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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:

- **Summoning Tolo correspondent by police in Helmand**
- **Arresting Khawar TV in Helmand**
- **Escaping Ariana News TV from Helmand to Qandahar**
- **Zabul and challenges towards freedom of speech**
- **Menacing the Reeda Radio in Takhar province by the fundamentalists**
- **Violations against journalists in Kabul**
- **Financial problems in media a big challenge**
- **Resisting against access to information in government entities**



جمهوری اسلامی افغانستان  
کمیسیون نظارت دسترسی به اطلاعات

Islamic Republic of Afghanistan  
Oversight Commission on Access to Information



د افغانستان اسلامي جمهوریت  
اطلاعاتو ته د لاسرسي د څارني کمیسیون





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Though passing one decade and half from the new government` life which was built on the foundation of democracy and freedom of speech, still there are too many hurdles against these values and these problems get from bad to worse every day. Recently, there are a remarkable numbers of journalists who complain from the illegal behaviors of the government authorities. The journalists, editors and journalist federations in Helmand province say that if they write or report something about the realities of the situation in their area, they are put under the pressures of the authorities. A clear example is the head of Khawar TV in the province who was released from detention by signing a pledging letter by force. During the recent three months, there have been three violation cases recorded in Nai media watch department. One of them was belonged to Tolo News journalists who was summoned by the police office, but he did not refer due to considering it as illegal order made by the police department. The second issue belongs to RTA journalist who was forced to sign a pledge and then released from the jail. It is not only about Helmand province, but in other areas and provinces like Zabul also complain from the current atmosphere created by the government. The Zabul governor has tightened up too much the opportunities regarding access to information and even directed to his spokesman not to be ready for any interview





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### **Tolo news journalist summons by Helmand commander:**

Abdullah Hamim who works as provincial journalist in Helmand, is summoned by the commander of the province, in order to give explanation about a report that he had sent through Tolo News. In an interview with Nai, he said that his report was focused about insecurity and organized crimes in the province. According to Hameem, basically the report was outsourced by Pajwak news agency and he had used it as second hand. He added that there is a contract between Tolo and Pajwak agency for practicing this procedure and there was all standards of journalism observed and for keeping the balance between two different views, the interview of Helmand commander was placed orderly.

To summon a journalist is totally against rules and regulations of media. Considering the current pressures from different directions it seems that the journalistic activities face with lots of problems. Our contact with commander of Helmand was failed each time. Essentially the rules say that if someone claims against some journalist or media, he or she can approach to the commission which is assigned for solving these kinds of problems. If there was a need for further investigation, then it would be transpired whether it is a need to send it to justice entities or no. The police of Helmand province is an executive entity.

### **Khawar TV director arrests in Helmand:**

Mohammad Sadiq, director of Khawar TV in Helmand province, was arrested by security entities and then released after few hours. He says that the main reason of his arresting was a report about a press conference of governor deputy that he broadcasted it through live program. According to him, a security officer picked him up from his office and took him to their office for investigation. Before entrance to the security office, his phones received by the guards and guided to interrogations room. In interrogation rooms he was asked who had given him the direction to broadcast that report. The detention of Sadeq, has overshadowed over other journalists in the province and they concern about their activities. Zainullah Stanekzai, head of journalists' unity in mentioned province said that the government authorities are totally against broadcasting the realities and try to bring all media workers under their own control.

But the authorities claim that they try to be supportive for media and journalists. Omar Zowak, the spokesman of Helmand province say that Khawar had broadcasted a report and it needed some explanation only, but we don't want to be opponent and tough against the media and press at all. But Sadiq was





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released after eight hours detention and later on made to sign a pledge in which asked that he would never broadcast these kind of reports in future. Now he says that he we rely more on effective law that is stronger than his pledges signed in the interrogation office since he is an independent journalist. Unfortunately, it is not the first time that the authorities of the province put pressures on journalists and get their words in a letter, but before there were some others like Abdullah Hameem, the Tolo news TV, local journalist who was obliged to do the same. Nai strongly condemn these kind of pressurizing on journalists which clearly against media law. The media law plainly says that any complain and claims against media are referred to special commission.

