

# Growth under adversity



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**Cover photo:** Journalists demonstrate for the freedom of Ajmal Naqshbandi, captured by the Taliban in February 2007 and Tawab Niazi, detained by Afghan authorities in January 2007. Naqshbandi was murdered by the Taliban in March 2007; Niazi was released in August 2007 after being held without charge for over seven months. Photo courtesy Rahimullah Samander, Wakht News Agency.



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## Media grows and diversifies in hostile and unsettled conditions

Independent media have expanded and diversified in Afghanistan, though the country remains a precarious and hazardous place for journalists and media organisations. Nine journalists have been killed between January 1, 2007 and the writing of these lines (though one case remains a little unclear), while abductions, physical violence, threats and intimidation against journalists continue with worrying frequency. While the establishment of a number of print, broadcast and online media outlets creates an atmosphere of hope for the growth of free media in the

**“Women journalists are particularly threatened as they contend with objections from some quarters – often expressed violently – about their right to express their views and work as equals alongside men.”**

country, attacks on journalists, death threats and intimidation from armed insurgency owing allegiance to the Taliban continue. Worryingly, there has also been an increasing trend of official and governmental sources, not to mention the various armed groups that continue to have immense influence in the national houses of parliament, to threaten and harass media and media workers. The threats are clearly intended to silence debate about the new Afghanistan, and to stifle the development of an independent and critical media through which such debate would be conducted.

Religious hardliners continue to apply pressure on the Government of President Hamid Karzai to impose or support harsh measures against individuals and institutions who do not bow to fundamentalist ideas about the direction of Afghan society. This is despite the clear guarantee in Afghanistan’s Constitution of the right of citizens to freedom of expression. The most prominent example is that of Sayed Parvez Kambakhsh, a young journalist with the *Jahan-e-Naw* weekly and a student at Balkh University, Mazar-e-Sharif, who was sentenced to death after a four-minute closed-door hearing in January 2008, on charges of blasphemy.

Meanwhile, women journalists are particularly threatened as they contend with objections from some quarters – often expressed violently – about their right to express their views and work as equals alongside men. These are just some of the very serious challenges for journalists and aspiring journalists in Afghanistan who wish to pursue critical journalism and the promise of democracy

## Hardliners gain sway

Despite threats and intimidation from government authorities, the significant majority of attacks and threats against journalists and freedom of expression and the media have been led by members of the Taliban and their supporters, mostly in relation to perceptions of Islam. In a climate of intimidation, agencies of the State have been unable to uphold basic norms of press freedom that they have committed to.

These issues are best represented in the case of 23-year old Sayed Parvez Kambakhsh, a journalism student at Balkh University in Mazar-e-Sharif and a reporter with the daily *Jahan-e-Naw*, who was arrested on October 27, 2007 for allegedly downloading an article titled “Anti-women verses of the Quran” from the internet and then handing out printed copies to his friends at the university. The article, written in Persian, is still available on certain websites and has not been found offensive by several who have read it.

Some of his classmates initially claimed that the article was written by Kambakhsh, but this claim was later withdrawn, when no evidence was found to support it. The case was referred to the Provincial Attorney’s office. In custody, he was already being intimidated and threatened with death.

After a month long investigation by the Attorney’s office, the following charges were brought against Kambakhsh:

- Downloading of an article offensive to Islam from the internet and its distribution among friends in Balkh University.
- Possession of a book called “Religions in the History of Civilization” by Will Durant (this book is available in many bookstores of Kabul and cities in Afghanistan).
- The Attorney’s office also cited a supposed claim by Kambakhsh’s classmates, that he has been at the forefront of beginning debates on anti-Islamic themes at the university.

When asked, Kambakhsh’s teachers at Balkh University readily testified to his seriousness and dynamism in academic work and his respect for the faith of Islam. Friends of Kambakhsh have rebutted the claim that he has been engaged in initiating debates against the faith and said that he respects Islamic values.

Following this, the Islamic Ulema Council (Islamic Scholars’ Council) requested in an official letter that Kambakhsh be sentenced to death. However, a community elder from Saripul, Kambakhsh’s home province, described him in a letter as a devout Muslim.

After all the above accusations, the Attorney’s office requested that a fine be paid by Kambakhsh, according to article 347 of Penalty Law. But this was rejected by the Public Court of Security Bureau in Balkh city, which called

on the Attorney's office to act according to the Islamic Sharia law. The punishment for this kind of blasphemy is highly controversial among Islamic scholars. Mavlavi Hanif, an influential scholar from the Balkh Ulema council, said that anyone who has written an article that is "insolent" or "humiliating" to the faith of Islam and its prophet, should be named an infidel and apostate. According to Islamic law, the apostate person should remain in prison for three days and after three days if he changes his mind and expresses that he is a Muslim and offers an apology, he may be forgiven according to Islamic rules and regulations. If he is persistent in his insolence, then he could be punished with the death penalty.

Since the case was sent to the Public Court of Security Bureau of Balkh Province, a group of influential people with strong support from the governor and other senior officials have pushed for the case to be considered according to Islamic values. After some members met Kambakhsh in jail on January 6, the Provincial Council of Balkh Province appealed to the Court that he be released.

On January 14, 2008, the Ulema Council held another meeting and repeated their demand that Kambakhsh be sentenced to death. There has since been another meeting of Islamic Scholars in the north-eastern province of Kunduz requesting the death penalty for Kambakhsh for insolence to Islamic values. This was broadcast in the news service of a private TV channel supported by the Jamiat-e-Islami party of the former president of Afghanistan, Burhan-ud-din Rabani.

The governor of Balkh, Atta Mohammad Noor told the AIJA media monitor that some students of Balkh University had come to him and demanded the imprisonment of Kambakhsh.

On January 22, AIJA was alerted by Kambakhsh's brother, Ibrahim Yaqoobi, and chief editor of *Jahan-e-Naw* daily, Qayum Babak, that the primary court had delivered a ruling against Kambakhsh. The decree, mentioned that the accused journalist was being "severely punished according to article 130 of the constitution" for "insolence to the Holy Prophet and distortion of the Holy Quran". The decree was signed by Movlavi Shams-ur-Rahman, Head of the Primary court in Balkh Province. Kambakhsh' trial was held behind closed doors in the absence of journalists' unions, advocates for his cause and civil society organisations.

The decree came just two days after the AIJA protests and a press conference in Kabul widely covered by the media in which appeals were made to the President, Parliamentarians, the Attorney General and the Supreme Court to intervene and release Kambakhsh as soon as possible.

Days later, the Balkh Governor, Attah Mohammad Noor, addressed a press conference to claim that he had no involvement in the case, which had been entirely the responsibility of the Attorney's office and the primary court in the Balkh province. The Primary Court in the Balkh province meanwhile,

warned journalists to avoid commenting on the case, since they could otherwise be arrested in accordance with Islamic law.

On January 29, 2008, the upper house of Parliament endorsed the decision of the Balkh Primary Court. A statement issued by the upper house said, "the members of the upper house are deeply concerned at the endeavours of persons and organisations who have caused the embarrassment and humiliation to sacrosanct Islam and the national ethnicity and culture. They request that this kind of aggression should be immediately stopped."

The upper house of parliament also criticised the pressure put on the government from journalists' associations and global organisations. The statement from the upper house came three days after the Ulema Council in the eastern province of Nangarhar supported the decision of the Balkh Primary Court.

On January 31, Aminuddin Muzafary, secretary for the upper house of Parliament, spoke at a press conference to amend the position of the upper house on the case. "The upper house calls for an inclusive inquiry to be carried out, and full legal rights to be provided to the accused person at a free and independent trial", Muzafary said. He also requested all media outlets to make public the revised statement of the upper house. The case has now been transferred to Kabul and initial talks have commenced with the International Legal Foundation Afghanistan (ILFA) to handle the case.

On February 6, Karzai said in a dialogue with AIJA and CPAJ representatives that he would assess the death penalty against Kambakhsh.

