

A curbside radio-seller in Quetta.  
FM radio is hugely popular in Balochistan

Photo by Aurangzaib Khan



PRESS IN STRESS -

# MEDIA UNDER **THREAT** IN **BALUCHISTAN**



# Press in Stress – Media Under Threat in Balochistan

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# Introduction

**T**he southwest Balochistan province of Pakistan bordering Afghanistan and Iran has seen 14 dead journalists in 4 years since 2008. Hundreds others that work in the province have to figure out every day how to stay safe, to stay alive.

Journalists have to watch their backs as much as they watch out for news as they go out to report on a province troubled by military operations, underground separatist movements, growing radicalism, sectarian violence and tribal feuds. Caught in the crosshairs of conflicting international interests, the ethnically and politically divided Balochistan has all the elements of a pot-boiler and it is often the journalist that sustains the burns.

Balochistan can be roughly divided into three regions from the perspective of threats to media and challenges posed by indigenous and regional conflicts. The districts in the northeast – Dera Bugti, Kohlu, Naseerabad, Jafferabad, Jhal Magsi, Bolan, and Barkhan – are where threats flow out of reporting on military operations against the Bugti and Marri resistance, underground separatist groups, insurgent attacks on military, police and government installations, human rights violations such as the IDP crises and target killings. With journalists from Bugti and Kohlu displaced those from the neighbouring districts report on the tribal areas of Dera Bugti and Kohlu where a slow burning conflict between the military and insurgents continues.

Compared to Dera Bugti and Kohlu that are virtually no go areas for the media, the districts of Naseerabad and Jafferabad is where local media is subject to a feudal system. Adjacent to the Sindh southeast province, the feudal influence from across has diluted the local tribal structure here. Cases of violence against women are common in these districts though difficult to report in view of tribal sensitivities, according to a local journalist. In this region, Brahvi is a dominant language even though there are Balochi and Sindhi speaking

populations as well.

In the Pashtun belt comprising Pishin, Loralai, Qilla Abdullah, Qillah Saifullah, Mussakhel and Zhob, activities of Taliban and al Qaeda are the focus of national and international media. These districts fall along the border with Afghanistan and people here have ethnic and blood ties with Pashtuns in Afghanistan. This region is more clannish than tribal and tribal strictures are not all that stringent because the population is inclined towards business and cohabitation due to proximity to the populous northeast Punjab province. Here the population is divided between two political elements - the anti-Taliban nationalist groups and the pro-Taliban religious parties. The threat to media here emanates from reporting on cross border movement of Taliban, conflicting international interests and policies, activities of shadowy groups and security agencies, smuggling, attacks on Nato supplies and resistance to American and Nato presence in Afghanistan. In view of the aggressive posture of political elements, local journalism is opportunistic or subservient to their influence.

The third, the Baloch-dominated coastal belt comprising Gwadar, Panjgur, Awaran, and the districts in the centre such as Khuzdar, is where threat to media flows from conflict between the military and the separatist Baloch groups. In Gwadar, Panjgur and Awaran, anti-state sentiment is high among the local population and journalists are faced with pressures and threats from the state machinery and anti-state groups. Most journalists identify with the dominant sentiment, some openly, others not. The newspapers published locally are, however, more open about their support to the nationalist cause. Here the journalists are threatened and targeted often, allegedly by the state for being supportive of militant groups or reporting on issues like the missing persons and extra-judicial killings, which along with the rest of the Baloch districts, is a huge concern here. In fact, journalists were the first among people killed in target killings in

Balochistan. In the centre, Khuzdar district has seen more journalists killed than any other place in Balochistan.

Along the coast is the Gwadar seaport where international interest and contradictory policies and politics have spurred conflict over autonomy and access to local resources, the development and control of the port and cities along the coast. With the sense of deprivation feeding alienation, this issue fuels the Baloch insurgency and the state's highhanded response to it. This has had a negative impact on the growth of journalism, media space and freedom of speech in the region.

The people living in the coastal districts of Balochistan are free of tribal influences. Being contiguous to Karachi and the Gulf, the population here is forward looking, open to education and social change. The region is where the Baloch intellectual capital is concentrated and most of the people in government posts come from here. This is also where Dr Allah Nazar's Balochistan Liberation Front – an underground separatist movement with backing from Baloch intelligentsia and the middle class – is active.

In Quetta, the provincial capital, where the media activity is concentrated, journalists come from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. They are an inspired lot, educated and motivated to raise a voice for their province. Where most information is generated for the local, national and international media in Quetta, it remains a garrison city with a mistrustful security mindset shaped by decades of conflict and separatist politics stemming from resentment against the centre's neglect of the province. Journalists work in an environment marked by fear, rampant obstruction and intimidation. In many cases, information is vetted by security agencies and the state employs coercive tactics like restriction on advertisements and print material to browbeat media into submission.

Balochistan doesn't have a private industrial base, the economy sustained by the government sector giving it much influence over local businesses. In case of media, it comes in the form of advertisements. And if that doesn't work, there are disappearances, killings and shutting down newspaper offices, a trend that has registered an alarming spike in recent months and years in the backdrop of insurgency in the province.

For every independent newspaper and journalist, there are several that are pro-government. Here the threat flows from nationalist and militant separatist organizations because publicity (or propaganda) or coverage is tipped in favour of authorities in case of the local pro-government or mainstream media, often provoking a violent reaction. In the provincial capital, Quetta, tribalism holds sway in corridors of power – the present governor and the chief minister are tribal chiefs and almost all of the former office holders were powerful tribal chiefs - and newspapers dependent on official advertisements stay quite about tribal taboos or the repressive tribal sardari system.

The international interest in Balochistan also complicates the equation because the official circles and newspapers have their own policies about how to treat the Americans, the Chinese, the Iranian, the Afghan or the Indian influence in the province. Grappling with enormous challenges compounded by lack of professional training and support, media in Balochistan negotiate a minefield of direct and indirect threats stemming from reporting on a region where multiple forces are out to control information in a conflict that is as much an armed battle as it is a propaganda war.

Finally due to all these biases – personal or policy related – the truth hardly ever comes out or is too controversial for journalists to dare. Journalism, in the words of a veteran journalist in Quetta, was in better health at the start of the new millennium. With deterioration in political institutions and security environment in the troubled province, there has been a decline in standards of journalism directly in response to the conflict over the last ten years. And like all institutions aimed at serving the public interest, it can't be expected to improve unless a political solution to problems of Balochistan is found.

Reporting from a troubled region is stacked with danger and journalists cannot be safe unless their capacity on reporting ethically, sensitively and professionally is dramatically improved and a resource and support system developed and sustained that focuses on helping them stay safe and secure to keep the flow running of information uncluttered from all round propaganda that permeates the province.

