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Media Watch Report

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Media Watch Report

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

- Two journalists fled Sar-e-Pul province for Kabul after the Public Order and Security Forces beat and threatened them
- A journalist fled Zabul province after severely beaten and threatened to death by Zabul security forces
- A journalist survived an assassination attempt in Baghlan province
- A local journalist for Radio Salam-Watandar in Faryab province was beaten and insulted by the National Security officers
- Director of Barlik TV Station was insulted and threatened by Taloqan police in Takhar province
- Chief Editor of Radio Nasim was summoned by Daikundi Police Office
- National Security Council ordered police chiefs to avoid talking to journalists
- Findings of a Nai polling about the situation of freedom of speech in the time of the National Unity Government
- Najibullah Mosafer, the imprisoned photojournalist, was finally freed after 18 days in prison
- Afghanistan's Brave Journalist of the Year was announced





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Journalists in Afghanistan continued to face violence in the month of Hoot, 1393 (February 20 – March 21, 2015). Some were even forced to leave their towns and provinces and seek sanctuary in Kabul during this period.

At least four journalists were beaten and injured, all by security and law enforcement forces, in this month. Atila Noori and Yaqoob Ali Madani, two journalists from Sar-e-Pul province, left their families and town and moved to Kabul after security forces beat them. They complained about deterioration of security and safety conditions for journalists in their province and said that they would not return unless the provincial governor assures their safety.

Meanwhile, Zabul police has beaten and briefly detained Ahamd Wali Sarhadi, Provincial Chair of Zabul Journalists' Union, after he produced and published a report about police's torture practices in the province. After being beaten and injured by Zabul Police, Mr. Sarhadi fled to the neighboring Kandahar province. He said in a press conference in Kandahar that he was threatened and beaten by security forces and that his life was at risk in Zabul.

Mr. Sarhadi has recently arrived in Kabul and said that Zabul Police Chief has threatened him and his family to death. He added that initially the bodyguards of Zabul Police Chief considered killing him.

This journalist is now in Kabul, unable to return and resume his journalistic works in his native Zabul province. Both cases in Sar-e-Pul and Zabul provinces share similarities: journalists in both provinces have been beaten up by police for publishing critical reports and then have fled to Kabul for their safety.

In another case, police have beaten Feroz Ghafoori, a reporter for Radio Salam Watandar in Faryab province, and prevented him from attending a program held by the Provincial Directorate of Women's Affairs in observance of International Women's Day.

Yet in another development, Director of Barlik local TV station in Takhaar province was beaten by police forces while he was filming and reporting on a traffic accident.

In addition to the cases of physical violence against journalists in Afghanistan, systematic efforts have gained momentum to impose restrictions on journalists: the recent measures taken by the National Security Council have hurt open circulation of information in the country.

In an unprecedented decision, the National Security Council and the Ministry of Interior have announced that journalists cannot interview provincial police chiefs and their spokespersons to obtain information on security issues.

This decision by the government of Afghanistan has caused a wave of strong responses from journalists and advocacy organizations for supporting media and freedom of speech. They have called the decision in clear violation with the Constitution and other effective laws of the country.

Citing the National Security Order, police chiefs and other governmental officials across the country now refuse to provide even trivial information to the journalists.





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Nai supporting open Media in Afghanistan

In a separate development in Daikundi province, judicial organs summoned the Chief Editor of local radio station Nasim and questioned him to clarify broadcast of a specific piece of news. This process was in violation of the Mass Media Law. Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan advocated and succeeded in assuring that the case is only lawfully pursued in accordance with the Mass Media Law.

On the other hand, findings of a recent poll conducted by Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan show that in spite of pledges by both leaders of the National Unity Government (NUG), the situation of freedom of speech has not improved and has in fact deteriorated in certain cases in the country.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan has conducted a polling to assess the situation of freedom of speech since the NUG has assumed office. The polling directly interviewed 305 journalists in five major cities across the country and sought their opinion on five indicators.

The findings of the polling show that after the NUG assumed office, the situation of freedom of speech has not improved in the country, the leaders of the NUG have not acted on their pledges, and the expectations of journalists and media directors remained unmet.

The causes behind journalists' dissatisfaction about the situation of freedom of speech in the country could include state institutions' refusal to provide information to journalists as well as deterioration of security conditions for journalists in the past six months.

In a separate development, as a result of consistent advocacy by journalists and freedom-of-speech advocacy groups, Najibullah Mosafer, a renowned photojournalist, was freed after spending 18 days in prison with no criminal reason.

Mr. Mosafer had committed no crime. But a court sentenced him to six months in prison. The court's verdict, on one hand, brings under question the functioning of judicial institutions in the country, and on the other hand, shows that journalists and media workers are still vulnerable here. State officials can easily press or imprison a journalist whenever they want.

In the face of so much violence and threats that Afghanistan's journalists encounter, Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan appreciated brave journalists across the country through electing Afghanistan's Brave Journalist of the Year. The process began in 1393 (2014), and ended in electing Afghanistan's Brave Journalist in the first week of solar year 1394 (third week of March 2015).

Thirteen journalists, who faced violence while on duty in different parts of Afghanistan, participated in this open competition. Mukhtar Wafayee, a journalist for Jam'a-e-Baaz Daily in Balkh province won the highest number of the votes and was presented by the Statute of Brave Journalists in 1393 (2014).

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan expressed its sympathy with journalists who faced violence while on duty and persuaded them to reveal corrupt, law-breaking, and abusing faces.





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Nai supporting open Media in Afghanistan

Two journalists fled Sar-e-Pul province for Kabul after the Public Order and Security Forces beat and threatened them

Atila Noori, an Ariana-News-TV journalist, and Yaqoob Ali Madani, a freelancer, left their province, Sar-e-Pul, first for Mazar-e-Sharif, Balkh, and then for Kabul, the capital, after the Public Order and Security Forces beat them on March 13, 2015.

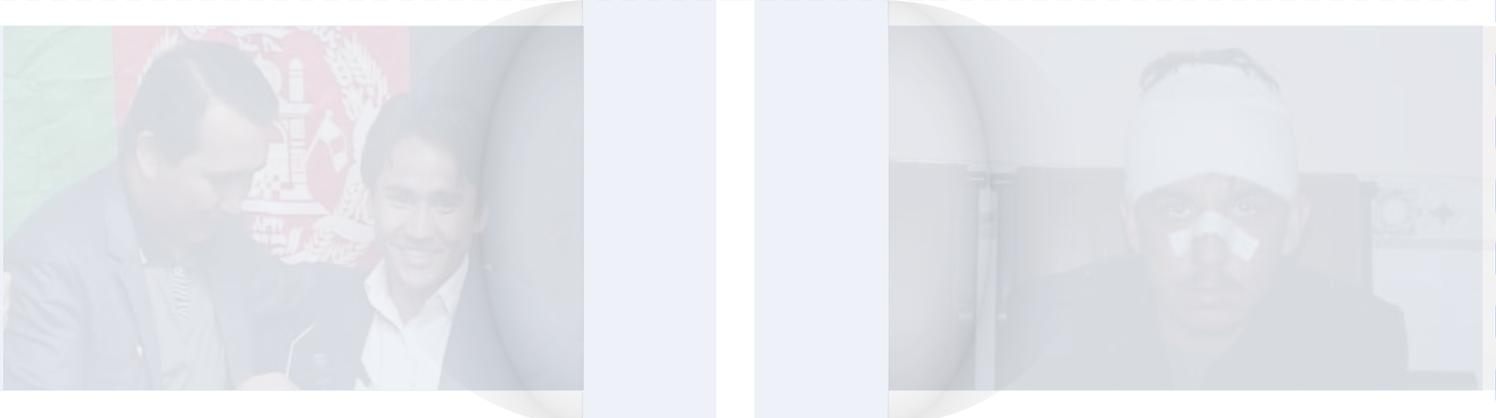
Both journalists said that they went to the Office of Sar-e-Pul Electricity Company for work-related purposes and parked their car in the vicinity of the building when the Public Order and Security Forces told them that they were not allowed to park there. They took it as a pretext for beating Yaqoob Ali Madani. They also beat Atila Noori after she wanted to film the incident.

