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Media Watch Report

Owner Nai

Monthly Report #129

February

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Media Watch Report

The current issue of Media Watch newsletter covers the following topics:

- Unidentified armed persons injured two journalists by gunshots in Pul-e-Khomri city, Baghlan province
- Extremist groups threaten journalists in Takhar province
- Daesh-launched radio station was destroyed in Nangarhar province
- An Afghan photo-journalist drowned in Turkey waters on the way to migrate to Europe
- The challenge of lack of professional female staffers in Afghanistan radio stations
- Challenges of transitioning televisions from analogue to digital system
- A new economic publication launched in Kabul





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Targeted attacks on freedom of speech, journalists and media personnel in Afghanistan have been increased and intensified in the beginning of 2016 and continued to take toll on media and journalists in February.

At least three cases of violence against journalists in the country were recorded last month. Armed persons injured two journalists of Radio Adib in Pul-e-Khomri city, Baghlan province. They injured one of them by firing a gunshot into his head and beat up another with their gun. The victims were two brothers.

Mohammad Ibrahim Hashemi and Musa Hashemi, both brothers and colleagues who work for the local radio station Adib, were heading for their home in the evening of a working day. Gunmen stopped them in District 1 of Pul-e-Khomri city. They shot and injured Mohammad Ibrahim in the head and beat up his younger brother, Musa, with boxes, kicks, and their gun.

Both injured brothers, who still suffer from severe pain and injuries, belong to a poor family. Their family cannot afford to pay their treatment costs. Meanwhile doctors have not been able to take the bullet out of Mohammad Ibrahim's head.

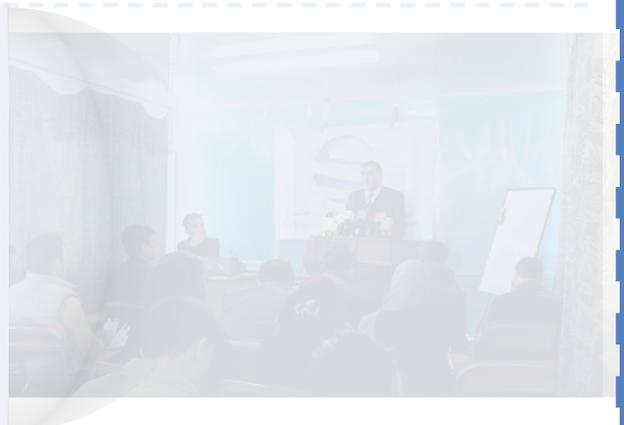
In another incident in Takhar province, journalists complain that a group called Hezb-ul-Tahrir threatens them. They claim that journalists cannot write and criticize openly in the province.

Karimullah Danish, chief editor of Taswir Weekly in Takhar province says that he has been threatened to death after he published an article written by one of the popular writers in the country.

On the other hand, due to insecurity and other problems, one of Afghanistan's photojournalists along with his family migrated out of the country towards Europe. Unfortunately, like many other Afghan migrants, he and his entire family were drowned in the waters between Turkey and Greece.

Around 250 journalists and media staffers have left the country through illegal channels and difficult ways and sought refuge in western countries in the past several years. The escape from the country and asylum seeking of the expert and educated young journalists abroad can hit a severe impact on the body of freedom of speech in Afghanistan.

In another development, the so-called "Voice of the Caliphate" Radio Station operated by Daesh terrorist group in Nangarhar province was destroyed in a military operation by the international air forces in the country two months after the station was launched. The operation also killed five staffs of that radio station. Broadcasting of the so-called "Voice of the Caliphate" Radio Station created concerns among citizens particularly journalists in Nangarhar province. Using radio broadcasts for its propaganda, Daesh terrorist group was persuading citizens of Nangarhar province to join their group while it was threatening jour-