However, the case has not been heard by the appeals court in Kabul till the time of this writing. Two successive hearings on May 18 and 25, were adjourned for various reasons: first because Kambakhsh lacked legal counsel and second, because he was in poor health at the time.

The case of Sayed Parvez Kambakhsh illustrates several of the ambiguities shrouding the right to free speech in the new Afghanistan. The Primary Court relied on Article 130 of the Constitution of Afghanistan in arriving at its ruling. This allows for an area of judicial discretion where Islamic law can be deemed to apply in areas where the Constitution is silent. However, Article 34 of the Constitution also defends the right to freedom of expression, in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "... freedom of expression shall be inviolable. Every Afghan shall have the right to express thoughts through speech, writing, illustrations as well as other means in accordance with provisions of this Constitution."

The community of Afghan journalists has been working hard through campaign efforts, to dispel these ambiguities. Though they have gained an international audience and considerable global sympathy, they are yet to obtain a fair hearing in their own country.

In a separate case, Ghows Zelmay, an independent publisher and spokesman for the Afghan attorney-general, was arrested by police on November 4, 2007, in the Torkhum area, at the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Zelmay had published a Dari translation of the Quran without its Arabic script. After distributing a few copies, Zelmay came in for heavy criticism from the

***“Freedom of expression shall be inviolable. Every Afghan shall have the right to express thoughts through speech, writing, illustrations as well as other means in accordance with provisions of this Constitution.”***

Islamic clergy (*ulema*) and other religious scholars. This translation of the Quran was carried out by Bakhtayari Nejadi, read by Qari Mustaq Ahmad Imam in Kabul city and published after final approval by Zelmay at the Noori printing house.

The Minister of Hajj affairs and members of parliament criticised this translation of the Quran as inaccurate. They requested an official investigation and the punishment in

accordance with Islamic law, of all those responsible. Both the lower and upper houses of Parliament organised a special session, calling on the government to detain Zelmay and his associates. Zelmay is still in detention and his fate is unclear. In response to persistent enquiries, officials have been saying since February 2008, that he would be committed to trial in the near future. This however, is yet to happen.

After a prolonged official process, representatives of the AIJA and the CPAJ managed to obtain permission to meet Zelmay at the detention facility of the NSD in Kabul. The AIJA and CPAJ found that he was confined within a dark room along with dozens of other prisoners. He was rarely if ever allowed into the sunlight and was suffering acute depression and a serious collapse of morale on account of his prolonged detention in very poor conditions.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Information and Culture ordered four private television stations to stop broadcasting Indian soap operas by April 15, 2008. The warning underlined the concerns of free media proponents that the Government is increasingly bowing to pressure from hardliners seeking to obstruct freedom of expression. At the time of going to press, several of the television stations were defying the order.



At the first open hearing of the blasphemy case against him, Syed Parvez Kambakhsh chooses to defend himself in the absence of an attorney, displaying the symbol of the scales of justice on his shirt. Photo courtesy by Naimullah Nasary from Wakht News Agency.



Rahman Qul. Picture from the AIJA and CPAJ

## Journalists killed

The media rights monitoring unit of the Afghan Independent Journalists' Association (AIJA) recorded eight violent deaths of journalists in the period under review.

Anwer Salih, a reporter for *Islam Ghagh* weekly, was beheaded on January 2, 2007 in Hangu, in the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan, near the Afghanistan border. According to Habib Shah, chief editor of *Shah Weekly*, Anwar Salih had written articles and cartoons critical of the Taliban and had participated in political and religious debates with the Taliban. This is believed to be the cause of his murder, as his ideas were not acceptable to Taliban-like extremists. Anwer Salih's family believe the Taliban is responsible for his killing as they had no other enemies. Salih had previously worked as a reporter and journalist for BBC and Khost Government Radio.

On Feb ??, 2007 two armed persons on motorcycles shot and killed Rahman Qul, chief editor of *Andkhoy* daily in Andkhoy district of Faryab province. Along with his journalistic commitments, Rahman Qul also worked with certain German non-governmental organisation, mainly in the educational sector in the Faryab province. One suspect was arrested after his killing, though there has been no further progress in investigation or trial.

On March 8, 2007, Ajmal Naqshbandi, an Afghan reporter working as a facilitator with an Italian journalist in the southern province of Kandahar, was killed after being held in captivity by the Taliban since February 9. Their driver, Sayed Agha, was killed by beheading at the moment the news crew was captured. The Italian journalist was released two weeks later, after President Karzai reportedly conceded the main conditions laid down by the Taliban. Naqshbandi however, was held for another fortnight and killed when the Afghan government refused to meet the conditions laid down for his release. President Karzai responded to widespread concerns over this sequence of events by



Ajmal Naqshbandi, who was brutally killed by Taliban insurgents on April 8, 2007 in the Helmand province. Picture from the AIJA and CPAJ

pleading that he had been under pressure from the Italian government to ensure the release of the Italian journalist but that he could not meet the conditions laid down for the release of the Naqshbandi because that would have meant capitulating to terrorist blackmail.

On June 1, 2007, Shokiba Sanga Amaaj, 22, who worked at the private Shamshad Television channel, was shot dead at home. The AIJA could not confirm that Shokiba was killed due to her work, but she had suffered intimidation and received several threats warning her to stop working at the station. General Abdul Qadir Safi, of the Interior Ministry, told the AIJA that police had determined that Shokiba's father had killed his daughter. He was reportedly sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment.

On June 6, 2007, a prominent journalist for Sada-e-Sulh (Peace Radio), Zakia Zaki, was gunned down in her home in Parwan Province, just north of Kabul. She died instantly in the presence of her children. After the attack, the District Police Commissioner said that six suspects had been arrested in connection with Zaki's murder. However, the case was subsequently closed and there has been no further action to bring the killers to justice. Before her death, Zakia had received several threats from local military commanders warning her to shut down Sada-e-Sulh. The AIJA and the Committee to Protect Afghan Journalists (CPAJ) continue to call for the case to be investigated independently.

In another incident underlining the dangers faced by journalists as they conduct their work, Afghanistan Radio



**Double Hazard:** While the circumstances of her June 1 death are unclear, Shokiba Sanga Amaaj, 22 received constant warnings throughout her career to stop working as a journalist. Five days later, peace Radio reporter Zakia Zaki was killed in her home after months of intimidation and threats against her work. Photo courtesy of Naqibullah Taib, AIJA



On June 6, 2007, Zakia Zaki, a prominent female Afghan journalist was gunned down inside her home near Kabul. After her murder, the District Police Chief announced that six people had been arrested in connection to the case but her file was never reopened by the government officials and details were kept secret. Photo courtesy Aina Production

Television journalist Abdul Munir was killed on December 28 while travelling to Mazar-e-Sharif. The bus on which he was travelling came under fire by armed gunmen. Munir was wounded and died in hospital.

Soon after, on January 14, 2008, a Norwegian reporter for *Dagbladet* newspaper, Carsten Thomassen, died from wounds he sustained in an attack at the Serena Hotel in Kabul, while covering the visit of a European Union delegation to Afghanistan. Six others died in the blast, for which the Taliban claimed responsibility.

Mir Ali Asghar Akbarzada director of broadcasting department of Radio Television Afghanistan, told AIJA that Najma Siddiq a journalist with his organisation, had been killed in Jan 21, 2008 in Kabul. The reasons for the alleged killing remain uncertain. Akbarzada informed the AIJA in the month of February, that his source had been Ali Shah Paktiawall, head of the criminal branch of Kabul police department. When AIJA approached Paktiawall, he said that he was not at liberty to reveal any information on the case, though an investigation was ongoing. After a certain period of time, when the AIJA made another inquiry with Paktiawall, he denied that there was any basis at all for launching an investigation. Despite all efforts by the AIJA, the case still remains unclear.



**Extreme danger:** Abdul Samad Rohani, 25, was found dead after being reportedly abducted on June 7, 2008 in the southern Helmand province. Samad's courage and dedication have been a key part of the BBC's reporting from Afghanistan in recent years.

