

# India Press Freedom Report 2020



**RIGHTS AND RISKS ANALYSIS GROUP**

**INDIA PRESS  
FREEDOM  
REPORT 2020**

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AIADMK	–	All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
ASI	–	Assistant Sub Inspector
BJP	–	Bhartiya Janata Party
BWJA	–	Baramulla Working Journalist Association
CAA	–	Citizenship Amendment Act
CBI	–	Central Bureau of Investigation
CID	–	Crime Investigation Department
CNS	–	Current News Service
CrPC	–	Code of Criminal Procedure
DC	–	Deputy Commissioner
DFO	–	Divisional Forest Officer
DIPR	–	Department of Information and Public Relations
DM	–	District Magistrate
EGI	–	Editors Guild of India
FIR	–	First Information Reports
GPC	–	Guwahati Press Club
GRP	–	Government Railway Police
IANS	–	Indo-Asian News Service
IPC	–	Indian Penal Code
KPC	–	Kashmir Press Club
KUWJ	–	Kerala Union of Working Journalists
MLA	–	Member of Legislative Assembly
MP	–	Member of Parliament

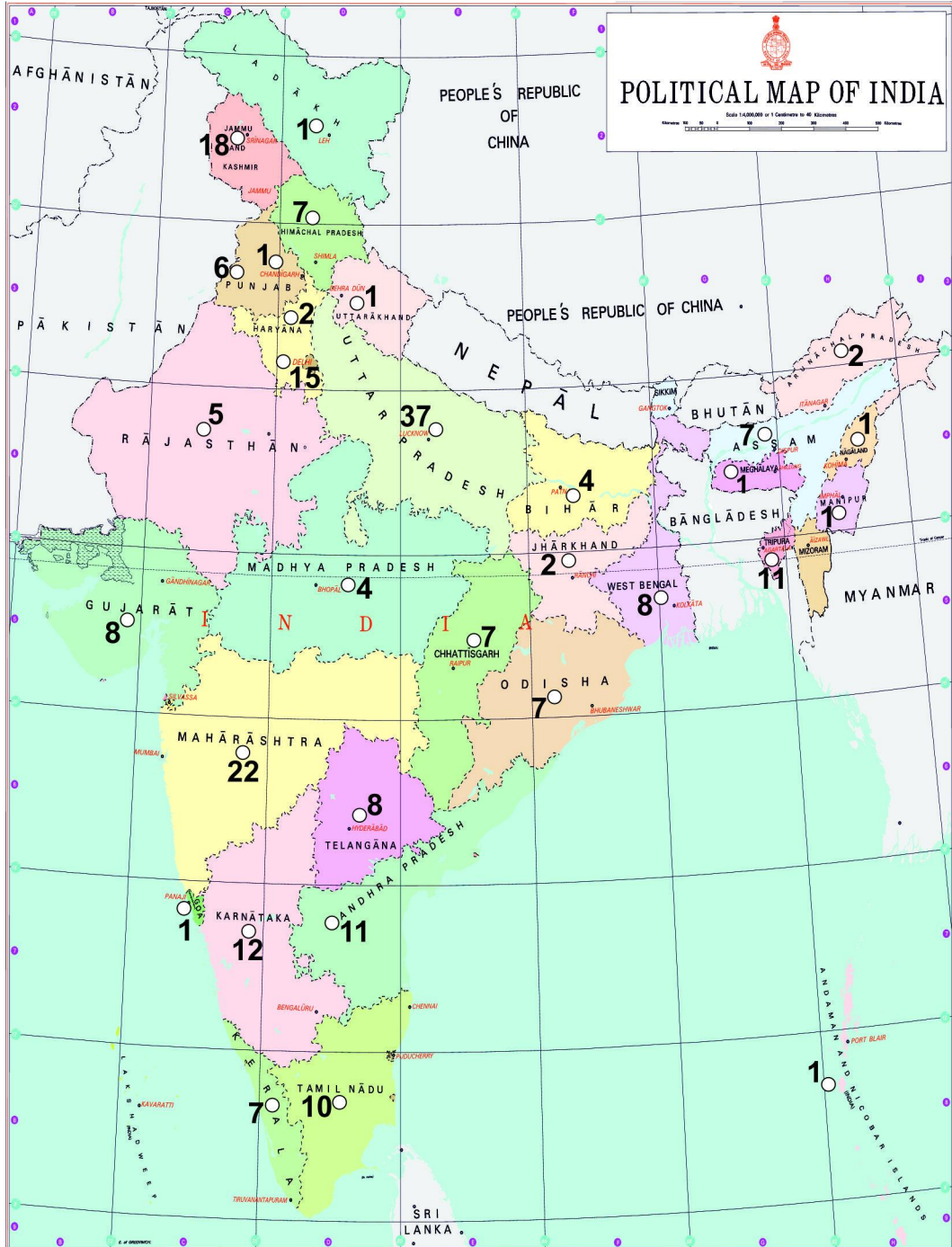
NIA	–	National Investigation Agency
NKJA	–	North Kashmir Journalists Association
NRC	–	National Register of Citizens
OC	–	Officer-in-Charge
OTV	–	Odisha Television
PCI	–	Press Council of India
PHC	–	Primary Health Centre
POCSO	–	Protection of Children from Sexual Offences
PPE	–	Personal Protective Equipment
PTI	–	Press Trust of India
SDM	–	Sub-Divisional Magistrate
SHO	–	Station House Officer
SP	–	Superintendent of Police
SSP	–	Senior Superintendent of Police
TRS	–	Telangana Rashtra Samiti
UAPA	–	Unlawful Activities Prevention Act
UT	–	Union Territory

