

**Harassment and cases against journalists  
during COVID19**

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**A report by Human Rights Law Network**

## Introduction

Over the last several years, India's rank in the annual World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has sunk lower and lower. The Index is "based on an evaluation of pluralism, independence of the media, quality of legislative framework and safety of journalists in each country and region". In 2020, India was placed 142nd out of 180 countries.

The COVID-19 lockdown has not improved the situation. Far from it – it has rather empowered and emboldened the Indian government, security forces and private citizens to suppress freedom of speech, cement the oppression of marginalised groups and prevent reporting on government mismanagement and human rights violations at all costs.

The situation for journalists under COVID-19 has been a complex one. First of all, their circumstances have been made more precarious by the economic uncertainty caused by the nationwide lockdown, which has caused layoffs, newspaper closures and unprecedented instability for freelance workers of all kinds. Secondly, lockdown has, by its very nature, restricted movement, and the exceptions declared for journalists by the government to allow them freedom to report have frequently been flouted by the police.

Beyond these practical implications, the government's attitude to reporting on the COVID-19 pandemic has been defined by defensiveness and manipulation from the very beginning. On 24 March 2020, even before the first, three-week nationwide lockdown was announced, Prime Minister Narendra Modi hosted a video conference with over twenty editors and owners of newspapers and other media channels, in which he encouraged them "to publish inspiring and positive stories" about COVID-19. In the weeks and months that have followed, the consequences of flouting this "suggestion" have been made exceedingly clear, as has been documented in this report.

Not only have individual incidents such as those recorded here demonstrated the severity of the government's reaction to criticism, but the government has also made significant attempts to stifle reporting on a systematic level. Just a week after the lockdown was announced, for example, on 1 April 2020, the

Indian government asked the Supreme Court to pass an order that the media should be forbidden from releasing any information about the pandemic before ascertaining a factual position from the government. The court responded with an order, saying “We do not intend to interfere with the free discussion about the pandemic, but direct the media [to] refer to and publish the official version about the developments.”<sup>1</sup> The reference to the Disaster Management Act, 2005 in this same order has proved an ominous precursor to the many cases of arrest and detention of journalists who supposedly disseminated “unverified news capable of causing panic” under the lockdown.

This report documents arrests, detentions, assaults and harassment against journalists over the lockdown period (from 24 March 2020 to the time of publication). The diversity of the individuals featured here demonstrates that no category of “human rights defender” has escaped the Indian government’s systematic suppression of free speech during this period, whether they are employed by a major media house or freelance; working in a city or rural area; reporting on the COVID-19 response or simply carrying out their usual journalistic duties.

As always, the journalistic community has been united in its condemnation of these abuses, and many of the cases have seen official statements from press organisations and journalistic bodies. However, there has been no such abundance of official intervention, with many promises of investigation or review so far unfulfilled.

It is important to remember, even among the chaos caused by COVID-19, that the issues that journalists and the country as a whole were facing before lockdown continue to threaten democratic values and human rights. Indeed, the marginalisation of certain communities in India has in many cases been amplified by the lockdown – most prominently, perhaps, for India’s vast informal workforce and migrant labourer communities, who in many cases lost access to their livelihoods, homes and freedom with just a few hours’ notice. Meanwhile, in Kashmir, citizens have been facing debilitating restrictions since

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<https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/india-supreme-court-orders-media-to-only-publish-official-information-on-covid-19.html>

long before the COVID-19 lockdown began. Throughout the pandemic, residents of Kashmir have been unable to access vital information online and now, in June, the government has launched a fresh attack on the very foundations of journalism through a new media policy that will empower the government to decide what is “fake” or “anti-national” news.

Journalism is a vital resource for the community, particularly in times such as these. The unprecedented circumstances in which we are currently living have highlighted both the value of frontline reporting and the extreme dangers faced by those on that frontline. The suppression of journalists presents a Catch-22, in which public awareness of the abuses against journalists actually relies on their own reporting of the abuses. Now then, more than ever, it is vital that we protect journalistic freedom.

## **Glossary of laws invoked in the documented cases:**

### **Indian Penal Code**

- Section 124A (sedition)
- Section 153A (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony)
- Section 182 (false information)
- Section 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant)
- Section 269 (negligent act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life)
- Section 270 (malignant act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life)
- Section 294 (obscene acts and songs)
- Section 336 (endangering life or personal safety of others)
- Section 451 (house-trespass in order to commit offence punishable with imprisonment)
- Section 500 (defamation)
- Section 501 (printing or engraving matter known to be defamatory)
- Section 504 (intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of the peace)
- Section 505(1)(b) (offences committed with the intention to cause fear or alarm among the public, or induce people against the state)
- Section 505(2) (statements creating or promoting enmity, hatred or ill-will between classes)
- Section 506 (punishment for criminal intimidation) of the Indian Penal Code;

### **Information Technology Act**

- Section 66 (computer related offences)
- Section 66A (punishment for sending offensive messages through communication service, etc)
- Section 67 (punishment for publishing or transmitting obscene material in electronic form)

- Section 67A (punishment for publishing or transmitting of material containing sexually explicit act, etc., in electronic form)

### **Disaster Management Act, 2005**

- Section 51 (punishment for obstruction)
- Section 54 (punishment for false warning)

### **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act**

- Section 13 (punishment for unlawful activities)

### **Motors Vehicles Act**

- Section 192 (using vehicle without registration)
- Section 196 (driving uninsured vehicle)

### **Scheduled Tribes/Scheduled Castes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act**

- Section 3(1) (d) (whoever not being a member of a Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe “garlands with footwear or parades naked or semi-naked a member of a Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe”)
- 3(1)(r) (whoever not being a member of a Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe “intentionally insults or intimidates with intent to humiliate a member of a Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe in any place within public view.”)

### **Disaster Management Act, 2005**

### **Epidemic Disease Act, 1897 (ED Act)**

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Himachal Pradesh	7
Jammu and Kashmir	6
Maharashtra	6
Telangana	4
Delhi	3
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Karnataka	3
Odisha	3
Punjab	3
Tamil Nadu	2
Arunachal Pradesh	2
Sikkim	2
Chhattisgarh	2
Madhya Pradesh	2
Andhra Pradesh	1
Jharkhand	1
Meghalaya	1

**Ravi Reddy****Name of the person:** Ravi Reddy**Date of the incident:** 23 March 2020**City, State:** Hyderabad, Telangana**Profession of the person:** Bureau Chief, The Hindu**Details of the incident:**

On 23 March 2020, Ravi Reddy, Bureau Chief of The Hindu, was on his way home when he was assaulted by the Begumpet police, who held him by the neck and pushed him for “violating curfew”, despite the fact that Government Order 45 exempts journalists from the curfew. A lathi-charge also allegedly occurred when journalists began to gather and question the police.

Reddy says that he was awaiting the removal of barricades by the police, and that he had shown his identity card to an Assistant Commissioner of Police level officer to explain that he was exempt from the curfew. Reddy was then assaulted by a Sub Inspector and constables, who forced him into his car by holding his neck and pushing him. Reddy claimed that none of the police officers involved had name plates on display.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/health-professionals-and-journalists-at-tacked-telangana-police-day-1-curfew-120998>

<https://www.theweek.in/news/india/2020/03/24/telangana-lockdown-chaos-and-panic-reign-police-use-force-after-people-violate-curfew.html>



<https://www.mediavigil.com/media/aaj-tak-journalist-abused-and-beaten-up-by-delhi-police/>

<https://www.thequint.com/news/india/coronavirus-lockdown-journalists-attacked-cpj>

**Uttkarsh Chaturvedi**

**Name of the person:** Uttkarsh Chaturvedi

**Date of the incident:** 25 March 2020

**City, State:** Thane district, Maharashtra

**Profession of the person:** Deputy News Editor, ET Now

**Details of the incident:**

Uttkarsh Chaturvedi, Deputy News Editor with business news channel ET Now, was allegedly assaulted by policemen while he was reporting on the lockdown in Thane.

Chaturvedi says he showed the officers his press card to no avail. He says four to five officers beat him with sticks until he was forced to drive forward on his bike to escape the violence.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://ipi.media/covid19-media-freedom-monitoring/>

<https://www.thequint.com/news/india/coronavirus-lockdown-journalists-attack-ed-cpj>

<https://www.rediff.com/news/report/tv-journalist-beaten-up-by-cops-during-lockdown/20200326.htm>

<https://twitter.com/uttkarsh311090/status/1242711171234398208>

**Chalamashetty Srinivas and up to nine other journalists**

**Name of the person:** Chalamashetty Srinivas and up to nine other journalists

**Date of the incident:** 25 March 2020

**City, State:** Krishna district, Andhra Pradesh

**Profession of the person:** Journalists for Vaartha newspaper and others

**Details of the incident:**

On 25 March 2020, around ten journalists were assaulted with lathis by the West Godavari police at a security checkpoint in Andhra Pradesh. Seven reporters were allegedly injured.

According to Chalamashetty Srinivas, one of the victims of the assault, the group of journalists had gone to the security checkpoint to investigate claims that people were being prevented from entering the district by the police. They tried to ask the police to move the checkpoint. The Circle Inspector responded by asking who they were, and after the journalists showed their accreditation cards, the Deputy Superintendent of Police, Dilip Kiran exited his vehicle and charged the journalists with a lathi.

After the attack, ten journalists staged a protest at the same location. Srinivas alleges that Kiran beat them again during the protest. The Minister of Transport and Information and Public Relations, Perni Venkataramaiah (Nani), asked the journalists to stop protesting and assured them that action would be taken against Kiran, but the journalists committed to filing a case against him nonetheless.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://ipi.media/covid19-media-freedom-monitoring/>  
<https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/journos-attacked-police-during-lockdown-andhra-stage-protest-121203>

**K. K. Saxena****Name of the person:** K. K. Saxena**Date of the incident:** 27 March 2020**City, State:** Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh**Profession of the person:** Journalist**Details of the incident:**

On 27 March 2020, a case was registered by police against K. K. Saxena, a journalist who had attended a press conference on 20 March by the then Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, Kamal Nath, who was announcing his resignation, despite the fact that Saxena's daughter had returned from the United Kingdom two days previously. Both Saxena and his daughter later tested positive for COVID-19.

The case was registered under IPC sections 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant), 269 (negligent act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life) and 270 (malignant act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life).

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://ipi.media/covid19-media-freedom-monitoring/>

<https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/india-news-journalist-who-attended-kamal-naths-resignation-presser-tests-positive-for-coronavirus/349414>

<https://theprint.in/health/mp-journalist-who-attended-kamal-nath-presser-with-200-others-tests-positive-for-covid-19/388109/>

<https://www.businesstoday.in/current/economy-politics/coronavirus-update-case-against-journalist-kamal-nath-press-conference-daughter-return-uk/story/399469.html>

**Om Sharma****Name of the person:** Om Sharma**Date of the incident:** 29 March 2020**City, State:** Baddi tehsil, Solan district, Himachal Pradesh**Profession of the person:** Reporter, Divya Himachal**Details of the incident:**

Police have opened three investigations against Om Sharma, a reporter with Hindi daily Divya Himachal, since late March.

The first was opened on 29 March 2020 in connection with a Facebook live video that Sharma posted. Sharma was reporting on the inadequate support by the administration to homeless migrant workers in Baddi tehsil, Solan district. He claimed that the workers, who were protesting by the roadside, had not eaten in two to three days due to a lack of arrangements by the government. Within 15 minutes, police officers and politicians were at the location, asking the labourers to return home. A Bharatiya Janata Party councillor promised that they would provide them with food at their homes. While Sharma recorded, the councillor told him that one of the migrants had food at home, and that they were simply complaining because they had not received the same fresh rations as the neighbouring colony. Sharma's video saw 1,500 shares on Facebook. On the same day, Sharma was booked under Article 54 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005, and four sections of the Indian Penal Code: 182, 188, 269 and 336.