Abdul Samad Rohani was found dead near the city of Lashkar Gah in the southern province of Helmand province on June 8, 2008. He had gone missing on June 7 while proceeding in his car to Lashkar Gah on assignment. His body bore three bullet wounds as well as marks of torture. Rohani had been, since 2006, working for the Pashtu language service of the BBC, besides being a facilitator for the English language service. Government officials put the blame for his killing on the Taliban, but a spokesman for the Taliban in Helmand province denied all involvement.

## Journalists Arrested, Detained and Abducted

Journalist Tawab Niazi, detained on January 14, 2007, was released on August 22 after spending 7 months under the detention of the National Security Directorate (NSD). He was arrested while trying to obtain an interview with the spokesman of the Taliban at the time. He was charged with alleged ties to the Taliban and sentenced to one year in jail, after spending three months in primary court detention. He was finally released largely due to efforts of AIJA and CPAJ after intense lobbying and several meetings with officials. The verdict was delivered on August 19, during the Afghanistan independence day celebrations, by President Karzai

Tawab Niazi described his detention as illegitimate and further added: "I was kept in detention for seven months without any reason. I am completely innocent of the charges that were brought against me and the security authorities do not have any evidence to back up their

claims and justify my arrest". In the course of an interview shortly after his arrest, he told the AIJA that he was unable to leave his house for fear of being rearrested.

Shapoor Arab, freelance journalist and former producer of Mili Paigham Radio, was detained on March 11, 2007 by the counter-terrorism directorate of Logar province, after he published a report of a rocket attack on International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) headquarters in the Logar province. He spent more than six hours in detention and all of his equipment (including minidisk, mobile phone and notebook) was searched by the officials from the directorate. He was freed after negotiations by the CPAJ and officials in Logar.

On April 16, 2007, Muhammad Abdullah, presenter, journalist and Sediqullah Ahmadzada News Manager of Tolo TV, were arrested by security officials. They were detained for a few hours and then released. Hamid Haidary, who worked on a story where the Attorney General was a source of information, was under close supervision of police.

Amir Shah and Fifnik Abrashi, reporters for Associated Press (AP), were detained when they attempted to report on the police search of the Tolo TV premises. Police stopped and detained both journalists for several hours. Their release came an intervention from their employers with the President's office in Kabul.

Kamran Mir Hazar, chief editor of Kabul Press and reporter for Salaam Watandar radio, was arrested by National Security Directorate (NSD) officials without any charges on July 4, 2007. Kabul Press had been publishing articles that were highly critical of ranking government officials. Four days later, on July 8, he was released on bail.

Muhammad Asif Nang, chief editor of *Aman* Magazine and spokesperson for the country's office of administration, was arrested on July 1, 2007 by security officials after he published an article titled "Afghanistan as a football between the large oil companies", in the eighth issue of *Jergha Aman* Magazine. The article angered the Afghan president who ordered the arrest of the chief editor of the government magazine. Nang publicly apologised to President Karzai for the article, explaining that a mistake had inadvertently been missed during the editing process. Nang was released unharmed on July 13.

Najeeb Khwaja, a Danish journalist of Afghan origin who worked for an international magazine was kidnapped along with his driver and interpreter from the residence of Haji Madar, a tribal leader in the eastern province of Kunar, on July 25. According to local sources, the journalist wanted to prepare reports about an air raid by coalition forces in the region which caused civilian casualties. All three men were released unconditionally after being held hostage for 14 hours, following extensive efforts of a delegation, which included the local representative of AIJA. The Taliban through a spokesman in the area, claimed responsibility for kidnapping the trio.

On August 8, 2007, Kamran Mir Hazar, chief editor for the



Kabul Press website (www.kabulpress.org) and reporter of Salaam Watandar Radio, was re-arrested outside his office by gunmen who belonged to the National Security Directorate. Following increasing pressure from journalists and media freedom activists, he was released after six hours of detention unharmed. He later travelled to India and left in November for Norway after being granted political asylum.

Twenty-two year old Jawed Ahmad Yazmi was arrested on September 2, 2007 in Kandahar, after allegations he had improper contact with Taliban. Yazmi had been working with Canadian TV (CTV) for the preceding two years and has since his arrest, been kept in military detention, without charge, at Bagram airbase near Kabul. AIJA and CTV officials have jointly been working on this case. CTV is speaking with government officials in Canada, the US and with military officials in an attempt to obtain the release of Yazmi. Paul workman the south Asia Bureau chief of CTV told AIJA, that at the end Canadian and American officials are not ready to share any information about the case and improvement of About Ahmad with CTV, because Jawed is non-US or non-Canadian Journalist. Lieutenant-Colonel David Acceta, spokesman for the American Military at Bagram, confirmed that Yazmi was being detained there but said that he was “not detained because he is a journalist”. But Yazmi’s family believe that he is being held because he has had contact in a journalistic sense, with the Taliban and was carrying a Taliban-related video recording. Many experts and media rights organisations believe, in the absence of further elaboration from the military authorities, that it not necessarily against the law to be in contact with multiple sides in a conflict zone. On September 29, 2007 Ghulam Ali Sarem, chief editor of

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*Ehtesham* monthly magazine, came under attack from the Afghan National Army (ANA) when he was photographing the result of a suicide attack in an army bus which killed 30 people and injured 20 more. The ANA soldiers forcibly stopped him from taking pictures and kept him in detention for around two hours.

Mujahid Kakar, chief editor of Lemar TV, was arrested by security officials on October 6, 2007 for publishing what was deemed an “inappropriate” picture from an October 6 suicide attack on the airport road in Kabul, which killed five civilians and foreign soldiers. Kakar was released the same day after clarification was made by Lemar TV regarding the issue. Mohammad Nawab Mohmand, a reporter of Tolo TV, explained that Kakar’s footage and report had reflected a dispute between national security officials and police over which were the roads that needed to be blocked after the attack. This allegedly, was the reason for his arrest. Katrine Wada, chief editor of *Cheragh* daily, told the AIJA

that on November 25 they published an article titled “Masoul-e-Kustarhayee zanjiraiee wa seyasi kist?” (“Who is responsible for the human massacre?”). Two days after the article was published, security officials attempted to take the chief editor in for questioning, but he wasn’t available at that time so they took four journalists working in the daily with them. The four were released several hours later, after interrogation.

Aziz Ahmad Tasal, reporter for IWPR (Institute of War and Peace Reporting), and Abdul Samim from Al Jazeera TV and Aziz Ahmad Shafi, reporter of Radio Azad Afghan, were detained and taken for questioning by security officials on their return from the Musa Qala district after interviewing the Taliban on November 4. They were released after several hours in detention. The journalists told the AIJA on their return from the Musa Qala district, that they were held for several hours and all of their equipment was seized and checked by security officials. Their equipment was later handed back.

Abdul Wadoud Hejran, regional reporter of Ariana TV, was taken from his home and detained for questioning by security officials after returning from the Musa Qala district at a time when it was under Taliban rule. This occurred following his interview with the Taliban on November 4. All of his equipment, including a video camera, was seized. He was released after negotiations by the AIJA and CPAJ with Helmand Governor and security officials. On November 10 his equipment was returned to him.

On November 28, Ehsanullah Shahidzai, journalist for government-owned RTA in its Laghman station, was detained by NSD and accused of having ties with Taliban rebels. He was released on December 5 after negotiations with local officials. He was released on December 4 as the NSD failed to present any evidence to support claims for detention.

Muhammad Reja, Manager of Daikundy Radio was detained on December 10, 2007 on the command of Daikundy’s Governor Sultan Ali after he published a report on the country’s economic and financial ministries. The Daikundy Governor said the report was in violation of national interest and issued the journalist’s arrest. After six hours in detention he was released after an agreement was arrived at between members of parliament and the provincial council of Daikundy

On March 4, 2008, Ali Muhaqiq Nasab, editor of Afghanistan’s monthly *Haqq-i-Zan* (Women’s Rights) magazine, was arrested by police in the Iranian city of Qum, under allegations of “suspicious relations” with foreign embassies and “publicity against the government and publication of false information” in an application for resettlement submitted to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. His wife, Sahar Muhaqiq Nasab, told the AIJA early in May, that she has since then, been constantly pursued by armed men. On May 8, four armed men reportedly entered her home in an apparent bid at abduction. Ali Muhaqiq Nasab, who has been a refugee in Iran for 24 years, was released on May 29. No charges were brought against him.