Atila Noori told Media Watch: Although they went to the Chief Commander of Public Order and Security Forces to solve the issue, the latter just further complicated it by forcing them to drop any possible charges and threatening them to stop taking the issue any farther. He continued: “I was in town when they called me and asked about my location. I told them and then they asked me to stay there until they arrive. But fearing another turn of beating, I quickly went home.”

Mr. Noori added that the same soldiers who beat him also came to his home and asked for his assurance to the governor that he would not pursue the issue any further and that it was all cleared there. Mr. Noori said that such pressures and threats made him leave Sar-e-Pul for Mazar-e-Sharif, Balkh, and then for Kabul. In Kabul, he has contacted and informed several governmental and non-governmental organizations to seek their assistance in resolving the issue.

The other journalist, Yaqoob Ali Madanai, told Media Watch: After we went to the office of Sar-e-Pul Governor to resolve our problem, the Governor implicitly hinted that the provincial administration would most likely have collapsed if he would have fired those individuals who had beaten us.

Meanwhile Mr. Noori said that the efforts made by the Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan resulted in the Governor’s contacting both journalists and asking them to return to their works in Sar-e-Pul province. Previously, Mr. Abdul Jabbar Haqbeen, the Caretaker of Sar-e-Pul province had told Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan that he would support journalists and media and will pursue any cases that they would file legally. He had pledged to refer the violators and perpetrators to the Office of the Attorney General.





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Continuing its advocacy efforts, Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan sent a letter to the Office of Sar-e-Pul Governor and asked for their attention on Mr. Noori and Mr. Madani's problems. The letter requested the office of the Governor to provide a trustable and productive work environment for the mentioned journalists in accordance with the Constitution, the Mass Media Law, and the Law of Access to Information.

Part of the Nai's letter to the Office of Sar-e-Pul Governor reads: Two Sar-e-Pul-based journalists, Atila Noori and Yaqoob Ali Madani have complained about lack of access to information and misbehavior from security officials in the mentioned province. They have asked in a written complaint for all restrictions on their journalistic works to be lifted and for all their challenges and security problems to be solved.

As an advocacy and supporting organization to the media and journalists, Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan, has been in frequent contact with governmental and non-governmental organizations and officials to tackle challenges and solve problems that exist on the way of journalism and circulation of information. In this specific case, Nai contacted the Office of the Administrative Affairs and the Office of the Chief Executive, both of which assured that authorities in Sar-e-Pul will support media and journalists and will solve their problems. Attached to the letter was a copy of the journalists' complaint which the letter asked authorities to consider it and act to solve their problems in accordance with effective laws.

A journalist fled Zabul province after severely beaten and threatened to death by Zabul security forces

Ahmad Wali Sarhadi, Provincial Chair of Zabul Journalists' Union, was severely beaten and injured by security forces in Zabul province. Mr. Sarhadi has recently fled from his native Zabul province to Kabul.

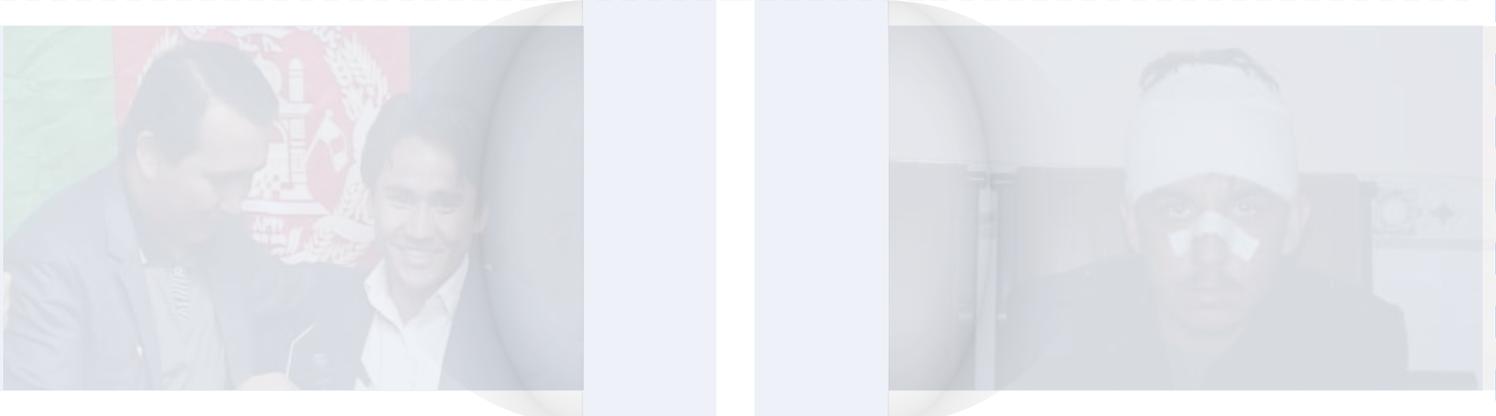
Mr. Sarhadi told Media Watch in a telephone conversation that bodyguards of Zabul Provincial Police Chief beat him after he had published a report about torturing practiced by police forces in the Province.

Mr. Sarhadi also added that the same people who had beaten him also took him into custody in a private prison for two hours.

Mr. Sarhadi now fears for his life and says that the plot was pre-planned to kill him.

According to Mr. Sarhadi, the individuals who beat him were close relatives of Zabul Police Chief and acted under his direct order.

But in an interview with Media Watch, Zabul Police Chief, Ghulam Sakhi Rogh-Lewanai, rejected Mr. Sarhadi's claims that police severely beat him. Mr. Rogh-Lewanai added that Police only had a verbal dispute with Mr. Sarhadi for his unusual way of driving and the police officer, who misbehaved with him, has already been arrested.





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Nai supporting open Media in Afghanistan

Zabul Police Chief also said that Mr. Sarhadi was not a journalist and that he only knew him as a teacher who had been fired from his job.

The Police Chief added that police had not beaten any journalist and would never do so. He also commented on Mr. Sarhadi's claim that his life was at risk in Zabul: "No one can threaten anyone to death in Zabul."

However, Mr. Sarhadi added that before the recent incident, he had published another report about the Police Chief's comments that the funds for Education ended up in Taliban's pocket. Soon after that, according to Mr. Sarhadi, armed individuals entered his home to kill him but his neighbors prevented them from succeeding in their plot.

