greater media professionalism in the associated fields.

In her article on digital challenges to media in Pakistan, one Nighat Daad noted a disturbing trend that:

*"The previous regimes in Pakistan preferred a behind-the-scene approach for controlling internet freedom but the PML[N] regime in its first 18 months in office has been vocal in the Parliament and on media for using strong measures to censor social media."*

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Bob Dietz, the Asia Coordinator of the Committee to Protect Journalists [CPJ] told a sympathetic audience of journalists and media practitioners:

*"For a democratic country, Pakistan ranked worryingly high when it came to the number of attacks on journalists. Though it was better off than countries such as Iraq, Syria or Somalia that were torn apart by civil war and internal strife, Pakistan's numbers of violence against journalists were not comparable to those countries."*

Bob Dietz was addressing the second international conference on *Combating Impunity and Securing Safety of Media Workers and Journalists in Pakistan*. He deplored that the authorities in Pakistan had failed to move forward in this regard.

*"Why can't we make the situation better,"* he asked, earnestly, adding that far too many journalists were getting caught in the crossfire between militants and the authorities. However, he opined that the PML[N] regime had recognised the issue while referring to PM Nawaz Sharif's March 2014 meeting with representatives of the CPJ where Information Minister Pervaiz Rasheed was also present in the conference.

But the same year of 2014, Pakistan was noted as the worst for media men in comparison with its own earlier years' record.

The CPJ body had earlier met Gen Musharraf – who was the president at that time – and expressed concerns over violence against media. But he totally denied it and his minister termed the incidents as *'accidents'*; adding that a similar response was seen when the matter was raised with President Asif Ali Zardari and the ministers of that PPP's era.

Addressing the inaugural session, the Federal Information Minister said that the whole nation was united in the fight against terrorism and the government was trying its best to find solutions. *"I would like media-persons to come forward and help identify the culprits,"* Mr Rasheed said.

The CPJ noted with sorrow that despite some assurances made by the PM Sharif and his team, the journalists were still not satisfied with the PML[N] government's measures.

When veteran journalist and former Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists president Mazhar Abbas questioned the minister about low salaries and job insecurity in media organisations, the minister invited him to a high-level meeting to guide the government on what it could do.

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Senior journalist M Ziauddin said the Afghan war actually came to Pakistan after 2005, but the media was not ready to cover it; adding that:

*“At the same time, militants wanted to show their presence and pushed for space in the electronic and print media. The same method was adopted by ethnic, nationalist and sectarian parties – now the environment is dangerous and no place is safe.”*

Anchor-person Hamid Mir quoted several anecdotes from his career, from 2006 onwards and narrated his own ordeal before and being attacked by unidentified gunmen in Karachi in April 2014 adding that:

*“A hit-list of journalists in Balochistan was floated by pro-establishment militants and this list was published in a report by the PFUJ; even then, five of the people on the list ended up dead.*

*It is time the government should pass a law for the protection of the media. I do not say it will end the trouble, but it will be a first step towards a solution.”*

Representatives from the Open Society Foundation [OSF], United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [Unesco], as well as other countries from the region, such as Nepal, Afghanistan and Indonesia also participated in the subsequent panel discussion.

Ujjwal Acharya, South Asia regional coordinator for the International Federation of Journalists [IFJ], said that in Nepal and Pakistan, a lot of people believed that the media was not credible. Talking about the importance of perceptions, he said that there was a need to build people's trust in the mainstream press.

OSF's Maria Teresa shared her experiences of working on journalists' safety in Colombia and Mexico.

However, when the conference was over, the journalists and anchors were simply left at the mercy of terrorists and sectarian extremists who were showing their presence all over Pakistan – *Tain Tain Phish*.

*'REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS'*

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On 24<sup>th</sup> July 2015; 'Reporters Without Borders', an international media group based in Washington released a report complaining that:

*"Pakistani authorities have not kept their promise to protect media personnel and are sometimes even responsible for these abuses. Pakistani journalists are being forced to flee or go into hiding to escape acts of violence and intimidation that usually go unpunished."*

The report noted that the shooting of Baloch journalist Zafarullah Jatak on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2015 in his home was the latest in a series of "macabre murders" of media personnel that were not being solved. Mr Jatak worked for 'Intekhab', an Urdu newspaper based in Quetta, and had been a journalist for the past six years.

The report pointed out that no progress had been made in the investigation into the murder of former journalist Professor Syed Wahidur Rahman, who was gunned down in his car outside Karachi University on 29<sup>th</sup> April 2015, four days after media and human rights activist *Sabeen Mahmud was gunned down* in Karachi immediately after organising a discussion about the violence in Balochistan. Mahmud's murder had also gone unpunished till then.

The fact that crimes of violence against journalists were rarely solved and punished reinforced in Pakistan a climate dominated by death threats and physical attacks in whole country.