# To Report or Not to Report

*“B*ohot si khabrain jaib main hoti hain magar report nahi kar saktay (there’s are lots of stories in our pockets but we can’t report)”, a journalist on phone, overheard while speaking to a desk head at his TV channel

On a Thursday afternoon in November 2011, outrageous prices of sacrificial animals before Eid Ul Adha preoccupy men in frenzied streets of Quetta. Business and politics, the staple of street conversation on Jinnah Road, have been replaced by an immediate dilemma - whether to offer a sacrifice this year or not. Meanwhile, in Kabir Building at the end of the road, two reporters are wrangling with a tough decision of a different sort.

The conversation in Kabir Building – Quetta’s Fleet Street where national and international media offices jostle for space in a circa 1950 building compound - is about a Lashkar-e- Jhangvi mastermind arrested by authorities.

The journalists say the man from Lashkar -e- Jhangvi, a militant Sunni organization claiming responsibility for sectarian violence in Quetta, is among architects of recent attacks targeting the Shia Hazara community.

One of the reporters, a photo-journalist, wants to take pictures of the Lashkar man for a foreign wire-service. He has access to the jail where the man is held. His reporter’s instincts are focused on the big story, ignoring for a moment what is very clear to his colleague who asks: “But is it worth your life?”

“If we carry the story, it will be a major blow to the organization. They will think we are out to serve the interest of Shia community, the police”, says his colleague who works for a news TV network.

In the end, they decide that a picture showing the Lashkar man or a news strip on TV is not worth the price. A Hazara journalist working for Dawn News TV channel based in the same compound left the city earlier in the year in the wake of

sectarian killings fearing he may be targeted.

The journalists talk in hushed tones as if walls have ears. And maybe they do in Balochistan.

When it comes to news in Pakistan’s largest province ravaged by conflict and insurgency, there are no “lean” days. Any given day, there is a surfeit of stories, mostly bad ones, the kind media thrives on. News-editors don’t have to worry about setting aside stories to carry another day when a newspaper is short of news – say Sunday. However, what journalists do have to contend with on a daily basis is the choice to kill or carry them.

The decision can be tough on journalists but then they are reporting on the toughest beat one can ask for - Balochistan. Torn between duty, ambition – the relentless drive that is breaking news to keep a job or hunger for a scoop – and the anxiety to stay safe, journalists in Balochistan are watchful of both news and the consequences of reporting it. Since 2008, 14 dead journalists have fallen on the wrong side of the equation in Balochistan, becoming a consequence of their profession.

In Pakistan - where 76 journalists have died in the line of duty between January 2000 and December 2011 making it one of the most dangerous countries for journalists in the world – the province of Balochistan has seen a high count of casualties within a short span of time with no let up. Jawed Nasir Rind, was killed as recent as November 5, 2011 – when this report was researched and written – bringing the number of journalists killed in Balochistan to three in 2011 alone. According to the International Federation of Journalists, “Balochistan was the most dangerous region of the most dangerous country in the world for journalists in 2010. Of 97 journalists killed worldwide last year, 15 died in Pakistan. Of that number, six deaths were reported in Balochistan.”

The two reporters agonizing over the story of

Lashkar man have reason to resist the temptation to break the news. In 2010, the photo-journalist took picture of the Baloch leader Shahzain Bugti arrested by authorities. The picture showed a policeman dragging Shahzain as he resisted arrest. After the picture was released, the photographer received calls from the policeman saying he couldn't leave the house because he feared attack on his life and the journalist was to blame. The photojournalist was also questioned by the Frontier Corps intelligence unit for releasing a picture that caused threat to security officials.

The TV reporter, even though he says neither the militants nor state agencies pose any direct threat to media, adds that the media "desist from airing controversial stories involving the militants and the law enforcing agencies." He justifies self-censorship saying: "We are in a war-like situation. If I say civilians have been killed in an operation aimed at militants or a blast targeting the Frontier Corps (FC – a paramilitary force under military command, responsible for maintaining law and order in the province), they both don't like it."

As much as they are engaged in a real conflict, the parties are also at war to control information and conceal damages or loss. When the militants say they have killed many, the FC says only two or three of its soldiers have died. Likewise, the militants want to play down their losses in response to FC claims. That morning, the TV reporter had been holding back the story of a bomb attack on a FC convoy in Turbat because he can't get the casualties confirmed from FC. "I have called six times since morning and I can't get through to the FC spokesman", he says. "It is difficult to report because FC will contradict the figures even if the hospital has confirmed it. My channel is asking for the report but I don't have the official version. If I report the figures I have and they contradict the official figures, the FC will question me. If I don't, my organization wants to know why?"

The day before, when the Balochistan High Court issued arrest warrant for former military ruler General Musharraf - accused in the killing of Baloch leader Nawab Bugti, chief of the Bugti tribe who also served as a governor in Balochistan - the journalist had to wrestle with the decision whether to report it or not. "I knew the army would not be comfortable with report of arrest

warrant against a former army chief. The story, by its nature, would make me a sympathizer of Baloch insurgents. Likewise, if I report on a passing out parade at the army staff college here, the militants see me as a military agent. It is a fact that the journalists here are harassed, kidnapped and killed. A sense of insecurity makes us think twice about what we report."

## Free or Forced Journalism?

In June 2009, the BBC's Ayub Tareen interviewed the Baloch leader Dr Allah Nazar in hiding. When the interview was aired, Tareen was questioned by security agencies about the location of the Baloch leader: "I told them I was blindfolded. They wanted copies of video footage and threatened to stop it from getting aired or face consequences. The interview was aired on radio but the video was held back from the website."

"Journalism maybe the Fourth Estate elsewhere but it is certainly not in Balochistan", says Ayub Tareen. "If the poor does something wrong, the media drags them through muck but the powerful and the influential gets away with murder. You want to talk to the Hazaras who are being killed, the Baloch IDPs, the relatives of missing persons but you can't. You can gather news and soundbites and send it to your office but you can't do it in your voice."

Even when journalists do send stories to newspapers or TV networks, they cannot ensure if they will be carried. What is news from a local perspective may not be significant from the national perspective. While on the national networks, developments in Balochistan do find space in news-strips if not screen, the international media can't provide even that. The BBC Urdu, for example, has an hour long programme in the evening with everything from regional, national, international and sports thrown in the mix. With so much vying for space in a short time, news from Balochistan often go missing from the bulletins.

Says the BBC's Ayub Tareen: "I get calls from insurgents in Dera Bugti or Kohlu claiming they have killed this many soldiers in attack on a military convoy. You can't confirm it from journalists because there are none in Dera Bugti or Kohlu. So you depend on the administration but they don't know. Often incidents and attacks are claimed even before they occur. Sometimes they call to say that it will happen in the next few days. There are daily calls from these groups and they want their news to be included in the bulletin. And then there are rivalries between the insurgent groups. Sometimes

they call to say you give more space to the Baloch Liberation Army and not the Baloch Republican Army or claim this or that organization is fake. Then again, just how many stories of attacks on gas pipelines, electricity towers, railway lines and phone lines can you carry? When we don't report due to lack of confirmation, there are threats. There is a difference between print and electronic media. Print has more space whereas radio or TV can do only a story once in a while. So when we don't, there are threats. What we do in Balochistan is not journalism, it is forced journalism. What we do here is not journalism but a job and it can't even be that because you do a job of your own free will, here you are forced to report on what you know is not news."