## Official censure and intimidation

Government officials and the military continue to be a major source of threats to press freedom and the personal safety of journalists. The AIJA has recorded several incidents when government agencies have threatened and attacked journalists and media organisations in retaliation for critical material published and broadcast. Several journalists were reportedly beaten by security personnel attached to the police, the Afghan National Security Directorate and various officials. In other instances, media outlets were shut down or attacked.

Rahmat Gul, a reporter of Associated Press, Taqiullah Taqi of Tolo and Lemar TV, Sher Shah Humdard of Liberty Radio and AFP and Khan Wali Kamran of Ariana TV, along with three other journalists were threatened and forced to omit materials showing civilian casualties in the eastern province of Nangarhar on March 4, 2007.

The reports were of coalition forces operations, in which at least 12 civilian were killed and 35 others were wounded. Journalists were threatened by coalition and Afghan National Army (ANA) forces and forced to omit all filmed and recorded materials after their cameras and tape-recorders were seized. A photographer, who did not wish to be named, told AIJA that coalition forces told him to delete all pictures taken of the incident if he wanted to keep his job.

***“Government officials and the military continue to be a major source of threats to press freedom and the personal safety of journalists in Afghanistan.”***

Meanwhile journalists were stopped and prevented from getting to the site of the event. Following this incident the public remained uninformed of what happened in the area. Many events of this kind have happened since the collapse of the Taliban, where media have not been allowed to report civilian casualties.

Nasir Bihzad, a reporter for *Afghanistan Daily* told AIJA that on March 12, 2007, he conducted an interview in which the Provincial Council head of Ghazni, accused senior provincial officials of not cooperating. After publishing this report the spokesperson for the Ghazni Governor, Javid Alami verbally abused Nasir Bihzad and demanded that he be consulted before news of this nature is published.

Reporter Ahmad Fawad Ahmadi and cameraman Ishaq Quraishi for Ariana TV were beaten by police during violent demonstrations held at Herat city on March 21, 2007. Both journalists were injured, Ahmadi seriously. Both journalists were photographing the body of a civilian who had allegedly died under police torture. Police roughed up both journalists and seized their cameras which have still not been returned



Rights defender: Ali Muhaqiq Nasab, the editor of the monthly Haqq-e-Zan (Women's Rights), was arrested on March 4 in Iran. Photo courtesy of Rahimullah Samander, AIJA

On May 27, 2007 Abdul Muaeed Hashimi, Regional Reporter of Pajhwok Afghan News Agency, and Khan Wali Kamran, Reporter of Ariana TV, were stopped by police as they were on their way to report on the opening ceremony of the National Solidarity Programme in the Laghman province. They and their driver were badly beaten by armed NSD officers and the Laghman governor's bodyguards.

On May 31, 2007 Ahmad Shokib Dost, reporter for Ariana TV, was roughed up and mistreated by security officials inside the house of parliament, while preparing a report on the day's parliamentary deliberations. According to Abdul Qadir Merzai, Head of News at Ariana TV, the violence started on account of a misunderstanding. Journalists from all media organisations mobilised after this incident to demand an investigation and to warn of a media boycott of parliament unless proper redress was rendered to the reporter.

On August 28, 2007 Qasim Rahimi, Ariana TV reporter, was stopped and beaten by security officials on his way to attend a press conference of Taliban representatives at the Red Crescent Society office in Ghazni province. Rahimi told the AIJA that without any provocation police humiliated him, beat him and threatened him with death. They also seized all of his equipment. Through communication between the AIJA and Ariana TV officials and all seized equipment was later returned to the reporter.

Muhammad Rasoul Adil, on 13 September, 2007 regional reporter of Ariana TV, was beaten with the butts of assault rifles by police personnel while he was reporting on Afghan National Army combat casualties who had been brought to the public hospital in Khost province. Adil

sustained serious trauma to his arms and lower back. Several hours later Arsala Jamal, Governor of Khost, publicly apologised for this event and ordered an official investigation.

Fayez Khorshidi, a reporter for Press TV of Iran, told the AIJA that on October 18, 2007, on his way home he was abducted by foreign military personnel, seemingly American, who later beat him unconscious. He said that after he regained consciousness, his captors interrogated him and asked him about certain reports he had filed linking the prevailing insecurity in Afghanistan with the presence of foreign troops. He was warned not to work on stories of that nature and released after being held for 12 hours.

On November 5, 2007, Masoud Hussaini, photographer for Associated Press, was beaten by security guards of the Afghan president. He alleged offence was that at an earlier press conference, he had placed his foot outside the area designated for photographing the president in his official residence.

Omar Mohammadi, radio journalist working for Salaam Watandar, was verbally abused and threatened by police on the morning of December 4, 2007, while covering a tragic suicide attack on the road to the airport in Kabul. Mohammadi said that Qaseem Aminzoy, the Tenth District Police Commander of Kabul Police Department, personally tried to kick and punch him and seized his recorder as bodyguards pointed their guns at him. Mohammadi had been trying to enter a cordoned area where other journalists were receiving information about the suicide attack. The police returned the equipment several hours later.

The chief editor of *Saday-e-Watan* weekly, Abdul Hamid Mashoon, was on January 22, 2008, was stopped by a police officer by the name of Haroon when on his way to a local market in Kunduz city. He was badly punched and beaten with the barrel of an assault rifle, supposedly in retaliation for a story he had featured some three months before on the involvement of police personnel in certain criminal activities. He told AIJA that following a number of death threats that he received in the following days, he was compelled in the interests of personal safety, to suspend publication of his weekly.

Attaullah Sahil, presenter and reporter of Estiqlal Radio in Logar province was mistreated and beaten by NSD personnel on February 13, 2008. The incident occurred after the journalist had contacted Taliban sources in an effort to confirm some information. Sahil has told the AIJA that he has also been receiving several threatening telephone calls.

The negative attitude toward media personnel is mirrored by other officials and parliamentarians. A faction loyal to MP Noor-ul-Haq Olumi gathered all copies of *Mashal* magazine on June 23, preventing its distribution in a clear violation of Afghanistan's media law. The chief editor of *Mashal* and the daily *Erada*, Fazal

Rahman Oria, received death threats on August 15, 2007, apparently from supporters of General Abdul Rashid Dostum, the Chief of Army Staff, after the magazine published an article in July alleging murders carried out by Dostum. Meanwhile an official letter from the office of the Chief of Army staff was sent to the Media Violation Commission of the Information and Cultural ministry, warning of the consequences for them should they ignore it.

In another case, Muhammed Reja, manager of Daikundi Radio, was detained in Daikundi, on the orders of the provincial governor, Sultan Ali, for broadcasting a report that allegedly threatened the "national interest". He was released after six hours in detention.

***"The culture of impunity is perpetuated and deepened since the enforcers of the law, the police and armed forces, often show outright antagonism toward journalists."***

Continuous censorship and threats from high ranking officials led managers of the website Kabul Press to shut down operations on August 24. Kabul Press's chief editor, Kamran Mir Hazar, was twice arrested in 2007 by National Security Directorate forces and held without charge for varying periods of time. He fled the country in September and has since managed to make his website operational again.

The culture of impunity is perpetuated and deepened since the enforcers of the law, the police and armed forces, often show outright antagonism toward journalists. On December 4, the AIJA reported that the Tenth District Police Commander of the Kabul Police Force assaulted radio journalist Omar Mohammadi, of Radio Salam Watandar, while he was reporting on a suicide attack on the road to Kabul Airport.