Now Mr. Sarhadi says that he cannot go back to Zabul until the threats are not dissolved. Because, he says, they can kill him any time.

Media Watch strongly condemns beating, injuring, and imprisoning of Mr. Ahmad Wali Sarhadi in the hands of Zabul Police and calls on the Ministry of Interior to investigate the case and identify and punish the perpetrators.

However, the incidence of violence against journalists has consistently increased in the past thirteen years and the government of Afghanistan has not been able to punish the violators. This has in turn contributed to the further increase of violent incidents.

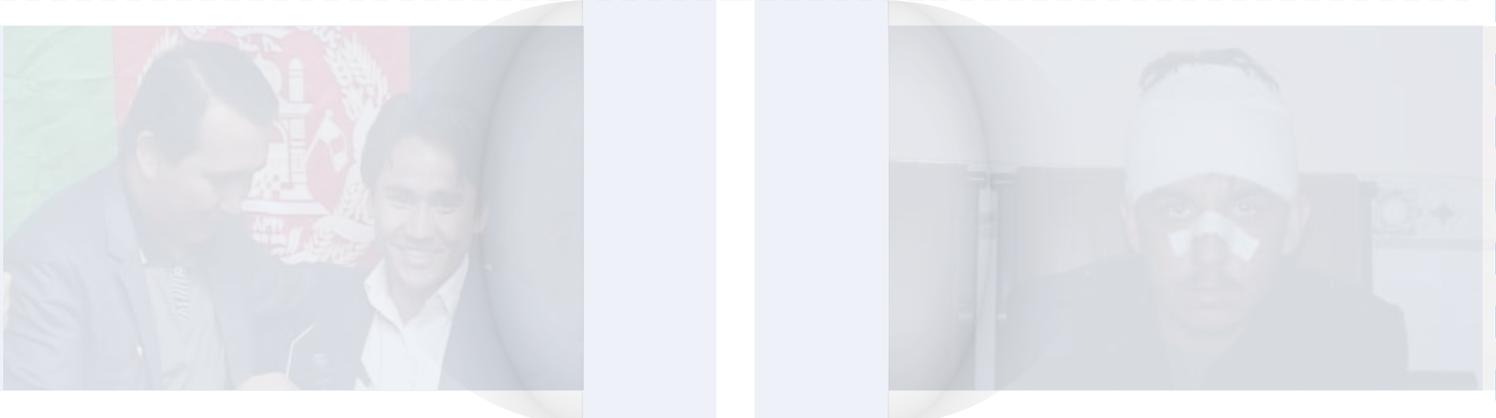
Director of Radio Adib station in Baghlan province survived an assassination attempt

Habiburrahman Sherzai, Director of Adib local radio station in Baghlan, claims that his car was targeted by an explosion on March 2, 2015 when he was on his way home. He was not injured, but two other individuals were wounded in the explosion and his car was destroyed.

Mr. Sherzai told Media Watch that unidentified individuals placed a bomb in a bicycle which went off at the time when he got off his car and so he survived.

The Director of Radio Adib thought that the assassination attempt was pre-planned by Taliban or other enemies of the people of Afghanistan as they cannot bear the presence of journalists in communities and try in every possible way to threaten or eliminate them.

Mr. Sherzai related the assassination attempt by the Taliban to his journalistic works and added that in many of the reports about security issues published by Radio Adib, Taliban have been quoted which may have made them plan the attempt.





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Security officials in Baghlan confirmed the incident and reported their efforts to identify and arrest the perpetrators.

Jawed Bashaarat, the Spokesperson for Baghlan Police Department told Media Watch: “The enemies of Afghanistan always aim at creating terror and insecurity in towns.”

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan condemns attacks on journalists and calls them as inhumane.

Nai calls on the government of Afghanistan and particularly on Baghlan security officials to seriously pursue the case of the attack on the mentioned journalist and double their efforts to identify and arrest the perpetrators. Insecurity and threats to the life of journalists in Afghanistan have now grown into a serious problem. Journalists face violence and misbehavior quite frequently, but the Government of Afghanistan has so far failed to provide a convincing answer to this serious problem threatening journalists and media community across the country.

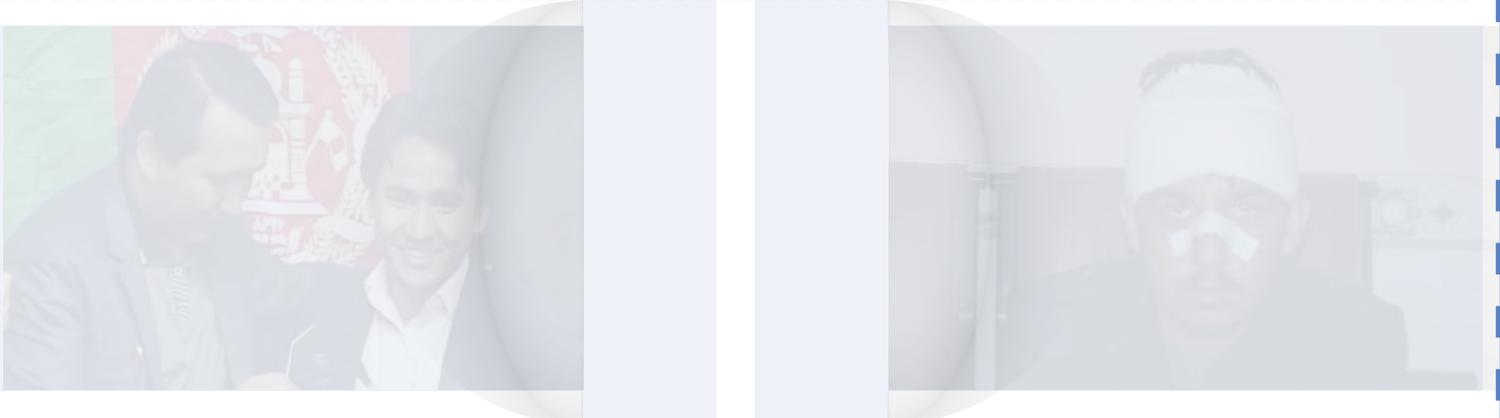
A local journalist for Radio Salam-Watandar in Faryab province was beaten and insulted by the National Security officers

Feroz Ghafoori, a provincial journalist for Radio Salam-Watandar in Faryab province, claimed that National Security officers have beaten and prevented him from attending a program held by the Provincial Directorate of Women’s Affairs in observance of International Women’s Day.

Mr. Ghafoori told Media Watch at Nai that when he wanted to attend and cover a program held by the Provincial Directorate of Women’s Affairs in observance of International Women’s Day, National Security officers searched his body and his equipment for several rounds. They ultimately did not grant Mr. Ghafoori permission to attend and cover the event and one of them even beat him on the site.

He added: “After body and equipment search, I wanted to enter the hall while another National Security officer stopped me and asked for my press card. When I produced my card, he took it, threw it on the ground and started insulting and threatening me.”

This Faryab-based journalist for Radio Salam-Watandar does not know the reason behind the National Security officers’ misbehavior and their beating of him, and says that he has taken his case to several organizations. Security officials in Faryab province have not confirmed beating of the journalist but said that there was a verbal dispute between a National Security officer and a journalist.