The second investigation was opened on 26 April in connection with Sharma sharing a news article from Hindi daily Amar Ujala on Facebook. The story reported that there had been a government order to close businesses in the case of a coronavirus-positive employee. Sharma had shared the article on his Facebook page. The government denied the story on Twitter and the article was removed by Amar Ujala. The police alleged that Sharma spread false information, issued a false warning, and disobeyed the order of a public servant. He was booked under Sections 182 and 188 of the Indian Penal Code, and Section 54 of the Disaster Management Act.

The third was opened on 27 April on charges that Sharma disobeyed the order of a public servant, and sent offensive messages on a computer or other communication device for criticizing the local government on social media. Sharma had criticised the local administration on Facebook for causing confusion by announcing curfew relaxations in the industrial area covering Baddi, Barotiwala and Nalagarh and then shutting down the shops that opened the next day (24 April), saying that only shops selling essential items could open. On Facebook, Sharma asked if the local administration thought people were “kites” that can be “swerved in any direction”. Three days later, the administration booked Sharma for these posts under Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code and Section 66 of the Information Technology Act, 2000.

Sharma also claims that the police have refused him the curfew passes that he needs to report outside during the COVID-19 lockdown and that now only government-accredited journalists are given permission to report in Baddi, Barotiwala and Nalagarh.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://thewire.in/media/himachal-pradesh-firs-journalists>

<https://cpj.org/2020/05/authorities-in-india-continue-to-investigate-detain-journalists-amid-covid-19-pandemic/>

<https://www.newslaundry.com/2020/05/12/himachal-pradeshs-journalists-face-firs-harassment-for-reporting-on-government-failures>

## **Jagat Bains**

**Name of the person:** Jagat Bains

**Date of the incident:** 30 March 2020

**City, State:** Nalagarh, Himachal Pradesh

**Profession of the person:** Journalist, News18 Himachal

### **Details of the incident:**

Jagat Bains, a reporter with News18 Himachal, has been booked for three cases in 50 days.

The first FIR was registered on 30 March 2020 in connection with a video report published on the same day through News18 Himachal about migrant workers who were not receiving the food promised by the government as part of a relief package. Bains was charged with spreading rumours during a pandemic and his curfew pass was revoked by the police the following day.

The second was registered on 25 April in connection with his report on 23 April about private vehicles crossing closed borders in Baddi subdivision. Bains was charged under IPC Sections 188, 269 and 270. The FIR said: "Press reporter Bains circulated videos of the administration without any reason. He also violated lockdown guidelines."

The third was also registered on 25 April in connection with his report of the same day, published on News 18 Himachal, regarding a protest by migrant workers who had been denied government rations by a government supplier. After Bains' report, rations were supplied to the workers the following day, which Bains also reported on, at the request of the local administration. However, he was then charged under Sections 188, 269 and 270 of the Indian Penal Code.

Bains has alleged that he has been denied a curfew pass ever since, which would facilitate his reporting.

Bhanu Verma, journalist and president of the Solan District Journalist Association and Press Club, said in a statement: “It is a clear attempt to suppress the truth. The desperation to file FIRs stems from the fact that Himachal Pradesh was inching slowly towards the green zone. Then there was a blast and now we have 18 cases with three dead. The chief minister is not happy. But if we report on it, an FIR is all they have to rein us in.”

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://thewire.in/media/himachal-pradesh-firs-journalists>

<https://www.newslaundry.com/2020/05/12/himachalpradeshs-journalists-face-firs-harassment-for-reporting-on-government-failures>

**APRIL****Siddharth Varadarajan****Name of the person:** Siddharth Varadarajan**Date of the incident:** 1 April 2020**City, State:** Faizabad, Uttar Pradesh**Profession of the person:** Journalist, Founding editor of The Wire**Details of the incident:**

On 1 April 2020, the Uttar Pradesh Police in Faizabad registered an FIR against The Wire and Siddharth Varadarajan, its Founding Editor, in connection with an article they published about Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath attending a public religious event in Ayodhya on 25 March after the announcement of the national COVID-19 lockdown (24 March).

The FIR was registered on the complaint of an individual under Sections 188 and 505 (2) of the Indian Penal Code.

The FIR against The Wire cited a specific passage but did not specify the date it was published or the article it was taken from.

The Wire has stood by its article, stating that what the FIR says they have stated is a matter of record. In a statement, the Founding Editors said:

“We have come to know through social media that an FIR has been registered under Section 188 and 505(2) of the IPC against The Wire by the UP Police in Faizabad.

A bare perusal of the FIR shows that the offences invoked are not even remotely made out and that it is aimed at stifling legitimate expression and factual information. The UP police seems to think its job is to go after those who criticise the CM. The registration of an FIR is a blatant attack on the freedom of the press.”

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://thewire.in/media/up-police-fir-against-the-wire-an-attack-on-freedom-of-the-press>

<https://ipi.media/covid19-media-freedom-monitoring/>

<https://www.deccanherald.com/national/over-200-journalists-condemn-fir-against-the-founding-editor-of-the-wire-siddharth-varadarajan-825318.html>

**Pawan Chaudhary****Name of the person:** Pawan Chaudhary**Date of the incident:** 6 April 2020**City, State:** Munger, Bihar**Profession of the person:** Web journalist**Details of the incident:**

On 6 April 2020, web journalist Pawan Chaudhary was arrested in Munger, Bihar for spreading misinformation about the death of a COVID-19 patient via social media and sent to judicial custody in jail in Munger, Bihar.

Chaudhary is from Keshopur locality, Jamalpur town under Jamalpur police station. SHO (Jamalpur) Ranjan Kumar said that Chaudhary had been found to be spreading rumours on social media.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://ipi.media/covid19-media-freedom-monitoring/>

<http://www.uniindia.com/bihar-journalist-arrested-for-spreading-rumours-of-a-covid-19-death-in-jamalpur/east/news/1944016.html>

<https://www.newslaundry.com/2020/05/07/gagging-the-media-a-list-of-indian-journalists-booked-arrested-assaulted-during-the-lockdown>

**Prashant Kanojia****Name of the person:** Prashant Kanojia**Date of the incident:** 7 April 2020**City, State:** Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh**Profession of the person:** Journalist**Details of the incident:**

An FIR was lodged against journalist Prashant Kanojia by Uttar Pradesh police on 7 April 2020 in connection with “objectionable remarks” he allegedly made about Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on social media.

The initial complaint was filed by local BJP leader Shashank Shekhar Singh. Kanojia was charged under Indian Penal Code sections 500, 501 and 505(1)(b), and the Information Technology Act.

Charges were also filed against Kanojia by the Uttar Pradesh police in June 2019.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://thewire.in/rights/prashant-kanojia-up-police-fir>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-48579626>

<https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/lucknow/up-fir-against-journalist-for-on-line-post-against-pm-cm-6352480/>

**Ashwani Saini****Name of the person:** Ashwani Saini**Date of the incident:** 8 April 2020**City, State:** Mandi, Himachal Pradesh**Profession of the person:** Journalist, Mandi Live, Dainik Jagran**Details of the incident:**

Five FIRs have been filed against journalist Ashwani Saini since the COVID-19 lockdown began. Saini produces news video reports for Facebook page Mandi Live as well as freelancing for newspaper Dainik Jagran.

Saini was first booked 8 April 2020 in connection with his report on 7 April on the local administration failing to supply food to migrant workers in Bharajwanoo village, Sundernagar. In the FIR, Rahul Chauhan, Sundernagar sub-divisional magistrate, accused Saini of spreading false news and disobeying the order of a public servant under Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code and Section 54 of the Disaster Management Act. Saini maintains that he has video footage of migrant workers making these claims.

On 13 April 2020, three more FIRs were filed against Saini over a story published that day on Mandi Live by Saini and a reporter from Divya Himachal about brick kilns in Sundernagar continuing operations despite lockdown orders. After Saini's reports, the police filed FIRs against the kiln owners and stopped the work, but also filed FIRs against Saini based on claims by the kiln owners that the reporters had harassed and misbehaved with the migrant workers. Saini was booked under IPC Sections 451, 504, 506 and 188.

According to Saini, local police also seized his car on 14 April due to a "curfew violation", despite the state government exempting journalists from curfew restrictions through an order on 23 March, 2020, and Saini was booked a fifth time under IPC Section 188, and Sections 192 and 196 of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988. Saini was not able to secure his car back from the police until 11 May.

Sub-divisional magistrate Chauhan has claimed that Saini is not a journalist and is not authorised by the government.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://thewire.in/media/himachal-pradesh-firs-journalists>

<https://www.outlookindia.com/newscroll/hp-scribe-booked-for-fake-news-about-migrants-not-getting-ration-he-writes-to-pm-modi-cm/1798558>

<https://www.newslaundry.com/2020/05/12/himachal-pradeshs-journalists-face-firs-harassment-for-reporting-on-government-failures>

**Damodharan**

**Name of the person:** Damodharan

**Date of the incident:** 9 April 2020

**City, State:** Minjur, Tamil Nadu

**Profession of the person:** Cameraman

**Details of the incident:**

TV cameraman Damodharan was arrested by the police on 9 April 2020 for allegedly taking photographs of pharmacy staff at the Minjur Primary Health Centre distributing medicine without a consultation or prescription from a doctor. The police complaint was filed by a doctor from the same Primary Health Centre.

Damodharan had suspected that there were no doctors at the Primary Health Centre, and he confirmed this through several visits, on which he saw nurses and paramedical staff distributing medicine to patients. On 9 April, he confronted the pharmacy staff and began taking video footage. Within a few hours, he had been arrested.

Damodharan was arrested at around 10.30pm, despite showing his journalist ID card to the police, and charged with cheating, forgery, and preventing a public servant from discharging his duty. Later that night, a magistrate remanded him in judicial custody.

It has been reported that the DGP has undertaken to conduct an inquiry by a senior police officer and revenue officials.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/cities/chennai/2020/apr/09/scribe-who-exposed-violations-at-phc-booked-as-fake-journo-2127664.html>

<https://ipi.media/covid19-media-freedom-monitoring/>

**Mushtaq Ganaie****Name of the person:** Mushtaq Ganaie**Date of the incident:** 11 April 2020**City, State:** Bandipore district, Jammu and Kashmir**Profession of the person:** Journalist, Kashmir Observer**Details of the incident:**

Mushtaq Ganaie, journalist for the Kashmir Observer, was arrested and detained on 11 April 2020 for two days at Sumbal police station and booked for “creating hurdles in a police officer’s duty” due to his reporting during the COVID-19 lockdown.

Ganaie was arrested on April 11 2020 by police in Bandipore district, Jammu and Kashmir for allegedly obstructing the police, violating the COVID-19 lockdown, and spreading the coronavirus. He was reporting on the lockdown when police stopped his vehicle and did not allow him to leave, even when he showed his press ID. Ganaie says that Station House Officer (SHO) Muneeb-ul-Islam slapped him and another officer beat him with his lathi, causing injury to his arms and body.

The police filed an FIR under charges including “violating the lockdown rules” and “interfering in the professional work of the officials.” Ganaie was released on bail on 13 April. He says his phone was returned to him two days after this, and his car after six days.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://scroll.in/article/959874/firs-against-kashmiri-journalists-sends-message-that-media-exists-at-the-mercy-of-security-agencies>

<https://kashmirobsrver.net/2020/04/17/mediaman-detained-in-kashmir-for-being-out-in-lockdown/>

<https://ipi.media/covid19-media-freedom-monitoring/>

<https://scroll.in/latest/959741/kashmir-press-club-condemns-case-against-photojournalist-seeks-intervention-of-amit-shah-lg>

**Balasaheb Navgire**

**Name of the person:** Balasaheb Navgire

**Date of the incident:** 11 April 2020

**City, State:** Ahmednagar district, Maharashtra

**Profession of the person:** Freelance reporter

**Details of the incident:**

On 11 April 2020, Balasaheb Navgire, a freelance reporter, was reportedly attacked by a mob in Ahmednagar, Maharashtra in response to a report of his about families that had been quarantined due to COVID-19. The police filed a case against the attackers, but there had been no arrests reported at the time of publication.

