

Journalists ask govt to protect their lives, properties

World Press Freedom Day

Hold rallies, seminars across the country; lament increasing intolerance towards freedom of press in country

ISLAMABAD: Journalist associations organised rallies all over the country to mark the World Press Freedom Day in the face of potential threats by the state, establishment and non-state actors that have shrunk the space for free press in Pakistan.

A big rally was jointly organised by the National Press Club (NPC) and Rawalpindi-Islamabad Union of Journalists (RIUJ), and the participants raised slogans in favour of the freedom of press. The written material distributed on the occasion revealed that Pakistan media were facing multiple threats to its freedom. Year 2016 started with many unfortunate incidents including attack on the offices of a private news channel and killing of a television journalist in Jamrud. According to the 2016 World Press Freedom Index, released by Reporters Without Borders, Pakistan is placed at number 147 out of 180 countries. India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Ethiopia, Thailand and even Palestine are better than Pakistan with regard to the freedom of press. The annual report by Freedom Network showed that in the year 2014, 14 journalists were killed, but it was the year 2015 that had really proved to be the year of gags and curbs on free speech. Addressing the participants of the rally, NPC President Shakeel Anjum said journalists had been rendering services for the freedom of press for the last many decades and they would continue their struggle for the cause in the face of potential threats.

“Now the time has come to find out the ways and means not only to identify the real elements who dislike freedom of press but also get rid of them to present real facts to the people,” he said. RIUJ President Ali Raza Alvi said Pakistani media were facing the worst kind of harassment all-over the country as there was no presence of independent media in many districts of Balochistan where a couple of journalists had been included in the list of criminals.

He said: “The reporters, photographers and cameramen work in the conflict areas where there are always dangers to their lives. But they never compromise on their work and bring real facts before the people.”

He said if the government and other non-state actors continue their efforts against the freedom of press then the journalists community would take aggressive stance and snatch its liberty from the clutches of the ‘evil nexus’.

RIUJ General Secretary Bilal Dar said Pakistan had been declared the most dangerous country for journalists in the world that underlined the fact that the incumbent government had completely failed to provide security to the media persons.

Our Lahore correspondent adds: A seminar was organised in Lahore on the topic of 'The Role of Media in Stability of Pakistan' by Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), Lahore Press Club and Punjab Union of Journalists at a local hotel.

Senior columnist Munno Bhai told the seminar participants that the press freedom was crucial for development and welfare of a society. He said providing media workers a safe environment was a responsibility of the media organisation owners and the government authorities.

Opposition leader in Punjab Assembly Mahmoodur Rasheed said that the government was spending millions of rupees on personal projection. Democracy doesn't mean that people keep dying for lack of facilities and the government play only the role of a spectator, he added. He assured the media persons of full support of the opposition parties.

Senior journalist and anchorperson Arif Nizami said that there was great need for jointly working for the freedom of press.

PFUJ President Rana Muhammad Azeem said media workers had always offered sacrifices for democracy and even laid down their lives. But, regrettably, no media organisation has got its workers insured so far.

Lahore Press Club President Shahbaz Mian said on the occasion that the media workers should pledge on the press freedom day that they would always stand united for safety and welfare of journalists.

PUJ President Shahzad Hussain Butt, speaking on the occasion, said that journalist bodies should always keep struggling for protecting rights of working journalists.

Senior journalist Majeed-ur-Rehman Shami, PUJ Secretary Amir Suhail, LPC Secretary Shadab Riaz, and others also addressed the seminar.

A joint declaration was approved at the end of the seminar. The declaration demanded the federal and provincial governments to protect lives and properties of working journalists. The provincial governments should pass journalist safety bills, the government should ensure salaries according to the wage board award, and link the advertisements bills with payment of salaries to media workers. All media workers should be insured by the respective organisations. The electronic media workers should also be provided a legal platform for redress of their grievances, on the pattern of the Implementation Tribunal for Newspaper Employees (ITNE) forum for the print media workers. The declaration demanded the government take steps for payment of one-year salaries to those workers who were rendered jobless by the closing of a new private TV channel.

Meanwhile, Pakistan People's Party Human Rights Wing also organised a seminar in Lahore in connection with the Press Freedom Day.

Also, in a statement, Punjab Finance Minister Dr Aysha Ghous praised the services of journalist community for the cause of democracy and people's rights in the country.

APP adds: The theme of the day was 'Access to Information and Fundamental Freedoms'. Every year on May 3, the World Press Freedom is observed across the world and in Pakistan too rallies and seminars in various parts of the country had been arranged to highlight the importance of freedom of press.

UNESCO had also arranged seminar on the day, attended by UNESCO representative to Pakistan Ms. Vibeke Jensen, ambassador of the embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Pakistan Ms. Jeannette Seppen, Parliamentary Secretary for the information broadcasting Mohisn Shahnawaz Ranjha.

Source: <http://www.thenews.com.pk/print/117393-Journalists-ask-govt-to-protect-their-lives-properties>