On August 26, 2011, a Baloch organization threatened Ayub that he and his family would bear the consequences if there is not enough coverage of their activities. The BBC Urdu World Service carried the story asking the organization what was it they wanted and if threats to media went in their favour. The BBC asked Ayub to move to Islamabad which he refused. He was asked to stop filing stories and go on leave. This he did. A month later, the proscribed organization's head called Ayub to apologize and he started working again. "It is the same all over again, the same calls and demands", says Ayub who feels the journalists should go to their organizations and journalist support bodies as soon as they receive a threat. Doing so minimizes the chances of real harm and can result in withdrawal of threat.

The Voice of America (VOA) focuses more on Talibanization in the region and especially Quetta, long believed to be home to the Taliban leader Mullah Omar. According to Ayub, they don't follow the Balochistan story all that much but the BBC does: "Over 80 per cent of the news I file are about the troubles in Baloch areas. It is a reality that is the issue here. The world wants to know. In the Pashtun area, there is Talibanization." This focus on "sensitive" news has cost the VOA correspondent Naseer Kakar his job who, after receiving threats, has relocated to the US.

## A “Monitored” Media

**M**any others, though, continue to live with threats such as the editor of the daily Intikhab, a newspaper that has for 23 years raised voice for the people of the province. Its tough anti-establishment stance on issues of Balochistan hasn't earned the newspaper any friends. Published from Quetta and Hub, the newspaper was only second to Jang for the government's advertisement quota once. Now it is fourth.

“The Ministry of Information has a secret book with a list of top ten pro-establishment newspapers, complete with colour codes assigned in relation to greater coverage of the government, the opposition and others”, says Intikhab's editor Anwar Sajjidi. “Even though we were in the top ten according to coverage and circulation, we never received any adverts from the federal government.”

The editor Anwar Sajjidi, highly respected in the local press circles, was named in the hit list of a militant organization, Baloch Tehreek-e-Nifaz-e-Aman [Balochistan Movement for Enforcement of Peace], which surfaced after the Chief Minister Raisani's nephew was killed in a bomb attack in August this year. The attack was aimed at the chief minister's brother but he survived with injuries. The organization's hit list had names of people that it blamed for the attack, allegedly because they were associated with the pro-independence Baloch insurgent group that had claimed responsibility for the attacks.

“Intikhab is read in Mastung, Turbat, Panjgur and Gwadar that are hotbeds of Baloch insurgency”, says Anwar Sajjidi. “Being sensitive, this area poses all the more threat to us with militants forcing our reporters to carry their statements, which we do anyways.” The newspaper's correspondent in Gwadar has received threats for being “pro-Pakistan” whereas its Turbat correspondent Manzoor Baloch has received threats for being “a spy of the intelligence agencies.”

In September this year, the paramilitary force Frontier Constabulary stopped Intikhab from distribution on the Balochistan University Campus – a ferment of student politics – saying it was not “government friendly”. Around the same time, the FC posted uniformed men outside the newspaper office without giving any reason. “When asked, they said, it was for the security of the newspaper even when we hadn't asked for it”, says Sajjidi.

Last year, FC men monitored the dailies Balochistan Express and Azadi, edited by Sidiq Baloch, who went to Chief Minister Raisani for help. Daily Asap, another pro-Baloch, anti-establishment paper run by a former secretary Jan Mohammad Dashti was closed down in protest against FC monitoring. The owner left for England among concerns for his safety. He has returned since then but the paper is now only issued as a dummy newspaper.

### An Arena for Political Wrestling

Media is where brinkmanship in the divisive Balochistan politics is played out between political parties competing for advantage and relevance. The competition often turns dirty, with parties demanding greater space in relation to others or prominent placement in media. In case of media's failure to comply, there are threats. Stories of political processions and student groups ransacking newspaper offices, arson of newspaper property and burning or stopping delivery of newspaper are common in Balochistan.

While the local newspapers are generally amenable to harass and control tactics of political parties, the mainstream national newspapers have to pay the price for complying if only because editorial decisions are made in Karachi and Lahore. Also, where the local press thrives on statements, the national media focuses on news. Political parties that release frequent statements and handouts want these to be carried in

newspapers. The national media's focus on economic and political power centers like Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad at the cost of the rest of Pakistan, especially rankles Balochistan where the sense of deprivation runs deep. "The political parties here say if your channel can give hours of coverage to Altaf Hussain's address to the party, why can't they report our activities", says Syed Ali Shah, correspondent for Dawn News. "If you explain that Karachi is where business is and MQM is more newsworthy than a party in Balochistan, it only invites anger. The local media is under immense pressure because every group here, whether political, religious or militant, wants their share in columns, especially in the widely read Jang, Mashriq and Express." Not able to reach the editors and owners away from Balochistan, the political elements direct their threat to the local offices and correspondents.

Tribal politics and rivalries are also the bane of local media where news that authorities have declared a tribal chief of the Rind tribe – traditional rivals of the Raisanis, the Chief Minister's tribe – will invoke the wrath of Rinds who blame the papers for carrying the government's version because "they get advertisements from the government." Tribal feuds when reported can create trouble for the journalist, who happens to be part of the same tribal society or tribe, or worse still of another tribe, leading to hostilities between tribes.

### **State not Safe**

Being a journalist with a state-owned news agency brings its own perils, more so in Balochistan where the subtext that goes with the state in news and conversations is the oppressive other. In recent years, especially after problems with image, competition from private, independent media and need for strategic communication in the wake of conflict in the northwest region of Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Balochistan, the state news and information apparatus has reinvented itself through aggressive pursuit and processing of information.

Journalists working with Pakistan Television (PTV), the state radio Pakistan Broadcast Corporation (PBC), and the state news agency Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) are often required to report the state's view of things. They often go as embedded reporters with the military to far flung areas in

FATA and Balochistan to report on army operations and its aftermath – strictly from a state perspective. And that doesn't help in a place like Balochistan where they come to be identified with the state and its interest.

Shah Mohammad, the bureau chief of state-run news agency Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) in Quetta is faced with a situation he feels may be a consequence of his association with APP and the news agency's active involvement in reporting on military operations in Dera Bugti and Kohlu in recent years. "We got over-exposed", says Shah Mahmood.

While on leave in Karachi in 2010, Shah Mohammad received a phone call from an underground group Lashkar Shuhada-e-Balochistan. The caller wanted him to carry a hit list including the Baloch leader Sardar Attaullah Mengal. "The APP doesn't entertain such stories so I declined", he says. "The caller said you know the consequence if you don't cooperate."

