

State of Media in January 09

Dawn of New Year 09 is dangerous and unsympathetic as media suffered three casualties of its working journalists in two separate incidents. In NWFP, two working media persons Dr Tahir Awan and Mohammad Imran were killed in a blast as both rushed to scene of a suicidal blast in front of the Government Polytechnic College near an Imambargah on Multan Road in Dera Ismail Khan. The suicide attack followed an explosion in which both fell in prey. Dr Tahir Awan was freelance for local dailies Eitedal and Apna Akhbar while Muhammad Imran was working as trainee cameraman for Express News.

In Rawalpindi Punjab, unknown assailants gunned down 'Dr Aamer Wakil', a senior journalist of Rohi TV, and editor in a local daily 'Awami Inqalab'. He was 41. After a week, his brother journalist Kamal Azfir survived an attempt on life in separate firing incident near Kohat in NWFP. Armed activists of Sindh National Front (SNF) attacked on the Sindh daily Awami Awaz in Karachi for poor coverage to party. The editor of Awami Awaz, Jabbar Khattak told he had been threatened by the SNF for not publishing its statement. Later Mumtaz Bhutto leader of SNF was arrested as nominee in case and produced before court in which bail was granted. According to news, Awami Awaz, received threatening fax for dire consequences if Mumtaz Bhutto, leader of SNF not released. "We will attack on newspaper's office if Mumtaz Bhutto not released".

Fatwa was issued for threats and physical attacks against journalists in Bajaur Agency, where fighting between the Taliban and security forces continues. A fatwa was issued against two journalists and a rocket-propelled grenade was fired at a press club in Bajaur recently. Journalist Hameedullah's house in Swat was blown by unidentified men. Dir Union of Journalists demanded government for early release of missing journalist Ibrahim of Swat also a member of Swat Aman Committee.

SAMAA TV Quetta office was ransacked during riots in Quetta when miscreants started firing and throwing stones protesting the murder of Hazara Democratic Party (HDP) Chairman. SAMAA TV's office came under heavy shelling of stones and firing. Transmission of a news channel Duniya was jammed in Gujrat after it aired live coverage of the city police roughing up students of Government Zamindara College. Government functionaries harassed Geo News investigation team which was on duty near Chak Shehzad farmhouses. Editorial Board of Waqt News lodged strong protest against Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Sherry Rehman over her statement in which she accused Waqt News, that channel is biased and supporting only one political party. Security personnel of EME Society, on Raiwind Road in Lahore manhandled media men and injured four journalists including Geo reporter with the butts of pistols. The incident occurred when the media persons reached the main gate of the society for coverage of police encounter. The Police yet to take action on a complaint of senior journalist of Azad Jammu Kashmir Waheed Chirgah, who was allegedly assaulted. Many Journalists manhandled at Qaddafi stadium when they were trying to enter stadium, some journalists even not allowed entering stadium for coverage. Chitrali Journalists held a protest against PIA for not lifting newspapers' bundles from Islamabad to Chitral bound Flights even assurances by PIA management. The Supreme Court Bar Association representatives held a press conference on the road, outside the main gate of the Supreme Court Lahore Registry Branch, as the Court authorities did not allow the journalists to enter the SC premises, where the Bar had its office, to cover the meeting. An Rs500 million scam in the Intelligence Bureau (IB) echoed in the National Assembly, as the government remained

clueless about reports of distribution of huge money to buy loyalists and favor of media persons. According to The News, government constituted a four-member team, headed by deputy chief of a spying agency, to launch a vilification campaign against journalists on its hit list and dissenting voices within the ruling PPP. Editors and senior journalists of daily 'The News' and the Jang Group of Publications decided to sue the Pakistan and Dubai-based TV channel, ARY One World, in Pakistani, UK, Canadian and US courts, for airing baseless and false allegations against them. Ansar Abbasi served the legal notices on Zahid Bashir, former press secretary to the prime minister; Dr Danish, host of ARY One World; and M/s ARY Communications (Pvt) Ltd through his counsel. The Reporters Without Borders (RWB) said that threats to renowned Pakistan journalists Ansar Abbasi and Shaheen Sehbai will be taken up in the European Union parliament and demanded of the Pakistan government to unearth elements behind the threats and award them exemplary punishment. Group Editor of The News Shaheen Sehbai dispelled the impression given by Rehman Malik, Adviser on Interior, in the National Assembly that proper inquiry had been carried out by the Interior Ministry into the threats given to senior journalist and Editor Investigations of The News Ansar Abbasi. Most people in Swat are becoming regular listeners of FM radio channel run by Taliban they want to know about new threats and decrees. Taliban are ruling in Swat through FM radio. Information Minister Sherry Rehman denied reports that alleged President Asif Ali Zardari for derogatory remark about journalists. Media reported that president commented in a meeting with Frontier Chamber of Commerce and Industries "journalists are biggest terrorists." Presidency rejected such remarks and told that PPP holds journalists in high esteem. Chamber president also denied such remarks against media persons.

The federal government notified the Press, Newspapers, News Agencies and Books Registration Ordinance 2002, (XCVIII of 2002). But later press ordinance rules were withdrawn. Media Freedom Coordination Committee was established with joint participation of newspapers owners and worker journalists. Committee will comprise of representatives of CPNE, APNS, PFUJ and ATJ. Tripartite meeting on 7th Wage Board Award was attended by representatives of journalists, newspaper publishers and the Information and Labor ministries. Meeting formed a working group to make suggestions for the award's implementation. Pemra made it clear that transfer of Three FM radio stations from small cities to Islamabad, Karachi and Multan done according to rules and Pemra didn't exempt licensing fee to any radio station. Prime Minister approved the establishment of Electronic Media department. Ministry of Information advised journalists that while applying for visa in Islamabad for visit to Gaza, a request be sent to its External Publicity Wing so that clearance process could start immediately and they do not face difficulty upon their arrival in Cairo. Pakistan Academy of Letters (PAL) will establish a literary TV channel during the current year. Former Chairman Journalism Department Punjab University and renowned media educationist, columnist, scholar and thinker Prof Dr. Miskeen Ali Hijazi died after prolonged illness.

DISCLAIMER: This report is compilation of incidents related to media, reported by National Press. The contents of this report are based on the news stories published in various papers and being reproduced. These are catalogued for record and reference purposes for researchers and stakeholders from the media and communications sectors. Muhammad Farouk does not author the contents of incidents of news stories reported in section of print media. Therefore, do not necessarily reflect the compiler's policy.