## DISCLAIMER

This report has been prepared based on news reports mainly in English language. The targeting of the journalists as reported in vernacular press could not be covered and not every incident covered by the vernacular press was reported by the English media. Further, not every incident targeting journalists is reported in the media. This report, therefore, does not reflect the exact scale of attacks on the journalists and media during 2020. It is only indicative of the patterns and practices of attacks on the journalists and media in India.



## State/UT wise number of journalists & media targeted during 2020



Map: Courtesy@ <https://static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/userfiles/India%20-%20Political1.pdf>

# 1.

## Executive Summary

COVID-19 pandemic during 2020 exacerbated the repression on the journalists and media in India. Across the country, at least 228 journalists (including two cases against media houses) were targeted during 2020. These included 12 female journalists who had faced physical violence, online harassment/threats and cases including under the stringent Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) of 1967.

Out of the total 228 journalists, 114 journalists were attacked by the non-State actors such as mob, unidentified miscreants, members/ supporters of political parties etc or online social media users while 112 journalists and two media houses were targeted by the State agencies. A number of journalists faced multiple targeting such as registration of First Information Reports (FIRs), show cause notices for appearance, detention and questioning without registration of any formal case before the police, custodial torture, etc.

Among the States, maximum number of journalists/media organisations were targeted in Uttar Pradesh (37); followed by Maharashtra (22); Jammu and Kashmir (18); Delhi (15); Karnataka (12); Andhra Pradesh and Tripura (11 each); Tamil Nadu (10); Gujarat, Telangana and West

## HIGHLIGHTS

**No of journalists and media targeted: 228** (226 journalists and two media houses)

**No of female journalists targeted: 12**

**No of journalists targeted by the State actors: 114** (112 journalists and two media houses)

**No of journalist targeted by the non-State actors: 114**

**No of journalists killed: 13**

**No of journalists arrested or detained: 37**

**No of FIRs filed: 64**

**No of show cause notices issued: 14** (13 journalists and one newspaper)

**No of journalists physically assaulted/ threatened online: 101**

**Laws invoked: IPC, CrPC, UAPA, Epidemic Diseases Act, Disaster Management Act of 2005, Prevention of Atrocities Act, IT Act, POCSO Act, the Official Secrets Act and JJ Act**

**Top five States where journalists/media were targeted: Uttar Pradesh (37), Maharashtra (22), Jammu and Kashmir (18), Delhi (15) and Karnataka (12)**

Bengal (8 each); Assam, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala and Odisha (7 each); Punjab (6); Rajasthan (5); Bihar and Madhya Pradesh (4 each); Arunachal Pradesh, Haryana and Jharkhand (2 each); Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh, Goa, Ladakh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Uttarakhand (1 each).

Among the North Eastern States, the maximum number of journalists were targeted in Tripura with 11 (including one newspaper), followed by Assam (7), Arunachal Pradesh (2) and Manipur (1), Meghalaya (1), Nagaland (1).

A total of 13 journalists were killed, 37 journalists were arrested or detained, 64 journalists/media institutions had FIRs registered against them, 13 journalists and one newspaper were issued show-cause notices/ summons by different authorities and 101 journalists were subjected to physical assault/online threats or their houses and family members being attacked. A number of journalists faced multiple FIRs within a State as well as in different States including Arnab Goswami, Vinod Dua, Aakar Patel, Jagat Bains, Om Sharma, Ashwani Saini, and Amish Devgan. To avoid being arrested following the filing of FIRs, several journalists had to seek relief from the courts including the Supreme Court.

With respect to the killing of 13 journalists, Uttar Pradesh reported the highest with six deaths (Shubham Mani Tripathi, Vikram Joshi, Ratan Singh, Suraj Pandey, Uday Paswan and Rakesh Singh), followed by two deaths each in Assam (Bijendeeep Tanti and Parag Bhuyan) and Madhya Pradesh (Sunil Tiwari and Syed Adil Wahab), and one death each in Kerala (SV Pradeep), Rajasthan (Abhishek Soni) and Tamil Nadu (Isravel Moses). Out of the 13 journalists, 12 journalists were killed by the non-State actors/criminals while one journalist was killed by two policemen together with the non-State actors/criminals. One disturbing pattern that was particularly common with respect to the killings was the fact that prior to their deaths, some of the journalists had approached the local police seeking protection but the police had failed to take action that could have saved their lives.