Next, he started getting text messages, some with updates about Taliban activity in Afghanistan. "We didn't go to the FC or the police because if you seek help from a state agency you, you clearly fall in that camp and therefore an obvious target."

After a visit to the US, Shah had put pictures of his visit on his Facebook account. Later, he was tagged in a picture with a US consular visiting Balochistan. He started getting messages that he was a US spy. He had to close down his Facebook account. "These days, the APP is trying to keep a low profile", says Shah. "We did a lot of embedded journalism in Dera Bugti and Kohlu. My office realized that the exposure may have put us on the radar for some of elements to start threatening us."

## Danger in the Districts

The correspondent and employer equation in the districts has taken an ironical twist – for the worse, adding to the burden of correspondent running on empty when it comes to salary or support from his organization. “It used to be *khud be khilao aur humain bhi khilao* [benefit yourself and benefit us also], now it is *khud bhi bacho aur hamain bhi Bachao* [stay safe yourself and keep us safe too]”, says Noor Zaman Achakzai, a journalist from the border town Chaman, who works with Geo TV and daily Jang.

Working without salary, whenever the journalists asked for wages or contract, they were told by their organization “*khud be khilao aur humain bhi khilao*” – feed yourself and also feed us, an allusion to the fact that you can use your status as a journalist to get favours without us paying you. Now the organizations expect journalists to “*khud bhi bacho aur hamain bhi bachao*” – protect yourself and also protect us.

The irony that not paying correspondents exposes them to unprofessional practices and pressures and further imperils their lives and profession is lost on those pushing journalists for breaking news and risky beats without financial or logistical support. Living and working in a troubled region without the state’s writ or protection, these journalists find sustenance in association with individuals and groups that need them to push their agendas. And in doing so, often become party to a conflict – tribal or between the state and anti-state elements.

Chaman, the tribal town along the Pak-Afghan border has been in news recently due to activities of Taliban. It neighbours the southern Afghan town of Kandahar – home to the Taliban. Due to its strategic significance, the town has, after the provincial capital of Quetta, the biggest concentration of media. It features regularly in news reports on electronic media. However, the fact that the editors are based in Karachi and have little knowledge or understanding of the tribal-

political pressures create problems for reporters. “They want news for the tickers – figures of Nato soldiers killed in Taliban attacks or Taliban killed in security operations – but not the local protests against such activities and violence”, says Noor Zaman. “These protests are often held by religious elements or local political parties depending on their interests and response to an event. They expect media to cover it. But media is only interested in tickers not event coverage. It makes them angry and the anger is often directed at us, the local correspondents.”

The Taliban, says Niamat Ullah Sarhadi, a correspondent for VOA Radio and Express News TV based in Chaman, are fairly organized. They don’t pose direct threat to journalists, he says. They, however, create an environment that is far more hostile than a direct threat. “They send out pamphlets saying the media is carrying news about Nato, the Americans and Karzai in Afghanistan but not Taliban activities”, says Niamat Ullah. “They say stop promoting the infidels and enter the ranks of the believers.” This suggests that journalists are not Muslims, or friends of Muslims, if they side with foreign powers in Afghanistan – which journalists in Chaman often report on for international and national media due to its proximity with the town. “When we report that Taliban have been killed in Nato attacks, the Taliban want to know why haven’t we reported the losses to Nato.”

The conflict of interests between the states – regional and international – comes into a sharp relief in the region along the border where information is hushed or controlled because it goes against stated positions. On both sides of the border, security agencies and spies work overtime, responding to developments and weaving their own spins on events. This brings its own challenges to journalists grappling with the pull and push of multiple conflicting forces and anxieties. “When the political parties here protest against the Taliban and we report, the intelligence

agencies want to know why we reported?”

“Express did a story about Al Qaeda and Taliban activity along the border and I helped the journalist from Karachi, taking her around for interviews and shooting footage”, says Niamat Ullah. “The story was critical of the authorities and when aired, I started receiving threatening phone calls because they know I am the Express’ correspondent here.”

The Pashtun belt where Chaman is based is also a stronghold of religious parties supporting the Taliban. They often protest against the Americans and Nato this side of the border, something that gets little or no coverage on the VOA or national channels. They want to know why only the “dead” make news from Chaman and not protests.

In 2001, Noor Zaman, the reporter for Jang, did a story on arrival of Gul Agha, the new governor of Kanadahaar, to Pakistan. The governor removed barriers from the border on entering. At the time, the status of Durand Line – the imaginary border between Pakistan and Afghanistan – had become a contentious issue and there were accusation of encroachment on part of Pakistani authorities. When the story appeared in Jang, the FC registered a case against him. “I had to appear in the court”, says the journalist from Chaman. “The journalist community in Quetta got involved to help me out.” Noor Zaman was acquitted but a treason case, had he been convicted, would have taken him to gallows or put in prison for life.

Reporters in Chaman cannot report on incursions from across the border due to problems with sovereignty, activities of Taliban or attacks on Nato supplies without checking with the FC first. “The security agencies want control over information”, says Noor Zaman. “If they see a ticker on a channel about Chaman, they call the reporter to ask why he hasn’t called them first. They tell us we should carry a Kalashnikov because we are on the hit list of militants. What am I supposed to carry, a Kalashnikov or a camera?”

The districts of Jafferabad and Naseerabad - in the southeast of Balochistan, bordering the Sindh province - have thousands of IDPs from Dera Bugti and Kohlu still living there despite the military’s claim that they have returned. Along with the local population, journalists, too, have been displaced from the Bugti and Marri tribal areas. It

then falls to the media in Jafferabad and Naseerabad districts – that border Dera Bugti and Kohlu – to report on the areas that are hotbeds of Baloch resistance. Bomb blasts, attacks on government installations such as gas pipelines, electricity towers and communication lines and target killings happen routinely in these areas. The journalists cannot report the attacks – such as the August 14 attacks on railway tracks and other installations in Jafferabad, Dera Bugti, Naseerabad, Sibi and Bolan - without invoking the wrath of authorities even when they are under pressure from insurgents to report them.

“In 2009, we received a call at 11 pm from insurgents in Dera Bugti claiming they had blown up a 30 inch gas pipeline so we reported it as breaking news”, says Dhani Baksh Magsi, a journalist who reports for ARY News and the daily Mashriq from Jafferabad. “Only, it didn’t happen until 4 am that morning. We couldn’t get it confirmed because there are no journalists in Dera Bugti and officials don’t cooperate. The story created a furore among the FC and Military Intelligence circles who wanted to know who had called us. We had to beg the authorities to let us go.”

