

Journalist's Car Attacked outside Press Club Hyderabad

The car owned by Mahesh Kumar, the former President of Press Club Hyderabad was attacked by three motor-cyclists while Mahesh was inside the club building on New Year's Eve around 11:30 p.m. Security guard of the press club saw them firing at the car and quickly escaping the area. Fortunately, no one was hurt. Mahesh Kumar is also the owner of daily Sindh, a regional newspaper.



Mahesh Kumar showing bullet signs and holes

This is second time that Mahesh's vehicle has been attacked by unknown people. From the pattern of the attacks, it seems this is the second warning issued to the journalist and this time the level of threat is higher than before. Mahesh' colleagues believe that this might be the last warning for Mahesh Kumar before he will be personally harmed. The Government must investigate into the matter and stop the culprits before it becomes too late.

Eight bullets holes were found at different places on the body of the car. The rear glass window of the car was also shattered by the bullets. Some of the bullets targeted the CNG (Compressed Natural Gas) cylinder which seems to indicate that their motive was cause an explosion.



Policeman is examining Mahesh' car

Mahesh told RightsNow Pakistan that he does not have any personal animosity with anyone. That's why he has not mentioned any names in the police report. However, he believes that this attack occurred due to his professional work. According to Mahesh' colleague, during Mahesh's tenure as president of press club Hyderabad, he took many initiatives which promoted human rights, harmony and secularism, which antagonized many people. In particular, during Mahesh's tenure press club made a decision to offer press club services to human rights victims at low cost. For example, 1200 PKR for organizing a press conference at the press club. Free of charges if the victim or his/her relatives are poor. "In some cases, if the victims or their relatives cannot afford press club charges, we give hall and other facilities free of cost," said Mahesh. He further shared that, "Hyderabad is also the only press club in Sindh where festivals of all religions, be it Hindus, Christians and Muslims are being celebrated without any discrimination. "This harmony is not liked by all people." When asked if he was being attacked because he is a Hindu journalist? Mahesh answered: "No". We have a very good environment here in Hyderabad. We all live with peace and harmony but there are some who want to disturb that peace.

Measures taken in the case:

- Police report has been filed against unknown people.
- Today all journalists from Hyderabad made a protest against the incident and demanded the investigation into the matter and arrest of the culprits.
- A committee of five journalists created for the investigation of this incident and further action for the protection of journalists. This committee consists of three former, one current president and one general secretary of the press club.

Issues shared by the Journalists:

RightsNow Pakistan met with a couple journalists from Hyderabad and solicited their comments regarding the incident. They shared their views in following way:

“Protection of journalists is very low. There are no organizations or institutions which provide protection to journalists,” stated one correspondent of an urdu daily.

“The government and international community always focus on the protection of journalists published in big cities and capitals or support the relocation of journalists who write in important newspapers and magazines, particularly in English. Protection needs of journalists, who are working in English media, are getting attention. However, those who are attacked or killed in remote and exclusive areas for smaller human rights issues in non-English media do not matter for them. Recently two journalists were relocated to abroad by the international community but had such threats been made to local journalists, they could have died without support,” a freelance journalist shared.

“Thanks to Shazia Mari, Sindh Information Minister, who calls and asks for support if there is any issue Otherwise, there is no one to turn to for help in time of extreme need when our lives are in danger,” shared a journalist works with a regional newspaper.”

RightsNow Pakistan met with a few journalists from the Hyderabad press club and asked about their protection needs. Most of the journalists talked about death threats from different state and non-state actors from time to time. They highlighted the need for safe houses. But even if there are safe houses, there should be some funds which cover threatened journalists and their families for some time until their threat level is reduced or lifted.

According to them, we do not feel confident enough to publish risky news when we do not have any mechanism to protect the Journalists. There must be a strong reason that the Committee for Protection of Journalist (CPJ) has declared Pakistan one of the deadliest nations for journalists. There is a long list of journalists who have been killed in Pakistan since 2001. They sacrificed their lives for the protection of freedom of expression and people’s right to information. In current circumstances, when the government and state institutions have failed to protect journalists in Pakistan. It is the responsibility of the United Nations and the international community to play an should play an active and effective role in the protection of journalists and must hear the call made by Navi Pillay, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, for the protection of journalists. Pakistani journalists in the present context are most vulnerable to threats. Therefore, the UN and international community should act where Pakistani government or its institutions are unwilling and unable to offer protection.

Journalists are called the *Fourth Estate*, as they play a vital role in the protection of human rights and exposing corruption. They deserve strong protection both from the government and international community.

In Pakistan there is also a need to educate the public, who feel aggrieved at media reports, to file complaints, take legal actions or use other nonviolent means, instead of resorting to violence. Capacity building of journalists at risk, threat assessments, threat reduction and taking other protective measures can also reduce the level of threat for journalists and save their lives in Pakistan. Finally RightsNow Pakistan stresses the need for probing and prosecuting journalists' assailants to deter future attacks on journalists in Pakistan.

RightsNow Pakistan is a civil society organization works for promotion and protection of human rights in Pakistan.

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