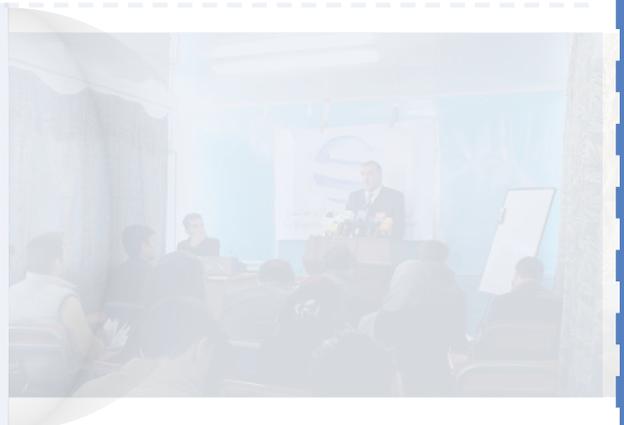


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nalists to death. Journalists support organizations as well as citizens of Nangarhar province repeatedly called upon the government to cut broadcasting of this radio, but government authorities in Nangarhar province saw it beyond their ability and claimed that the radio was broadcasting from the other side of the border in the Pakistani territory. However, international air forces conducted a series of air raids in Achin district of Nangarhar province and destroyed the radio station.

In another development, a survey of all radio stations in Afghanistan conducted by Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan on the occasion of World Radio Day, found that lack of women and professional staffers constitute one of the four major problems that Afghanistan local radio stations face.

Financial, security, and access-to-information problems made up the other three main challenges for Afghanistan radio stations.





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Unidentified armed persons injured two journalists by gunshots in Pul-e-Khomri city, Baghlan province

Mohammad Ibrahim Hashemi and Mohammad Musa Hashemi, both brothers and journalists for local radio station "Adib" in Baghlan province were injured by gunshots and physical violence from unidentified armed persons.

The journalist brothers were on their way home after they finished their working day at the radio station on February 3, 2016, when unidentified armed men stopped them near their home in District 1 of Pul-e-Khomri city. The armed men first beat them up, next they fired a gunshot into the head of Mohammad Ibrahim Hashemi, then they put the gun on Musa Hashemi's head and pulled the trigger but it did not fire fortunately, and finally they hit the gun in his head and injured him.

Police has arrested one of the attackers who had fired a gunshot into Mohammad Ibrahim Hashemi's head.

Mohammad Musa Hashemi told Media Watch that his brother's condition was severe and he has been under intensive care in the hospital.

Musa Hashemi described the incident of the armed men's attack on his brother and himself as following: "When our program in the radio was finished in the evening, my brother and I head for our home. Near the home, we heard somebody calling us from the back to stop. When we turned our faces, we saw armed men opening fire at us. They fired four gunshots and one of them hit into my brother's head. Then they began beating me up. One of them put his gun on my head and pulled the trigger. It did not fire. Then they beat me up again with their gun as well as with their boxes and kicks. They ultimately escaped."

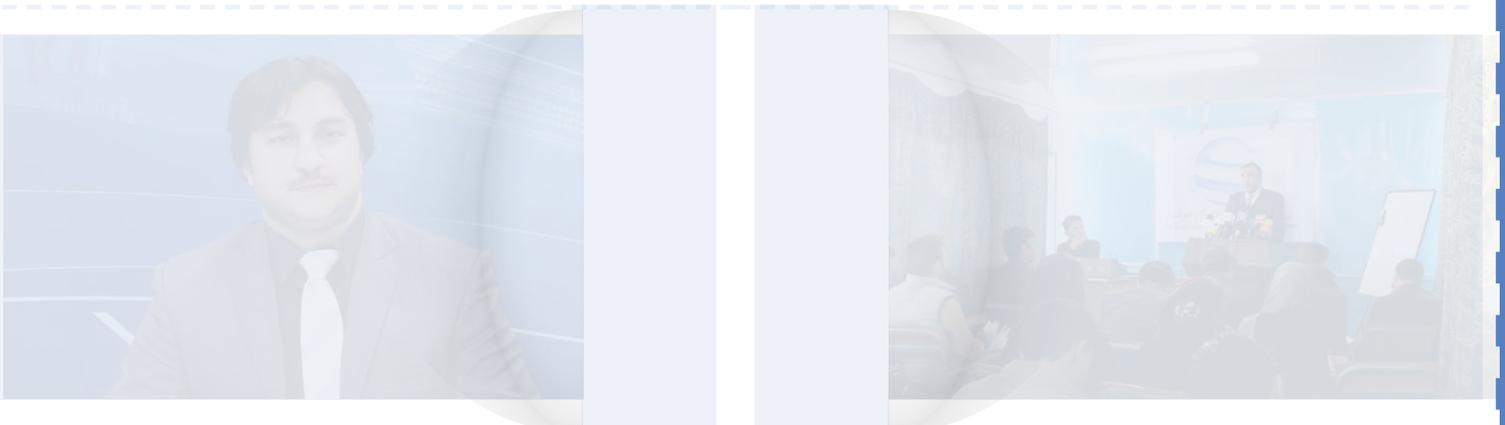
Musa Hashemi added that armed opponents had threatened them to death in the past. He believes that the perpetrators of this attack are armed opponents to the state in Pul-e-Khomri.