Dhani Bakhsh Magsi’s case underlines the challenges of reporting a troubled region where the traditional sources of information are absent, journalists have been displaced, insurgents and the military want to control and often use media. It is hard to triangulate information because officials don’t cooperate, militants are not accessible, there are restrictions on mobility and people are afraid to talk to media. “There are sources of information and then there are claims”, says Dhani Baksh. “What we are forced to report routinely are claims with no way of knowing they are true or not.”

Where there is generally ignorance about media’s role as an impartial reporting mechanism in Balochistan, it runs deeper in the tribal, feudal milieu dominant in the districts. People in general and insurgents and tribal lords in particular – as well as the local media and reporters – assume that being one of the tribe, a reporter has to stand up for local forces and interests in relation to the state. This undermines media’s freedom and makes reporter vulnerable to threats.

“A rocket hit a residential in the Pat Feeder area of

Dera Bugti and the relatives brought out the dead to Jafarabad-Dera Allahyar National Highway, closing the road”, says Shahid Ali Abro, a cameraman with ARY News TV. “While I was filming, a man approached me and said film the children under the shroud. I said I could not because the channel would not carry the images but I was forced to film them. The man said he would watch the news for the footage and if it wasn’t there, I should know that he would come for me.”

In August 2006, Nawab Akbar Bugti, chief of the Bugti party who had served as governor of Balochistan, was killed in a military operation. His grandson Mir Ali Bugti was appointed as the next chief of Bugti tribe by the government in the face of opposition from Bugti family. He was brought on a chartered plane to Dera Bugti on the day of coronation where his cousin Brahmdagh Bugti – head of the Jamhuri Watan Party lead by Nawab Bugti – had threatened to attack the gathering in Dera Bugti. Journalists from all over the country had come to cover the event and a bomb explosion did happen but away from the Pindal where the coronation was held. The local journalists had received threats not to cover the event, that it would be bombed. “Our families didn’t want us to go but we did”, says Dhani Baksh. “But we did. Fortunately we survived the attack in which 600 kgs of explosives were used.”

On March 20, 2010, Dhani Baksh received a call from Bugti commanders in hiding who said they had exclusive news for him. “I asked them to come to the office but they declined saying they were being followed by the FC, so we decided to meet at a place in the suburbs.” The next day, a Sunday, Dhani Baksh and Shahid Ali Abro went to the appointed place where they met three armed men with their faces covered. “As soon as we got off the bike, the men hit me in the head with the butt of khashnikov”, say Dhani Baksh. “He then hit me on the nose, breaking it. Next he hit Abro on the arm and broke his finger. All the time they kept saying recite Kalima as if our death was imminent. They said how dare we reported against Brahmdagh. We kept saying we were impartial. They took all our equipment, our ID cards, money and mobile phones and fired at our motorcycle, damaging it beyond repair. And then they left. We had to trek 5 kilometers in that condition before we could get to the road to find help.”

The story was aired on the channels the journalists work for but they only received visitors from their networks to confirm the incident even though they had registered an FIR and there was footage showing them bleeding, with 17 stitches in the head and a fractured nose. There was no assistance from the organization, the press club or the union, they say. The equipment they lost was their own, not the organizations they work for. The journalists think the incident was in reaction to a report they did on Mir Ali Bugti leaving the area after staying holed up in his house for a year even though the attackers said they had reported against Brahmdagh.

When the journalists reported on the case of women buried alive in Naseerabad, the situation turned explosive with threats to journalists. They got the chief of Magsi tribe involved to seek reconciliation. Later on when the Supreme Court announced its verdict punishing the perpetrators, the journalists met to decide whether to report or not. “We finally did but we haven’t been gone to the tribal areas for the last two years due to threats,” says Dhani Baksh Magsi.

In 2009, after an encounter between Bugti insurgents and police in the Chattar area of Naseerabad, the Bugtis took away 24 policemen who they killed in groups of three or four. When the security forces came in for operation, the insurgents killed all of policemen. It was a big story and every time the insurgents would kill policemen, they wanted journalists to report it. The authorities didn’t, saying they were only claims. “When we got reports from insurgents and aired them, they wanted to know who had called and from where”, says Dhani Baksh.

Lack of support and a hostile environment with threats from authorities and the insurgents have taken away the journalists’ motivation to report stories that could land them in trouble. Dhani and his colleagues didn’t go to get footage of seven pro-government Amn Laskar people killed in fighting with Brahmdagh’s men in November this year. “These days we hardly report on such issues”, says Dhani Baksh. “We also try and go late to blast sites expecting another explosion despite pressure from our networks. Journalists in the districts go to sensitive areas without any organizational support, taking risks, renting their own transport, negotiating minefields, going through FC checkpoints, travelling great distances

to lend among tribes that are hostile and divided among pro-establishment and anti-state groups. We get calls from the Bugtis that our people are killed and houses destroyed. Please come report. The insurgents threaten us for not reporting, they say put the footage on the net or you tube but report. But will the FC allow us.”

## A Province or a Tehsil?

**T**he national media, according to journalists in Balochistan, eschews issues affecting the lives and livelihoods of people in the province and is interested only in conflict related stories. According to the BBC's Ayub Tareen, the national media draws business from Karachi, Lahore or Islamabad and that is where they focus. It only focuses on conflict soundbites and even bigger stories, when covered, tend to disappear within hours. "It is only interested in controversial news, pushing journalists to report news that puts them in danger", says Syed Ali Shah of Dawn News TV.

Journalists in Balochistan feel that the mainstream media, like the political leadership in the country, is not sympathetic to the province and its issues. One big impediment to this is that Balochistan is cut off from the rest of the country through huge distances. Even within Balochistan, journalists cannot possibly cover everything happening inside the province due to the huge distances involved. But then, every major newspaper or TV network does maintain a bureau office or have correspondents in Quetta that can report on stories here provided the mainstream media wanted them to.

"The national media – both tv and print – don't give proper coverage to Balochistan news", says Saleem Shahid, President Quetta Press Club and correspondent for the English daily Dawn. "If the prime minister visits, they give blow by blow details of the event but it all fades to black after that. The attitude of national, mainstream media is the same as Islamabad and the federal government – that Balochistan is not a province but a tehsil. A man trapped in a lift in Karachi makes bigger splash than 3 men target-killed in Balochistan."

"It is tricky saying that Balochistan is not being covered by the mainstream media", says an editorial in *The News on Sunday*, the weekend edition of *The News* published in June 2011.

"Technically, the news keeps trickling out - of mutilated corpses, of lawyers or academics gone missing, of gas pipelines bombed, of Aghaz e Haqooq e Balochistan Package and so on. It is the manner in which these news items are treated - by the journalists, editors and analysts - that makes Balochistan a special case. The news of a mutilated body is not followed by an analysis of what the tally (of mutilated bodies) stands at for this month or year or the last five six years. Nor is it shared with the reader or viewer that the organization that claimed responsibility did not exist on the planet Balochistan before. Within the province, the media has decided to stick to this position; survival instinct, perhaps, because journalists have borne the brunt of freedom of expression."

