

22 Balochistan journalists killed in four years

QUETTA, July 8: A workshop on 'Media and Civil Society in Balochistan' was informed on Sunday that the media in Balochistan was not free and journalists on professional duty often faced harassment at the hands of influential elements and different pressure groups active in the province.

According to figures presented at the workshop, at least 22 journalists have been killed in the province during the past four years.

The Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) had organised the workshop in collaboration with the Association for Integrated Development.

CRSS executive director Imtiaz Gul said journalists faced challenges and difficulties in reporting and it was the duty of the state and non-state forces to spare the media from their rivalries and not to subject them to intimidation.

He praised the media for working in difficult circumstances and paid homage to media people who lost their lives while performing their duty.

Addressing the workshop, Quetta Press Club general secretary Abdul Khaliq Rind said the entire province had become a battleground.

"You cannot look at media's work in isolation. You cannot write about any group. It is very difficult for all of us," he said.

He said that decades of discrimination had resulted in intellectual and economic backwardness of the province.

Khalil Ahmed of DawnNews said: "We don't have access to information. We cannot even report corruption cases." Journalists, he said, had been sandwiched between corrupt officials and extremist groups because they faced threats from both if they reported about their wrongdoings.

He said that because of the geographical importance of the region international and regional powers were active in Balochistan to protect their interests.

Irfan Rana of the Express Group said: "Whenever journalists report something, pressure groups ask them to amend it and warn them of dire consequences if their 'orders' are not obeyed."

Irshad Mastoi of Online news agency said: "All resistance movements approach us for coverage and political parties and some institutions consider the media as a resistance group."

He accused political leaders of forcing reporters to cover their 'press releases'.

Shahid Rind of ARY TV said the media faced pressures from powerful institutions, political leaders, militants and criminals.

"We get diktat from all stakeholders, so we cannot follow journalistic rules and face threats and censure," he said, adding "there are red lines and we cannot dare to be objective in reporting".

Abdullah Baloch of WASH TV said objective reporting was the biggest challenge as all forces put pressure and journalists could not report objectively.

Even NGOs and trade unions put pressure on journalists to file reports in accordance with their instructions, he said, adding that no journalist was secure in Balochistan.

Akbar Sheikh said if jobs were given to thousands of unemployed graduates in Balochistan it would help make society tolerant.

Dr Ishaq Baloch of the National Party, senior journalist Shehzada Zulfiqar, Liaquat Ali, Aslam Baloch, Arshad Jan and Hammad Sanjrani also spoke.

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Pressure groups harassing media persons in Balochistan

QUETTA: Different pressure groups and powerful elements have been harassing and terrifying media persons in Balochistan as some 22 journalists have been killed in the province during last four years. This was stated in a workshop on 'Media and Civil Society in Balochistan' organized by the Center for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) in collaboration with the Association for Integrated Development (AID) here on Sunday.

Speaking on the occasion senior journalist Imtiaz Gul said, "Media is facing challenges, constraints and operational difficulties in reporting in Balochistan." It is the duty of all the stakeholders to spare the media from their rivalries and not subject them to fear, intimidation and dictation, he added.

He said it was the responsibility of both the media and the civil society to face up to the challenges that the province faces today. Gul also paid tribute to the 22 journalists who lost their lives in Balochistan in the last four years.

Journalist leader Abdul Khaliq Rind said that media and other sectors have been facing problems in the province. Decades of discrimination have resulted in intellectual and economic backwardness in Balochistan, he added.

Journalist Khalil Ahmed said that media was not free in Balochistan as the journalists had become sandwich among extremist groups.

Journalist Irfan Rana said there were lots of hazards of reporting in Balochistan. "We have to follow blasts/attacks and usually we are exposed to terrorist attacks," he added. Mr Rana said the pressure groups ask the journalists to report events as per their directive and warned of dire consequences if their 'orders' were not obeyed.

Journalist Shahid Rind said that media was facing pressure from political leaders, militants and criminals. "We get dictation from all stakeholders. We cannot follow journalistic norms as we face threats, intimidation and censure," he said, adding that there were red lines and they could not dare to have objective reporting.