On the other hand, Habiburrahman Sherzai, director of Adib local radio station in Baghlan province told Media Watch that the radio staff has been threatened through phone calls several times in the past, but this time, beating up of his colleagues and firing gunshots at them have highly raised their concerns. Mr. Sherzai added: "Previously we had two to three cases of threats in the radio station, but those threats were not up to this level - only through phone calls."

Meanwhile Zabihullah Shojayee, spokesperson for Baghlan police told Media Watch: "Police has arrested the perpetrator who opened fire at Ibrahim Hashemi. Investigations are ongoing and the case will soon be sent to the Office of the Attorney General."

Although both brothers have been threatened by terrorists in the past, but the spokesperson for Baghlan police rejects the claim and says that the beating up and shooting incident has been motivated by family issues.

However, Mohammad Musa Hashemi says that they have no personal or family animosity with anyone. He says the only reason behind the attack on his brother and himself is their working with media. He also says that the same people have sent them warning messages to leave their work with media in the past.





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Abdulmujeeb Khalwatgar, executive director of Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan, said in a statement: "Now that police has identified and arrested the perpetrator of the attack on these journalists, we appeal to the government of Afghanistan to prosecute him in an open trial and punish him."

Both journalist brothers are under treatment in a hospital in Kabul city now. The condition of Mohammad Ibrahim Hashemi is worrisome. The bullet is still in his head and doctors say that brain surgery is a difficult procedure which requires to be conducted in an appropriate time.

After spreading of insecurity across the country and continuation of war in cities and villages of Afghanistan, violence against journalists, particularly targeted attacks on journalists and media personnel, has been increased and intensified.

In January 2016 alone, terrorists killed eight journalists and media staffers and injured another 17 of them in targeted attacks.

After the terrorist attack on Tolo TV personnel in Kabul which killed seven media personnel and injured another 17, a veteran journalist of the National Radio Television was shot to death in Nangarhar province in the same month. Now, a month later, another journalist in Pul-e-Khomri is shot in the head by armed men and is now in coma in the hospital.

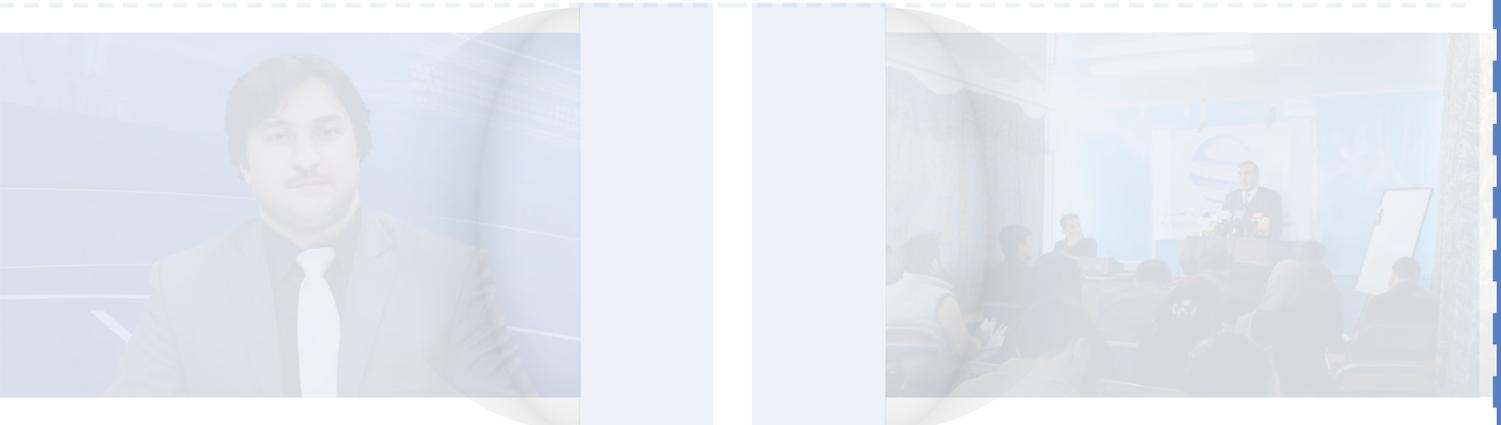
Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan cannot bear to see any further attacks on journalists and media personnel and strongly appeals to the state of Afghanistan to take practical measures in protecting freedom of speech and the lives of journalists and media staffers, as is mentioned in the presidential decree.