Ariana TV reporter Qasim Rahimi was beaten and threatened with death by police officers on August 28 as he made his way to attend a conference of Taliban representatives in Ghazni city. The police also confiscated his equipment. Another Ariana TV reporter, Muhammad Rasoul Adil, also was severely beaten by police at Khost city after preparing a report that contained photos of combat casualties of the Afghan National Army. He suffered permanent injuries to his back and thighs.

Habib Saeedi, journalist for Trajmir Radio in the provincial capital city of Pul-e-Khumri in Baghlan province, broadcast a report of an armed conflict which occurred in the Nahrin district between two local commanders named Rahmatullah and Muhammad Ali. After the report was aired on Trajmir Radio, both commanders allegedly plotted jointly to kill Saeedi. First they detained and severely beat him and then kept him in captivity for more than 12 hours. Both commanders wanted to kill Habib Saeedi but this plan was quashed due to police intervention and the journalist was rescued.

## Threats from non-state actors

On January 2, 2007, journalist Salih Mohammad of Liberty Radio received death threats from an anonymous caller, who identified himself as being from a faction loyal to the Taliban. The caller threatened the journalist for involvement with American and other foreign troops.

Ahmad Farzan, reporter for Shamshad TV and local representative of AIJA in Kandahar was told by Shuhab Atal, an alleged spokesman for the Taliban commander, Mullah Dadullah, that his group would take journalists hostage before killing them. However this Taliban commander also threatened and issued written decree of the death sentence of Rahimullah Samander the president of Afghan Independent Journalists' Association, and the owner of Wakht News Agency which is still existing, but fortunately Taliban were unsuccessful and Taliban this commander has dead .

Zarghona Hasan, of the presenter and Najia the chief editor of Zohra Radio located in the northern province of Kunduz say , they have received threats from an anonymous caller since March 8, 2007, when Zarghona began to present the "women's day" show. Zarghona told AIJA that unidentified people threatened her by phone and warned her that they would not allow her to defend women's rights. They called both journalists from two different phone numbers, and said that they knew their home addresses and that they would receive retribution for their actions.

She said that at the beginning she didn't pay attention to the threats but that they began to seem serious because the caller knew more about her personal life. The journalist has relocated to a new home but continues her work at the radio station.

After the deaths of two female Afghan journalists in two weeks, Farida Nekzad, who is the chief editor of Pajhwok, and the vice-president of South Asia Media Commission received death threats by both phone and email. Anonymous callers on three different days, referred to the deaths of two female journalists, Zakia Zaki and Shokiba Sanga Amaaj, and mentioned that Nekzad too would meet the same fate.

On February 18, 2007, Hayatullah Halim, a journalist working with *Malaly*, a monthly magazine, told the AIJA that he wrote a report which included a picture of a woman who was murdered by her husband. After the report appeared, he received a text message and phone calls from an anonymous caller, which stated "write your will, we will not let you move freely, we will kill you." The journalist says that he then changed his daily routines.

Sher Mohammad Jahish, chief editor of Radio Arzoo in Pul-i-khumri city, Baghlan province received threats on more than 16 occasions. An anonymous caller using ten different mobile phone numbers began making threats to buy out Jahish's stake in the broadcast company. The caller

then threatened Jahish with death. These threats followed two broadcasts by Radio Arzoo, which exposed a mail-order fraud being carried out by a shadowy outfit named Quest International. Radio Arzoo reported that a number of unsuspecting persons citizens had fallen victim to the fraud, which involves remitting a sum of US\$600 through a branch of Kabul Bank. The three persons who threatened Jahish were arrested by police. They were Afghan employees of Quest International from Baghlan Province. They have admitted their involvement in threatening Jahish, and said that they aimed to intimidate him for broadcasting the report on Arzoo Radio. Jahish told the AIJA that the officials of Quest publicly apologised for these threats, and the matter was settled in a friendly manner.

On August 15, 2007, Sayed Ismail Ansari, Director of the government-controlled Afghan Radio and Television in Kunduz, told the AIJA that he had been receiving threats for two weeks in the form of text messages, letters and phone calls from Taliban insurgents. The threats said he must join the Taliban movement, or be assassinated. The threats began after they began to broadcast a new series titled "bloody hands," in which Islamic scholars criticised suicide attacks as contrary to the principles of the faith.

On August 28, 2007, Mohammad Zahir Bahand, reporter of Salaam Watandar was kidnapped by two armed men on motorcycles who identified themselves as Taliban. He was blindfolded and taken to a location he could not identify, where he was subject to a threatening manner of interrogation. He told the AIJA that he was freed after one hour with warnings that if he was not fair in his reporting, he would be taken hostage and treated accordingly.

Lal Pacha Azmoon, senior journalist working with Ashna Radio, Vice of Americal and professor of Pashto literature at Kabul University, who is the provincial representative of AIJA in the eastern province of Nangarhar told the AIJA media monitor that he received death threats for a year and a half, from persons, who identified themselves as loyal to the Taliban. The letter, which he showed to AIJA, said that because of his work with the Americans he would be punished. These threats went on till September, 2007, after which they ceased.

On October 10, 2007, Mohammad Hanif Elham, presenter of a programme on Ariana Radio titled "Emroze Der Tarekh" (Today in History) told the AIJA that he had received threats more than four times in the previous five months, from anonymous callers. His programme involves a review of all important historical events that have happened on a particular day of the year. One such programme was about a date linked to the Taliban occupation and the killing of former Afghan president Najibullah Afghanistan by the Taliban. He also discussed the massacre of innocent people in Bamiyan and Mazar-e-sharif by the Taliban. During another programme he discussed the ties of Israel with Russia as an independent country.

After airing these programmes he received phone calls

warning him that if he continued to discuss such topics in similar vein, he would be killed.

The regional reporter of Liberty Radio for Takhar and Badakhshan Provinces, Dayan Ahmadi told the AIJA, that he received death threats from the warlord Habib-ur-Rahman, about whom he had published critical stories. The stories were about the stoning of a woman in Badakhshan, protests against influential warlords in governmental management bodies, deaths of children due to unavailability of food in the Zebak district of Badakhshan and the involvement of warlords in the smuggling of opium and other narcotics.

“I interviewed civilians in my reports who publicly criticised the involvement of warlords in such circumstances,” Ahmadi told the AIJA. Following each story the journalist was threatened with death. The threats came from people loyal to Habib-ur-Rahman and other armed factions. Following these, Ahmadi’s driver was badly beaten by Habib-ur-Rahman’s supporters and warned that Ahmadi, who is located in Kabul, would be killed if he returned to work in Badakhshan province.

Abdul Mutalib Hamid, manager of Radio Saday-e-Nejrab received threats from unidentified people, likely to be the Taliban. They demanded that he shut down Saday-e-Nejrab community station because it broadcast sentiments banned in Islam.

Hamid showed a pamphlet left in his house to the AIJA. It read “earlier you made a lot of mistakes, we ignored them, do not broadcast anti-Islamic programs from your station. If you don’t obey, we know how to approach you”. The pamphlet bore the signature of the deputy leader of the Hizb-e-Islami (Movement of Islam). On November 12, 2007 a rocket struck the station, though without causing any damage.

Mujhad Jawad, reporter with Liberty Radio told the AIJA that on 12 October, 2007, a programme was broadcast which included the voices of people who had lost their relatives and loved ones to suicide attacks. The programme went on to condemn such attacks. A person who identified himself as Abu Taib from the Taliban movement in Ghazni, soon afterwards, warned Jawad that the Taliban had declared that if his voice was heard being broadcast again, he would be killed the same way as Ajmal Naqshbandi. Liberty Radio immediately afterwards took Jawad off the air.

## Media offices come under attack

Hazrat din Nasrat, manager of Yawali Ghagh Radio (The Voice of Unity) told the AIJA, that on August 12, 2007, at 2 am, Taliban insurgents launched an attack in the district



**Media attacked:** Radio Yawali Ghagh was established in 2004 with technical support from Internews. Taliban insurgents attacked and burned down the station in August 2007. Photo courtesy Naimullah Nasari, Wakht News Agency

of Sayed Abad in Maidan Wardak province. One group of attackers led a charge on the offices of Yawali Ghagh Radio located there. Gunmen bound and blindfolded the guard on duty at the station and took him with them to the mountains, after having set the radio station on fire. They later released the guard. The arson attack on the station came reportedly after threats were received from the Taliban, demanding that it be shut down. Equipment worth an estimated US\$ 40,000 was destroyed in the attack.

