

Editorial

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Preconceived mode of protest

In democratic India, all people irrespective of their social status are equal before the law of the land. Any person is free to exercise his or her rights when he or she feels that he or she is deprived of what he or she were supposed to enjoy. It may be in the form of democratic protest, criticisms through various channels of mass media or by organising mass campaign that the people in the society can be made understand that, rights of a common person is deprived. Once people are convinced, it is natural that the people join hands to the fellow citizen whose rights has been deprived, not because for individual cause but because justice to the single fellow will also mean justice for all people in the society.

Mass media in today's world is playing tremendous role in bringing up issues which they think is for the cause of the common people. India is not lagging behind; there have been many cases that common people who were victims of atrocities were delivered justice. Many God men had been put behind bars, business tycoon are declared wanted and many politicians were not spared for the wrongs they had committed which affect the livelihood of the common people by the people in media risking their lives.

Paid news, reporting of cooked stories and yellow journalism are some of the familiar words coined to defame the people in mass media by those who had been exposed for their wrongs. Saying so it does not mean that some people in the profession are all pure and sincere in rendering their duty.

The mass media in this little state Manipur too has been playing its role effectively. Without bothering the kind of returns they enjoyed as payment to their service, people in this profession have been taking all risk in exposing what is not right when it comes for the cause of common people. Eight people in the field had lost their lives some remain as disabled in unfortunate accidents and incidents when they were on duty. Inappropriate salary in returns to their service had also forced many to quit the profession. Yet there is no shortage of manpower in this field.

From hand written pamphlets to letter press and then Offset printing machine and then come multi-coloured Web printing machines besides the emergence of electronic media like Television channels, mass media in Manipur too is marching ahead. Now it is the digital media that is slowly dominating the world of mass media. The traditional way of spreading news has been slowly changing converting the system to two ways channel - as both receivers and senders can communicate in a nick of time. The changing media trends showed that criticism, debate, arguments will be the future of media and it is already doing at many of the national and international media, even though it still seems way to go for the state of Manipur.

Saying so, it would be wrong to advocate a free speech of any individual or freedom of press without limit as legitimate. In democratic India a breached of privilege for some individuals or groups by any mass media can be challenged, but taking the law in hand to stand up or protest against any trespassing to individuals or groups is rather a sign of lawlessness. Government's silence on such matter will only be recorded as 'weak' or 'inefficient', by the future generation.

On one hand, when lawyers, advocates protest on the street for failure of law and order, and when media goes protest for some peoples' threat to sue them through proper channel, it showed the timidity character of the group of people in the profession which should be the most courageous people.

Steps like boycott of those voices against media which they felt not correct would be a more unjustified decision. Space for criticism to media should also be provided if someone felt that their image have been maligned by any writings or comment of a media house.

A hurriedly managed staged demonstration by any groups including political parties or media groups or anybody driven by emotion and sentiments is not a signed of civilize society.

Impunity prevails, but what is the solution?

By: Geeta Seshu and Sevanti Ninan
Courtsey: The Hoot

Being a journalist is increasingly dangerous business. Both at home and abroad. When there is injury to life and limb, perpetrators are almost never brought to book. Which is why the UN observes since 2013 an "End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists Day" on November 2nd.

What does it achieve? It provides an occasion to focus the attention of governments on a grim problem. UN Secretary General António Guterres set the context in his message this year. From 2006 to 2016, 930 journalists and media workers were killed he said. Thousands of others routinely face sexual harassment, intimidation, detention and ill treatment. Rampant impunity then compounds the crimes. In 9 out of 10 cases, the perpetrators are never brought to justice.

"When journalists are targeted, societies as a whole also pay the price. The kind of news that gets silenced — corruption, conflicts of interest, illegal trafficking — is exactly the kind of information the public needs to know." To that list for India we could add illegal mining of various kinds.

"When journalists are targeted, societies as a whole also pay the price" Impunity means exemption from the injurious consequences of an action. Or, quite simply, getting away with murder. It is now increasingly used in India to describe the growing vulnerability of all levels of journalists. When three are killed in a month as happened in September this year, it means impunity prevails. So far there have been arrests in only one of those three cases.