There were 12 assailants in the mob, including members from the family mentioned in the report, who were upset at being identified. They claimed that they had lost their jobs after the publication of Navgire's report.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://cpj.org/2020/04/journalists-detained-assaulted-in-india-during-cov/>

**Vishal Anand**

**Name of the person:** Vishal Anand

**Date of the incident:** April

**City, State:** Dalhousie, Himachal Pradesh

**Profession of the person:** Journalist, national news channel

**Details of the incident:**

Vishal Anand, a journalist associated with a national news channel, has had two FIRs filed against him.

In mid-April, Anand was booked by the local authorities for misrepresentation for using pictures of Gandhi Chowk, Dalhousie in a report concerning COVID-19 in Chamba district.

Anand was then also booked for a comment to a media outlet about the first FIR filed against him: “Some officials are misusing power and trying to intimidate journalists... This is the first time in my 18 years in journalism that an FIR has been filed against me.”

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://thewire.in/media/himachal-pradesh-firs-journalists>

**Saleem Akhtar, Hansraj Meena and four unknown journalists**

**Name of the person:** Saleem Akhtar, Hansraj Meena and four unknown journalists

**Date of the incident:** 13 April 2020

**City, State:** Bhadohi, Uttar Pradesh

**Profession of the person:** Two profession unknown, four journalists

**Details of the incident:**

On 13 April 2020, an FIR was registered at Gopiganj police station, Bhadohi against four journalists for spreading ‘fake news’ through a report about a woman, Manju Yadav, throwing her five children into a river. The FIR mentions two reporters from news agencies IANS and Business Insider along with the respective editors, although not by name. The two others, Saleem Akhtar and Hansraj Meena, were booked for circulating the report on social media.

Both the agencies suggested in their reports that Yadav is a daily-wage labourer and that she had thrown her five children into the Ganga because she had been unable to find food for them under the lockdown caused by coronavirus.

These claims have been rejected by the authorities, who have registered cases under the Indian Penal Code, including section 505(1)(b) and section 188.

District Magistrate Rajendra Prasad claimed that the woman is not a daily-wage labourer and was not facing any shortage of food; instead, he stated that the incident had occurred after an altercation between the woman and her husband, Mridul Yadav, who filed a complaint that led to Manju Yadav being arrested and charged with murder.

After Yadav had thrown her children into the river, she remained by the ghat until the following morning before telling her fellow villagers about it. The bodies of four of the children (Aarti (12), Saraswati (10), Maateshwari (8) and Shivshankar (6)) have been recovered but the fifth child has not yet been found.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://www.thequint.com/news/india/up-police-book-journalist-over-fake-news-about-up-mother>

<https://www.outlookindia.com/newscroll/up-police-book-journalist-over-fake-news/1801266>

**Gowhar Ali Wani****Name of the person:** Gowhar Ali Wani**Date of the incident:** 13 April 2020**City, State:** Handwara, Jammu and Kashmir**Profession of the person:** Freelance journalist**Details of the incident:**

On 13 April 2020, the father of freelance journalist Gowhar Ali Wani, who was not named, was reportedly threatened by a police officer in Handwara, north Jammu and Kashmir, who told him that his son would be arrested “if he continues to film and photograph”.

The next day, Wani was allegedly attacked by police who came to his home, pulled his clothes and slapped him. They then detained Wani’s father for one day, after which he was released without charge.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://twitter.com/GowharSpeaks/status/1250406513279004673>

<https://cpj.org/2020/04/journalists-detained-assaulted-in-india-during-cov/>

<https://thefederal.com/states/north/jammu-and-kashmir/kashmir-journalists-continue-to-be-harassed-summoned-and-intimidated/>

**Rahul Kulkarni****Name of the person:** Rahul Kulkarni**Date of the incident:** 15 April 2020**City, State:** Maharashtra**Profession of the person:** Reporter, ABP Majha**Details of the incident:**

Rahul Kulkarni, reporter with Marathi news channel ABP Majha was arrested on 15 April 2020 in connection with his report that some trains had “restarted” on 14 April and that new trains may also be opening for migrants who were stuck in large cities due to the COVID-19 lockdown.

The police believed that Kulkarni’s report may have led to a gathering of over 1000 migrant labourers outside Bandra West station, Mumbai on 14 April. The migrants were under the impression that they would be able to return to their hometowns by train.

Maharashtra Home Minister Anil Deshmukh said that misinformation had been spread using 11 different methods. Kulkarni claims that he had based his story on an official notice that the railways had issued, but railway officials said that the notice had not been intended for public dissemination. Kulkarni has stood by his story, and ABP Majha has supported him.

Kulkarni was released on bail on 16 April. He was accused of violating penal code sections for negligence and acts likely to spread disease, intent to cause panic, disobedience of a public order, and abetting an offense by the public, as well violating the Epidemic Diseases Act. These charges could lead to a sentence of up to three years in prison, if Kulkarni were to be convicted.

The Mumbai Press Club condemned Kulkarni’s arrest. They said it was a “serious infringement” on the right to freedom of speech: “To hold a reporter responsible for something the railways should have clarified, smacks of trying to shift the blame by the state government for its own intelligence failure about the mass protest. The Mumbai Press Club denounces the arrest and considers it as a

serious infringement on the right of freedom of speech and this is nothing but an attack on the freedom of press.”

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://cpj.org/2020/04/journalists-detained-assaulted-in-india-during-cov/>

**Priyanshu Kumar****Name of the person:** Priyanshu Kumar**Date of the incident:** 15 April 2020**City, State:** Samastipur, Bihar**Profession of the person:** Reporter, TV channel**Details of the incident:**

Priyanshu Kumar, a reporter with a TV channel, alleged that he had a gun pointed at him and was threatened with death by a group of people on 15 April in connection with his reporting on social distancing violations in Samastipur, Bihar.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://ipi.media/covid19-media-freedom-monitoring/>

**Public TV (channel)****Name of the person:** Public TV (channel)**Date of the incident:** 16 April 2020**City, State:** Karnataka**Profession of the person:** TV channel**Details of the incident:**

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting served a show cause notice to Public TV in connection with a programme they aired on 15 April 2020 allegedly saying that the government would be dropping money to the poor from helicopters during the COVID-19 lockdown.

The MIB alleged that Public TV was “spreading false information, creating panic and social unrest” and that the show was “false, mischievous and deliberate”. However, some have suggested that the channel was merely discussing the economic concept of ‘helicopter money’.

In its notice to the channel, the Press Information Bureau said, “You are hereby directed to show cause why your channel should not be taken out of air immediately. You are instructed to send your reply in this regard within 10 days of receipt of this notice. When the whole country is fighting COVID-19, your channel, instead of creating awareness and educating the public, spreading false information, creating panic and social unrest. In view of the serious violation of Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995 and rules framed there under, you are hereby directed to show cause why your channel should not be taken out of air immediately.”

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://thewire.in/media/kannada-news-channel-helicopter-money-india>

<https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/news-channel-gets-notice-allegedly-hinting-pm-will-throw-money-helicopter-122729>

<https://thefederal.com/states/south/karnataka/notice-issued-against-karnataka-based-public-tv-for-airing-fake-news/>

**Masrat Zahra****Name of the person:** Masrat Zahra**Date of the incident:** 20 April 2020**City, State:** Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir**Profession of the person:** freelance photojournalist**Details of the incident:**

Masrat Zahra is a freelance photojournalist who was booked under the amended Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) on 20 April 2020 in connection with social media posts that were alleged to be “anti-national” and motivated by “criminal intention to induce the youth and promote offence against public tranquillity”.

Zahra was summoned for questioning by the Cyber Police in Srinagar on 18 April 2020 as part of a police investigation into her social media posts. Zahra often posts images from her reporting to social media. On 18 April, the Cyber Police Station, Srinagar alleged in a press release that Zahra had been “frequently uploading anti-national posts with the criminal intention” and that her posts might “provoke the public to disturb the law and order”. In their statement, police also referred to a photograph taken by Zahra for a 2019 article for The New Humanitarian, which she later posted to Twitter. The photograph was of a Kashmiri woman whose husband had been killed by Indian soldiers because they suspected he had militant connections.

The Kashmir Press Club and the Directorate of Information intervened and the summons was dropped, but Zahra was called back on 21 April after a case was filed against her under Section 13 of the UAPA and Section 505 of the Indian Penal Code. These charges could result in a fine or imprisonment of up to seven years under the UAPA and a fine and imprisonment of up to three years under the IPC.

Aliya Iftikhar, senior Asia researcher at the Committee to Protect Journalists in New York, made the following statement: “Masrat Zahra and Peerzada Ashiq

should be free to report on events in Jammu and Kashmir without facing harassment and intimidation from local authorities. Police should drop their investigations into both journalists, and India should reform its laws to make such capricious actions by police impossible.”

The Kashmir Press Club also made a statement, seeking the intervention of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Lieutenant Governor GC Murmu and Director General of Police Dilbagh Singh to stop the “harassment” of journalists in the Valley: “While journalism in Kashmir had never been easy, challenges and hardships have multiplied for journalists since August 05, 2019 [the revocation of special status of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution]. Even in this time of coronavirus pandemic, journalists in Kashmir have been called to police stations and forced to present themselves to explain their stories.”

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://scroll.in/article/959874/firs-against-kashmiri-journalists-sends-message-that-media-exists-at-the-mercy-of-security-agencies>

<https://scroll.in/latest/959741/kashmir-press-club-condemns-case-against-photojournalist-seeks-intervention-of-amit-shah-lg>

<https://cpj.org/2020/04/jammu-and-kashmir-police-launch-investigations-int/>

<https://kashmirreader.com/2020/04/20/kpc-takes-strong-exception-to-case-against-photojournalist/>

**Peerzada Ashiq**

**Name of the person:** Peerzada Ashiq

**Date of the incident:** 20 April 2020

**City, State:** Srinagar and Anantnag, Jammu and Kashmir

**Profession of the person:** Journalist, The Hindu

**Details of the incident:**

Peerzada Ashiq is a senior journalist with The Hindu who has been interrogated twice, first by the Cyber police headquarters in Srinagar and then by police in South Kashmir, in connection with a report on the killing of two militants in Baramulla, Jammu and Kashmir.

Ashiq had reported on the burial of two militants in Baramulla, who were killed in an encounter between militants and security forces at Shopian and whose families wanted to exhume their bodies to perform funeral rites. The police alleged that this story “was factually incorrect and could cause fear or alarm in the minds of the public,” and that “the said news was published without seeking confirmation from the district authorities.” This press release by the police on 20 April did not specify the laws that Ashiq is alleged to be in violation of. They have not formally filed charges against him.

Contrarily, Ashiq claims that he has proof that he contacted the authorities for comment and that they did not issue a denial, or respond at all. He says that he showed the police these screenshots during questioning.

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**Link to media coverage:**

Original story:

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/families-of-slain-militants-given-curfew-pass/article31378804.ece>

<https://cpj.org/2020/04/jammu-and-kashmir-police-launch-investigations-int/>

<https://scroll.in/article/959874/firs-against-kashmiri-journalists-sends-message-that-media-exists-at-the-mercy-of-security-agencies>

<https://scroll.in/latest/959741/kashmir-press-club-condemns-case-against-photojournalist-seeks-intervention-of-amit-shah-lg>

**Samrat Pradhan and Amit Kar**

**Name of the person:** Samrat Pradhan and Amit Kar

**Date of the incident:** 20 April 2020

**City, State:** Bengaluru, Karnataka

**Profession of the person:** Business correspondent for a magazine; hotel employee

**Details of the incident:**

Police at Hennur police station in Bengaluru, Karnataka allegedly tortured Samrat Pradhan, a native of Darjeeling, and his cousin Amit Kar, who is from Nagaland, for 15 hours. They say they were attacked while out on a bike to buy essentials such as medicine for Kar because they did not have a pass.

Pradhan alleged that there was a crowd watching the beating who were calling him and his cousin “coronavirus”. Pradhan also claimed that he took video footage of the police assaulting him and his cousin, but that the video was deleted from his phone after hours of torture at the police station, which continued until he deleted it.