Enayatullah, chief administrator of Sayed Abad district, claims that the radio station was burnt by the Taliban, and Mohammad Ewaz Mazlum, the chief of police in Maidan Wardak province, says that the fire was ignited by a Taliban rocket attack.

Radio Yawali Ghagh is the only free and independent radio station in the area, and was established in 2004 with the technical support of Internews. It has a coverage of 45 kilometres.

A local independent radio station in Karabagh district of Kabul Province was seized by Khwaja Abdul Rahim, chief administrator of the district. The owner and manager of the station Marajuddin Manzoor told the AIJA he was prevented from entering the station and all his equipment was seized. He was also mistreated by the district chief, who had the support of Internews, a US based media organization. Internews was interfering in the affairs of the station and wanted control of the station. Internews had provided technical support at the beginning, when the station was installed, Manzoor told the AIJA. After the mediation of the United Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) on September 12, 2007 this issue was sorted out and the ownership was returned to Manzoor.

## Foreign forces against media freedom

Foreign military forces in Afghanistan have also participated actively in restricting media freedoms in the country, doing little to provide Afghan authorities with positive guidance about the role and value of a free media within a democracy.

The United States military has detained an Afghan journalist without charge at Bagram Air Base since September 2. Jawed Ahmad, 22, who works for Canadian Television (CTV), was arrested at Kandahar airport and accused of having contacts with local Taliban leaders and possessing a video containing Taliban material. His defenders point out that it is common for professional journalists to be in contact with multiple sides when reporting in a conflict zone.



Jawed Ahmad, 22, has been held in detention by the United States military since September 2007

***“Foreign military forces in Afghanistan have also participated actively in restricting media freedoms in the country, doing little to provide Afghan authorities with positive guidance about the role and value of a free media within a democracy.”***

A reporter for Press TV of Iran, Fayeze Khorshidi, reported to the AIJA that he had been abducted on October 18 by foreign military personnel, seemingly American, and later beaten until he was unconscious.

Meanwhile, Al-Jazeera cameraman Sami al-Hajj continues to be held in the US’s detention centre at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, without charge. Al-Hajj was arrested at the Afghanistan-Pakistan border on December 15, 2001, while on assignment to cover the war against the Taliban. He was transferred to Guantanamo in June 2002, finally Mr. Al-hajj was released after spending almost 7 years under the military detention in May, 2008.

## Media law falls victim to politics

A media law was issued by presidential decree in 2005 and subsequently worked on by local organisations of journalists and civil society groups, before being put in circulation early-2007 for public discussion. It was taken up by the lower house of Afghanistan’s parliament (the Wolesi Jirga) in May 2007. To the consternation of most media freedom advocates the Wolesi Jirga sought to reverse many of the ironclad guarantees of a free press that the draft law embodied. It sought to bring the state-owned Radio Television Afghanistan under greater government control and sought to exert a high degree of scrutiny over content even in privately owned media.

It also provided for a number of prohibitions on content that seemed to leave a lot of leeway for arbitrary interpretation, such as:

- content that goes against the principles of Islam;
- materials humiliating and offensive to real or legal entities;
- materials inconsistent with Afghanistan’s constitution;
- anything that is considered a crime by the penal code;
- publicising and promotion of religions other than Islam;
- broadcasting pictures of victims of violence and rape in a way to cause damage to their social dignity;
- topics that harm the physical, spiritual and moral well-being of people, especially children and adolescents.

Following intense lobbying and public awareness campaigns by press freedom bodies, the draft was modified in certain important respects. For instance, the state broadcaster RTA, was put under the direct control, not of the government, but of an independent commission that would be nominated with equal representation from professional organisations, government agencies, and civil society.

Apart from a number of prohibitions on media content, the law also contained several prescriptions on mandatory content.

When the law as passed by the Wolesi Jirga went before the upper house of Afghanistan’s parliament (the Meshrano Jirga), there were widespread apprehensions of a further erosion of its press freedom clauses. However, with energetic campaign and advocacy work by professional bodies, the law that went to President Karzai for his assent retained several of the positive features of the earlier draft.

Undefined political compulsions seemed to intervene at this stage and President Karzai on December 26, 2007,

reportedly declined to endorse the media law that had been arrived at after much deliberation and public debate.

At this writing, the media law seems stuck in a limbo. In this regulatory vacuum various political interest groups, members of parliament, and leaders of non-state militias have begun their own media operations. Reality in other words, is diverging ever more sharply from the scenarios envisaged in the draft media law. Without a major act of statesmanship by President Karzai and other key players in Afghan politics, it seems likely that a media controlled increasingly by big business and political interest groups, could defeat the much-cherished objective of media freedom.

## Progress of media: significant milestones

*Ghurka* is an independent monthly magazine which prints 20 pages on a variety of social, cultural and education topics. The first issue, with a print-run of 1000, rolled out on May 17, 2007.

Radio Farda is an independent and free community FM station based in the western province of Herat began operations early in 2007. Khalil Ahmad Amiri, owner and chief editor at the station, says that the station has a broadcast range of 70 km. All employees of the Radio station are young journalism graduates from Herat University. The Radio station takes up issues from the public and endeavours to find answers from officials.

Radio Khurasan is a private, independent radio station, financially supported by Internews in the Panjshir province. The station was launched on March 23, 2007. Radio Khurasan is the first independent FM station established in the province. The station broadcasts 10 hours of programming every day in Dari and Pashto, on social, educational, economic and cultural themes.

Al-Jazeera TV programmes had been suspended by the Ministry of Culture and Information following a decree from the Attorney-General's Office. Its programmes were relaunched on Lemar TV on April 23, 2007. Al-Jazeera TV broadcasts from its own studios in Doha, Kuala Lumpur, London and New York and these signals are re-broadcast locally for the Afghanistan market by Lemar TV.

*Tarneq* is the first independent newspaper printed in the southern province of Zabul. It was launched May 20, 2007. The paper is financially supported by a group of journalists working with independent media organisations. People have little or very limited access to independent media in the remote province of Zabul. *Tarneq*, published every 15 days, covers various topics including educational and cultural.

*Hasht-e-Sub* (Eight in the Morning) is a free and independent publication of four pages launched on May 22, 2007. Its content covers news and current affairs in Dari. It also seeks to provide in-depth analysis, perspectives and debates.

Noorin Radio and TV is a private and independent network. Noorin was initiated and is supported by an Afghan businessman. The radio station broadcasts for 14 hours, covering a 50 kilometre area over Kabul and its surroundings. Officials from the network say it is expected to widen. It was initiated to inform the public about daily events, said Sayed Alam Hashemi, broadcasting director. The network aims to encourage media freedom through its mass media service. The station began experimental broadcasts on June 6, 2007 and Noorin TV began in July 2007. Noorin Radio and TV broadcast news, in-depth analyses, entertainment, sport, religion and culture in Pashto, Dari and Uzbek languages.

On June 7, 2008 Radio Watandar, independent radio station accessible on the frequency 87.5 FM started to broadcast from Herat, 24 hours, covering a 30 kilometre area. Its programming consists of entertainment and popular music from different countries.

Tamdon TV is a private station which began broadcasting in June 2007, with the financial support of Shia Islamic cleric Ayatullah Muhseni. An official from the TV station said, "The goals of launching such a TV station are instructing the people and raising their awareness of modern Islam through different educational and Islamic programs."

Hewad (Country) Television started its experimental broadcasting from Kandahar in July 2007. According to Mursal Ahmadzai, the TV station is financially supported by local businessmen and currently broadcasts three hours of programs for Kandahar city and its surroundings, upto a radius of 50 kilometres. Hewad is the first independent television station in Kandahar city.