The report pointed out that there had also been a marked increase since 2014 in media freedom violations by government officials and various political factions. This disturbing trend constituted a major impediment to attempts to combat impunity and sustained a climate that did not encourage media freedom despite best planning. Contrarily the Pakistani government continued to bring indirect pressure on the media.

On 13<sup>th</sup> May 2015; the Pakistan Press Council sent a directive to the print media saying:

*".....acute care should be taken to avoid negative comments about the crisis in Yemen in order not to threaten Pakistan's friendship with the countries that are members of the Saudi-led coalition operating in Yemen."*

The Pakistani state agencies should have avoided passing on such instructions which tended to frustrate the media freedom.

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On 9<sup>th</sup> September 2015; a senior Pakistani journalist was shot dead by unidentified gunmen outside his house here, a day after an employee of GEO TV, a leading media house, was killed in Karachi in the latest attack on media persons in Pakistan.

Aftab Alam aged 42, who had been associated with different channels including Geo News and Samaa TV, was reversing his car in the city's North Sector C area after dropping his children at home when he was targeted by two gunmen on a motorbike.

Aftab who received multiple bullet wounds on his head, neck and chest, was rushed to Abbasi Shaheed hospital where doctors declared him dead. That target killing was the second incident in two days when the media persons were attacked by unidentified shooters on motorcycles.

A night earlier, news van of Pakistan's biggest media group, GEO Television Network came under fire by three unidentified gunmen in the Bahadurabad area of Karachi in which a senior technical engineer was killed while the driver was injured. The engineer, Arshad Ali Jaffri, died after being shot nine times in his upper body while driver Anis Chohan was injured and shifted to a private hospital.

The two new incidents in fact revived bitter memories of 2014's incident in the North Nazimabad area when two employees of the Express media group were gunned down while they were sitting inside their news van.

The shooting took place near Sir Syed market and within the remits of the Sir Syed police station. The Karachi Union of Journalists – Dastoor said Alam's killing was a question mark on the efficacy of the Sindh government and the security agencies. The organisation said it condemned the targeted killings of and attacks on media workers in the strongest possible terms.

Pakistan Rangers Sindh had taken serious notice of the target killings of media persons in the city and decided to kick off concerted efforts for the arrest of perpetrators of such heinous crimes. The nexus between some groups were trying to malign the operation for their ulterior motives.

Referring to daily 'the News' dated 30<sup>th</sup> December 2015:

*"Twenty-eight journalists were killed and 23 injured while performing their professional duties in 2015 in Pakistan. Fifty-one cases were lodged and only three killers have been held so far."*

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The Journalist Protect Committee, in its annual report, said that six journalists were killed in Karachi, five in Khyber PK and FATA, four in Balochistan while remaining journalists were killed in various parts of Pakistan in different incidents.

As said earlier; 40% killers, who murdered journalists, belonged to banned religious organisations, 20% to capitalists, and five percent belonged to political parties while 35% attacked media men during rendering their services. More disappointedly, the federation and provincial administrations did nothing practically to protect the media men; though the Rangers were able to capture the killers of two journalists in Karachi.

On 8<sup>th</sup> May 2016; a prominent Pakistani journalist and human rights activist, Khurram Zaki, was shot dead in Karachi.

Mr Zaki was dining in a restaurant in the city's north when suspects opened fire from motorbikes. He was an editor of the website *Let us Build Pakistan*, which used to condemn sectarianism and was seen as promoting democratic and progressive values. The spokesman for a splinter group of the Pakistani Taliban accepted the responsibility.

The killers sent message that they killed Zaki because of his recent campaign against a cleric of the Red Mosque in Islamabad. Mr Zaki and other campaigners had filed a court case charging Maulana Abdul Aziz with incitement to hatred and violence against the Shiite minority.

The case was brought in response to the cleric's refusal to condemn attack on the Army Public School Peshawar on 16<sup>th</sup> December 2014 in which 152 children and teachers were brutally massacred.

Two other people were badly wounded in that Karachi attack - a friend who Mr Zaki was dining with and a bystander. Staff at the website paid tribute to their murdered colleague and vowed to continue exposing militant groups. Their statement said:

*"...his [Mr Zaki's] contribution as a citizen journalist in supporting the rights of minority groups was much bigger than [that of] all journalists combined in Pakistan.*

*His death is the grim reminder that whoever raises voice against Taliban [and other militant groups] in Pakistan will not be spared. And when they have to murder, they never fail."*

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Mr Zaki's murder was also a 'dismal reminder' of the danger activists were expected to face in Karachi but it was also the latest sign that campaigners faced severe risks for speaking out against extremism in the country.

Fellow activist and lawyer Jibran Nasir told al-Jazeera he was certain the murder was a result of Zaki's activism. *"The primary reason behind Zaki being shot dead was his constant activism in a bold manner."*

Being a social activist in Pakistan and raising the voice for religious extremism & minority rights, means death warrant. Zaki's death was again an open challenge for the federal as well as Sindh government that they were unable to ensure the protection of the journalists and media men – the fourth pillar of the state - even with the cogent help of the Rangers.