Extremist groups threaten journalists in Takhar province

Journalists and civil society activists in Takhar province claim that the open sphere for their activities shrinks every day as people, claiming to be related to Hezb-ul-Tahrir, threaten journalists and send them insulting messages in their mobile phones and Facebook accounts.

Karimullah Danish, chief editor of Taswir Weekly in Takhar province, is also an active member of the civil society there. He told Media Watch that members of Hezb-ul-Tahrir have threatened him to death on his Facebook page multiple times in the past. Mr. Danish added: "These extremist people are active in universities and other places. When we accept their friendship request in Facebook they begin to insult and threaten us. For instance they have recently opened a Facebook account under the name of Nara-e-Takbir. When I accepted the friendship request from this account, the account holder began to insult me and said: You are servants to America and you are infidels. I immediately omitted the account from my friends' list. In another occasion, a university instructor named Tafakori, has published a message on his Facebook page in which he said: "I have gathered Badr troops and will soon eliminate each one of these infidels one by one."

Chief Editor of Taswir Weekly says that he has recently published in his weekly an article written by Bashir Ahmad Ansari. Then a commission called The Commission for Urban Reform has decided to complain to the Governor about publishing of





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that article.

Karimullah Danish continued: "In their meetings, they always call the civil society activists as infidels and threaten them in their Facebook pages. They are particularly members of Hezb-ul-Tahrir."

Haji Mohammad Agha Dawood, chief security officer of Takhar province, told Media Watch that the case of the university instructor, who threatened in his Facebook page journalists and civil society activists, is under process and investigation.

He chief security officer of Takhar province added that security forces always cooperate with journalists and if a journalist is threatened, he or she should immediately inform them so that they can take swift action.

Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan believes that any restriction and censorship imposed on media activities are in violation to the Access to Information Act and appeals to local government institutions in Takhar province to protect freedom of speech and the loud voice of open media in their province.

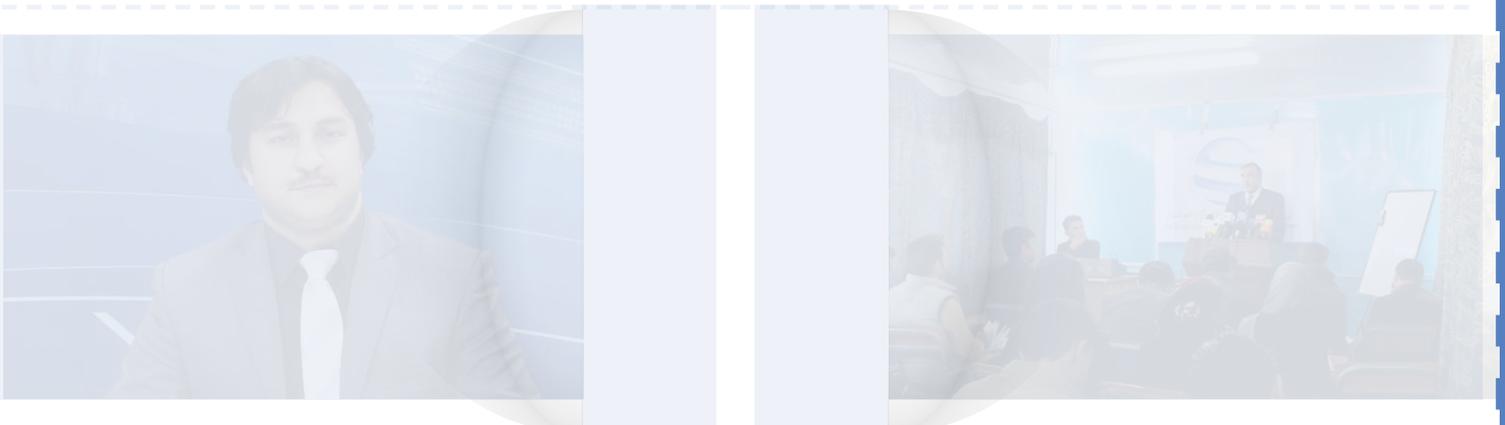
The government of Afghanistan is legally obliged to protect freedom of speech and media personnel. It must not allow any individual or groups who oppose freedom of speech and civil values to create an atmosphere of fear and intimidation and to prevent publishing of facts and truths.