*Layca* magazine contains between 60 and 70 pages of educational content and is sponsored by students in the eastern zone of the country. The first issue of the magazine was printed July 18, 2007 and is distributed nationally for students.

On August 12, 2007 Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA) extended its network to the Ghore province, covering a space of 30 kilometres and broadcasting 5 hours, of which three hours of programming would be from the national capital and two hours would be locally generated.

Shulgar Radio, a government station, was launched on August 12, 2007, with the financial support of the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in the remote district of Ghazni on a budget of US\$41,789. The station has a capacity of 300 Watts, and covers an area of 40 kilometres. Prior to this, three stations were active in Ghazni including a government broadcaster and two independent stations, Radio Ghaznawian and Radio Omid Jawanan.

Killid Radio is an independent community radio station that was launched in the eastern province of Nangarhar on August 19, 2007, Afghanistan's Independence Day. The radio broadcasts on 88 MHz over an area of 60 km.

*Trinkot* is a free, independent biweekly launched by journalists and writers working in the southern province of Uruzgan. The first issue, of over 8 pages in length with mostly educational and cultural information in Pashto, was published on August 23, 2007.

Noor TV started experimental broadcasting on August 19, 2007, in Kabul. The owner of the station is Professor Burhanudin Rabbani, former president of Afghanistan and head of Jamiat-e-Islami. All the station's programmes will be in accordance with Islamic law and most content will stress Islamic cultures and values. The station will not broadcast songs, or any programme involving dancing women. All female presenters will be dressed in accordance with custom and tradition.

*Mahnama wa Zandagi*, an independent monthly sport publication in four colour pages, was launched mid-2007, with an initial print run of 1000 copies.

Radio Television Afghanistan began constructing its permanent building in Bamiyan province with financial support of the Agha Khan Development Network (AKDN). RTA in Bamiyan started its broadcasts in 2007, with two hours of local programming and the rest from the Kabul.

RTA began broadcasting in the southern province of Helmand with the financial and technical support of the Indian government. The station had been silent since the collapse of the Najibullah regime in 1992. According to the officials from the Information and Culture Department, the station will relay programmes from the RTA in Kabul, apart from having two hours of local content.

City Radio, a private and independent FM station, started its experimental broadcasting in September 2007 and broadcasts a number of entertainment, musical and other programs for Kabul citizens.

The first edition since a 16-month long closure of the popular independent daily newspaper *Erada*, was released on September 8, 2007. Fazal-ul-Rahman Ori, owner and chief editor of *Erada*, said that short term commitments of donors and the absence of advertising spending in the economy means that most media face financial problems and have to close. *Erada* faced this problem. Currently the newspaper has funding commitment that will last it one year. *Erada* hopes that through advertisements and subscriptions they will be able to get enough financial support for the long term.

Radio Pathman Afghan Ghagh is an independent and free station which began experimental broadcasting on September 21, 2007, in the Paktika province. According to Mohammad Zia Arman, chief editor, the broadcasts cover an area of 70 km and consists of various kinds of political, social, educational and cultural programmes.

Killid Radio, a community station started broadcasts in the southern city of Kandahar and nearby districts. Seddiqullah Badar, chief editor of Mursal weekly, told the AIJA that they produce material for various programs,

mostly of a social, educational, cultural or political nature. Killid established its first broadcasting station in Kabul in 2004. This was followed with stations in Herat in 2005 and Jalalabad in 2007.

The first issue of the *Aftab Khursan* weekly was printed on December 9, 2007, according to Abdullah Noori, chief editor of the publication. It contains various social, cultural and educational content.

The first issue of the bi-weekly *Awa-e-Danishjo* was printed on December 11, 2007 in the Kapisa province. According to information from Muhammad Towfiq, chief editor, this is an independent publication that publishes social, cultural, political and educational content in four black and white pages with 4000 copies circulated.

*Afghanistan Emroze* is published with the support of a German foundation and the technical support of a well-known German media organisation. Chief editors and all journalists are under 16 years of age. The purpose of the publication is to increase the skills and experience of teenagers to encourage them to become professional journalists in the future.

*Jabran* weekly, launched on January 15, 2008, is a free and independent political, social and cultural publication which began with over 5000 copies in 8 pages in Pashto, Dari and English. According to the chief editor, the aim of the publication is to enlighten people by focusing on peace and reconciliation, human rights and women's rights, while also reporting on matters of corruption and the hazards of narcotics.

Zala Radio, a private FM station started broadcasts over a range of 55 Km on January 25, 2008. Based in the border area between Afghanistan and Pakistan, Zala Radio will also have an audience in Kunar and Nooristan provinces. Shukibullah Sanin, the chief editor, told AIJA that the station broadcast news, talks shows, and social, political and cultural programs in Pashto, Nooristani, Ghujury and Khohistani for 12 hours.

*Jawanan Maa*, a biweekly publication, was launched on February 20, 2008 in the northern Kunduz province. The publication is printed by the youth affairs directorate of Kunduz province, which aims to raise awareness among the youth about social, cultural and education matters. The magazine publishes eight pages in the two official languages of Afghanistan, Pashto and Dari.

Emroz private television went on air on March 4, 2008. The channel was launched by Najibullah Kabuli, a member of Afghanistan parliament. Fahim Kuhdamani, the chief editor, told AIJA that station would broadcast from 6 p.m. everyday till midnight, confining itself to begin with, to music and movies. Once this phase is over, the station would broadcast special programmes consistent with the national culture of Afghanistan.

It has been reported that two other private television stations, Aria and Negha, will soon launch from Kabul.



The FM station Eay Khanam launched in Takhar Province on March 6, 2008, with educational, cultural, entertainment and political programs for women and the youth. Attaullah Obaidi, manager of Radio Eay Khanam told AIJA, that his is the third FM station in Takhar province and provides ten hours of daily broadcasting from the provincial capital of Taluqan, over a range of 20 km.

An FM station for women, Nergis, was launched in the eastern province of Nangarhar on March 20, 2008, from the provincial capital of Jalalabad. The manager of radio station, Shehla Shaiq, told AIJA that this station belongs particularly to women and will have 18 hours of programming for to raise awareness among women audiences for both Dari and Pashto. The station has 12 female journalists and is Afghanistan's first to begin broadcasting exclusively for women.

Radio Aleena, established through the financial support of the Provincial Reconstruction Team, was launched in the province of Nooristan on March 13, 2008. The radio broadcasts various programs in Pashto, Dari, Nooristani and Pashayee. The radio is also believed to be available in the Alengar valley and other parts of the province of Laghman.

Radio Maram was launched on March 14, 2008 in the eastern provincial capital of Jalalabad. Sulaiman Khelwakh, the owner and chief editor of the station told AIJA, that the radio broadcasts programmes of special interest to the youth. The cost of launching the station, he said, was US\$ 20,000. This is the fourth independent FM station in Nangrahar province.

The government radio station in Kapisa resumed broadcasts on March 17, 2008, with a 600 watt transmitter that will cover all of Kapisa and parts of Parwan and Panjsher provinces. Hujatullah Mujadidi, manager, told AIJA that financial problems had compelled the radio to close down for a whole year, though it was now back on track with the support of the Provincial Reconstruction Team. This is the first ever station to go on the air in Kapisa province.

A special station for women by the name of Humsada went on air in northern Takhar province on March 27, 2008, with the financial support of US\$ 20,000 from the GTZ foundation. The stated goals of the radio are to raise awareness among women and encourage their involvement in social, cultural, educational and political structures of the country. The owner of the radio told AIJA that by having special programmes for women, the station would be able to decrease violence against women. Humsada is the second exclusive station for women in Afghanistan and the fourth to begin broadcasts in Takhar province.

An independent weekly by the name of *Pad Zahar* began publication in Faryab province. The weekly carries campaign material for the elimination of poppy cultivation in the country and was launched on March 27, 2008. According to Muhammadullah Noori, the chief editor, this is the tenth independent outlet initiated in Faryab province.