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Deputy Director of Faryab National Security told Media Watch: The National Security officers were assigned to search the guests upon their arrival to the event. The journalist was carrying multiple items and when the security officer wanted to search him and his equipment, he engaged in a verbal contention with the officer. During the contention, a radio mistakenly hit on the journalist's head.

The Deputy Director added that security officers in Faryab have close cooperation with journalists and help them on many occasions.

Meanwhile, in an interview with Media Watch, Naaser Maimanagi, Director of Radio Salam-Watandar, confirmed the security officers' clash with their journalist in Faryab province and called the conduct of the security officer as unprofessional. He added that no one had the right beat another individual.

Mr. Maimanagi called on Faryab authorities to seriously investigate the case and punish the perpetrator. He added that security officials have assured him of thorough investigation of the case but have not yet shared the findings of their investigation.

Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan condemns beating of Radio-Salam-Watandar journalist in Faryab and calls on security officials to prevent careless conduct of their officers.

No one, including National Security officers, has the right to beat another individual. National Security officers' misbehavior shows their unprofessionalism and is counted as abuse of their military uniform against civilian citizens and journalists.

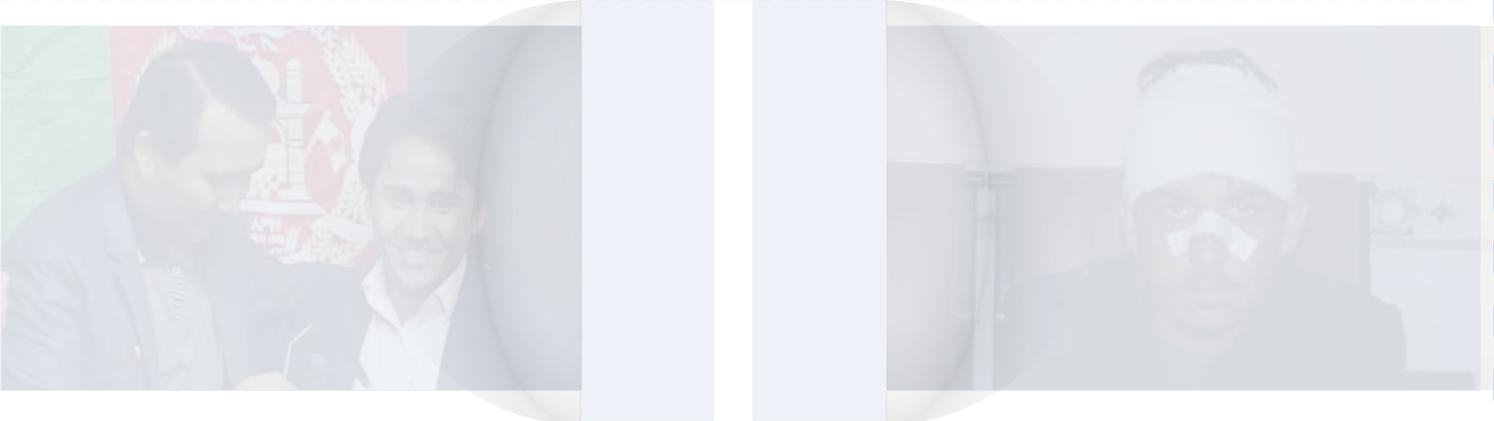
Also National Security officers' prevention of a journalist from covering an event demonstrates their lack of awareness of freedom of speech and the Law of Citizens' Access to Information. Preventing a journalist from covering an event is eventually denial of the right of citizens to have access to information.

Violating laws under the disguise of security provision and law enforcement is itself a criminal act.

Director of Barlik TV Station was insulted and threatened by Taloqan police in Takhar province

Abdul Ghafoor Rahmani-Moghol, Director of Barlik TV Station in Takhar province, claimed that Takhar Police officers threatened and insulted him. They have also hit his camera to the ground and broke it.

Mr. Rahmani said: "A police Ranger vehicle was moving in the opposite direction on the street in Taloqan, when it hit a private Corolla car. The driver of the latter immediately begged the police driver for compensation which the police driver was rejecting to pay. I wanted to film the scene and make a report. While I was interviewing the driver of the private car, police officers interfered, cut the interview, violently hit my camera to the ground and broke it."





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Nai supporting open Media in Afghanistan

The journalist added that if it was not for the meddling of the local residents, police would have beat him on the scene.

Mr. Rahmani told Media Watch that the police officers, who were involved in the accident, did not want to be filmed and did not want their violation to be broadcast. Neither had they wanted the affected driver to be filmed.

Meanwhile, Mohammad Yasin Dehzaad, Provincial Chair of National Journalists' Union in Takhar, told Media Watch that, Munir, the individual who violently behaved toward Mr. Rahmani, is a relative to a police chief in Takhar province and has no official connection with police.

Mr. Dehzaad added that Munir's Family has apologized to the Barlik TV officials and have promised to buy a new camera for the Station in compensation.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan calls on Takhar provincial authorities to prevent any perpetrators from insulting and threatening journalists.

Reckless behavior of relatives of police chiefs will harm the image of police in the eyes of the public and will push the latter to reduce cooperation with the police.

Chief Editor of Radio Nasim was summoned by Daikundi Police Office

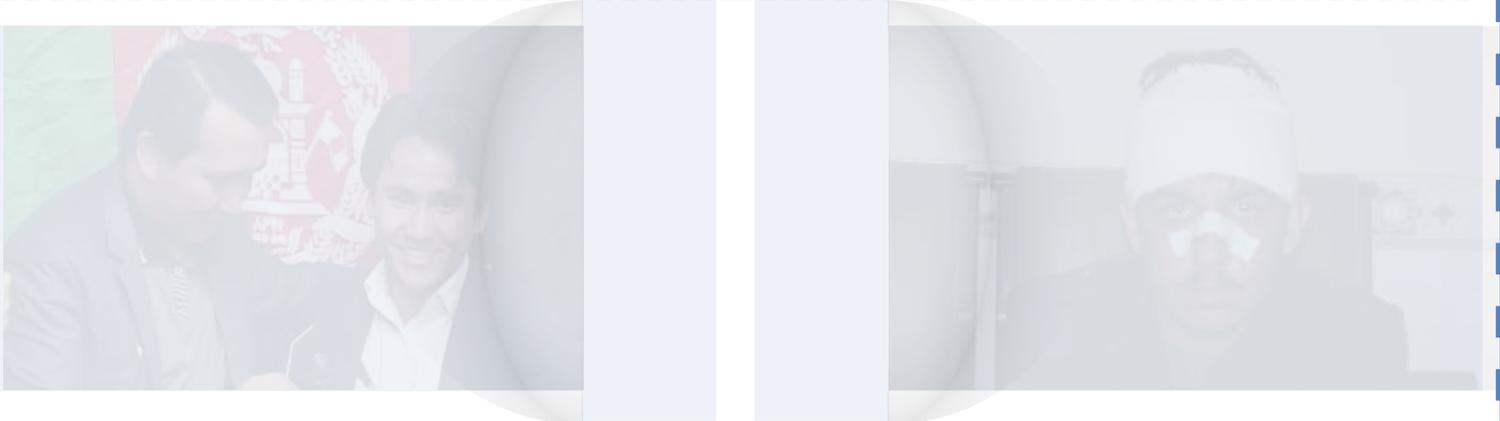
Reza Waahedi, Chief Editor of Radio Nasim in Daikundi province, was summoned by the order of the Daikundi Caretaker on March 13, 2015.