### **Escaping a Helmand journalist from Helmand to Qandahar:**

A local journalist of Ariana News Barialai Rahimi, has escaped from Helmand to Qandahar province for fear of kept in detention based on the direction of the governor. He says that presently the governor wants some kind of despotic atmosphere ruling by him and time to time he summon the journalists in his own office and blame them about their activities. He says that the governor has recently ordered on police in the province to search for him for arresting. Our contacts with him were failed each time, since he and his spokesman were not ready to speak with us. According to the spokesman the governor had traveled out of the country. These kinds of reactions by the governor is very concerning for us and therefore we asked him to be very careful in protecting the achievements of last decade. The freedom of speech is one of the basic rights of all Afghan citizens and the government authorities should respect it.

### **Zabul journalists activities limiting:**

A number of journalists in Zabul province claim that they have no access to information due to sanctions put by its governor "Besmillah Afghan Mal". Ahmad Wali Sarhadi, head of Zabul journalists unity said that the governor has no reasonable behavior with journalists and he has ordered all of his personnel including spokesman no to make any appointment for interview with journalists. Those journalists believe that the main reason behind of these kind of ill behaviors are that he scares too much from revealing the corruption files which are going on currently in his administration. The head of journalists say that they have frequently complained to the government but no one paid attention. The governor of Zabul province defended from himself and his office that none of them has reacted rudely with journalists. Afghanmal





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emphasized that there is no document to prove that the journalists are under pressure and behaved violently but there are some adventurer people who want to make some accusations against his office. He added that struggling against corruption is not feasible without media involvement.

### **Takhar radio director gets warning:**

Mirwais shariat madari, director of “Reda” radio based in Talkar province, claims that some unknown people threatened him. “ Time to time I receive some phone calls from unknown people who speak in Pashto and after threatening ask me to give them my address” said shariat madari. He added that their programs are entirely religious and broadcasts music only one hour. According to him all religious figures of the province are in favor of this radio and they criticize through their program on those countries which support the extremism and terrorism. He thinks that head of information and culture of the province strangely have extreme thoughts, though he is a worker of the government but clearly speak against mass media in some public events. He also mentioned the names of some fundamentalist groups like Jamiat Islah and Tahreer parties who time to time send their menacing threats to the address of radio. This radio, according to its director is supported by Turkish government and tries to focus its program against fundamentalism. It is mentionable that the media and journalists have been always under pressures and viewed as those who proceed frivolities in the country through broadcasting and publishing modern program. One of clear example is a teacher of Talkhar university named “Maroof Motafekery” who had voiced out against media and threatened them that soon they will face with hard punishment. This man was arrested for his expressions and soon released. The media watch is concerning about the lives of journalists in these area and ask the governors in all province to be very careful about them.

### **A journalist receives blunt reaction:**

In a shocking incident some body guards of parliament member “Mullah Tarakhail” rampaged on a police car and incinerated it in front of Kabul University. During the conflict between police and the riots, those journalists who were in the scene wanted to take photo and clips but faced with aggressive actions of police. Sajad Mohammadi, a journalist of “1 TV” says that some police men started beating them and





said now they will take the revenge of wrong doings of the riots from them. He says during the conflict with journalists the spokesman of Kabul security chief was personally present in the area. The spokesman of the chief executive of Kabul security “Basir Mujahed” says that most of police are ignorant about the rules and law and therefore these kind of violations against journalists committed by them. He added that police had asked the journalists to stay far from the scene because of preventing from further incidents.

### **Financial problems, the biggest challenge for media:**

The new findings of Nai shows that the local media in the country are facing with biggest problems. Some of local media warns that if the condition goes ahead like this, next year most of them will be closed. They underlined three major problems about access to information:

- 1- Financial problem
- 2- Security problem
- 3- Access to information

Among these three key problems, the finance difficulty has raised up above all. Some of media managers complain that beside lowering their incomes the official taxes upon media is another knot which entangle their hurdles multiply, since the government deal with them as if they are a productive business company. Therefore it is predicted that in forthcoming some of them will be closed.