Journalist Abdullah Baloch said that the objective reporting was the biggest challenge as media in Balochistan was pressurized and media persons could not report objectively. "Even NGOs and trade unions put pressure on journalists to file news stories as per their dictation," he said. Akbar Sheikh said that if jobs are given to thousands of unemployed university and college graduates in Balochistan, it would help make the society tolerant.

Others who spoke included Liaquat Ail, Aslam Baloch, Arshad Jan and Hammad Sanjrani. Senior Vice President National Party, Dr. Ishaq Baloch and Senior Journalist Shehzada Zulfiqar were also present on this occasion.

Journalists express concern over media freedom in Balochistan

* Imitiaz Gul says state, non-state actors, should spare media from rivalries, not subject it to fear, intimidation

By Mohamamd Zafar

QUETTA: There is no free and independent media in Balochistan, as different pressure groups and powerful elements have been harassing and terrifying media persons, which have led to the killing of 22 journalists in the last four years.

This was declared in a workshop on 'Media and Civil Society in Balochistan', organised by Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS) in collaboration with Association for Integrated Development (AID) on Sunday.

Speaking on the occasion, senior journalist and CRSS Executive Director Imitiaz Gul said, "Media is facing challenges, constraints and operational difficulties in reporting in Balochistan. It is the duty of all state and non-state actors, and stakeholders, to spare the media from their rivalries and not subject them to fear, intimidation and dictation."

He appreciated the media for their performance in Balochistan's difficult environment. He said it was the responsibility of both the media and the civil society to face up to the challenges that the province faced today.

Gul also paid tributes to the 22 journalists, who had lost their lives in the province over the past four years.

Quetta Press Club General Secretary and reporter of a leading Urdu daily, Abdul Khaliq Rind; said, "You cannot look at media's work in isolation. You cannot write about any group. It is very difficult for us all." Rind further said that decades of discrimination was the prime reason for intellectual and economic backwardness in Balochistan.

Khalil Ahmed, a reporter of a private TV channel, said, "We have not been given access to information, even we cannot report corruption cases." He said that due to the geographical importance of Balochistan, the US, China, Iran and Afghanistan played a significant role in the region to protect their interests.

Irfan Rana, a reporter from a private TV channel, talked about the hazards of reporting in Balochistan. He said, "We follow blasts and are usually exposed to terrorist attacks." Rana added that whenever journalists in Balochistan reported something, pressure groups asked them to amend it and warned of dire consequences if their "orders" are not obeyed.

Irshad Mastoi, the bureau chief of an online news agency, said, "All resistance movements approach us for coverage and political parties and some institutions also behave with us like resistant groups," adding that political leaders force journalists to cover their specific "press release". He observed that society was extremely militarised in Balochistan.

Shahid Rind, the bureau chief of a private TV channel, said that the media faced pressures from powerful institutions, political leaders, militants and criminals. He said, "We get dictation from all stakeholders, so we cannot follow journalistic norms, as we face threats. There are red lines and we cannot dare be objective in reporting."

He said that dictation, censure, fear, intimidation and blackmailing by pressure groups defined journalists' formal reporting.

Abdullah Baloch, staff representative of a local language news channel, said that objective reporting was the biggest challenge as all 'big guns' in Balochistan pressurised the media, which hindered objective reporting. He said, "Even NGOs and trade unions put pressure on journalists to file news stories as per their dictation."

Akbar Sheikh, another speaker pointed out that disappointment, frustration and fear had angered and irritated the Baloch, who as a result mistreated the media. He suggested that if government jobs were given to the thousands of unemployed university and college graduates of Balochistan, society would become more tolerant.

Sheikh further said, "When political statements become news, instead of stories about crime, court, sports, health, education and environment; then media persons will have to face threats and consequences."

Other journalists present at the workshop were National Party Senior Vice President Dr Ishaq Baloch, senior journalists Shehzada Zulfiqar, Liaquat Ali, Aslam Baloch, Arshad Jan and Hammad Sanjrani.