Daesh-launched radio station was destroyed in Nangarhar province

The so-called "Voice of the Caliphate" radio station, which was launched by Daesh terrorist group in the eastern part of the country two months ago, was destroyed in international forces' air raids on February 1, 2016. The raids also killed five Daesh members who were running the radio station.

Ataullah Khogiane, spokesperson for Nangarhar Governor confirmed this news and told Media Watch: "Radio Voice of the Caliphate was destroyed in a series of air raids conducted by international forces in Momendara area of Achin district, Nangarhar province." The spokesperson for Nangarhar governor added that the air raids destroyed a nearby internet apparatus which was used to make programs for this radio station for terrorist purposes, and killed all three staffers who worked there. Radio Voice of the Caliphate first began its broadcasting in Pashto language which reached out to Jalalabad city and the surrounding districts intermittently in various hours of the day. Daesh used the radio broadcasting to persuade citizens against the political system as well as persuading youth to join the group. The radio's broadcasting was also designed to propagate mistrust and disunity among multiple ethnic groups in the province.

Continuation of broadcasting of this radio station created a lot of protests. Jalalabad citizens, journalists, media and media support organizations, particularly Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan called it against the society's wellbeing and Afghanistan's sovereignty and demanded it to be stopped. However, the radio's broadcasting not only was not stopped, but was even expanded into Persian language recently and announced to begin in English and Arabic too.





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Media Watch contacted Nangarhar government officials to discuss the issue, but they repeatedly insisted that the radio was broadcasting from the other side of the border, from Pakistan, and that it was impossible for the government of Afghanistan to stop its broadcasting.

Ataullah Khogiane, spokesperson for Nangarhar Governor, explained later that it was a mobile radio and was only recently stationed in Achin district. He added: "There is a mountainous area near Durand line where this radio was initially broadcasting in a mobile way. It was only recently placed in this area [Achin district]."

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan believes that launching and running of media outlets by terrorist groups to advance their terrorist and hateful objectives clearly is in violation of the effective laws of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Nai appeals to the government of Afghanistan to prevent any similar incidents from happening in the future.

Launching and running of media outlets by terrorist groups and enemies of humanity can land a hit a strong blow to freedom of speech in the country and to reduce people's trust in the state.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan calls upon the government of Afghanistan to be sensitive and act in time to prevent terrorist groups from abusing freedom of speech and advancing their agenda of recruiting youth to their groups and cause and spreading negative propaganda against the people and state of Afghanistan.

An Afghan photojournalist drowned in Turkey waters on the way to migrate to Europe

Feroz Mozaffari, was a photojournalist at Afghan Wireless telecommunication network. He had also worked with various media companies in Afghanistan. He had earned many prizes in photography and his photos won the best photo prizes in numerous contests.

Given deterioration of security conditions in the country and fear of an unknown future ahead, after many years of working with media, Mr. Mozaffari, together with his family, decided to leave Afghanistan for Europe in search of a more secure country to live in. Unaware of the quite different and catastrophic fate, his family and he left for Europe, but did not reach their destination.

Feroz Mozaffari and his family were all drowned in Turkish waters and their bodies were sent back to Kabul and buried by their relatives and dear ones.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan released a statement in which it called Mr. Mozaffari's death as a great loss for the freedom of speech in Afghanistan.

The media staffer lost his life at a time when many young Afghans leave their country due to increasing insecurity, vague future, widespread financial and administrative corruption, and lack of employment in their own country. They incur huge financial costs and take life-threatening risks to migrate to Europe through illegal immigration routes and channels. The





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trend has been ongoing and intensifying in the past two years.

Over 250 journalist and media personnel have left Afghanistan and sought asylum in western countries in the last two years. From the northern province of Balkh alone, over 70 journalist and media personnel have migrated to Europe and America. Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan believes that escape and migration of journalists and media personnel out of the country will leave freedom of speech and the society of Afghanistan in an irrevocable loss. Continuation of this trend is worrisome to the society.

Abdulmujeeb Khalwatgar, executive director of Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan, says: "We demand from the National Unity Government to assure that the lives of the country's citizen and particularly those of the journalists are not in danger and that it should take practical steps in protecting journalists.