Apart from the murders, 101 journalists were attacked physically and online during 2020. Of these, 42 journalists were subjected to beating by public officials including police with 35, which included five custodial torture; three (3)

journalists were allegedly beaten by the Army; two (2) journalists were allegedly beaten by forest guards; one (1) journalist was allegedly beaten by Government Railway Police (GRP) and one (1) by staff of a panchayat; 14 journalists were targeted allegedly by members/supporters of political parties; 39 journalists, including the house of one journalist was damaged and his two family members beaten, were attacked by vigilantes/mob and unidentified persons; while six (6) journalists were subjected to online harassment/threats.

Among the 37 journalists arrested, the maximum number were arrested/detained in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu with five (5) each, followed by Telangana and Uttar Pradesh with four (4) each; Jammu and Kashmir (3); two (2) each in Gujarat and West Bengal; and one each in Assam, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Jharkhand, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Ladakh, Manipur, Odisha, and Uttarakhand.

In 2020, journalists were arrested/detained for a number of frivolous reasons, such as, allegedly publishing what the police/administration termed misinformation or spreading rumour about COVID-19 or COVID-19 related issues such as migration, hardships, starvation etc; violating COVID-19 lockdown rules despite the press having been declared an essential service exempted under the lockdown; exposing corruptions including selling books exposing corruption; covering protests against Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC) or reporting on them; uploading a poem against CAA/NRC; alleged links with armed opposition groups/banned organisations; exposing criminal nexus in cattle smuggling; publishing alleged fake news; social media posts on Ram Mandir or ruling party politicians; alleged extortion; obstructing public servants from discharging their duty; alleged espionage, among others.

The laws invoked against the journalists included the Indian Penal Code (IPC) of 1860, the Code of Criminal Procedure of 1973, the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) of 1967, the Epidemic Diseases Act of 1897, the Disaster Management Act of 2005, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989, the Information Technology Act of 2000, the Motor Vehicles Act of 1988, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences

(POCSO) Act of 2012, the Official Secrets Act of 1923 and the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act of 2015.

With respect to the 64 FIRs filed, journalists were booked for exercising their fundamental right to freedom of expression and opinion while reporting or making comments in social media. Some of the reasons for which journalists across the country were booked included sting operations conducted to expose corruption by officials, politicians and hospitals; for reporting communal violence or expressing opinions about communal violence; comments against CAA; taking pictures and videos of tribals wearing masks made of palm leaves because of the lack of masks; exposing denial of food ration to migrant workers; reporting on hunger and starvation during COVID-19; reporting about politicians and political parties; using pictures of a particular place along with news stories; spreading what the authorities termed as “fake news”; uploading alleged anti-national posts in social media; allegedly indulging in unlawful activities; allegedly hurting religious sentiments; alleged defamation; reporting on the mismanagement and negligence at quarantine centres; reporting regarding problems faced by Home Guards during Covid-19; reporting about the condition of hospitals during COVID-19; or for simply expressing opinions on certain matters.

Both the State governments and the Central Government continued crackdown including by denying advertisement. On 7 July 2020, the Land and Development Office under the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs sent a notice to news agency Press Trust of India (PTI), asking it to pay over Rs 84 crore as a penalty for allegedly violating the terms under which the news agency was allotted the plot for its Parliament Street headquarters in New Delhi. The government’s notice to PTI came two weeks after the national broadcaster Prasar Bharati threatened to cancel its subscription of the news agency for its “anti-national coverage” after PTI interviewed Chinese ambassador Sun Weidong amid the border standoff between India and China.<sup>1</sup>

**Suhas Chakma**  
Director, RRAG

# 2.

## The list of journalists and media targeted during 2020

A total of 228 journalists and media houses were targeted during 2020 as given in the table below:

**Table 1 : List of journalists and media targeted**

Sl. No.	Name of journalists/media house	State	Number of journalists targeted	Nature of attack/repression in each State
1	Zubair Ahmed	A&N Islands	1	Arrest
2-11	10 journalists including Chalamashetty Srinivas	Andhra Pradesh	11	Beaten by police
12	Mr Venkata Narayana	Andhra Pradesh		Vandalisation of house by a political leader
13	Hofe Dada	Arunachal Pradesh	2	Assaulted by unknown men
14	Tongam Rina	Arunachal Pradesh		Online threats
15	Bijendeeep Tanti	Assam	7	Murder
16	Parag Bhuyan	Assam		Murder
17	Arun Paul	Assam		Beaten by police