In the absence of proper coverage on national media, there is a big audience for international media such as the BBC World Service or VOA in Balochistan. With their focus on human rights – a concern at the heart of Balochistan problem with issues like the missing persons, displacement due to operations, floods, target killings and extra-judicial killings – people look up to international media for their voices to be heard. This also serves the interest of the pro-independence groups that want to gain international sympathy for their cause. This focus on human rights, however, translates into trouble for local correspondents of international media.

"The local administration and the military do not treat the population that migrated to Naseerabad from Dera Bugti due to operations as IDPs, they treat them as supporters of terrorists", says Ayub Tareen who works for the BBC World Urdu Service. "They don't allow you to report on their condition. They are living out in the open and in a far worse shape since the 2010 floods but we still can't report. We want to report on the missing persons, but if I do, I'll be putting myself and the family I talk to at risk."

## Independent but Partisan

Journalists and newspapers identifying with a certain school of thought are not rare in Balochistan and the provincial capital Quetta, divided along the ethnic, political, religious or ideological lines which in itself shouldn't be a problem till their biases and sympathies creeps into reporting, rendering it subjective and impartial. For example, when the Press Club in Quetta was built, the members wanted to name halls after Baloch and Pashtun leaders such as Nawab Akbar Bugti and Abdul Samad Khan Achakzai.

These sympathies also leads to rivalries and defeats merit within ranks of media where one group seeks to dominate or debase another, dividing the media and rendering it weak and ineffective to take a united stand against external pressures. Such divisions only go to serve the elements that want to use media for its own purposes and interests.

The local independent media in Balochistan even though small compared to the burgeoning pro-establishment dummy newspapers that thrive on government advertisements, is held more representative of local aspirations. However, even when independent in views and free of state pressures, it tends to be partisan and therefore only finds audience among groups divided along ethnic and ideological lines instead of the society as a whole in Balochistan. This bias often comes across strong in editorials and opinion then news reports and keeps them in a state of war with the establishment.

It is not uncommon for owners and editors of papers to have political leanings and they tend to highlight the parties, individuals and groups they are loyal to rather than covering all sides in a balanced way. They also hire and keep reporters from ethnic and political groups they identify with, which leaves others with little opportunity to learn the ropes through field-based journalism even when there is interest. Jobs and salaries are fixed on the basis of ethnic and political affiliations – daily *Intikhab* prefers Baloch staff, *Bakhabar* and *Kohistan* Pashtun. Jang has more staff from Punjab than local. Similarly, ethnic considerations affect coverage – *Intikhab* focuses on Baloch issues and population,

*Bakhabar* and *Kohistan* on the Pashtun population – and enjoy readership in their respective ethnic/target population. The fact that media reflects a society is nowhere more manifest than Balochistan - where media is as divided as the society it mirrors.

Media professionals in Balochistan don't see a qualitative change in the mainstream media's attitude towards Balochistan anytime soon. They believe that the media is out to defend national interest than public interest or rights of the people. "Balochistan is a security province where the government has no writ or say", says Siddiq Baloch, editor of dailies Balochistan Express and Azadi. "The security environment has only deteriorated over the years and with that death and destruction have become priority as far as news go. Since the days of Shaukat Aziz who had instructed the national media to blackout Balochistan, there hasn't been any improvement. High profile journalists visit as embedded reporters, get the army's version of the situation and leave. The national media is hostile and unfriendly due to the security establishment."

Anwar Sajidi, Editor of *Intikhab* has a different take on the issue though. He thinks the mainstream English dailies – Dawn and the News – give fair coverage to Balochistan in news, write-ups and editorials. It is the Urdu press that ignores Balochistan but that is "because they are regional in scope, role and outlook. Even within that strictly regional role, they don't carry news and information if it is not local – for example Mashriq and Aaj in Peshawar."

"Outside the province, Balochistan is as neglected", says The News on Sunday editorial. "There is no demand for an investigation for all bad news. Balochistan is not on newspeople's agenda. Today, journalists cannot set foot in the province because it is a 'conflict area'. By choosing to not cover it the way it should have been covered, we all let it slip into becoming one. By not picking the news or blowing it up, the media put no pressure at all on the law enforcement agencies which weren't pushed to act, even if as a cover up."

# A Media Under Siege

The local media, at least the one that maintains a semblance of independence, is besieged by pressures from all sides – the insurgents, the military, the political parties, the religious sectarian groups, the tribes and the government. The widely read Mashriq and other regional newspapers recently carried statements from the banned Sunni sectarian group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi that incited hatred against the Shias, calling them “Kafir” or infidels. The Balochistan High Court Chief Justice Qazi Faez Issa took suo moto action issuing a provisional order in October 2011 that said, “The press and the media are directed not to print or publish any propaganda of an organization that has been banned....This order is of an interim nature and if any newspaper or media organization feels aggrieved they may make submissions in this regard.”

Media representatives present on the occasion said they simply report and it is for the news-editors, chief editors and owners to print or air a story. They also said that they received threats from proscribed organizations that if their stories are not published, they will be targeted. And so it is out of fear that they carry such stories. The court order however says that it can't be a justification for violation of law and constitution of Pakistan – Section II of the Anti-terrorism Act that says “the printing, publishing and disseminating any material that instigates hatred or gives projection to any proscribed organization....or anyone concerned with terrorism is itself an offence – and anyone who does it will face the consequences provided in the law. The order says media reports also run afoul of provisions in Article 19 of the Constitution. Anyone committing contempt of the order would be sent to prison for 6 months whereas a court case registered under Anti-Terrorism Act could lead to 3 years in prison.

It is ironical that the newspapers continue carrying statements saying 6 months in prison are better than death at the hands of militant organizations. After the High Court order, journalists met several times to decide that if they follow the court order,

they cannot work on ground. Journalists have received threats saying, “If we can attack the DIG FC House and the Police Chief, we can attack your office which is far less secure”. In July 2011, the Baloch Students Organization (Azad) stopped distribution of all local papers in interior districts of Balochistan, beating up newspaper hawkers and setting fire to newspapers against “not enough coverage” of BSO (Azad) activities. It was only when the editors met the student organization and gave guarantees of “prominent coverage” that the newspaper distribution was allowed. On October 1, 2011, the Balochistan Union of Journalists observed a “black day” against ban on media from the government and pressure from militants to carry statements.

The judiciary justifies the order saying it is mindful of the freedom of press guaranteed under Article 19 but “the said Fundamental Right itself restricts such freedom if it results in incitement to an offence” and that “it is not expected that media which is stated to be the fourth pillar of the State would undermine or weaken the integrity and the cohesion of the State and the people residing within it.”