Mr. Waahedi told Media Watch: National Security officers arrested and imprisoned Head of Administrative Affairs at Nili Municipality for embezzlement on March 11, 2015. We broadcast the news through Radio Nasim which provoked relatives of the imprisoned subject. They complained to the Office of the Governor and the latter ordered to summon the Chief Editor of Radio Nasim.

Media Watch contacted Daikundi provincial authorities and called the summoning of Radio Nasim Chief Editor as unlawful.

After efforts made by Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan, the Office of Daikundi Governor revised its decision and in accordance with Mass Media Law and referred the case to the Mass Media Commission.

According to the Mass Media Law, a complaint case a media outlet goes to the Mass Media Commission, which investigates and decides upon the case. Only if the Commission identifies criminal elements in the case, it will refer it to the investigative and judicial organs.





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On the other hand, media in Daikundi province complain about lack of access to information and criticize the recent decision of the National Security Council that ordered police chiefs in all provinces to avoid talking to media. They call it a step toward restricting freedom of speech and media activities.

Chief Editor of Radio Nasim told said that Daikundi Police Headquarters has recently stopped cooperation with media and refrained from sharing any information, even in tiny pieces, with media.

Mr. Waahedi added that due to lack of access to information, it has been extremely difficult to operate in Daikundi province and he has thought of shutting down the radio station.

“No state authority talks to journalists so what should we broadcast to the citizens,” said Mr. Waahedi.

Meanwhile other media outlets, including radio stations, in Daikundi province also complain about lack of access to information. In an interview with Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan, they shared their concern about lack of cooperation from police and other governmental organizations with media.

Media Watch expresses its utmost concern about government’s pressing of media and journalists and calls it unlawful.

On the other hand, access to information is one of the fundamental rights of citizen and no organization, governmental or nongovernmental, has the right or authority to deny it.

Covering or hiding facts is defined as a crime in the law and the Government of Afghanistan is obliged to punish those who violate the laws.

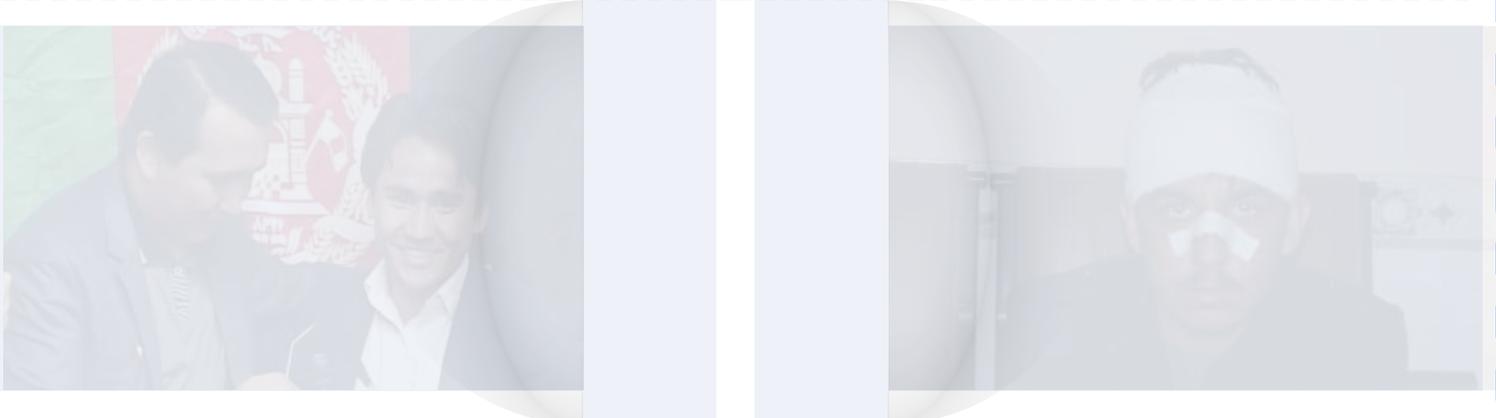
Meanwhile, not sharing information with media and journalists will leave a void that other mercenary individuals and terrorists will willingly exploit and feed media with distorted information to reach their illegitimate purposes. This will cost both the state and the people so dearly.

National Security Council ordered police chiefs to avoid talking to journalists

The National Security Council and the Ministry of Interior have jointly informed all security officials and their spokespersons that they were no longer allowed to share information with media and be interviewed by the journalists.

The order also refers journalists to the Office of the Spokesperson for the Ministry of Interior to get information about security incidents as well as police activities.

Hashmat Stanekzai, the spokesperson for Kabul Police Headquarters, wrote on his Facebook page about this recent decision: “According to a proposal by the Ministry of Interior and decision of the National Security Council, from now on only the Office of the Spokesperson of the Ministry of Interior will share with media





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information about police's achievements and other security related issues. No police chief or his/her spokesperson is allowed to talk to media anymore.”

The spokesperson for Kabul Police HQ has not given any further information about the exact date of the Order, but written on his page that from now on, information about police activities and security incidents will only be communicated through publishing statements.

Meanwhile authorities at the Ministry of Interior have said that there is no such position as ‘spokesperson for police HQ’ in the Ministry’s ranks.

Najib Danesh, deputy spokesperson for the Ministry of Interior, told Media Watch: “On the provincial level, there is only a public relations office that is assigned to facilitate media activities for the police chief commander.”

“All senior police chiefs in provinces can talk to media, but prior to that, they need to coordinate with the Office of the Spokesperson for the Ministry of Interior in order to maintain a shared perspective,” said Mr. Danesh. He added that police chiefs can talk to media about security incidents, police achievements and other subjects of interest only within their own circle of authority.

Deputy Spokesperson for the Ministry of Interior also said: The decision will go into effect very soon and in order to get information, journalists will only be able to ask the provincial police chief, the spokesperson or deputy spokesperson at the Ministry of Interior.

Journalists and media advocacy organizations reacted to the National Security Council’s decision. They called it in violation of the effective laws of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan believes that the National Security Council’s recent decision is in violation of Article 50 of the Constitution as well as provisions of Mass Media Law and Law of Access to Information.

Abdul Mujib Khalvatgar, Executive Director of Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan told a press conference: “It is impossible for this Order to be executed.”

Nai Executive Director also said that there were 12,000 active journalists operating across Afghanistan on a daily basis and if police chiefs and their spokespersons are banned from interviews with journalists, then the spokesperson for the Ministry of Interior will never be able to respond to journalists on such a scale. This can deliver a big blow to the freedom of speech and the citizens’ right of access to information.

Nai Executive Director called on the leadership of the National Unity Government to honor their vow made to media during their campaigning period to protect freedom of speech and media.





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Each leader has vowed during the electoral campaigning season that if he won the elections he would definitely support freedom of speech and media.

Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan expresses its utmost concerns about the recent decision taken by the National Security Council and the Ministry of Interior. It believes that execution of such a decision will create challenges for media and freedom of speech and is unacceptable.

Media Watch asks the President, the Chief Executive Officer, the National Security Advisor, and the Minister of Interior to reverse the mentioned Order and stop taking firm restraining step toward freedom of speech in the country.

Terrorists and other enemies of the people of Afghanistan will exploit the void that this Order will create. When provincial police chiefs and their spokespersons do not deliver information to journalists in a timely manner, enemies of the People will accelerate their propaganda to fill the void. This will harm both the people and the state of Afghanistan.

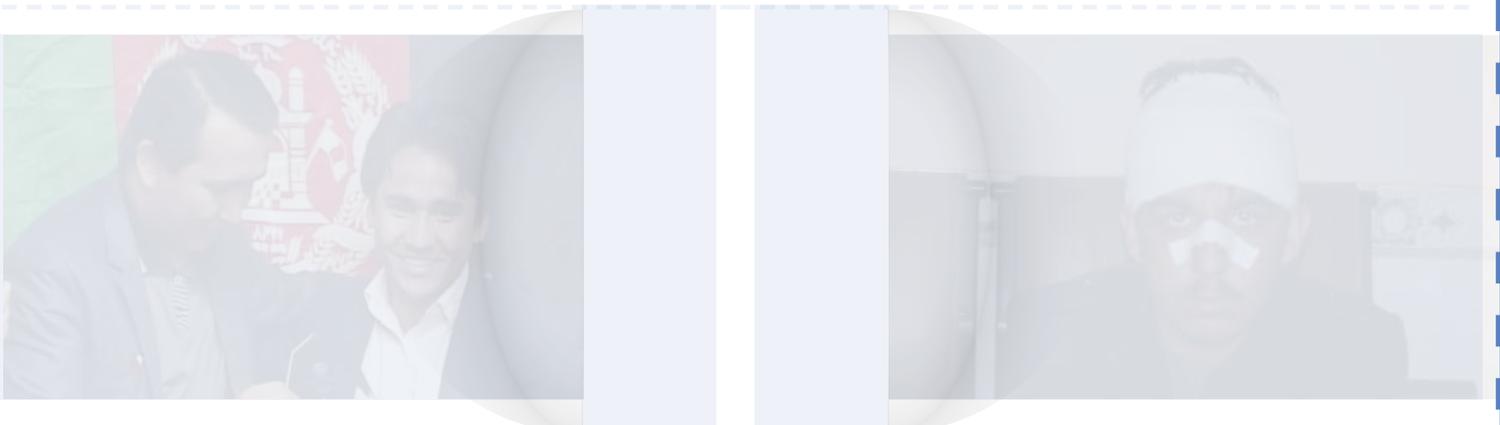
The situation of freedom of speech has not improved in Afghanistan: Nai Polling

In a poll conducted by Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan, half of a total of 305 respondents believed that despite the promises made by the two leaders of the National Unity Government, the situation of freedom of speech has not improved in Afghanistan ever since.

A third of the participants in the poll said that the situation of freedom of speech has even deteriorated ever since the National Unity Government started to work. Only a seventh of the participants believed that the situation of freedom of speech has improved ever since.

Sediqullah Tawhidi, Director of Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan said in a press conference: in this polling, 305 journalists, daily contributors, and media chief editors participated in direct interviews in five major cities including Kabul. The questions asked about five indicators as follows:

1. What are the impacts of the National Unity Government's policy for promoting and expanding freedom of speech?
2. How do you assess the process of accessing information from security institutions?
3. How do you assess the process of accessing information from public services and civilian institutions?
4. How has the security situation affected journalists' works since the National Unity Government assumed office?





5. To what extent has the National Unity Government considered media reports in its anti-corruption campaign?

The respondents had to select one of the three following responses for each question: deteriorated, has not changed, or improved.

The first question asked to determine the impact of the NUG's policy on the expansion of freedom of speech in the country. Thirty-three percent of respondents indicated that the situation has deteriorated after the NUG has assumed office, 56% responded that in spite of the NUG Leaders' promises and journalists' high expectations, the situation has remained unchanged. Only 13% of the respondents reported a positive impact of the NUG's policy on the expansion of freedom speech in Afghanistan.

The responses to the question about accessing information from security institutions is worrisome. Over half of the responding journalists said that after the NUG has taken the office, the process of accessing information from security institutions has deteriorated. Thirty-six percent reported no change comparing to pre-NUG period and only 12% believed that it has improved.

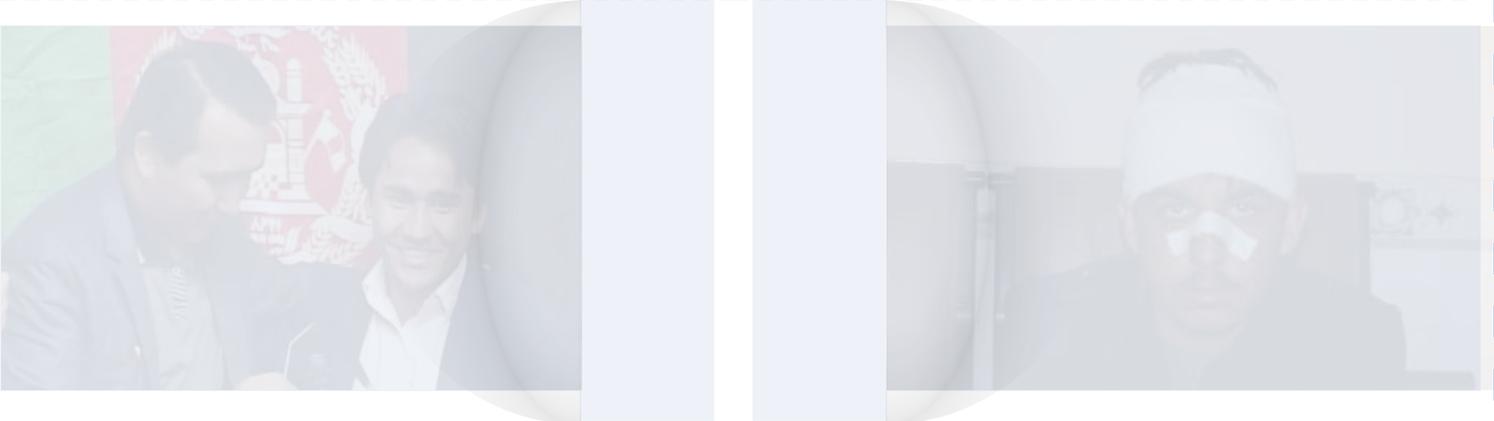
The responses to the question about accessing information from public services and civilian institutions have been slightly better. Twenty-eight percent reported a deterioration, while 59% indicated no change and only 13% indicated that the situation has improved.

The responses to the question about the impact of security situation on journalists' works is again worrisome: forty-one percent reported a deteriorated situation, about 50% indicated no change, and 10% reported an improved situation.

Responses to the question about the extent to which the National Unity Government has considered media reports in its anti-corruption campaign are as following: a quarter of respondents reported the situation has deteriorated, 50 responded that it has remained the same and another quarter indicated an improved situation. Overall, half of the participants indicated that the situation has remained the same.