18	Milan Mahanta	Assam		Assault by criminals
19	Rajiv Sharma	Assam		Arrest
20	Manjit Mahanta	Assam		Registration of FIR
21	Manash Jyoti Baruah	Assam		Summoned by NIA
22	Priyanshu Kumar	Bihar	4	Threatened by mob
23	Rajan Pandey	Bihar		Shot at by unknown men
24	Pawan Choudhary	Bihar		Arrest
25	Gulshan Kumar Mitho	Bihar		Registration of FIR
26	Satender Chauhan	Chandigarh	1	Attack by cadres of political party
27	Kamal Shukla	Chhattisgarh	7	Attack by cadres of political party
28	Sushil Sharma	Chhattisgarh		Arrest
29-31	Three unnamed journalists	Chhattisgarh		Registration of FIR
32	Manish Soni	Chhattisgarh		Registration of FIR
33	Neeraj Shivhare	Chhattisgarh		Show cause notice by administration

34	Navin Kumar	Delhi	15	Beaten by police
35	Ahan Penkar	Delhi		Custodial torture
36	Deepak Chaurasia	Delhi		Attack by mob
37-39	Jitendra Sharma, Neeraj Gaur and Qamar Khan	Delhi		Attack by mob
40-42	Akash, Arvind Gunasekar and Saurabh	Delhi		Attack by unidentified men
43-45	Shahid Tantray, Prabhjit Singh and a woman journalist	Delhi		Attack by mob
46	Mahender Singh Manral	Delhi		Summoned by police
47	Prashant Tandon	Delhi		Summoned by police
48	Rajeev Sharma	Delhi	Arrest	
49	Soiru Komarpant	Goa	1	Beaten by police
50	Hardik Joshi	Gujarat	8	Assaulted by mob
51	Aakar Patel	Gujarat		Arrest
52	Dhaval Patel	Gujarat		Arrest



53	Ashlin Mathew	Gujarat		Registration of FIR
54-57	Mahendrasinh Jadeja, Pratipalsinh Gohil, Prakash Rameshbhai and Imran Hothi	Gujarat		Registration of FIR
58	Akarshan Uppal	Haryana	2	Attack by unknown men
59	Naresh Khohal	Haryana		Arrest
60	Jagat Bains	Himachal Pradesh	7	Registration of FIRs
61	Om Sharma	Himachal Pradesh		Registration of FIRs
62	Ashwani Saini	Himachal Pradesh		Registration of FIRs
63	Vishal Anand	Himachal Pradesh		Registration of FIRs
64	Gauri Shankar	Himachal Pradesh		Registration of FIRs
65	Somdev Sharma	Himachal Pradesh		Registration of FIRs
66	Vinod Dua	Himachal Pradesh /Delhi		Registration of FIRs
67-69	Suhail Khan, Ashiq Mir and Mudasir	Jammu & Kashmir	18	Alleged beating by Army
70	Gowhar Ali Wani	Jammu & Kashmir		Beaten by police

71	Kamran Yousuf	Jammu & Kashmir		Beaten by police
72	Faisal Bashir	Jammu & Kashmir		Beaten by police
73	Auqib Javeed	Jammu & Kashmir		Custodial torture
74	Mushtaq Ahmad Ganai	Jammu & Kashmir		Arrest
75	Qazi Shibli	Jammu & Kashmir		Detention
76	Gowhar Geelani	Jammu & Kashmir		Registration of FIR
77	Masrat Zahra	Jammu & Kashmir		Registration of FIR under UAPA
78-79	Naseer Ganai and Haroon Nabi	Jammu & Kashmir		Summoned
80	Peerzada Ashiq	Jammu & Kashmir		Summoned
81-83	Fayaz Ahmad, Mudasir Qadri and Junaid Ahmad	Jammu & Kashmir		Beaten by police
84	Fahad Shah	Jammu & Kashmir		Summoned
85	Anand Dutta	Jharkhand	2	Custodial torture
86	Basant Sahu	Jharkhand		Arrest
87	Samrat Pradhan	Karnataka	12	Custodial torture

88-89	Nolan Pinto and Prajwal Bhat	Karnataka		Beaten by police
90-92	Ravi Kumar PS, Pradeep KM and Rudresh BV	Karnataka		Attack by mob
93	A woman journalist	Karnataka		Attack by mob
94	Rajabakshi	Karnataka		Arrest
95-98	KN Nagegowda, Sunil, HS Mahesh and Madan	Karnataka		Registration of FIRs
99	SV Pradeep	Kerala	7	Murder
100	Jomon V Xavier	Kerala		Attack by miscreants
101	Abhilash Padacherry	Kerala		Detention
102	Sudhir Chaudhary	Kerala		Registration of FIR
103-105	Nisha Purushothaman, Kamalesh KG and Prajula Kamalesh	Kerala		Online harassment
106	Tsewang Rigzin	Ladakh	1	Arrest
107	Sunil Tiwari	Madhya Pradesh	4	Murder
108	Syed Adil Wahab	Madhya Pradesh		Murder
109	KK Saxena	Madhya Pradesh		Registration of FIR