The court sources insist that at a time when the media is concerned about safety, the court order ensures exactly that because journalist can offer it as a legal protection to resist pressure and threats from militant organizations. However, in at least one case, statements from judiciary that the media houses are coward and should close offices if they can't stand up to threats betrays ignorance and insensitivity towards media and the way it works.

“The anti-state elements are not under control of the government, the state or the judiciary, whose writ is even weaker once you leave Quetta”, says Saleem Shahid, President Quetta Press Club. “The judiciary can ask for bullet-proof cars but the journalists have no protection.” The Chief Justice High Court has received threats from banned organization after the order.

## A State of Stress

The high court order only took an already tense environment for media in Balochistan to a boiling point. According to BBC's Ayub Tareen, the militant groups don't care about the state, let alone the high court. At least in one case - that of Akhtar Mirza, the 46 years old news-editor of Jang newspaper - the decision created so much stress that in internal meeting with staff after the court order the editor clearly betrayed signs of stress telling the staff, "one of us will have to go given the circumstances." The news-editor died of heart attack in October soon after the court order and the media in Quetta and his colleagues in the newspaper insist that it was due to the immense stress due to pressure on him from all sides.

"Only two years ago, there were two organizations", says Hammad Rind, a journalist with Jang Quetta. "Now there are 28 with their own demands. They are in direct contact with the staff. They want their statements to be published. They say we have no right to speak or edit even when the language is indecent."

Jang is the most popular newspaper in Balochistan, widely read in Quetta and the interior districts and therefore sought by all sides – the state and the anti-state elements - for coverage of their activities. Says Hammad Rind: "Here in Balochistan, there is a culture of press releases and statements. There is always a problem with the political and tribal elements that use their influence and force to promote themselves through media. They insist on front page display even when the press releases are without an element of news. They ask if news about the prime minister and the president can go on the front page, why not us?"

Political and sectarian mobs have set fire to the Jang office thrice in the past. At least in one case, the office was fired at. In 2005, a planted bomb exploded outside the office injuring the staff. Aijaz Khan, bureau chief of Geo TV and the News, lost

his eye in a second blast when he was reporting on a bomb blast in the Satellite Town. Arif Malik, a cameraman with Sama TV died in a bomb blast at the civil hospital in which the Shia Hazara community was targeted. "There have been threats in the decade since 2001 but the situation has worsened since the high court decision that has created a lot of pressure on media", says Abdul Khaliq Rind, Secretary General Press Club Quetta and a journalist with Jang.

The late editor Akhtar Mirza was part of a committee that journalist formed to minimize the incident of media becoming a pawn in multi-faceted conflict after the high court order. The committee was formed when in the wake of the court decision in October this year, all major local newspapers including Jang, Mashriq, Express, Intikab and Azadi received threats from proscribed organizations. It comprises editors from news-wire services NNI and Online, Raza Rehman of Express News, the late news-editor Akhtar Mirza of Jang and Issa Tareen, President of Balochistan Union of Journalists. The committee vetted all statements from banned militant groups before releasing a uniform, edited version to media through NNI and Online.

## A Negative Media

A common refrain in the government and military circles is that positive things are happening in Balochistan and yet the media continues to focus on bad news. Inspector General Frontier Constabulary Obaidullah Khan says the local newspapers dedicate 50 to 60 percent of space to proscribed organizations: “We understand there’s no protection and media does it under force. The FC is perfectly cognizant of the pressures but sometimes the media goes overboard. It is a propaganda war. I have heard stories that the FC men are going around snipping beards and shalwars of Balochs. When I ask for proof, it is not there.” The media, says Obaidullah Khan, generally criticizes the state institutions but not the militants. “We feel the victims of violence need our sympathy, the perpetrators need to be criticized across the board and the state security agencies that are responsible for providing security can do better.”

To the criticism that the media focuses on conflict and not development activities, journalists respond that Balochistan is a diverse beat with a lot happening. There is international interest in the region and beyond as it shares borders with Iran and Afghanistan and has a seaport that international players are keen on. “The security agencies say they do a lot of development activities but that’s for the state TV and radio to cover”, says the BBC’s Ayub Tareen. “We can’t report on army setting up a school or digging up a well.”

### Deteriorating Standards

That said, there are concerns about practices within media that exposes it to threats and leads to restrictions on press freedom. The President Quetta Press Club, Saleem Shahid, says media would publish stories without material inciting hatred, violence or discrimination, and carrying diverse opinion from all sides, he remains concerned about the professional and ethical standards however.

“Journalism overall has deteriorated”, says Saleem Shahid. “The standards have gone down due to lack of independent, professional editors. Partisan editors and media networks force journalists to do stories in keeping with their interest instead of the public’s. People enter journalism to further their lot. Those who can’t find a job elsewhere join media and owners have encouraged this trend. They don’t care if their staff is unqualified and untrained as long as they work without pay. Quality is not a concern.”

Media professionals in the province recognize the fact that journalists – due to pressures, inducements or political loyalties - often side with militants, insurgents or the military. Certain journalists, especially those in the districts, identify with the cause and stance of combatants and fail to disassociate themselves from them professionally. “A big threat to journalists stems from the fact that they become party to the conflict by sympathizing with one group or another”, says Saleem Shahid, President Quetta Press Club. “Journalists are often not balanced in their approach.”

In meetings with the government, judiciary and the military, questions about focus on bad news, banned organizations and sensational reporting came up repeatedly. According to a court source, “it is the competition for breaking news that is the killer because the newspapers and TV networks compete through sensationalism. The militants dictate the headlines, even the pages the story should go on. This fear of the militants has also affected the standards of journalism because the perverse logic of these organizations has forced media to promote violence and hatred under force.”

People in the judiciary, the government and the army believe that media is obsessed with certain stories where it has taken on the role of ridiculing, judging their role and passing verdicts without recourse to the law and legal process.

# The Need for Training

**T**ake a journalist not trained to report conflict, put him in a remote district with little access to information or sources, take away all incentive to work such as decent, regular wages, leave him without organizational support to fend for himself in an environment where both the state and anti-state elements want to control him and information through extreme tactics, on his own to grapple with tribal, ethnic and political loyalties and rivalries (including his') and you have a recipe for a disaster waiting to happen.

Amidst all the threats and dangers, the journalists are "less-qualified, ill-equipped, inexperienced and not trained" to deal with the volatile situation that prevails in the province. They are learning conflict reporting the hardest way – by risking their lives. Few are qualified or experienced enough to write a straight copy let alone ensure it is accurate, balanced, objective, attributed to sources, verified and complete. Most of the journalists in the districts are teachers or clerks in government offices who moonlight as journalists without regular salary and often no salary at all and, therefore, are easily exploited.

Veteran journalists like Saleem Shahid and Siddiq Baloch insist that alone brings grief to journalists, especially in the interior districts where information and communication infrastructure is absent. "Journalists in interior Balochistan are not trained and exposed to threats", says Saleem Shahid. "They go for influence that comes from being associated with local influential groups and therefore become partial, partisan and amenable to pressures. However, in a tribal system if one side is favoured against the other, it becomes a matter of honour for the group in opposition and the threat is directed at the journalist, among others."