The police have denied all claims.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://ipi.media/covid19-media-freedom-monitoring/>

<https://www.timesnownews.com/mirror-now/crime/article/bengaluru-two-men-from-north-east-tortured-by-police-for-15-hours-allege-they-were-called-coronavirus/581794>

<https://www.firstpost.com/india/northeasterners-continue-to-face-racist-attacks-in-bangalore-8416251.html>

<https://bangaloremirror.indiatimes.com/bangalore/crime/two-ne-residents-tortured-in-police-station-for-15-hours/articleshow/75282066.cms>

**Tongam Rina****Name of the person:** Tongam Rina**Date of the incident:** 20 April 2020**City, State:** Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh**Profession of the person:** Associate Editor, The Arunachal Times**Details of the incident:**

On 20 April 2020, Tongam Rina, Associate Editor of The Arunachal Times, related on Twitter that she had received multiple threats online in response to her reporting.

Rina received these threats after she reported on government officials seeking to track down hunters of animals and reptiles due to fears over the spread COVID-19 through these animals in a story titled “Wildlife hunting on spike, say forest officials”.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/arunachal-media-groups-flag-threats-to-editor-over-wildlife-hunting-report/article31406985.ece>

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/concern-over-threat-to-scribe-in-arunachal/article31409965.ece>

**Gowhar Geelani****Name of the person:** Gowhar Geelani**Date of the incident:** 21 April 2020**City, State:** Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir**Profession of the person:** Journalist and author**Details of the incident:**

A case was filed against Gowhar Geelani, journalist and author, under the UAPA on 21 April 2020.

The Cyber Police Station Kashmir Zone alleged that he had been “glorifying terrorism in Kashmir Valley”, “causing disaffection against the country” and “indulging in unlawful activities” through social media that are “prejudicial to the national integrity, sovereignty and security of India”. It also claimed that it had received complaints of threat and intimidation by Geelani.

Geelani has also criticised the Indian government’s policies in Kashmir in the past, and was stopped from leaving India after 5 August 2019, when Jammu and Kashmir was stripped of its special status under Article 370. He has also recently uploaded posts to Twitter in support of his fellow journalists, Masrat Zahra and Peerzada Ashiq.

Geelani’s counsel Salih Peerzada made a petition to the Jammu and Kashmir High Court challenging the jurisdiction of the Cyber Police Station, Srinagar to file a first information report against Geelani. The case was heard by Justice Ali Mohammad Magray through videoconferencing due to the COVID-19 lockdown.

The petition argued: “The respondent has no jurisdiction to investigate the offences beyond the purview of the Information Technology Act, 2000. There is no genesis or manner of the commissions of alleged offences mentioned in the FIR, as such, the initiation of persecution being in abuse of the process of law can’t be allowed to sustain.” Peerzada claimed that the FIR had been filed

through misuse of police powers and sought to quash the FIR and request interim protection from arrest for Geelani.

On 24 April, the Jammu and Kashmir High Court on Friday denied interim protection from arrest to Geelani. They issued a notice to the Union Territory government and listed the case for 20 May.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://scroll.in/article/959874/firs-against-kashmiri-journalists-sends-message-that-media-exists-at-the-mercy-of-security-agencies>

<https://scroll.in/latest/960161/j-k-high-court-refuses-interim-protection-from-arrest-to-journalist-booked-under-uapa>

<https://ipi.media/covid19-media-freedom-monitoring/>

**Subrat Kumar Swain**

**Name of the person:** Subrat Kumar Swain

**Date of the incident:** 22 April 2020

**City, State:** Keonjhar, Odisha

**Profession of the person:** Correspondent, Sambad

**Details of the incident:**

Subrat Kumar Swain, correspondent with daily newspaper Sambad, was allegedly beaten by police sub-inspector Ashutosh Mohanty on 22 April 2020 while en route to Keonjhar district headquarters hospital with his sick, 4-year-old son.

Swain says Mohanty stopped him while he was driving in his car, suspecting that he was flouting lockdown rules. Despite Swain's lockdown pass, identity card and explanation that he was going to consult a doctor for his son, Mohanty allegedly hit him with his baton.

Keonjhar SP Mitrabhanu Mahapatra has asked the additional SP to inquire into the matter. Until there has been a probe into the matter, the sub-inspector will not be deployed on road patrolling duty.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/odisha-journalist-taking-sick-son-to-hospital-assaulted-by-cop-for-flouting-lockdown/story-85O55zHwPDCdsbqWFtO1GK.html>

<https://sambadenglish.com/odisha-journalist-en-route-to-hosp-with-ill-son-thrashed-by-cop/>

**Arnab Goswami**

**Name of the person:** Arnab Goswami

**Date of the incident:** 22 April 2020

**City, State:** Mumbai, Maharashtra

**Profession of the person:** Editor, Republic TV

**Details of the incident:**

On 22 April 2020, Arnab Goswami, Editor, Republic TV, and his wife, Samyabrata Ray, were allegedly attacked by two men while driving home in Mumbai.

The men threw black ink at Goswami's car and were stopped by his security guards. They have since been arrested. Goswami claimed that the attackers were from the Congress party and were motivated to attack Goswami by his critical comments against the party.

Multiple police complaints have also been filed against Goswami by Congress party workers after the panel discussion he held about Congress President Sonia Gandhi's alleged silence on the lynching of two Hindu monks.

On 25 April, the Supreme Court stopped police from taking any coercive action against Goswami for three weeks.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://cpj.org/2020/04/journalists-detained-assaulted-in-india-during-cov/>

**Andrew Sam Raja Pandian, Jerald Aruldas and M Balaji**

**Name of the person:** Andrew Sam Raja Pandian, Jerald Aruldas and M Balaji

**Date of the incident:** 23 April 2020

**City, State:** Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu

**Profession of the person:** Founder and Chief Executive of SimpliCity; Reporter; Photographer

**Details of the incident:**

Andrew Sam Raja Pandian, founder and chief executive of a portal called SimpliCity, was arrested by the R.S. Puram police in Coimbatore on 23 April 2020 after SimpliCity published a report on 18 April alleging that there was government corruption in the public distribution system. Pandian was accused of violating the Epidemic Diseases Act and two sections of the penal code.

Pandian was arrested under Sections 188, and 505(i) of the IPC and Section 3 of the Epidemic Diseases Act. According to the police complaint, SimpliCity and Pandian “attempted to bring a bad name to the state government, created unrest among government officials and through this tried to gain popularity for the site.” If Pandian is charged and convicted, he could be imprisoned for up to three months for violating the Epidemic Diseases Act and up to three years for violating Sections 188 and 505 (1) of the penal code violations.

Jerald Aruldas and M Balaji, the journalist and photographer who reported on the story, respectively, had been detained earlier on 23 April but were released after nine hours.

CPJ called for the charges to be dropped in the following statement by Aliya Iftikhar, CPJ’s senior Asia correspondent in New York: “Indian authorities should not misuse laws meant to fight a pandemic in order to silence critical reporting. Authorities in Tamil Nadu should immediately release journalist Andrew Sam Raja Pandian and drop their investigation into his outlet’s work.”

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://cpj.org/2020/04/police-in-indias-tamil-nadu-state-arrest-journalis/>

<https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/india-news-tamil-nadu-journalist-held-for-reporting-on-doctors-not-getting-food-ppe-at-work/351372>

<https://ipi.media/covid19-media-freedom-monitoring/>

Unnamed journalists

**Name of the person:** Unnamed journalists

**Date of the incident:** 25 April 2020

**City, State:** Bengaluru, Karnataka

**Profession of the person:** Journalists

**Details of the incident:**

On 25 April 2020, Janata Dal (Secular) MLC K.T. Srikante Gowda and his son Krishik protested the testing of journalists for COVID-19 near their residence in Bengaluru, Karnataka. Krishik allegedly assaulted a journalist and was detained by police and charged with the assault and obstructing COVID-19 testing.

The tests had been organised by the Department of Information and Public Relations at Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Bhavan. 17 journalists attended the camp on Friday 24 April, and up to 21 arrived on Saturday 25 April. This led to a protest by Gowda, Krishik and other supporters of theirs, who were unhappy with the location of the testing. They abused government personnel and Krishik allegedly assaulted an unnamed journalist, for which he was detained by the police for questioning.

Mandya Deputy Commissioner M.V. Venkatesh said the district administration would investigate the incident and initiate measures against the persons involved.

The Karnataka Journalists Union (KJU) condemned the incident and asked the government to take action against the accused.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://indibuzzonline.com/india/mlc-opposes-covid-19-tests-son-detained-for-a-saulting-journalist/>

**Neeraj Shivhare****Name of the person:** Neeraj Shivhare**Date of the incident:** 26 April 2020**City, State:** Chhattisgarh**Profession of the person:** Reporter, news website Bastar Ki Aawaz**Details of the incident:**

Neeraj Shivhare, a reporter with the news website Bastar Ki Aawaz, was served a show cause notice and threatened with a police investigation in Chhattisgarh on 26 April 2020.

Shivhare had published a report on 25 April on a woman being driven to sell her refrigerator because she was unable to pay for food due to the COVID-19 lockdown. The local administration summoned Shivhare in connection with this, issuing him with a show-cause notice and asking him to explain why a legal case should not be filed against him. They claimed that his report had “damaged the image of the administration”.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://cpj.org/2020/05/authorities-in-india-continue-to-investigate-detain-journalists-amid-covid-19-pandemic/>

<https://ipi.media/covid19-media-freedom-monitoring/>

**Zubair Ahmed****Name of the person:** Zubair Ahmed**Date of the incident:** 27 April 2020**City, State:** Andaman and Nicobar Islands**Profession of the person:** Freelance journalist**Details of the incident:**

Zubair Ahmed, a freelance journalist in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, was arrested on 27 April 2020 in connection with a tweet that he posted on Twitter about a decision by the government to quarantine a family that had only spoken to a COVID-19 patient over the phone. Ahmed was charged under Indian Penal Code sections 188, 269, 270 and 505(1), and sections 51 and 54 of the Disaster Management Act.

In his tweet, Ahmed was referencing claims from an article by a journalist with the Andaman Chronicle, which were refuted by the police. Director General of Police of Andaman and Nicobar Islands Dependra Pathak claimed that the tweet had created communal tensions in the islands.

Ahmed is now out on bail.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://thewire.in/media/andaman-journalist-arrested-for-tweet-accused-of-spreading-false-information>

<https://cpj.org/2020/05/authorities-in-india-continue-to-investigate-detain-journalists-amid-covid-19-pandemic/>

**Subhash Rai, Vijay Vineet**

**Name of the person:** Subhash Rai, Vijay Vineet; Jansandesh Times

**Date of the incident:** 28 April 2020

**City, State:** Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh

**Profession of the person:** Journalist and Editor-in-Chief, respectively, Jansandesh Times

**Details of the incident:**

Subhash Rai, journalist and Vijay Vineet, Editor-in-Chief at Jansandesh Times received a show cause notice from The Varanasi District Magistrate (DM) Kaushal Raj Sharma on 28 April 2020 in connection with a report by Jansandesh Times alleging that members of the Musahar community were eating grass to survive in Koiripur village, Varanasi district.

The story was reported on by journalists Vijay Vineet and Manish Mishra and published on 26 March, along with photographs of children eating grass. These photographs have now been widely shared on social media.

In a notice to Vineet and Rai, DM Kaushal Raj Sharma called for them to publish a denial of their report, stating that it was fabricated. Sharma claims that an investigation he ordered by an ADM-level officer established that the Dalit people were eating ankari dal (wild pulses), not grass. He also said that since they were also eating green gram, it was a “nutritious meal” and that the Jansandesh Times had “sensationalised a trivial issue”. Sharma then took and distributed a photograph of himself and his son eating ankari dal.

Vineet has stood by his report, however, saying that the condition of the Musahar community in Koiripur village had been poor for three to four days due to the lockdown, which has left them unable to travel and lacking in funds. He claims that he has footage of Musahar people showing him empty utensils in their homes as well as of the community eating the grass. Vineet feels that the report has been beneficial as it prompted the local administration to visit the

locality that same day and arrange food for the Musahar families. Individuals from neighbouring villages have also come to Koiripur village to help.