110	Tansen Tiwari	Madhya Pradesh		Registration of FIR
111	Ashish Raje	Maharashtra	22	Beaten by police
112	Narsinha Ghone	Maharashtra		Beaten by police
113	Uttkarsh Chaturvedi	Maharashtra		Beaten by police
114	Raghunath Bansode	Maharashtra		Manhandling by police
115	Arnab Goswami	Maharashtra		Registration of FIRs, arrest & attack by political party cadres
116	Samyabrata Ray Goswami	Maharashtra		Attack by political party cadres
117	Balasaheb Navgire	Maharashtra		Attack by mob
118	Rana Ayyub	Maharashtra		Online threats
119	Rahul Kulkarni	Maharashtra		Arrest
120	Gammat Bhandari	Maharashtra		Arrest
121-122	Anuj Kumar and Yashpaljit Singh	Maharashtra		Arrest
123	Rahul Zori	Maharashtra		Registration of FIR
124-129	Six journalists of Divya Marathi	Maharashtra	Registration of FIRs	

130	Pradeep Bhandari	Maharashtra		Registration of FIR
131	KV Kurmanath	Maharashtra		Summoned by NIA
132	Vidya Krishnan	Maharashtra		Online threats
133	Kishorechandra Wangkhem	Manipur	1	Arrest
134	Patricia Mukhim	Meghalaya	1	Registration of FIR
135	Prasanjit Dutta	Nagaland	1	Beaten by GRP
136	Subrat Kumar Swain	Odisha	7	Beaten by police
137-138	Two journalists	Odisha		Beaten by Forest guards
139	Mahadev Nayak	Odisha		Held hostage
				by Sarpanch
140	Bibhubhusan Pati	Odisha		Attack by unidentified men
141	A journalist (unidentified)	Odisha		Attack by hospital staff
142	Ramesh Rath	Odisha		Arrest
143	Hussan Lal	Punjab	6	Attack by supporter of a political party

144	Major Singh Punjabi	Punjab		Custodial torture
145-146	Chandanpreet Kaur and Surendra	Punjab		Manhandled allegedly by an MP
147	Gurnam Singh Sidhu	Punjab		Beaten by a mob
148	Jai Singh Chibber	Punjab		Registration of FIR
149	Abhishek Soni	Rajasthan	5	Murder
150	Veerendra Rajpurohit	Rajasthan		Registration of FIR
151	Amish Devgan	Rajasthan		Registration of FIRs
152-153	Sharat Kumar and Lokendra Singh	Rajasthan		Registration of FIR
154	Isravel Moses	Tamil Nadu	10	Murder
155	Ezhil	Tamil Nadu		Beaten by staff of a panchayat
156	M Karthi	Tamil Nadu		Attack by alleged supporters of a political party
157	Aathi Suresh	Tamil Nadu		Attack by cadres of a political party

158	S Sam Pradeep	Tamil Nadu		Attack by cadres of a political party
159	V. Anbazhagan	Tamil Nadu		Arrest
160	Damodharan	Tamil Nadu		Arrest
161-163	Andrew Sam Raja Pandian, Jerald Aruldas and M Balaji	Tamil Nadu		Arrest & detention
164	Ravi Reddy	Telangana	8	Beaten by police
165	Naveen Kumar Chintapandu	Telangana		Attack by activists of a political party
166	Mr Paramesh	Telangana		Demolition of house allegedly by supporters of an MLA
167	Mubashiruddin Khurram	Telangana		Detention
168-170	Veeramalla Satyam, Shiva and Venkateshwara Rao	Telangana		Arrest
171	Sridharan Siddhu	Telangana		Registration of FIR
172-173	Banti Das and Sevak Deb	Tripura	10	Attacked by miscreants
174	Ashish Mia	Tripura		Beaten by police

175	Parashar Biswas	Tripura		Attacked by mob
176-177	Samir Kanti Debnath and Suman Nag	Tripura		Attacked by unidentified men
178-180	Prangopal Acharya, Pintu Paul and Biswajit Debnath	Tripura		Attacked by unidentified men
181	Mr Prasantha Charkavarti	Tripura		Family members beaten and house destroyed by mob
182	Shubham Mani Tripathi	Uttar Pradesh	36	Murder
183	Vikram Joshi	Uttar Pradesh		Murder
184	Suraj Pandey	Uttar Pradesh		Murder
185	Uday Paswan	Uttar Pradesh		Murder
186	Rakesh Singh	Uttar Pradesh		Murder
187	Ratan Singh	Uttar Pradesh		Murder
188	Ankit Singh	Uttar Pradesh		Beaten by police
189	Asad Rizvi	Uttar Pradesh		Beaten by police
190	Naveen Singh	Uttar Pradesh		Attacked by activists of political party