Where journalists do take pains over their stories, they often run into trouble because versions, interests and sources – if available, that is – are often conflicting due to the conflict and it doesn't

help that the "national media demands conflict stories, failing to report the real issues of the people of Balochistan."

In case of most local newspapers, the editors are not professional or trained journalists. They go for political statements or crime news because it is sensational and sells. "Most of the news filed are views or statements not news in the strict sense of the word", says Saleem Shahid. "Reporters, too, since they are not paid and motivated, are given to non-professional practices. No wonder nothing improves here because our media focuses only on 'he said, she said', not the the civic, social aspect of issues demanding accountability in the public interest."

Without orientation and training in conflict sensitive journalism, the journalists of Balochistan stand exposed and vulnerable in their daily routine.

# Running on Empty

**A**t least 95 percent of the journalists working for local media don't get paid at all, the rest are underpaid or don't get paid regularly or on time", says Issa Tareen, president Balochistan Union of Journalists. "In case of national media, only big newspapers or channels pay, others don't pay on time or very little. There's no job satisfaction among most of journalists and job security is virtually non-existent at the local level. Journalists working for national media have to compete to keep their jobs, grappling with immense pressure to report even the most hazardous of news to stay ahead of the competition."

In the rare case where journalists get paid by big media houses, they have to work for both print and TV for the same pay. The BBC's Ayub Tareen says, "In Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad, journalists working for Express News will be paid for their work for print and TV separately. They are often not required to work for both as they have their own dedicated staff. Here a journalist who is paid Rs15,000 has to work for the newspaper and TV. In absence of financial incentives and constraints, journalists exploit their position to get benefits from nawabs, tribes, the government and military. Save for a few big ones, most of the media offices here have been set up by journalists to sell their profession."

The problem of wages undermines professional standards and capacities across the board but assumes daunting proportions in the districts where journalists working without salaries, contracts or organizational support are left to fend for themselves. This has corrupted the media in districts. It has become a mouthpiece for elements journalists draw benefits from, given to blackmailing and taking bribes. Where this has eroded the people's trust in media, it has also vitiated the security environment within which media finds itself in Balochistan.

"I would say 99 percent threats to journalists stem

from lack of professionalism", says Shahzad Baloch, a young journalists with Express Tribune. "But then if you don't pay how can you expect journalists to follow best practices and standards?"

## A Quota to Control

When it comes to the government, the provincial advertisement quota is a handy tool to keep newspapers in line with its interests. The provincial government has an annual advertisement budget of Rs 70 million. There are some 140 local newspapers published daily in Balochistan. Except for 6 or 7 dailies, the rest are all dummy newspapers claiming a lion's share of the advertisement quota.

"The editors and the government officials share the booty because the owners are not professional journalists but shopkeepers and travel agents who have started newspapers to benefit from advertisements or the nuisance value press has" says Syed Alis Shah of Dawn News. "They toe the official line and don't challenge the authorities at all."

Some local newspapers like Intikhab, Azadi and Balochistan Express have forfeited fortune for freedom but they are constantly struggling with sustainability concerns. "Newspapers like Tawar, Asap, and Intikhab reflect the Baloch aspirations and are widely read but they can't pay their staff", says a journalist in Quetta.

The local media depends on local advertisements to sustain staff and operations and the authorities use it to their advantage, cutting the quota should a media outlet fall out of line. However, those that get advertisements from the government are on the hit list of the insurgent groups and in that respect it is a double jeopardy where media is both threatened and controlled by the advertisements it gets.

# Mission Recommendations to Make Media in Balochistan both Professional and Safe

- ❖ All journalists in Balochistan should undergo conflict sensitive journalism (CSJ) trainings
- ❖ All journalists should undergo media law clinics to be educated on rights and responsibilities
- ❖ A Safety Fund for Balochistan should be set up to provide resources on safety and security and address their legal, psychological and, where needed most, financial needs
- ❖ The court order should be used to forge a united stand against threats from militant organisations
- ❖ Journalists should be hired on basis of merit. Those with a degree in journalism should be given preference or at least those with a master's degree
- ❖ For the big majority of journalists without journalism degrees, special journalism and thematic reporting and editing courses should be designed and made available
- ❖ The press club system in Balochistan should be strengthened by building their infrastructure, technical and professional capacities to enable them to better safeguard the interests of the province's journalists
- ❖ Job security such as regular salary, appointment letters and contracts and organizational support should be ensured to help journalists maintain their freedom and impartiality.
- ❖ Security training for journalists, especially those in the districts, with a focus on ethics and good journalism standards and the pitfalls of becoming party to the conflict.
- ❖ Implementation of the wage board award can help reduce corruption in media and maintain freedom from interest groups that control media through favours and pressures
- ❖ Measures should be taken to educate militants and state institutions on the independent role of media and journalists
- ❖ Anchors on electronic media should be trained in holding objective, result-oriented discussions
- ❖ Residency trainings should be held for some of the leading papers and news agencies to train their staff in conflict sensitive copy-editing
- ❖ Create a unit within Quetta press club to analyze reporting and media coverage for unethical, unprofessional standards to minimize threat and harm. The unit should ensure check and balance on media, self accountability and support to journalists
- ❖ Regular period reports on the state of media in Balochistan should be produced to keep the working journalists in the loop and improving their capacity to collectively respond to threats to life and profession
- ❖ Train the military and government sources in dealing with media, the media's information needs and the need for independence
- ❖ Open media and community dialogues on role of media held in town halls or village community centres
- ❖ The government should create a committee with journalists on board to immediately respond to information needs and emergencies like violations of journalists' rights
- ❖ The news networks need to review the culture of breaking news that is fraught with hazards for journalists
- ❖ Organizations should ensure insurance of equipment, life and property of journalists
- ❖ Journalists in districts should be able to access a support mechanism including press clubs and unions in the urban area

# The Assessment Mission

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Saleem Shahzad, the president of Quetta Press

Club, Essa Tareen, the president of Balochistan Union of Journalists, Moosa Farman, the vice president of Balochistan Union of Journalists, Tahir Rathore, the president of Rawalpindi Islamabad Union of Journalists (RIUJ) and Qurban Satti, a journalist who has worked in Balochistan, and Aurangzaib Khan, the media development manager of Intermedia Pakistan were part of the mission that met the Balochistan Chief Minister Nawab Mohammad Aslam Khan Raisani, Inspector General Frontier Constabulary Obaidullah Khan and Chief Justice Balochistan High Court Qazi Faiz Esa during a 3-day visit to Balochistan from October 3-5, 2011.

Interviews with journalists from Quetta, interior districts and official sources were conducted during the same time.