## कार्यालय कलेक्टर एवं जिला मजिस्ट्रेट, वाराणसी।

संख्या: 789 / एसटी0-कैम्प-2020

दिनांक: 26 मार्च, 2020

### नोटिस

श्री सुभाष राय,  
प्रधान सम्पादक, जनसंदेश टाइम्स,  
तेलियाबाग, वाराणसी।

श्री विजय विनीत,  
वरिष्ठ संवाददाता, जनसंदेश टाइम्स,  
तेलियाबाग, वाराणसी।

कृपया दैनिक समाचार पत्र 'जनसंदेश टाइम्स' में दिनांक: 26.03.2020 को प्रकाशित समाचार 'बनारस के कोइरीपुर में घास खा रहे मुसहर' शीर्षक से सम्बन्धित समाचार (संलग्नक-1) का अवलोकन करें, जिसमें ग्राम कोइरीपुर, थाना बड़ागाँव, तहसील पिण्डरा, वाराणसी के मुसहर जाति के बच्चों का घास खाते हुए फोटो छापकर खबर प्रकाशित किया गया है।

उक्त प्रकरण में अपर जिलाधिकारी (वि०/रा०), उप जिलाधिकारी (पिण्डरा) एवं तहसीलदार (पिण्डरा) वाराणसी को मौके पर भेजकर जाँच करायी गयी, जिसमें पाया गया कि उक्त बच्चों के घास खाने का प्रकाशित समाचार एव तथ्य वास्तविकता के विपरीत है। इस गाँव में बच्चे फसल के साथ उगने वाली अखरी दाल और चने की बालियाँ तोड़ कर खाते हैं व ये बच्चे भी अखरी दाल की बालियाँ खा रहे थे। उक्त जाँच अधिकारीगण द्वारा अपनी जाँच आख्या के साथ मौके पर सम्बन्धित के बयान लिये गये तथा समाचार पत्र में जिस घास की फोटो प्रकाशित की गयी है, नमूने के तौर पर जाँच आख्या के साथ इस घास (जो वास्तव में अखरी दाल है) के सैम्पल भी भेजे गये। जाँच अधिकारी द्वारा भेजे गये घास (जो वास्तव में अखरी दाल है) को अधोहस्ताक्षरी द्वारा स्वयं अपने परिवार के साथ खाया गया, जिसकी फोटो संलग्न है (संलग्नक-2)।

उक्त से स्पष्ट है कि जनसंदेश टाइम्स के सम्बन्धित रिपोर्टर द्वारा उक्त प्रकाशित समाचार में घास खाना लिखकर मुसहर जाति के परिवारों पर लांछन लगाने का कुत्सित प्रयास किया गया है व जन-सामान्य के बीच गलत संदेश फैलाया गया है, जो वर्तमान हालात में काफी संवेदनशील हो सकती है। इस समाचार को निराधार बताने का व्हाट्सैप मैसेज भेरे द्वारा आपको मध्य रात्रि 01.30 बजे ही भेज दिया गया था, परन्तु फिर भी आपने फ्रंट पेज पर झूठा समाचार छपा।

अतएव कृपया उक्त के सम्बन्ध में 24 घण्टे के अन्दर स्पष्ट करें कि उक्त समाचार पत्र में मुसहरों के घास खाने का जो समाचार प्रकाशित किया गया है, वह किस आधार पर किया गया है। इसके साथ ही कल दिनांक: 27.03.2020 के जनसंदेश टाइम्स के प्रकाशन में उक्त समाचार का खण्डन प्रकाशित करते हुए यह प्रकाशन भी करें कि आपके द्वारा दिनांक: 26.03.2020 के प्रकाशन में जो खबर लिखा गया है, उसमें इस गाँव से कोई घास नहीं खा रहा है। यदि आपके द्वारा कल दिनांक: 27.03.2020 के जनसंदेश टाइम्स के प्रकाशन में उक्त समाचार का खण्डन जारी नहीं किया जाता है, तो विधिक कार्यवाही भी अमल में लायी जायेगी।  
संलग्नक: उपरोक्तानुसार।

( कौशल राज शर्मा )  
जिला मजिस्ट्रेट, वाराणसी।

प्रतिलिपि: निम्नलिखित को सूचनार्थ एवं आवश्यक कार्यवाही हेतु प्रेषित।

- 1 वरिष्ठ पुलिस अधीक्षक/अपर जिला मजिस्ट्रेट (नगर) वाराणसी।
- 2 प्रभारी निरीक्षक (थाना चेतगंज) वाराणसी को इस निर्देश के साथ प्रेषित कि उक्त नोटिस सम्बन्धित को तामील करकर तामीला प्रति अधोहस्ताक्षरी को उपलब्ध करें।

संलग्नक: उपरोक्तानुसार।

( कौशल राज शर्मा )  
जिला मजिस्ट्रेट, वाराणसी।

Congress state president Ajay Lallu made the following statement criticizing the state administration:

“If someone is eating ankari grass, then the Uttar Pradesh government and its administration should be ashamed and DM Kaushal Raj Sharma should immediately apologise for his conduct.”

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://theprint.in/india/journalist-behind-story-of-starving-dalits-eating-grass-in-varanasi-district-gets-notice/390385/>

**MAY****Manish Pandey****Name of the person:** Manish Pandey**Date of the incident:** 1 May 2020**City, State:** Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh**Profession of the person:** Journalist, News 1 India**Details of the incident:**

Manish Pandey, a reporter with TV channel News1 India in Lucknow, says he was interrogated by Special Task Force, Uttar Pradesh on 1 May 2020 after he reported that hospitals and medical colleges were being supplied with poor quality personal protective equipment (PPE) on 17 April.

In his story of 17 April, which aired on News 1 India, Pandey reported on a letter sent by a senior government official about low-quality PPE in government hospitals and medical colleges. The police allegedly questioned him for an hour about his sources.

According to Assistant Superintendent of Police Vishal Vikram Singh, however, the police only requested Pandey's presence for a five to ten minute discussion over tea, as one of the many meetings they have been having with journalists to discover who leaked the letter.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://cpj.org/2020/05/authorities-in-india-continue-to-investigate-detain-journalists-amid-covid-19-pandemic/>

**Chitaranjan and one other reporter**

**Name of the person:** Chitaranjan and one other reporter

**Date of the incident:** 3 May 2020

**City, State:** Puri, Odisha

**Profession of the person:** Cameraperson, Reporter

**Details of the incident:**

A reporter and cameraperson from Kanak News were allegedly attacked by a Forest Guard near Balukhand-Konark Wildlife Sanctuary, Puri, Odisha on World Press Freedom Day while they were documenting a report related to cyclone FANI. The cameraperson has been identified as Chitaranjan.

The reporters came upon two forest guards consuming liquor, who then allegedly attacked them and broke Chitaranjan's camera because they were under the impression that he had taken pictures of them consuming liquor.

A complaint was lodged by Chitaranjan and some members of Puri Yuva Congress at Puri Town Police Station.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://www.orissapost.com/forest-guards-attack-journalist-in-puri/>

<https://sambadenglish.com/forest-guard-attacks-journalists-in-odisha-breaks-camera/>

<https://odishabytes.com/watch-journalists-assaulted-by-forest-guards-in-puri-district/>

**Sudhir Chaudhary****Name of the person:** Sudhir Chaudhary**Date of the incident:** 7 May 2020**City, State:** Kerala**Profession of the person:** Editor-in-Chief, Zee News TV**Details of the incident:**

On 7 May 2020, an FIR was filed against Sudhir Chaudhary, Editor-in-Chief, Zee News TV, for offending the Muslim religion through his programme, Daily News And Analysis (DNA) on Zee New.

The FIR references a DNA programme from 11 March 2020 that presented a flowchart called a “jihad chart” which aimed to demonstrate different “types of jihad”. It invokes Section 295A of the Indian Penal Code.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://thewire.in/media/zee-news-sudhir-chaudhary-fir-jihad-chart>

**Prasanjit Dutta****Name of the person:** Prasanjit Dutta**Date of the incident:** 8 May 2020**City, State:** Dimapur, Nagaland**Profession of the person:** Journalist, Nagaland Page**Details of the incident:**

Prasanjit Dutta, a journalist with Nagaland Page, was allegedly assaulted by a Government Railway Police (GRP) official on 8 May 2020 near Dimapur Railway Station in Nagaland. Dutta says the officer slapped him six times and asked him if he was Muslim after he asked if he could cross over a railway platform to reach the end of a footbridge.

According to Dutta, he showed one officer his press identity card, but another officer lost his temper, asked who had told him to use the platform and began slapping Dutta. He asked Dutta if he was Muslim, told him that it was not his state and that if he wanted to spread the virus he should do it in his own state.

After this, one of the other officers apologised on behalf of the officer who had committed the assault. Dimapur Police subsequently made a statement that disciplinary action had been taken against the railway personnel.

Nagaland Page had filed an FIR against the officer for the assault but withdrew it after he made an “unconditional apology”.

Samrat Choudhury, Convenor of The Foundation for Media Professionals, made the following statement: “The introduction of a communal angle in the assault further aggravated the seriousness of the incident... Implicit bias on a communal basis amongst the police, or any government official, is a serious issue not only in Dimapur or Delhi, but around the world, with certain communities – for instance, blacks and Hispanics in America – being routinely subjected to worse treatment by police officials.”

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://ipi.media/covid19-media-freedom-monitoring/>

<https://scroll.in/latest/961530/nagaland-newspaper-withdraws-fir-against-police-officer-for-assaulting-journalist-after-apology>

<https://morungexpress.com/journalist-assaulted-police-officer-dimapur>

**Dhaval Patel****Name of the person:** Dhaval Patel**Date of the incident:** 8 May 2020**City, State:** Ahmedabad, Gujarat**Profession of the person:** Editor, Face of Nation**Details of the incident:**

On 8 May 2020, an FIR was filed against Dhaval Patel, Editor of Face of Nation, under Section 124(A) of the Indian Penal Code and Section 54 of the Disaster Management Act, in connection with a report suggesting a leadership change in Gujarat due to the rising coronavirus cases in the state. Patel was detained on 11 May 2020 and charged with sedition and spreading false news amid the COVID-19 pandemic on 12 May.

The report was published on 7 May and suggested that the chief minister of Gujarat may be replaced due to his handling of the COVID-19 health crisis.

Patel's lawyer Anand Yagnik said that Patel was only presented before a magistrate at 5pm on 13 May, more than two days after his initial detention. This contravenes Indian law, which states that any arrestee should be produced before a judge within 24 hours of their arrest. The police also allegedly did not allow Yagnik to meet his client until the evening of 13 May, despite him making several requests. The Assistant Commissioner of Police (Crime Branch) B.V. Gohil claimed that Patel was formally arrested one day after his detention because of a special protocol mandated by the Gujarat High Court that all arrestees should be tested for the COVID-19 virus before formal arrest.

The sentence for violating India's Sedition Law can be up to life in prison. Patel could also face two years in prison for spreading false claims amid the pandemic, under the Disaster Management Act.

Patel was granted bail by a sessions court in Ahmedabad on 27 May because the FIR and other documents filed by the police to support the sedition charge were not found to establish the charge.

Aliya Iftikhar, CPJ's senior Asia researcher in New York, made the following statement: "Gujarat authorities should release journalist Dhaval Patel immediately and drop the ludicrous charges against him. Indian journalists must be allowed to cover local political issues—especially those related to the COVID-19 pandemic—freely and without fear that they will be arrested and charged with sedition."