Blaming his journalism for a reporter's death is tricky when many poorly paid reporters and writers in the country's mofussil areas do more than one thing for a living. Even so, as the list of those killed since 2010 grows longer, and the proportion of perpetrators brought to book shrinks, it seems evident that journalists are primarily killed or attacked because of what they expose, and the police inaction has something to do with their hands being stayed by those in power.

Of the 30 journalists whose killings we have tracked since 2010, there have been arrests in 14 cases, a conviction in one, and a closure in one case with no arrests made. In the remaining 14 therefore, there has been not even an arrest so far. In other words, in 50 per cent of the cases there has been no action. This year eight killings have been reported till now, the evidence points to their reporting being the reason in half these cases.

There have been 45 incidents of attacks on journalists so far in 2017, several of these brutal. As culled from reported incidents. When the statistics from the National Crime Research Bureau come the figure will be much larger, since they are collected from police stations around the country. In 2014 and '15 these have been well over a 100 each year.

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Until now attacks and deaths have been reported from Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Delhi, Bihar, Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Kerala, MP, Maharashtra, Manipur, Odisha, Punjab, Tamilnadu, UP, Tripura, and W Bengal. There were six assaults in Kashmir alone.

Coming together to discuss the issue in UNESCO'S Delhi office journalists made the following observations:

- Those who face attacks or threats find themselves isolated and quite devoid of support.
- Those who face threats or are doxed (their personal details posted online) end up self-censoring themselves, even changing phone numbers or places of residence in fear.
- Trolling affects journalists — they become psychologically affected. This must be acknowledged and spoken about. It must be addressed.
- Incidents of violence are taking place in remote areas yes, but also in the national capital. Yet, there is no accountability.
- Journalists who work for big, well-known, national newspapers are protected in some ways but the plight of those who work for small, local newspapers or media houses is pathetic. Many of them have even stopped reporting news for fear of attack.
- Journalists who belong to the minority community and 'dare' to report on any issues like attacks on minorities or lynching, are abused and trolled. Their details are shared and their every report is followed very closely. They are under watch. Name calling such as 'jihadis' are routine and the threats to silence them are

very real.

If a few years back, the online trolls were in the big cities, they are now everywhere, even in small towns.

When journalists are threatened or attacked, they first inform the office they work for or gather news for. This first level of reporting must be taken seriously.

They are confused over whether they should file FIRs with police or pursue any kind of legal redressal mechanism. Invariably, even with witnesses or evidence, they prefer not to get into the 'jhanjhar' of filing complaints.

Journalists who do file complaints find out, the hard way, that police are reluctant to register the complaints or drag their feet over investigating it or collecting evidence. Often, they are dissuaded from pursuing the complaint or given veiled threats that it may not be a good idea.

They need good, sound, legal advice and help. They are often put off because they fear lawyers cost money so a network of committed lawyers would be a great help.

Likewise, a network of senior journalists and media organizations would also be a great help to immediately approach when in trouble.

Journalists don't always get support from the media house they work for or gather news for. If some glaring instance of violence does take place, the media house may give the news but doesn't use mechanisms like its own legal department or HR department to follow up with authorities about the incident. Merely publishing the news is important, but not enough.

Unity of journalists across media houses, across different journalists' organisations to raise a voice of protest has become imperative — otherwise incidents of violence and crimes against journalists will keep happening.

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Why is nobody brought to justice? The answer to this last question lies in who the perpetrators of violence against reporters and writers are. In India the answers are leading back to politicians and criminal elements among them more than any one single category. When political elements are behind an attack, police and investigating agencies develop conditions ranging from amnesia to cold feet.

The majority of instances of killings of journalists and attacks, with the exception of the killing of Gauri Lankesh in the heart of Bengaluru on September 5 this year, occur far away from the seat of power either in the Centre or in the States. Leave alone follow ups, even immediate basic information about the journalist of the circumstances leading to the violence become difficult to access.

But it is not just the attacks and killings. That comes later. Invariably, there is a prolonged period of threats that journalists do get and they either ignore it or try to live with it, until it is too late, said Adv Colin Gonsalves who spoke on the urgent need to put together a national legal defence for journalists.