Nai officials announced the purpose of the poll as comparing the situation of freedom of speech between the NUG and its predecessor administration.

Abdul Mujib Khalvatgar, Nai Executive Director, said: We attempted to take a close look into the situation of freedom of speech six months after the NUG assumed office. The intention behind the polling was to find out that, following the promises of both NUG leaders and the high expectations of the journalists, whether and to what extent the situation of freedom of speech for journalists and media directs has actually changed.





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Meanwhile Sediqullah Tawhidi, Director of Media Watch at Nai, stated about the poll: During their election campaigns, many political leaders of Afghanistan make promises to the citizens that they cannot fulfill later. One of such promises was the written pledges on supporting freedom of speech made by both National Unity Government leaders during their election campaigns. Either leader promised that if he won the presidential election, he would have supported, promoted, and expanded freedom of speech in the country.

Mr. Tawhidi added: “The findings of this poll shows that the leaders of NUG have not acted upon their promises to expand and promote freedom of speech. This has created serious concerns among media communities across the country.”

Media Watch at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan, believes that the findings of such polling can remind the NUG leaders of their shortcoming in fulfilling their promises, thus preventing the situation from further deterioration.

Media Watch found the results of the recent polling worrisome and demanded from the National Unity Government to revise in its policies toward media and journalists and support freedom of speech as it is obliged by the effective laws of the country.

If the NUG acts in accordance with law, refrain from pressing media, and pursues pending media related cases, the incidence of violence against journalists will fall out and there will be hope that the coming year be a better one for the media and journalists.

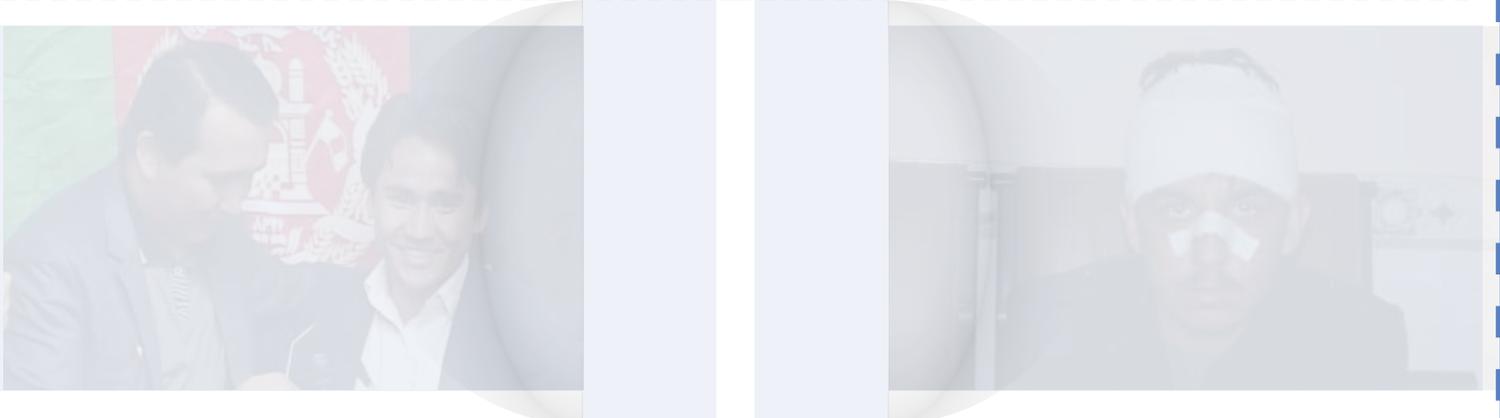
Najibullah Mosafer, the imprisoned photojournalist, was finally freed after 18 days in prison

Najibullah Mosafer, the photojournalist who was imprisoned on February 22, 2015, was freed from the prison by a Presidential decree 18 days later.

Later Mr. Mosafer told Media Watch that his imprisonment was unlawful since a court, in a trial in absentia, sentenced him to six months in prison for a crime that he had never committed.

Mr. Mosafer emphasized that he had not committed any crime and was sentenced only by corrupt judges.

Eight years ago, Mr. Mosafer took a picture of a parade in the Education Fair in Kabul, in which female students were carrying banners with written slogans for education. Then he sold the picture to Honar-e-Haftom Production Company. The latter manipulated the picture and used it in an advertisement for Etesalat Telecommunication Company. The production company replaced the educational slogans for Etisalat Telecom motto. The case originated here.





نی حمایت کننده رسانه های آزاد افغانستان
Nai supporting open Media in Afghanistan

Mr. Mosafer added that an expatriate judge persuaded the family of a girl who was photographed in the picture, to litigate a case in the court and earn up to a million-dollar fine from Etisalat Company.

A preliminary court fined the photojournalist to AFS 10,000. He complied and paid the fine and the family of the photographed girl agreed to acquit him from the charge. But the judges related the case to the right of God, reopened the case. The second trial confirmed the proceeding of the preliminary court. Recently after seven years, a third court, tried the photojournalist in absentia, and sentenced him to six months in prison.

The manner in which the courts were convened and the behavior of the judges indicate that they have failed to thoroughly judge the case and the judges have irresponsibly adjudicated the case.

Mr. Mosafer added that the judges did not know anything about photojournalism and thought as if they were dealing with photo-store photographer or one that films wedding parties.

Media community of Afghanistan reacted to the trials and sentencing of Mr. Mosafer to six months in prison. They called the entire process as unfair.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan, protested the trial and the sentence of Mr. Mosafer since his first day in prison and called on the judicial organs to reopen and adjudicate his case in an appellate court.

Users of social media networks also protested the photojournalist's imprisonment and demanded his immediate and unconditional release.

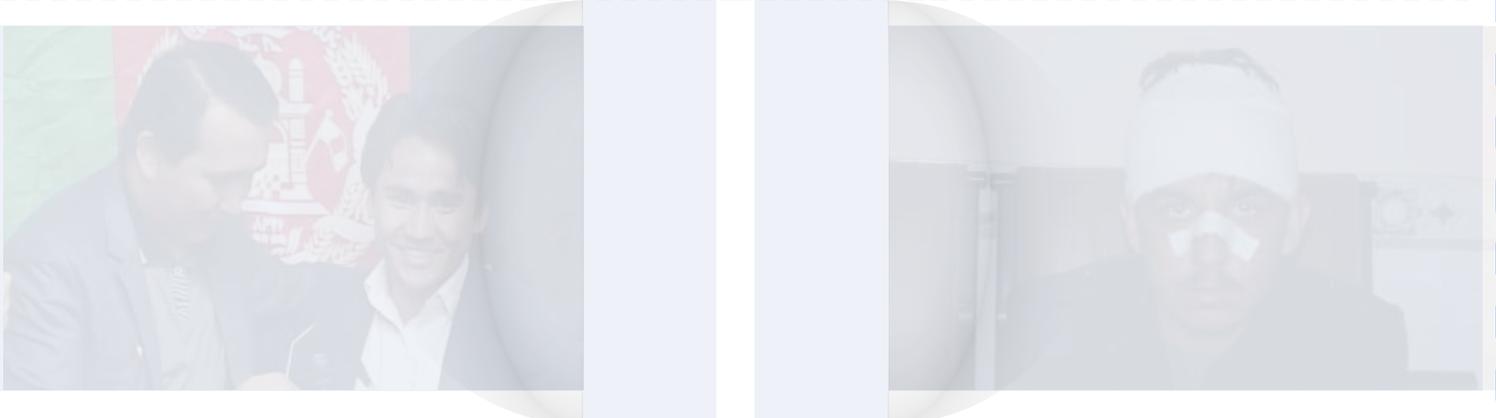
Pressures kept building on the government and the Chief Executive Officer raised Mr. Mosafer's case in the Council of Ministers' meeting. He demanded Mr. Mosafer's release. Then the President signed a special decree and granted amnesty to Mr. Mosafer.