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://thewire.in/media/gujarat-dhaval-patel-sedition>

<https://ipi.media/covid19-media-freedom-monitoring/>

<https://cpj.org/2020/05/indian-journalist-dhaval-patel-arrested-charged-wi/>

<https://thewire.in/media/gujarat-covid-dhaval-patel-sedition-bail>

[https://www.huffingtonpost.in/entry/gujarat-sedition-bjp-govt-vijay-rupani\\_in\\_5ecf84a9c5b6ce8f6b7bfc3?guccounter=1&guce\\_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce\\_referrer\\_sig=AQAAACb\\_oL\\_rCEozb1LgPtKb4vuv8XmXGhsefVyk4Cd9How\\_xq\\_rKgGbBLcI7yoZjTxwnmuc6JGskXxyPpT6bpbTW10oE8yOt9tYCabe2knYb8rUXvzb5XVC5Gw\\_V-bVn\\_7eoL7i87mFoEebJP7QFNfbBD38DGmfOLQi3RinnS10oeO6](https://www.huffingtonpost.in/entry/gujarat-sedition-bjp-govt-vijay-rupani_in_5ecf84a9c5b6ce8f6b7bfc3?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAACb_oL_rCEozb1LgPtKb4vuv8XmXGhsefVyk4Cd9How_xq_rKgGbBLcI7yoZjTxwnmuc6JGskXxyPpT6bpbTW10oE8yOt9tYCabe2knYb8rUXvzb5XVC5Gw_V-bVn_7eoL7i87mFoEebJP7QFNfbBD38DGmfOLQi3RinnS10oeO6)

**Lalit Pokhrel, Bishnu Dulal and the Editor-in-Chief of 'All Sikkim News'**

**Name of the person:** Lalit Pokhrel Sharma, Bishnu Dulal and the Editor-in-Chief of 'All Sikkim News'

**Date of the incident:** 9 May 2020

**City, State:** Pakyong, Sikkim

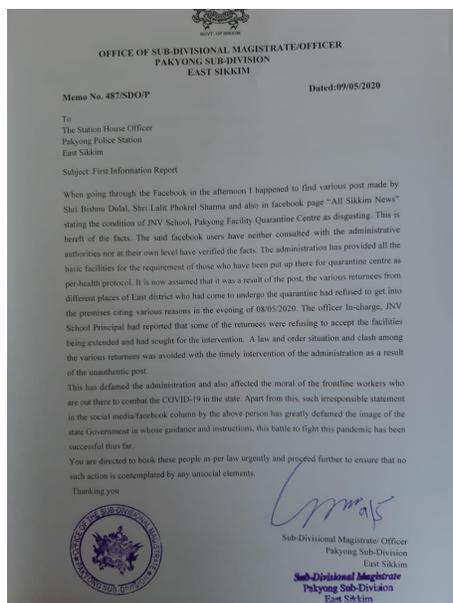
**Profession of the person:** Administrator, 'All Sikkim News' Facebook page; unknown; Editor-in-Chief of 'All Sikkim News'

**Details of the incident:**

On 9 May 2020, an FIR was lodged against Lalit Pokhrel, administrator of the 'All Sikkim News' Facebook page, Bishnu Dulal and the Editor-in-Chief of 'All Sikkim News' for reporting on mismanagement of quarantine centres.

The FIR was filed by Hemant Rai, Sub Divisional Magistrate, Pakyong in connection with a Facebook post by Pokhrel on the condition of JNV School in Pakyong East Sikkim, which has been turned into a quarantine facility centre by the government. A case was filed against Pokhrel under Section 505(2)/188/34 of the IPC. The authorities were unhappy with Pokhrel on two counts: first, that he posted photographs without consulting the concerned officers; second, that they believed that his report had led to people refusing to stay at the facility.

**Documentation:**



**Lalit Pokhrel Sharma** is with धुव रेग्मी रोडथाङ्गे and 7 others.  
8 May at 16:53 · 🌐

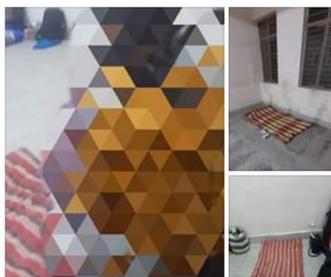
#Atleast\_Better\_If\_Not\_Best

We all are aware government of Sikkim has initiated a step to bring stranded sikkimese back home and have made requisites arrangements for Quarantine facilities in all the district of Sikkim which is a highly appreciable step. There are two types of quarantine facilities Paid and Government centres wherein people of all works and situation are present may be students, workers, patients stranded for treatment and also may include womens during their pregnancy too, for which such facilities should be appropriate and adequate.

This is picture of Quarantine centre of pakyong JNV school with only चौपक (mattress). More than two people in a room like dormatorium is seen. How can they survive for 14 days in such a situation still the area being so cold place. If this is the reality in ground zero then, I would like to request Sub divisional Administrators to resolve this issues and provide requisite facilities at the earliest. We all believe in you all. Hope for the best sooner.

There should not be any issues in doing best for our people and every thing they are doing and agreeing is for the betterment of rest in Sikkim, so we all need to respect them and help them come out of this together and better.

People and Institution have donated for betterment and time has come to utilize here.



## Link to media coverage:

<https://www.thesikkimchronicle.com/netizens-uproar-over-lalit-pokhrels-arrest-administration-deems-the-action-necessary/>

<https://www.thesikkimchronicle.com/police-grants-bail-to-lalit-pokhrel/>

<https://thedarjeelingchronicle.com/fragile-freedom-sikkim/>

**Mahendra Singh Manral****Name of the person:** Mahendra Singh Manral**Date of the incident:** 11 May 2020**City, State:** New Delhi**Profession of the person:** Journalist, Special Correspondent, The Indian Express**Details of the incident:**

Mahendra Singh Manral, a journalist with The Indian Express, was issued a notice by the Delhi Police to appear on 11 May 2020 in connection with a news article from 10 May.

The Indian Express article of 10 May alleged that investigation undertaken by the Crime Branch of the Delhi Police as part of the FIR against Tablighi Jamaat head Maulana Saad Kandhalvi had found that an audio clip attributed to Saad was “doctored” and in fact consisted of several audio files that had been stitched together. The audio note, which had been found in circulation on WhatsApp on 21 March, allegedly requested Tablighi Jamaat members to ignore the lockdown and social distancing measures and instead attend the religious gathering of the Markaz.

In his report, Manral alleged that highly placed sources had told him that a laptop police recovered from the Tablighi Jamaat headquarters contained over 350 audio clips in three forms: raw clips from Markaz events; audio clips that they sent to their followers; and clips that they uploaded onto their YouTube channel.

The Delhi Police claimed that this news report was “factually incorrect”, but the Indian Express has stood by their report. They claim that the reporter spoke to “sources and officials aware of the probe against Maulana Saad” and that Special CP (Crime) Praveer Ranjan was contacted for comment both over the phone and via message before publication. He did not respond.

On 13 May, the Editors Guild of India made a statement on a “growing pattern of misuse of criminal laws to intimidate journalists in different parts of the country”:

“While Manral wasn’t charged under any law, he was threatened that failure to join the probe could result in legal action under Section 174 of the IPC with punishment of a prison term and fine. This appears to be a little more than a fishing expedition to try and extract the journalist’s source and, thus, warn other reporters.”

The Press Council of India also released a press release on 15 May:

“The Press Council of India expresses its concern over alleged threat of criminal prosecution and questioning of a Special Correspondent of the Indian Express, by Delhi police on 11.05.2020 in connection with a news report published in the paper on May 9, 2020.

Since matter affects the free functioning of the press, while taking suo-motu cognizance of the matter, a Report on Facts of the case is being called for from the Commissioner of Police, Delhi.”

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://www.thequint.com/news/india/tablighi-jamaat-indian-express-reporter-fake-audio-delhi-police>

<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/editors-guild-tablighi-express-journalist-delhi-police-6408139/>

<http://presscouncil.nic.in/WriteReadData/Pdf/PressReleasesuomotumay.pdf>

**Gulshan Kumar Mithu****Name of the person:** Gulshan Kumar Mithu**Date of the incident:** 14 May 2020**City, State:** Sitamarhi, Bihar**Profession of the person:** Journalist, Dainik Bhaskar**Details of the incident:**

On 14 May 2020, an investigation was opened into Gulshan Kumar Mithu, a journalist with Dainik Bhaskar, in connection with his report in Dainik Bhaskar on 12 May regarding protests by migrant workers in a government quarantine facility about poor food and living conditions.

Police alleged that Mithu violated four sections of the IPC, including unlawful assembly, violating instructions of public officials during a pandemic, and acting negligently in a way likely to spread infection or disease.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://cpj.org/2020/05/authorities-in-india-continue-to-investigate-detain-journalists-amid-covid-19-pandemic/>

**Rahul Zori****Name of the person:** Rahul Zori**Date of the incident:** 16 May 2020**City, State:** Shirpur tehsil, Dhule district, Maharashtra**Profession of the person:** Journalist, TV9 Marathi**Details of the incident:**

On 16 May 2020, Rahul Zori, a journalist with TV9 Marathi, was booked by the Maharashtra police in connection with his reports criticising the management of Hadakhed relief camp for migrants in Shirpur tehsil, Dhule district, Maharashtra.

Tehsildar Aaba Mahajan, who filed the FIR, accused Zori of defaming him by suggesting that there was corruption at the Hadakhed camp and of obstructing official work. Zori was booked under penal sections for obstructing a public servant from doing their duty, defamation, and publishing matter that is known to be defamatory, but he stands by his story.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://www.newslaundry.com/2020/05/26/its-just-wrong-maharashtra-journalist-booked-for-reporting-on-migrant-relief-camps>

**Somdev Sharma****Name of the person:** Somdev Sharma**Date of the incident:** 16 May 2020**City, State:** Manali, Himachal Pradesh**Profession of the person:** Journalist, Punjab Kesari**Details of the incident:**

On 16 May 2020, police booked Somdev Sharma, a journalist with Punjab Kesari, in connection with his report on the administration's insufficient efforts to quarantine interstate travelers.

Kullu Superintendent of Police Gaurav Singh stated that Sharma had made a false claim, namely that a person had entered the district illegally without a pass, and that Sharma had hence created panic.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://thewire.in/media/himachal-pradesh-firs-journalists>

**Ravindra Saxena****Name of the person:** Ravindra Saxena**Date of the incident:** 17 May 2020**City, State:** Sitapur, Uttar Pradesh**Profession of the person:** Journalist with Today-24**Details of the incident:**

An investigation was opened on 17 May 2020 and an FIR filed on 20 May against Ravindra Saxena by the Uttar Pradesh government due to his reporting on the mismanagement of a quarantine centre in Sitapur.

Saxena had interviewed a person who was making a complaint to SDM Shashi Bhushan Rai about being served rotten rice at a government-run quarantine centre in Maholi tehsil, Sitapur district. The individual had brought the rice with him to show the SDM. Saxena subsequently visited the quarantine centre to make a detailed video report on the mismanagement there.

Saxena was charged under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act and the Disaster Management Act.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://cpj.org/2020/05/authorities-in-india-continue-to-investigate-detain-journalists-amid-covid-19-pandemic/>

<https://thewire.in/media/ravindra-saxena-fir-ifj-nuji-condemn>

<https://www.newslaundry.com/2020/05/12/himachal-pradeshs-journalists-face-firs-harassment-for-reporting-on-government-failures>

**Hardik Joshi****Name of the person:** Hardik Joshi**Date of the incident:** 17 May 2020**City, State:** Shapar, Gujarat**Profession of the person:** Correspondent, ABP Gujarati**Details of the incident:**

On 17 May 2020, Hardik Joshi, a correspondent for ABP Gujarati, was attacked by a group of protesting migrant workers in Shapar, Gujarat and was critically injured.

The ABP News team was filming a group of migrant workers who were protesting the rescheduling of a train to take them home to the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The workers attacked the crew, many of whom managed to escape. Joshi, however, was severely beaten by the mob, who also broke his camera. He was rushed to hospital and was given five stitches in his head. In the same altercation, superintendent of Rajkot rural police, Balram Meena and three other policemen were injured by stones thrown by the protestors.

29 people were arrested following the incident for rioting, voluntarily causing hurt and for attempt to commit culpable homicide.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/india-protesting-migrant-workers-attack-journalist.html>

<https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/ahmedabad/sp-journalist-injured-as-migrant-workers-go-on-the-rampage-in-rajkot-6414712/>

<https://www.newslaundry.com/2020/05/19/abp-asmita-reporter-attacked-in-gujarat-channel-blames-migrant-workers>

**Fahad Shah**

**Name of the person:** Fahad Shah

**Date of the incident:** 20 May 2020

**City, State:** Jammu & Kashmir

**Profession of the person:** Journalist, founding-editor of The Kashmir Walla

**Details of the incident:**

Fahad Shah, Founding Editor of The Kashmir Walla, was summoned by the cyber cell of the Kashmir Police on 20 May 2020.