Counting Mr. Mozaffari's death, the number of casualties among journalists and media personnel in 2016 has reached to nine.

A few months earlier, another journalist who had previously worked for Ariana News TV, planned to migrate with his family to Europe. They were drowned in the waters between Turkey and Greece. They were rescued, but their little child lost his life in the sea storm.

The challenge of lack of professional female staffers in Afghanistan radio stations

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan celebrated World Radio Day on February 13, 2016. Nai interviewed representatives of all 120 radio stations in Afghanistan about their major challenges and problems. The results reveal that almost all radio stations in Afghanistan suffer from financial and economic problems. Security problems came in second place. Lack of professionally trained staffers and female personnel was pointed as a third major problem, and finally restrictions on access to information came as the fourth major problem for Afghanistan's radio stations.

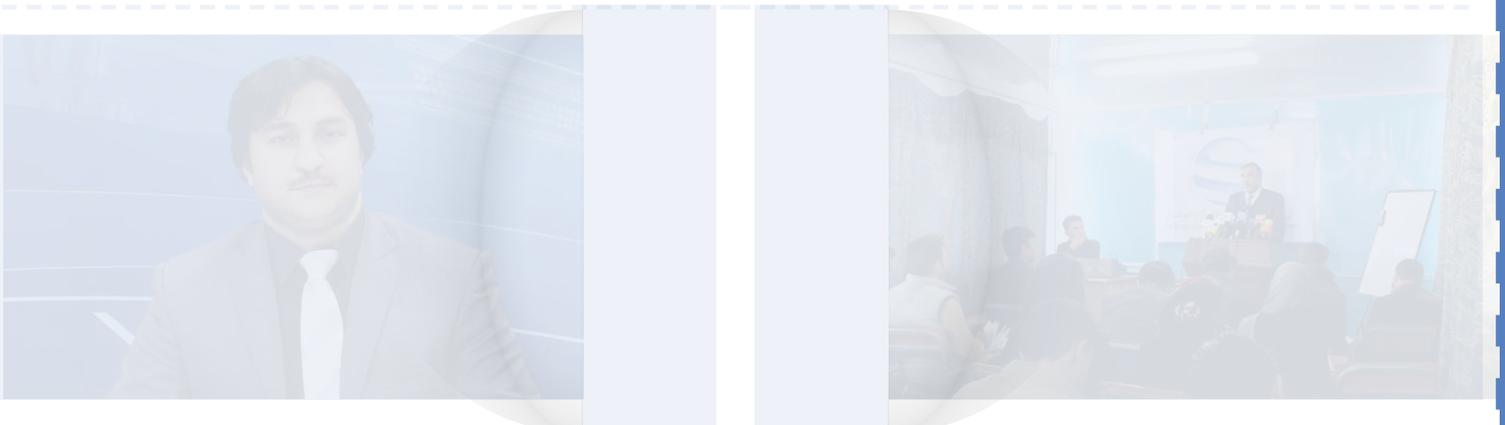
Ninety out of 120 radio stations interviewed, pointed economic problems as the main challenge on their way. While 61 radio stations pointed security problems among their most important challenges. Lack of female and professionally trained staffers came out as the third major challenge and lack of access to information as the fourth one in the interviews.

Out of the 26 radio stations operating in Kabul, 84 percent pointed economic problems; eight percent, security problems; and eight percent, technical equipment problems as their major challenges.

All 19 radio stations in the central parts of the country mentioned economic problems as their main challenge. Additionally, as other main challenges to their works, 58 percent of them pointed security problems; 26 percent, lack of professional female personnel; and 16 percent, lack of access to information.

All 30 radio stations interviewed in northern zone of the country pointed financial and economic problems as the main challenge to their work. Then they mentioned security problems (76 percent), lack of professional and female personnel (14 percent), and problems of accessing information (10 percent), as their other major problems.

Similarly, all eight radio stations interviewed in the eastern zone of the country pointed financial and economic problems as





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the main challenge on their way. Half of these radio stations mentioned lack of professionally trained and female personnel as their next major challenge whereas another half of them pointed lack of proper technical equipment and lack of access to information as their other main challenges.

All of the 12 radio stations interviewed in the western zone, pointed economic problems as the main challenge on their way. Half of these stations mentioned security problems as the next major challenge whereas another half of them mentioned lack of female and professionally trained personnel and lack of access to information as the next major challenges before them.