But Mr. Mosafer insists that he has not committed any crime in the first place to be forgiven.

He thinks that the appellate court should have been convened; it should have investigated all the proceedings of the previous courts and should have proved his innocence.

Mr. Mosafer is one of Afghanistan's leading photojournalists who has been sentenced to six months in prison for taking a picture in an open space. His imprisonment shows that the legal and judicial institutions are not well aware and knowledgeable about cases related to journalism or its branches. Judges' lack of awareness and knowledge about journalism as a professional career, and about Mass Media Law as well as other laws actually ends up in sentencing a photojournalist to six months in prison for a crime that he has never committed.

Media Watch demands the judicial institutions to use their utmost precision and thoroughness in cases related to media related violations and act in accordance with the Mass Media Law of Afghanistan. They should allow the Mass Media Commission, which is a technical commission, to investigate and decide on such cases. Ac-





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Nai supporting open Media in Afghanistan

According to the Law, the Commission will refer media related cases to judicial organs only if they find through their investigation criminal aspects in a given case.

Media Watch at Nai welcomes Mr. Mosafer's release from the prison and calls on the government and judicial organs to not imprison any journalist without proving that they committed a crime.

Afghanistan's Brave Journalist of the year was announced

In an open contest among 13 journalists, Mokhtar Wafayee, a journalist for Jam'a-e-Baaz Daily Paper with the most votes, won Nai's Statute of Brave Journalist of the Year.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan introduced to an open contest, the 13 journalists, from different areas of Afghanistan, who had experienced violence while on duty and had their cases registered with Media Watch.

The idea behind the Brave Journalist of the Year by Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan was to express sympathy with journalists who faced violence while on duty and to persuade them to reveal corrupt, law-breaking, and abusing faces.

Saber Fahim, senior reporter for Media Watch, told a meeting at Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan that Mokhtar Wafayee has received 9,132 votes and won the first position.

Mr. Fahim added: All together 22,384 users of social media networks voted for their favorite candidate. The highest number of votes went to Mr. Wafayee.

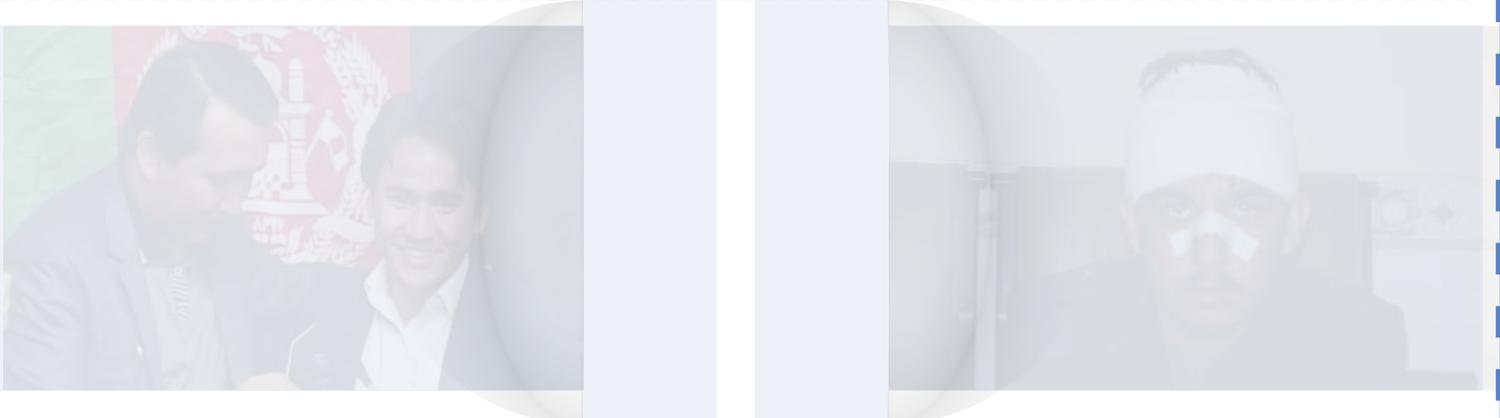
Najim Rahim, a Kunduz-based journalist got 7,944 votes and ended up second to Mr. Wafayee.

Noor Agha Sharifi, Nai provincial executive in Mazar-e-Sharif, also said in the meeting: Journalists should be aware that there are institutions which appreciate their works and support them to take firmer steps toward realization of freedom of speech in Afghanistan.

Aslam Jawaadi, Chief Editor of Jam'a-e-Baaz Daily Paper, addressed the meeting and expressed his gratitude to Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan. He added that such journalists who put their life at risk for a transparent and professional reporting are worthy of appreciation and support.

Mokhtar Wafayee, the winner of the Statute of Brave Journalist of the Year, said: Whoever picks up a pen, has the courage to write in a country like Afghanistan, and writes is undoubtedly brave.

Mr. Wafayee dedicated the Statute of Brave Journalist of the Year for all those journalists who have lost their life for spreading freedom of speech in the country in the past 13 years.





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Nai supporting open Media in Afghanistan

Mr. Wafayee spoke of the problems on the way of journalism in Balkh province. He mentioned of self-censorship and invisible pressures and hoped that they soon come to an end.

The voting process for choosing the Brave Journalist of the Year was accessible online to social media users who were able to cast their online vote for their favorite candidate.

Nai Supporting Open Media in Afghanistan nominated the following journalists for the Brave Journalist of the Year: Najim Rahim, Jamshed Hakkaak, Jawed Ziarat Jayee, Hossain Seerat, Farhad Sadeqi, Yasin Azhand, Mokhtar Wafayee, Mansoor Moradi, Rahmatullah Ziarmal, Toryalai Hemmat, Mamoon Dorrani, Saadeq Rashti, and Ahmad Lodin.

Users of social media networks had 45 days to cast their votes for their favorite candidates. The voting process was completely transparent. There were over 22,000 users participated in the voting process until March 16, 2015.

The results of the voting was automatically visible to the candidates and to the voters alike.

This was the first time in Afghanistan that an organization appreciated such journalists who have faced violence while being on duty and have presented the Brave Journalist of the Year Award to one of them.

Nai's Statute of the Brave Journalist of the Year will persuade journalists in their pursuit for reporting credible information and will help expand freedom of speech.

From now on, the Brave Journalist of the Year Award will be presented to the bravest journalist of the country who will be elected through a transparent online election every year.





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Nai supporting open Media in Afghanistan

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.

For more information on Media Watch project please contact our team at:

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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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