Shah and a colleague of his had reported on a gunfight that occurred between security forces and militants on Tuesday 19 May 2020 in Nawakadal, Srinagar, in which two Hizbul Mujahideen militants, one of whom was the son of a separatist leader, were killed.

In the wake of this incident, several houses in the area were burnt, destroyed or damaged. In the reports collected by Shah and his colleague, there were several accusations that security forces had stolen money and possessions such as jewellery from residents.

Shah says that he arrived at the police station at 1.30pm on Wednesday 20 May 2020 but was not given the reason why he had been summoned until 3.34pm, at which point he was accused of “maliciously maligning the police’s reputation” on the basis of his reporting on the Nawakadal gunfight.

Shah’s response was that he interviewed local residents whose houses had been burned. These interviews were conducted on camera. He said: “If the police differed with the allegations of the local residents, we would have given equal space to the same in our report as a professional journalist. However, no such clarification was given.”

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://scroll.in/latest/962571/kashmir-press-club-voices-concern-about-media-freedom-after-police-summon-j-k-journalist>

**Aashish Avasthi**

**Name of the person:** Aashish Avasthi

**Date of the incident:** May 2020

**City, State:** Uttar Pradesh

**Profession of the person:** Editor, Media Break

**Details of the incident:**

On 20 May 2020, The Press Council of India requested a report from the government of Uttar Pradesh on the filing of an FIR against Aashish Avasthi, Editor of Media Break, in connection with a news item about problems being faced by Home Guards during COVID-19.

The PCI released a statement saying:

“The Press Council of India Chairman Justice Shri C. K. Prasad has noted with concern that an FIR has been lodged against Shri Aashish Avasthi, editor, Media Break on publication of news item regarding problems being faced by Home Guards during Covid-19.

Taking suo-motu cognizance of the case, a Report on Fact of the case has been called for from the Government of Uttar Pradesh.”

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://www.outlookindia.com/newscroll/press-council-seeks-report-from-up-govt-over-fir-against-journalist/1840892>

<http://presscouncil.nic.in/WriteReadData/Pdf/EnglishPressreleasetwenty.pdf>

**Jai Singh Chhibber**

**Name of the person:** Jai Singh Chhibber

**Date of the incident:** 22 May 2020

**City, State:** Chamkaur Sahib, Rupnagar district, Punjab

**Profession of the person:** Reporter, Punjabi Jagran

**Details of the incident:**

A case was registered against Jai Singh Chhibber, reporter for Punjabi Jagran, on 22 May 2020 in connection with his news report about a Congress minister following the suggestions of astrologers.

Chhibber was booked under Sections 188 and 505 of the IPC and Section 67A of the IT Act.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://thewire.in/media/punjab-police-beat-seniorjournalist-reporter-booked-for-astrology-story-on-minister>

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/chandigarh/chandigarh-press-club-condemns-fir-against-punjabi-journo/story-HUtThGcaM0Hdca2ZEgFdUJ.html>

**Hussan Lal****Name of the person:** Hussan Lal**Date of the incident:** 22 May 2020**City, State:** Bhogpur, Jalandhar, Punjab**Profession of the person:** Reporter, PTC Channel**Details of the incident:**

On 22 May 2020, Hussan Lal, a reporter with PTC Channel, was assaulted by a Congress sarpanch near Bhogpur, Jalandhar district in connection with reporting he had done about a fight.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://thewire.in/media/punjab-police-beat-seniorjournalist-reporter-booked-for-astrology-story-on-minister>

## **Major Singh Punjabi**

**Name of the person:** Major Singh Punjabi

**Date of the incident:** 22 May 2020

**City, State:** Mohali, Punjab

**Profession of the person:** Journalist, correspondent for Rozana Pehredar from Mohali and Chandigarh

### **Details of the incident:**

At around 1.30pm on 22 May 2020, Major Singh Punjabi, a journalist with Rozana Pehredar, was beaten by two assistant sub-inspectors from the Mohali police station, Phase-1 at Gurdwara Kalgidhar Sahib Singh Sabha, Phase-4, Mohali.

Major Singh had gone to report on the meeting of two groups at the gurdwara, when he witnessed ASI Om Prakash and Amar Nath bringing a man named Jaspal Singh Nami out of a room and began to record the incident on his mobile phone. Jaspal escaped from the police and was later caught, but fled again before the police officers managed to get him inside the vehicle. Due to this, the police began to abuse and beat Major Singh.

Major Singh says that he informed the two policemen that he was a journalist, but they nonetheless pushed him into a private vehicle with a Haryana number plate and took him to the station. Before he stepped out of the vehicle, ASI Om Prakash began to beat him with a stick. He was then taken to the jail, where the two policemen tortured, abused and humiliated him, and even pushed his turban aside and threw his 'kangha'.

Major Singh was admitted to Civil Hospital, Mohali and received a medico-legal report. He had severe injuries on his left leg, arms and back and says that he believes he would have died had SHO Mohali phase-1 Mansoor Singh not arrived to rescue him.

Photographs and video footage of Punjabi and his injuries were shared widely

on social media, which led senior officials to take action. SP (City) Harvinder Singh Virk said that a departmental inquiry had been ordered and that the two ASIs had been suspended, however Major Singh said that the police were asking him to 'move on'.

Deputy commissioner Mohali Girish Dayalan also said that he had asked SDM Mohali Jagdeep Sehgal to conduct an independent magisterial inquiry and that a report would be presented within three days. The Chandigarh Press Club and Chandigarh Journalists Union president Balwinder Singh Jammu and others have condemned the attack on Major Singh Punjabi and sought action.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://thewire.in/media/punjab-police-beat-seniorjournalist-reporter-booked-for-astrology-story-on-minister>

<https://sikhsiyasat.net/2020/05/23/mohali-police-asis-torture-sikh-journalist-major-singh-in-police-station/>

<https://www.sikh24.com/2020/05/22/punjab-police-cops-brutally-thrash-sikh-journalist-major-singh/#.XvdbxGq2kWo>

**Paramesh****Name of the person:** Paramesh**Date of the incident:** 22 May 2020**City, State:** Narayankhed, Sangareddy district, Telangana**Profession of the person:** Journalist

On 22 May 2020, the Narayankhed Municipal Commission allegedly demolished a house belonging to Paramesh, which was under construction at the time, after he reported on Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS) MLA Mahareddy Bhupal Reddy violating the lockdown rules by having a birthday party attended by over 500 people.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://thewire.in/media/telangana-journalist-home-demolishedmla-birthday-party>

**Mahadev Nayak****Name of the person:** Mahadev Nayak**Date of the incident:** 23 May 2020**City, State:** Korua panchayat, Naugaon block, Jagatsinghpur district, Odisha**Profession of the person:** Journalist**Details of the incident:**

On 23 May 2020, journalist Mahadev Nayak was allegedly illegally held by sarpanch Aranya Nayak in a temporary medical centre at Korua panchayat, Naugaon block, Jagatsinghpur district, Odisha, in retaliation for reports Mahadev had published about Aranya receiving food and clothes from his family despite quarantine guidelines.

Mahadev had visited the temporary medical centre, which was being used as a quarantine centre for patients with COVID-19, with the expectation that he would be interviewing the sarpanch, who had agreed to speak with him. Instead, Aranya allegedly seized Mahadev's mobile phone, gold chain and cash of Rs 10,000, then asked others at the TMC to detain him. Six hours later, officials rescued Mahadev and sent him to another quarantine facility in Alanahat, because he had been put at risk of COVID-19 by the contact with those under quarantine at the TMC.

Mahadev's wife Priyatama Nayak has lodged a complaint against the sarpanch and his brother for the detention and for misusing Collector's power. The IIC of Naugaon police station, Gobardhan Sahoo, stated that an investigation is underway, but the sarpanch had not been arrested at the time of publication.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://www.newindianexpress.com/states/odisha/2020/may/24/sarpanch-holds-scribe-hostage-for-reporting-facts-2147338.html>

**Sishil Sharma**

**Name of the person:** Sishil Sharma

**Date of the incident:** 23 May 2020

**City, State:** Kanker, Chhattisgarh

**Profession of the person:** Journalist, Editor of Bastar Bandhu

**Details of the incident:**

Sishil Sharma, editor of Bastar Bandhu, was arrested on 23 May 2020 and had an FIR registered against him in connection with his reporting on corruption in Kanker, Chhattisgarh.

Sharma was later released on a personal bond of Rs. 5000.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://world360news.com/en/jagdalpur-journalists-submitted-memorandum-commissioner-collector-regarding-fir-against-sushil>

**Tansen Tiwari**

**Name of the person:** Tansen Tiwari

**Date of the incident:** 24 May 2020

**City, State:** Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh

**Profession of the person:** Journalist

**Details of the incident:**

The Madhya Pradesh Police booked journalist Tansen Tiwari on 24 May 2020 for referring to leaders from the Bharatiya Janata Party as gappu (braggart) and tadipar (externed) in a social media post from 22 May. A case was registered against Tiwari under Section 294 and 500 of the IPC and Section 67 of the IT Act.

The matter was reported to the Gola Ka Mandir police station by local BJP leader Awdhesh Singh Bhadauria.

According to Bhadauria, Tiwari uploaded a Facebook post indirectly referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi as ‘gappu’ and other party leaders as ‘tadipar’ and ‘balatkari’ (rapist). Bhadauria claimed that the post defamed the party and its leaders and hurt the sentiments of party leaders and “crores of members”. Tiwari’s post did not name any specific leaders.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://thewire.in/media/gwalior-fir-journalist-bjp-leaders-gappu-tadipar>

**Basant Sahu****Name of the person:** Basant Sahu**Date of the incident:** 24 May 2020**City, State:** Jamshedpur, Jharkhand**Profession of the person:** Reporter with a vernacular daily**Details of the incident:**

Basant Sahu, a reporter with a vernacular daily, was allegedly arrested on 24 May 2020 for asking a Deputy Commissioner about COVID-19 cases and circulating his response.

Sahu had asked Seraikela-Kharsawan Deputy Commissioner A. Dodde about the first COVID-19 case in the district. He asked Dodde to confirm if there were any COVID-19 cases in Ichagarh, but Dodde allegedly denied this and told Sahu to go to bed. Sahu recorded the conversation and then circulated Dodde's response in the news and on social media.

Sahu was arrested and sent to Saraikela divisional jail. He is now out on bail.

The Jharkhand Journalist Association (JJA) observed a black-badge protest, met with Deputy Inspector General Rajiv Ranjan Singh at Circuit House and demanded Sahu's immediate release. The JJA also planned to take the case to the Press Council and the Human Rights Commission.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://www.telegraphindia.com/jharkhand/scribe-arrest-protest-in-jharkhand/cid/1776070>

<https://sabrangindia.in/article/jharkhand-journalist-association-decries-scribes-arrest-questioning-authorities>

## **JUNE**

### **Vinod Dua**

**Name of the person:** Vinod Dua

**Date of the incident:** 4 June 2020

**City, State:** Delhi; Shimla, Himachal Pradesh

**Profession of the person:** Journalist

#### **Details of the incident:**

On 4 June 2020 a complaint was filed against senior journalist Vinod Dua's YouTube show, "The Vinod Dua Show", in which he had talked about the riots that had happened in the northeast district of Delhi. Dua was also booked under a sedition case on 12 June.

The police registered the first case on a complaint by BJP spokesperson Naveen Kumar under sections 290, 505 and 505(2) of the Indian Penal Code. The police stated that Dua was spreading rumours and misinformation about the sensitive issue of the Delhi riots and that his comments could cause communal unrest.

On 10 June, the Delhi High Court stayed this FIR, however on 12 June the police in Shimla summoned Dua in connection with a sedition charge filed against him by Bharatiya Janata Party leader Ajay Shyam. This complaint alleges that Dua instigated violence by spreading "fake news" and that he had accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of using "deaths and terror attacks".