Radio stations in the provinces of Nangarhar, Samangan, Urozgan Herat, Parawan, Ghazni, Jowzjan, Kunduz, Daikundi, Zabul, Kandahar, Helmand, Khost, Wardak, and Kunar pointed lack of professionally trained and female personnel as the main challenge before them and think that tackling it would take both time and money.

Directors of radio stations in these provinces have said that due to continuation of war and spread of insecurity, most of their female personnel, who were also professionally trained, left and bid farewell to their stations.

Radio stations in Kabul and northeastern provinces of the country also complained about inadequate or lack of electricity. They said that in some cases they could not afford to pay the electricity-related expenditures.

There is a total of 175 radio stations in Afghanistan which seven of them have ceased to continue their broadcasts due to inadequate finances.

Sidiqullah Tawhidi, director of Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan, addressed a press conference which was held in observance of World Radio Day: The year 2016 began with difficult days for Afghanistan's media. In less than a month time, 20 media personnel have been injured in the country. This shows that this year will be a difficult one for the country's media.

Mr. Tawhidi added: "The year 2016 began with difficult days for journalists and we have so far lost eight of our journalists while another 20 have been injured. During this short period, over 10 cases of violence against journalists have been recorded. This all indicates that we, Afghanistan's media, are heading through a difficult year. We hope that the government of Afghanistan, international community, and international media support organizations pay fundamental attention to protect media, particularly local radio stations, and take radio journalists under a credible protective cover."

Media Watch director also said: According to the findings of our interviews, the majority of Afghanistan's radio stations face budget shortages and if they do not receive financial aid from the state of Afghanistan, there is a real possibility that a high number of them may cease to broadcast anymore. Mr. Tawhidi added: "Currently there are seven out of a total of 175 radio stations which have stopped their broadcasts due to lack of financial assistance and inadequate budgets. Radio stations in Afghanistan are in need of financial assistance from the government of Afghanistan, international community, and international organizations. If they are not supported financially, the entire sector will incur a huge damage."





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Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan appeals to the government of Afghanistan to support the country's radio stations and do not let down the loud voice of Afghanistan media and journalists in the farthest corners of the country.

The state of Afghanistan is obliged by its constitution to support freedom of speech. This should include financial support to those radio stations that cannot reach out to commercial advertisements and private companies.

Challenges of transitioning televisions from analogue to digital system

Media growth in Afghanistan in the past 14 years is a story of achievement for the people of Afghanistan. Over 1,400 print, visual, and audio media outlets have been initiated and operated in Afghanistan in the past 14 years. Switching Afghanistan's television stations from analogue to digital system has been a repeated subject of discussion in the past few years.

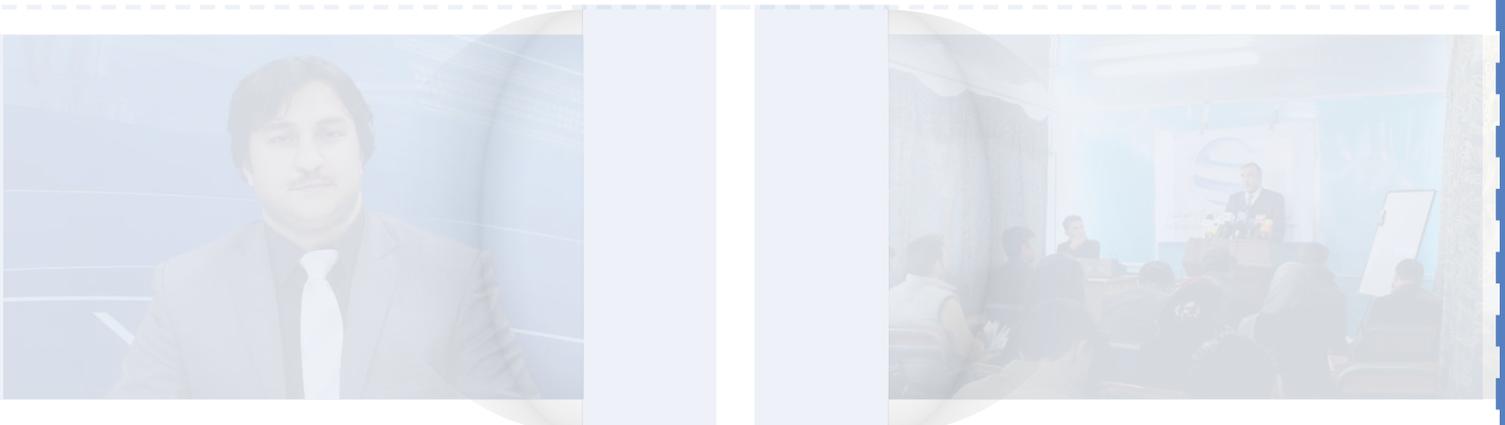
On this topic, the Union of Afghanistan's Radio and Television Stations convened a seminar. As a speaker in the seminar, Sediqullah Tawhidi, director of Media Watch, said: "Through convening of this seminar, the Union of Afghanistan's Radio and Television Stations tries to assess the ways of using digital technology and possible technical and market challenges that may lie before it."