191	Haider	Uttar Pradesh	Attacked by miscreants
192	Vinay Tiwari	Uttar Pradesh	Attacked by a village head and others
193	Ravi Choudhary	Uttar Pradesh	Attacked by mob
194	Ashwini Nigam	Uttar Pradesh	Attacked by unidentified men
195	Mohammed Irfan	Uttar Pradesh	Arrest
196	Prashant Kanojia	Uttar Pradesh	Arrest
197	Santosh Jaiswal	Uttar Pradesh	Arrest
198	Siddique Kappan	Uttar Pradesh	Arrest and jailed
199	Siddharth Varadarajan	Uttar Pradesh	Registration of FIR
200-203	Four unnamed journalists	Uttar Pradesh	Registration of FIR
204	Ajay Bhadauria	Uttar Pradesh	Registration of FIR
205	Ravindra Saxena	Uttar Pradesh	Registration of FIR
206	Aashish Avasthi	Uttar Pradesh	Registration of FIR
207	Supriya Sharma	Uttar Pradesh	Registration of FIR

208	Amitabh Rawat	Uttar Pradesh		Registration of FIR
209	Sankalp Neb	Uttar Pradesh		Registration of FIR
210-214	Ashish Tomar, Shakil Ahmed, Lakhan Singh, Aamir Khan and Moin Ahmad	Uttar Pradesh		Registration of FIR
215-216	Vijay Vineet and Subhash Rai	Uttar Pradesh		Show cause notice by DM
217	Manish Pandey	Uttar Pradesh		Summoned by police without notice
218	Rajesh Sharma	Uttarakhand	1	Arrest
219-220	Shafikul Islam and Suraj Ali Khan	West Bengal	8	Arrest
221-225	Bhupendra Pratap Singh, Abhishek Singh, Hemant Chowrasia, Ayush Kumar Singh and Umesh Kumar Sharma	West Bengal		Registration of FIR
226	Anirban Chattopadhyay	West Bengal		Summoned by police
<b>Name of Media Houses</b>				
227	Dainik Sambad newspaper	Tripura	1	Notice by DM

228	Unnamed media institutions	Uttar Pradesh	1	Registration of FIR
	<b>Grand total</b>		<b>228</b>	

## 2.1 Women journalists targeted during 2020

Out of the 228 journalists/media organizations targeted across the country in 2020, 12 were female journalists. They faced physical violence, online harassment/threats and cases including under the stringent Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA).

The details of targeting the 12 female journalists are given below:

**Table 2 : List female journalists targeted**

Sl. No.	Name of journalists	State	Nature of attacks
1	Tongam Rina	Arunachal Pradesh	Online threats
2	A woman journalist (unidentified)	Delhi	Attack by mob
3	Ashlin Mathew	Gujarat	Registration of FIR
4	Masrat Zahra	Jammu & Kashmir	Registration of FIR under UAPA
5	A woman journalist (unidentified)	Karnataka	Attack by mob
6	Nisha Purushothaman	Kerala	Online harassment
7	Samyabrata Ray Goswami	Maharashtra	Attack by political party cadres
8	Rana Ayyub	Maharashtra	Online threats
9	Vidya Krishnan	Maharashtra	Online threats
10	Patricia Mukhim	Meghalaya	Registration of FIR



11	Chandanpreet Kaur	Punjab	Manhandled allegedly by an MP
12	Supriya Sharma	Uttar Pradesh	Registration of FIR



# 3.

## Crackdown by the State actors

The crackdown on the journalists and media houses intensified during COVID-19 lockdown and the Central and State governments invoked the following laws against the journalists and media houses:

- The Indian Penal Code, 1860
  - Section 34 (Acts done by several persons in furtherance of common intention)
  - Section 116 (abetment of offence punishable with imprisonment)
  - Section 117 (abetting commission of an offence by the public or by more than ten persons)
  - Section 120-B (Punishment of criminal conspiracy)
  - Section 121 (Waging, or attempting to wage war, or abetting waging of war, against the Government of India)
  - Section 121-A (Conspiracy to commit offences punishable by section 121)
  - Section 124-A (Sedition)
  - Section 153 (wantonly giving provocation with intent to cause riot)
  - Section 153-A (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language)
  - Section 153-B (Imputations, assertions prejudicial to national-integration)
  - Section 160 (committing affray),

- Section 182 (False information, with intent to cause public servant to use his lawful power to the injury of another person)
- Section 188 (disobedience to order promulgated by public servant),
- Section 269 (Negligent act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life)
- Section 288 (Negligent conduct with respect to pulling down or repairing buildings)
- Section 290 (punishment for public nuisance in cases not otherwise provided for)
- Section 294 (public acts of obscenity)
- Section 295-A (Deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs)
- Section 270 (malignant act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life)
- Section 294 ( Obscene acts and songs)
- Section 323 (Punishment for voluntarily causing hurt)
- Section 336 (endangering life or personal safety of others).
- Section 341 (Punishment for wrongful restraint)
- Section 353 (Assault or criminal force to deter public servant from discharge of his duty)
- Section 354 (assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty)
- Section 384 (punishment for extortion)
- Section 385 (putting person in fear of injury in order to commit extortion)