Another private FM station by the name of Zenat went to air in Logar province on April 2, 2008, located at the provincial capital of Pul-e-Alam. Its broadcast range covers virtually the entire province. Noorullah Navid, station manager, told AIJA, that the station is installed on a total cost of US\$ 14,000 and by having 300 watt transmitter it would be the strongest station in the province. He said the radio would attempt to convey the voices of the people to officials. Furthermore he said, they currently have eight hours broadcasting, which could be expanded to 24-hours shortly. Following successful launches by Milli Paigham, Estiqlal and Ittifaq, this the fourth FM station to go on air in this province.

On April 13, 2008, the private radio station Rushani went on air with a 300 kilowatt transmitter in Kunduz province. Sidiqa Shirzay, the owner of the station told AIJA, that she invested US\$ 13,000 US in the launch. The station broadcasts several programs in the region for the youth. The station employs eight personnel in production and in the technical maintenance activities of the station. Two other FM stations by the name of Zohra and Jaihoon are actively working in the Kunduz province.

## International recognition for Afghan media and other positive developments

Despite the catalogue of violence and intimidation during 2007-08, there nevertheless are some signs of improvement in the media landscape for Afghanistan and perhaps even room for optimism.

The breadth and diversity of the growing media market in Afghanistan presents great opportunities for the development of strong and independent journalism in the face of persistent threats to media freedom. According to the Ministry of Communication and Information, 114 new publications were registered and approved to start operations during 2007. Seven television stations, seven radio stations and several electronic media publications have also begun operations.

In the past, most media organisations were funded directly by donors, and subsequently closed when funds dried up. The coming year will be a testing time for Afghanistan's newest media organisations, but hope can be garnered from the example of the reopening of *Erada Daily*, which has found alternative funding, while Al-Jazeera's programs have also resumed broadcasting through Lemar TV. As well, several organisations have extended broadcasting and publication to new provinces.

According to the Ministry of Information and Culture, more than 700 publications have been registered with the ministry over the last six years. In the past these were mostly financed by a variety of donors and when funding stopped, many media outlets ceased to operate. During

2007, 114 daily, weekly, monthly and quarterly publications registered with the Ministry of Information and Culture and received permission to publish in Afghanistan.

Since the collapse of the Taliban regime, more publications have become active in the national capital of Kabul, and other cities. But the Afghan population still require a high-quality newspaper to keep them informed about daily matters occurring in the rural regions of Afghanistan.

Also since 2007, a number of private television stations have become active after registering with the ministry. The TV stations include Noorin, Tamadon, Noor, Farda, Hewad, Maiwand and Kawsar.

***“The breadth and diversity of the growing media market in Afghanistan presents great opportunities for the development of strong and independent journalism in the face of persistent threats to media freedom.”***

As well as the emergence of these private TV stations, the period since 2007 also saw a number of FM radio stations file registry forms within the ministry. These included: Noorin, Farda, Afghan, Pathman Ghagh, Radio Sahar, Paiman, Kawun Ghagh. Some of these began broadcasting in 2007, while others will commence broadcasting in the near future.

Afghanistan made good progress in electronic media in 2007 as more online news agencies emerged. Among the new agencies launched were Roz, Wakht and the News Agency for Energy, Power and Reconstruction.

Afghan journalists received national and international awards. In 2007, two senior journalists, Abdul Hamid Mubarez and Abdul Haq Wala, received awards from the Afghan president. Farida Nekzad, chief editor of Pajhwok Afghan News Agency, received the International Press Freedom Award (IPFA) at the 10th anniversary of the award organised by Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE).

On August 8, 2007, four journalists based in Kunar province — Nematullah Karyab, provincial Head of AIJA and Reporter for BBC Pashtu service, Roohullah Anwari, deputy provincial head of AIJA and reporter for the Pashtu service of Liberty Radio, Abdullah Nezami, Reporter of Al Jazeera TV, and Khan Wali Salarzai, Head of Bakhter News Agency in Kunner — were honoured with letters of appreciation from provincial Governor Shah Alizai Diddar. The Governor praised the role of AIJA and these four journalists in freeing a Danish journalist on July 25, 2007 after he had been held hostage for 16 hours.

In a photo competition involving more than 115 news agencies from around the world held in Spain, the Pajhwok Afghan News Agency (PAN) won third place on October 26, 2007.

Safia Saifi, photographer for Pajhwok News Agency, won



**Courage recognised:** Farida Nekzad, Pajhwok News Agency, received the 2007 International Press Freedom Award from Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE). Photo courtesy Naqibullah Taib, AIJA

third place in an international competition where more than 115 News agencies competed for prizes. On October 24, 2007 Zubair Shafiqi, chief editor of daily *Wessa*, received an award from the Afghan Cultural Society.

CBS News correspondent Lara Logan and her team won the Association of International Broadcasters (AIB) award for “Clearest Coverage of a Single News Event”, for Logan’s reporting from Afghanistan on the resurgence of the Taliban. News producer and facilitator Sami Yousafzai, negotiated with the Taliban for six months to secure the interviews. Radio Nawa and Radio Ariana FM programs also won awards at the same ceremony. Nawa Radio won the international award in a competition held from May 12 to May 18, 2007 in Mashhad, Iran.



**Reporter awarded:** Sayed Yaqub Ibrahim receives an award from the Italian Journalists' Association. Photo courtesy Frozan Danish Rahmani, AIJA

Nawa FM is an independent radio station that was established in early 2006 and broadcasts to more than 17 provinces in Afghanistan.

Two local programs of Radio Ariana also won awards at the international competition. The competition was between 58 Radio stations from 31 countries all over the world. Five local radio stations participated in the competition. Radio stations from Japan, India, and Iran won first, second and third positions respectively.

Afghan journalist Sayed Yaqub Ibrahim was honoured with a Reporter of the Year award by the Italian Journalists' Association. The award is presented to journalists who work in difficult conditions and write comprehensive investigative reports. Ibrahim is a graduate of the political science faculty of Balkh University. He started his journalistic career in 2002. He has worked with the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) and written several stories about the human rights situation in the country.

In a gesture of respect to Ajmal Naqshbandi who was brutally killed by Taliban insurgents, the road between Deh Afghanan and Baraki in Kabul city was named after him on the first anniversary of his murder. Naqshbandi's father in a message, strongly criticised the international community and the Afghan government. The Afghan government, he recalled, had released five prisoners to secure the life of the Italian journalist Naqshbandi was accompanying. But it did little to save a native Afghan journalist.

In a significant move to ensure the professional recognition of journalism, the Ministry of Information and Culture in August 2007 announced they would distribute identity cards to all journalists and media workers in Afghanistan. Din Mohammad Mubarez, Deputy Minister of Information and Culture, said the reason for the identity cards was to determine accurate figures of the number of journalist working actively in Afghanistan. The cards will aim to make access to government officials easier for journalists wanting to conduct interviews or gain information.

As media reach expands, the AIJA's media monitoring unit, based in Kabul, has become an invaluable tool for defending press freedom and promoting the development of independent media. The unit is a clearing house for information about attacks and legal restrictions on journalists and other actions that impinge on media freedom. By disseminating information and campaigning for the rights of journalists and media workers, the unit supports and strengthens challenges to Afghanistan's culture of impunity.

The Afghan media community has been proactive in adopting the best practices of journalism. A national summit of journalists and media organisations in Kabul in July 2007, organised by the AIJA and CPAJ with the support of the IFJ, agreed unanimously on a . The Charter outlines an agenda for promoting a media culture across Afghanistan that is based on editorial independence, balance, accountability and social responsibility.



The IFJ is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation that promotes coordinated international action to defend press freedom and social justice through the development of strong, free and independent trade unions of journalists. IFJ Asia-Pacific coordinates IFJ activities in the Asia-Pacific region. The IFJ works closely with the United Nations, particularly UNESCO, the United Nations Human Rights Commission, WIPO and the ILO, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the European Union, the Council for Europe and with a range of international trade union and freedom of expression organisations. The IFJ mandate covers both professional and industrial interests of journalists.

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