Mr. Tawhidi also said: "The analogue system is an old and nearly abandoned one. Switching to the digital system will pave the ground for further growth of media in the country. The digital system has the capacity of increasing the number of frequencies without creating any restrictions in acquiring frequencies. This will pave the way for sustainable growth for the country's television and radio outlets. On the other hand, the quality of digital broadcasting is several times better than that of the analogue."

Saida Mojgan Mustafawi, deputy minister of information and culture in publishing affairs, said that the increase in the number of media outlets in Afghanistan in the past 14 years is unprecedented. However, she added: Transitioning of all media outlets into world-class standards is a difficult job and requires time. She added: "Growth and progress of our media outlets was a media and information explosion. Therefore, it cannot be all standardized in only 14 years' time. It is not easy to improve the quality of them and solve all of the problems at once. It requires joint cooperation between the state and media institutions." The deputy minister of information and culture in publishing affairs also said: Afghanistan's media law also contains shortcomings and problems that require revision and amendment.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan supports digitalization of Afghanistan's media and appeals to the National Unity Government to ease the conditions for digital transitioning process so that all media can easily switch to the digital system.

Afghanistan radio and television stations, especially local television stations in the provinces, express their concerns over digital transitioning and have questions with regards to the cost of it. Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan hopes that the government of Afghanistan can provide convincing answers to their questions and concerns and pave the way for their transition from analogue to digital system.





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A new economic publication launched in Kabul

Paitakht-e-Eqtesaad, is a new publication which just joined the family of Afghanistan's print media. This publication does not publish breaking news; unlike many other publications, it publishes about social and economic topics in the society.

Mujtaba Sadat, owner of the publication, told Media Watch: The purpose of launching this publication is to build capacity for the families and to promote critique in the society.

Mr. Sadat added: "Our motto clearly says it: we began with the motto of 'sound family and full economy'. We want to build the capacity among families so that with sound families we can have a sound society."

Paitakht-e-Eqtesaad is published in four colored pages in a 2,000 circulation in Kabul. The owner of the publication says that he has plans to expand publishing it in other provinces too.

Shortage of budget and lack of financing means always stand on the way of print publications in the country. The owner of Paitakht-e-Eqtesaad publication pays the publication's expenses out of his own pocket and is concerned that if they cannot find financing sources, they may face financial problems.

Mr. Sadat told Media Watch about the expenses of his publication: "We are a media team and pay out of our own pockets to publish our publication. We hope that we can finance our publication through commercial advertisements in the future."

There are so far seven columnists writing for Paitakht-e-Eqtesaad and they all work voluntarily.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan welcomes Paitakht-e-Eqtesaad publication to Afghanistan's print media family. Nai advises the owners of this publication to come up with a more accurate planning and a different approach to attract commercial advertisements and finance publishing of their publication in the market.

The readership of print media gets their breaking news and other news-related information through electronic media and expects from print media more than just publishing of news and reports. Their expectations include analyses, scientific articles, and general information which all appear less frequently in Afghanistan's print media.





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Attention!

All journalists and media organizations are hereby notified that Mr. Mohammad Qasem Rahmani works with the Media Watch in the capacity of Media Lawyer. Those journalists and/or media outlets that face legal issues in connection with their media related and journalistic activities, or need consultation on performing such activities, may contact him by phone at 0799 830 905 or via email at: m.qasim@nai.org.af.

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To obtain a soft copy of the report, please visit the following link: <http://www.nai.org.af/Media-watch.htm>

Note:

1. To maintain confidentiality and to protect sources it was not possible for Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan to corroborate the incidents by carrying out additional investigations.

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