- sections 388 (extortion)
- section 389 (putting person in fear of accusation of offence, in order to commit extortion)
- Section 420 (Cheating and dishonestly inducing delivery of property)
- Section 448 (Punishment for house-trespass)
- Section 451 (House-trespass in order to commit offence punishable with imprisonment)
- Section 452 ( House-trespass after preparation for hurt, assault or wrongful restraint)
- Section 465 (Punishment for forgery)
- Section 467 (Forgery of valuable security, will, etc)
- Section 468 (Forgery for purpose of cheating)
- Section 469 (Forgery for purpose of harming reputation)
- Section 471 (Using as genuine a forged document or electronic record)
- Section 500 (defamation)
- Section 501 (printing or engraving matter known to be defamatory)
- Section 503 (criminal intimidation)
- Section 504 (intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of peace),
- Section 505 (Statements conducing to public mischief)
- Section 505(1) (statement conducing public mischief)
- Section 505(1)(b) (Whoever makes, publishes or circulates any statement, rumour or report, with intent to cause, or which is likely to cause, fear or alarm to the public, or to any section of the public



whereby any person may be induced to commit an offence against the State or against the public tranquillity)

- Section 505(2) (Statements creating or promoting enmity, hatred or ill-will between classes)
- Section 505(3) (Offence under sub-section (2) committed in place of worship, etc.)
- Section 506 (punishment for criminal intimidation)

The Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973

- Section 107 (Security for keeping the peace in other cases)

The Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897

- Section 3 (Penalty. Any person disobeying any regulation or order made under this Act shall be deemed to have committed an offence punishable under section 188 of the Indian Penal Code)

The Disaster Management Act, 2005

- Section 51 (Punishment for obstruction, etc.)
- Section 54 (Punishment for false warning)

The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989

- Sections 3(1)(d) (whoever not being a member of a Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe “*garlands with footwear or parades naked or semi-naked a member of a Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe*”)
- Section 3(1)(r) (whoever not being a member of a Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe “*intentionally insults or intimidates with intent to humiliate a member of a Scheduled Caste or a Scheduled Tribe in any place within public view*”)

The Information Technology Act, 2000

- Section 66 (Computer related offences)

- Section 67 (publishing or transmitting obscene material in electronic form)
- Section 67A (obscenity)

#### The Motor Vehicles Act, 1988

- Section 192 (Using vehicle without registration)
- Section 196 (Driving uninsured vehicle)

#### The Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), 1967

- Section 13 (Punishment for unlawful activities)

#### The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012

- Section 23 (Procedure for media)

#### The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015

- Section 74 (Prohibition on disclosure of identity of children)

#### The Official Secrets Act, 1923

#### The Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, 1984

### 3.1. Arrest and detention

During 2020, at least 37 journalists were arrested or detained under various charges across the country. Several others were given relief from being arrested by the courts including the Supreme Court. Most journalists arrested/detained were in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu with five (5) each, followed by Telangana and Uttar Pradesh with four (4) each; two (2) each in Jammu and Kashmir; Gujarat and West Bengal; and one (1) each in Assam, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Jharkhand, Haryana,

*Majority of the journalists were arrested for reports relating to COVID-19.*

*Four journalists were arrested for sedition. While a journalist, Siddique Kappan, was arrested on his way to Hathras to report on rape and murder of a Dalit girl, continued to be in jail at the year's end.*

Karnataka, Kerala, Ladakh, Manipur, Odisha and Uttarakhand.

Journalists were arrested/detained for a number of reasons, namely, allegedly publishing what the police/administration termed misinformation or spreading rumour about COVID-19 or COVID-19 related issues such as migration, hardships, starvation etc; violating COVID-19 lockdown rules despite the press having been declared an essential service exempted under the lockdown; exposing corruptions including selling books exposing corruption; covering protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC); uploading a poem against CAA/NRC; alleged links with armed opposition groups/banned organisations; exposing criminal nexus in cattle smuggling; publishing alleged fake news; social media posts on Ram Mandir or ruling party politicians; alleged extortion; obstructing public servants from discharging their duty; alleged espionage, among others.