The threats, as journalist Mohammed Ali of *The Hindu*, reporting from the heart of the cow-belt in Meerut in Uttar Pradesh discovered, play an insidious role in creating a fear psychosis in the mind of the journalist. Often, the journalist is doxed, with details of place of residence etc shared on social media. Ali, who was forced to shift residence, found twitter trolls closely following his work and questioning his credentials. Routinely abused for his reporting, reminded of his religious minority status and questioned over his legitimacy, the threats are ever present.

When journalists dissent, uncover corruption or record patently illegal acts, they come under the radar. And, as the arrest of former journalist Vinod Verma in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh, on Oct 27 showed, the Chhattisgarh police could pick him up without even an arrest warrant.

Ultimately, the incidents of crimes against journalists occur with such regularity because those in power know they can get away with it. When journalists are threatened or attacked, the support of their colleagues and the media houses they work for will go a long way to combat this impunity.

A united response against attacks and threats was the overriding plea of young journalists at the meeting.

Geeta Seshu and Sevanti Ninan are consulting editor and editor of the Hoot.

National and International News

3 LeT terrorists involved in Amarnath Yatra attack killed in encounter in Kashmir

PTI Srinagar, Dec. 5: Three Lashker-e-Taiba terrorists, including two Pakistanis, allegedly responsible for carrying out an attack on Amarnath pilgrims in July this year, were killed in an encounter in South Kashmir, police said on Tuesday.

One terrorist, who had managed to flee from the encounter site, was also arrested by the police from a maternity hospital of Anantnag district of South Kashmir, they said.

The encounter broke on Monday afternoon when the terrorists opened fire on an Army convoy, on its way to Srinagar, at Qazigund near Jammu-Srinagar national highway. One soldier was killed in the attack while another sustained injuries.

The security forces cordoned off the area and launched a hunt for the terrorists. The search operation turned into an encounter with terrorists which

ended at 2am this morning, the police said.

The police identified the dead terrorists as Yawar Basir, who is a local terrorist, Abu Furqan and Abu Maviya (both foreign terrorists). Basir, hailing from Habiash of Kulgam, joined ranks with Lashker-e-Taiba this year in February after snatching weapon from a policeman. Furqan had taken over as the head of Lashker-e-Taiba in South Kashmir after the death of Abu Ismail, who had led the attack on Amarnath pilgrims in July this year.

Police said that all the three, killed on Tuesday, were part of the squad that carried out the attack on yatris on July 10. Eight pilgrims were killed and 19 others injured.

Police said the group headed by Furqan, was involved in a series of terror crimes in Anantnag and Kulgam area, which included the Yatra Bus Attack case at Banting, few attacks on security forces at Lower Munda on the national highway, attack on police party at bus

stand in Anantnag.

Furqan had replaced Ismail in South Kashmir and was responsible for the recent attacks carried by LeT, police said.

Pursuing the leads available at Qazigund encounter, one individual Rashid Ahmed Allai of Hamzaporang sangam Bijbehara was arrested from Janglatmandi maternity hospital with a Chinese pistol and live cartridges last night. He was missing since last two days from his house and had joined the Yawar group of LeT.

The police said that he was part of the terrorist group when they carried out attack on army at Qazigund yesterday but managed to escape from the site when encounter broke.

He had taken shelter at the hospital in Anantnag with the help of one of his associate.

According to the police, he along with his associates were intending to snatch weapon from the policemen by attacking them.

Security increased along India-Nepal border in UP

PTI Mahrajganj, Dec 5: Security along the 500 km-long India-Nepal border in Uttar Pradesh has been beefed up in view of the general and assembly elections in Nepal on December 7.

The decision to seal the border was taken during a recent meeting of officials from both the countries, Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) commandant Shiv Dayal said today.

"The India-Nepal border will be sealed completely three days before polling and movement of people would also be banned," he said.

Security has been increased in UP's Lakhimpur Kheri, Siddharth Nagar, Pilibhit, Kushinagar, Bahraich, Shravasti and Balrampur districts.

"Security personnel are maintaining vigil round-the clock," the commandant informed.

Paramilitary force, civil police and intelligence organisations are also keeping a close vigil on all activities in the border areas, he added.

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