### **Problems in Qunduz province:**

- None existence of finance resource – due to lack of advertisements and reducing the business companies
- high charging the electricity bills and using the generator instead
- High taxes and imposing strict rules by the government like paying fines due to postponing their taxes
- Reducing the workers due to economical press
- Concern about capturing the province by Taliban
- Increasing organized crimes like kidnapping and threats





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- Local high authorities prefer watching external and international channels rather than local TVs

#### **Problems of media in Khost province:**

- None – existence of business advertisements
- Carelessness of local government and international donors towards media

#### **Problems of media in Daikundi:**

- Limitation of access to information
- Underestimating the media by local authorities
- High charges upon media

#### **Problems of media in Herat:**

- High taxes upon media equal to business companies
- Paying for power expenses equal to the level of business companies
- Paying expensive amount for extending and renewing the license
- Practicing the discriminatory policy by local authorities with private media in the aspect of helping them to access to information

The developing of multi-media, as a great achievement of recent decade, has been recorded in the level of regional countries. But unfortunately this achievement is under the serious threats due to insecurity, economical problems and none access to information. Nai, supporting open media is extremely concern about dissipating these achievements and therefor call on the government to be loyal and cautious about keeping these values alive. No doubt if the government doesn't do enough for preserving these achievements, in fact the voices of Afghan citizens will be suffocated by weakening the private mass media. Of course that will eventuate exactly to corruptions and other disasters. So, we want the government to do its best for removing the mentioned problems, uplifting the heavy charges and taxes on media and try to pave the way for access to information for all journalists and Afghan citizens according the effective laws and regulations of our country. More important the security of journalists is very important for us. Furthermore, we want from leader of Hezb Islami, Gulbudding Hekmatyar who is going to join with the government after peace negotiations, to introduce the assassinator of Mirwais Jalil, the late journalist of BBC who was killed by his personnel, in order to bring him to justice. He was killed after making interview with Hekmatyar in the territory where dominated by Hezb Islami. Nai, also call on Zabul authorities to respect the rights of people in the province and remove any kind of obstructions in the way of freedom





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of speech.

### **Sharing information a big lack in government offices:**

Although the law of access to information has been officially signed by the president, in order to be effective practically, but still sharing information among government offices is not recognized as a formal culture. For monitoring the process of implementing the law, there is a commission but notwithstanding, this culture is not institutionalized within the government administration. The commission which is assigned to monitor the process of access to information, currently is complaint about the lack of budget for performing their duties. Danish Karukhail one of the commission member said that for proceeding their works there is a big need for budget which is not possible to do any thing. He added though their budget is approved by the government which come up to 12 million dollars but due to bureaucracy they could not obtain it. The commission wants to conduct some workshops and seminars for raising awareness among public regarding the access to information and responsibilities of the government offices for making it happen. The commission wants to activate and turn the culture of access to information from written documents to action and for doing it they want all ministries and offices should initiate a separate department in their own framework for giving information. Unfortunately still the government entities procrastinate in this regard. According to Karookhail, so far, they have received tens of complains from journalists about government entities that they don't respond to their questions. The commission is going to conduct a new program which is called triangle set of access to information. This program will include: commission, journalists and spokesmen. They believe that through this program they will be able to mitigate the problems, in terms of access to information. It is mentionable that last year (2016) more than 400 incidents of violations against journalists were recorded that 30 cases out of 400 were stemmed in efforts made by journalists to access to information. Nai, supporting open media has sent all recorded cases with full details including the names, location, type of violations etc to the commission for taking action and drawing attention of the government authorities about violations against media workers.





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### **Attention!**

All journalists and media organizations are hereby notified that Mr. Atiqullah Saket 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 0777274099 or via email at: [saket.atiq@nai.org.af](mailto:saket.atiq@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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