On 14 June, The Supreme Court granted Dua protection from arrest until July 6. It also issued notices to the Centre and the Himachal Pradesh government, requesting them to respond to Dua's petitions to cancel the cases against him. It did not stay the investigation against him but it did state that Himachal Pradesh Police would have to give Dua notice of 24 hours before questioning him at home. The court also directed the Himachal Pradesh government to submit a complete status report in the case before the next hearing on July 6.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://scroll.in/latest/964648/vinod-dua-gets-interim-protection-from-arrest-in-sedition-case-sc-refuses-to-stay-investigation>

**Kabita Sharma**

**Name of the person:** Kabita Sharma

**Date of the incident:** 10 June 2020

**City, State:** Sikkim

**Profession of the person:** Journalist, Sikkim Chronicle

**Details of the incident:**

Kabita Sharma was informed that a complaint has been lodged before the State Vigilance Officer against her with regards to her citizenship. No case has been officially made; she has just been called for interrogation.

**Link to media coverage:**

**Aakar Patel****Name of the person:** Aakar Patel**Date of the incident:** 11 June, 3 July 2020**City, State:** Surat, Gujarat**Profession of the person:** Journalist**Details of the incident:**

Two FIRs have been filed against journalist Aakar Patel for activity on his Twitter account.

On 11 June 2020, the police filed a case against Patel in connection with tweets that allegedly suggested that members of marginalised groups in India should emulate protests in the United States against police brutality and the murder of George Floyd in police custody. Patel had posted video clips of the protests in the United States, asking Muslims, Dalit, Adivasis and women in India to also protest. A week later, Twitter blocked Patel's account in India. The Bengaluru Police booked Patel under sections 505 (1) (b), 153 and 117 of the Indian Penal Code.

The second FIR was filed on 3 July by a Bharatiya Janata Party MLA in Surat West, Gujarat and president of Samast Gujarati Modhvanik Samaj Purnesh Modi in relation to Patel's tweets about the Ghanchi community, which he posted on 24 and 27 June, allegedly connecting the community to the Sabarmati train carnage in Godhra, 27 February, 2002. Patel is accused of "promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony" through his Twitter posts. The complainant mentioned three of Patel's tweets in the FIR and used a derogatory term to refer to black people.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://scroll.in/latest/964465/journalist-aakar-patels-twitter-account-blocked-in-india-week-after-allegedly-calling-for-protests>

<https://scroll.in/latest/966361/bjp-mla-in-gujarat-files-fir-against-aakar-patel>

<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/surat-fir-against-journalist-aakar-patel-over-objectionable-tweets-6488274/>

**Supriya Sharma and Editor-in-Chief of scroll.in****Name of the person:** Supriya Sharma**Date of the incident:** 13 June**City, State:** Uttar Pradesh**Profession of the person:** Executive Editor and Editor-in-Chief of scroll.in**Details of the incident:**

On 13 June 2020, Supriya Sharma and the Editor-in-Chief of scroll.in were booked under various sections of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act (POA Act) and the Indian Penal Code, based on a complaint made by Mala Devi, resident of Domari village, Varanasi.

The FIR was filed under Sections 3(1) (d) and 3(1)(r) of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act (POA Act) and sections 269 and 501 of the Indian Penal Code.

Sharma had written a report headlined “In Varanasi village adopted by Prime Minister Modi, people went hungry during the lockdown” about the poor state of affairs in Domari, one of the villages adopted by the Prime Minister under the Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana, a model village scheme for parliamentarians. The report mentioned Mala, a Dalit domestic worker who had stopped receiving income during the lockdown and did not have a ration card to receive help from the district administration. Sharma reported that Mala had therefore been looking for odd jobs and begging on the streets of Varanasi.

Mala has now alleged that Sharma’s report was inaccurate, that her condition has not worsened during the lockdown and that she did not tell Sharma anything of the sort. Mala claimed in the FIR that when Sharma came to her house, she told her that “neither she nor her family faced any problem in getting food and water”.

She also alleged: “It has come to be known that Supriya Sharma wrote lies about me that I work as a cleaner and dishwasher and that I slept with only tea and

bread in my stomach... By writing that I and my children went hungry during the lockdown, Sharma mocked at my impoverishment, my caste, because of which I have suffered mentally. It (the report) has hurt my standing in society.”

Scroll.in has stood by its story, saying in a public statement:

“This FIR is an attempt to intimidate and silence independent journalism, reporting on conditions of vulnerable groups during the Covid-19 lockdown. Scroll.in interviewed Mala in Domari village, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, on June 5, 2020. Her statements have accurately been reported in the article titled, ‘In Varanasi village adopted by Prime Minister Modi, people went hungry during the lockdown.’ Scroll.in stands by the article, which has been reported from the Prime Minister’s constituency.”

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://thewire.in/media/up-police-fir-supriya-sharma-journalist-domari>

<https://thewire.in/media/supriya-sharma-fir-abuse-law-press-freedom>

<https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/delhi-journalist-supriya-sharma-charged-by-up-cops-over-story-on-varansi-village-adopted-by-pm-2248547>

**Shubham Mani Tripathi****Name of the person:** Shubham Mani Tripathi**Date of the incident:** 19 June 2020**City, State:** Unnao, Uttar Pradesh**Profession of the person:** Journalist, Kampu Mail**Details of the incident:**

Shubham Mani Tripathi, a reporter for newspaper Kampu Mail, was murdered by “unidentified persons” on 19 June 2020 while returning home on a motorcycle in Unnao, Uttar Pradesh. He died in a hospital in Kanpur. Tripathi’s killing was allegedly ordered by the local ‘sand mafia’ and illegal land grabbers.

A few days previously, Shubham Mani Tripathi had informed authorities about threats made to him by persons involved in illegal sand mining and land encroachment. According to journalist Vishal Maurya, Tripathi had sent letters to state authorities on 15 June to inform them that he had been threatened, naming 10 persons. Tripathi had also written on Facebook on 14 June that one of his reports had led to an illegal construction by “land mafia” being demolished. He claimed that the “mafia” had been angered by this and that they had registered a false application to the district magistrate in retaliation. After Tripathi’s death, bureau chief of Kampu Mail, Ritesh Shukla, mentioned that Tripathi had recently had arguments with land grabbers and had expressed fear of being killed.

Three people were arrested in connection with the murder and the police were seeking the arrest of two more. According to one of the arrestees, the murder was organised by “local real estate figure Divya Awasthi”, who seems to be the same person that Tripathi was referring to in his aforementioned Facebook post.

**Link to media coverage:**

[https://thewire.in/media/shubham-mani-tripathi-journalist-killed-unnao-sand-mafia](https://thewire.in/media/shubham-mani-tripathi-journalist-killed-unnao-sand-<u>mafia</u>)

**Hofe Dada**

**Name of the person:** Hofe Dada

**Date of the incident:** 29 June 2020

**City, State:** Lekhi Village, Arunachal Pradesh

**Profession of the person:** Journalist, Gyoloo News

**Details of the incident:**

Hofe Dada, a journalist with Gyoloo News, Arunachal Pradesh, was allegedly attacked by four men on 29 June 2020 in connection with his investigation of pollution levels at the factory of SMS Smelters Ltd in Lekhi village.

After the attack, the men allegedly stole Dada's phone and threatened him with further violence.

Dada filed a complaint about the attack with Nirjuli police. The police have arrested Nangram Tapu, who is a security officer for SMS Smelters and a suspect in the case. There is also an investigation underway into whether the factory is legal.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://newsmove.in/arunachal-pradesh-journalist-attacked-for-investigating-factory-pollution/>

<https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/india-journalist-attacked-for-investigating-factory-pollution.html#:~:text=01%20July%202020-,India%3A%20Journalist%20attacked%20for%20investigating%20factory%20pollution,a%20factory%20in%20Aruachal%20Pradesh.&text=The%20factory%20has%20continually%20produced,to%20those%20from%20surrounding%20villages.>

**JULY****Rana Ayyub****Name of the person:** Rana Ayyub**Date of the incident:** 1 July 2020**City, State:** Online**Profession of the person:** Investigative journalist**Details of the incident:**

On 1 and 2 July 2020, investigative journalist Rana Ayyub tweeted about Kashmir, nationalism and the murder of Bashir Ahmed Khan by police in Kashmir. This led to a barrage of abuse and rape and death threats.

On 1 July, Ayyub tweeted: "when it comes to Kashmir, there are no humanists, just convenient nationalists." The following day, she mentioned a photograph of the grandson of Bashir Ahmed Khan, a civilian killed by the police in Kashmir, sitting on his grandfather's dead body. She also quoted Khan's wife in a tweet. Ever since, Ayyub has received aggressive comments and rape and death threats across social media platforms. One comment read "Remember Gauri Lankesh", referencing the murder of a journalist in 2017 who had spoken out against right-wing Hindu nationalists.

Mumbai police have begun an investigation.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/in-dia-investigative-journalist-rana-ayyub-receives-rape-and-death-threats-for-social-media-posts-ab.html>

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/gdpr-consent/?next\\_url=https%3a%2f%2fwww.washingtonpost.com%2fopinions%2f2020%2f07%2f07%2fthreats-censorship-are-price-questioning-narratives-about-kashmir%2f](https://www.washingtonpost.com/gdpr-consent/?next_url=https%3a%2f%2fwww.washingtonpost.com%2fopinions%2f2020%2f07%2f07%2fthreats-censorship-are-price-questioning-narratives-about-kashmir%2f)

<https://theprint.in/india/remember-gauri-lankesh-rana-ayyub-receives-death-rap-threats-after-posts-on-kashmir/453884/>

**Venkateshwara Rao, Veeramalla Satyam, Shiva**

**Name of the person:** Venkateshwara Rao, Veeramalla Satyam, Shiva

**Date of the incident:** 6 July 2020

**City, State:** Hyderabad, Telangana

**Profession of the person:** Reporter, Editor, Sub-editor, Aadab Telangana

**Details of the incident:**

Reporter Venkateshwara Rao, Editor Veeramalla Satyam and Sub-editor Shiva of Aadab Telangana were arrested on 6 July 2020 by Jubilee Hills police in connection with a news report claiming that Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao had tested positive for coronavirus and had been admitted to a corporate hospital.

The complaint against the three was lodged by Mohammed Illyas, who stated that the article was 'fake', and created panic among the general public. The police accordingly registered a case under Section 505 of the Indian Penal Code and Section 54 of the Disaster Management Act, against both the publication and the editor.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/telangana/editor-staff-arrested-for-fake-news-on-cms-health/article32005392.ece>

**Patricia Mukhim****Name of the person:** Patricia Mukhim**Date of the incident:** 6 July 2020**City, State:** Lawsohtun village, Meghalaya**Profession of the person:** Editor, Shillong Times**Details of the incident:**

On 6 July 2020, Lurshai Shylla, the head of the Lawsohtun village council, filed a complaint against Shillong Times Editor Patricia Mukhim over a Facebook post of hers.

Shylla accused Mukhim of inciting communal tensions through a post on 4 July regarding an attack on 3 July on five “non-tribal youth” by a group that she claimed was made up of “tribal boys”. Mukhim said in her post that “non-tribal brethren continue to live in perpetual fear in their own state”.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/india-village-council-files-police-complaint-against-shillong-times-editor.html>

<https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/complaint-against-meghalaya-veteran-journalist-patricia-mukhim-over-social-media-post-2259507>

<https://scroll.in/article/967001/the-violence-within-us-why-patricia-mukhims-appeals-from-meghalaya-must-be-heeded-by-everyone>

**Gauri Shankar****Name of the person:** Gauri Shankar**Date of the incident:** Date unknown**City, State:** Kullu, Himachal Pradesh**Profession of the person:** Reporter, Dainik Bhaskar**Details of the incident:**

A case was filed against Gauri Shankar by police in Kullu in connection with his report about a hunger strike by migrant workers who had been stranded due to the COVID-19 lockdown. He was accused of spreading “fake news” by the local sub-divisional magistrate, even though his story was proven to be true.

**Link to media coverage:**

<https://ipi.media/covid19-media-freedom-monitoring/>

<https://rsf.org/en/news/surge-harassment-indian-reporters-over-coronavirus-coverage>

<https://thewire.in/media/himachal-pradesh-firs-journalists>