**Table 3 : List of journalists arrested/detained**

<b>Name of journalists</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Charges for arrest/detention</b>	<b>No. of journalists</b>
V. Anbazhagan	Tamil Nadu	Sections 341 and 506 IPC	1
Mubashiruddin Khurram	Telangana	Sections 147, 341, 353, 188, 149 IPC, and under Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act	1
Rajabaksh	Karnataka	Section 505 IPC	1
Pawan Choudhary	Bihar	On charges of spreading misinformation about death of a COVID-19 patient	1
Damodharan	Tamil Nadu	Cheating, forgery and preventing a public servant from discharging his duty	1
Mushtaq Ahmad Ganai	Jammu & Kashmir	On charges of violating COVID-19 lockdown rules	1

Rahul Kulkarni	Maharashtra	Spreading misinformation about a train during the COVID-19 lockdown	1
Andrew Sam Raja Pandian, Jerald Aruldas and M Balaji	Tamil Nadu	Sections 188 and 505(1) IPC and Section 3 of the Epidemic Diseases Act	3
Basant Sahu	Jharkhand	Asking a DC about Covid-19 case and circulating DC's purported denial on news channels and social media	1
Sushil Sharma	Chhattishgarh	For a report on corruption	1
Zubair Ahmed	A&N Islands	Sections 188, 269 and 505(1), and Sections 51 and 54 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005	1
Abhilash Padacherry	Kerala	Alleged link with Maoists	1
Naresh Khohal	Haryana	Sections 160, 188, 269 and 270 IPC, and Section 51 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005	1
Dhaval Patel	Gujarat	Section 124A (Sedition) IPC and Section 54 of Disaster Management Act, 2005	1
Mohammed Irfan	Uttar Pradesh	Section 151 of Code of Criminal Procedure	1

Shafikul Islam and Suraj Ali Khan	West Bengal	On charges of alleged extortion	2
Veeramalla Satyam, Shiva and Venkateshwara Rao	Telangana	Section 505 IPC and Section 54 of the Disaster Management Act	3
Rajiv Sharma	Assam	Sections 389, 384, 385, 354 and 506 IPC	1
Gammat Bhandari	Maharashtra	Several sections including a few non-bailable of the IPC and the Epidemic Diseases Act	1
Qazi Shibli	Jammu and Kashmir	Section 107 CrPC	1
Rajesh Sharma	Uttarakhand	Sections 420, 467, 468, 469, 471, 120-B, 124-A (sedition) IPC	1
Prashant Kanojia	Uttar Pradesh	Sections 153-A, 153-B, 420, 465, 468, 469, 500, 505(1) (b) and 505(2) IPC and Section 66 of IT Act, 2008	1
Tsewang Rigzin	UT of Ladakh	For comments by an unknown person on his Facebook group against a BJP leader	1

Santosh Jaiswal	Uttar Pradesh	On charges of extortion and obstructing public servants from discharging their duty	1
Anuj Kumar and Yashpaljit Singh	Maharashtra	Sections 452, 448, 323, 504, 506 and 34 IPC	2
Aakar Patel	Gujarat	Sections 153 A, 295 A, 505 (1) B, 505 (1) C, 499 and 500 IPC	1
Rajeev Sharma	Delhi	Officials Secret Act	1
Kishorechandra Wangkhem	Manipur	124-A (sedition), 153A, 503 IPC and 3(1)(r) of SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989	1
Siddique Kappan	Uttar Pradesh	Sections 124A (sedition), 153A and 295A IPC and Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act	1
Ramesh Rath	Odisha	Charged for allegedly circulating an obscene video in 2019	1
Arnab Goswami	Maharashtra	Abetment of suicides of an architect and his mother	1
<b>Total</b>			<b>37</b>

The details of the cases are given below.

### Case 1: V. Anbazhagan, Tamil Nadu

On 12 January 2020, V. Anbazhagan, a journalist, was arrested after he displayed a book titled ‘Corruption Book of Chennai Corporation’ dealing with the Tamil

Nadu government's alleged corrupt activities at a book fair in Chennai. The authorities allegedly forced the organizer of the book fair, "*Booksellers' & Publishers' Association of South India*" to remove the journalist's stall on 11 January 2020. Although the journalist vacated the stall, an FIR was lodged against him.<sup>2</sup> He was booked under sections 341 and 506 of the IPC and remanded to 10 days judicial custody by the local court.<sup>3</sup>

### **Case 2: Mubashiruddin Khurram, Telangana**

On 8 February 2020, Mubashiruddin Khurram, a journalist with Urdu daily *Siasat*, was detained by the police in Hyderabad, Telangana while covering a protest against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizen (NRC). Accusing him of being behind the protest, police detained him for 15 hours. He was allegedly questioned for being active on Twitter and also for being seen with Bhim Army chief Chandra Shekhar Azad during the latter's visit to Hyderabad.<sup>4</sup> Mubashir, along with others, were booked by police under Sections 147 (Rioting), 341 (Wrongful restraint), 353 (Assault or criminal force to deter public servant from discharge of his duty), 188 (Disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) read with 149 (Member of unlawful assembly), of the IPC, and under the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, 1984.<sup>5</sup>

### **Case 3: Rajabakshi, Karnataka**

On 18 February 2020, Rajabakshi, editor of an online news portal, was arrested along with a poet in connection with recital of a poem against the CAA and the NRC at a function in Gangavathi town in Koppal district, Karnataka. Siraj Bisaralli, the poet had allegedly recited an anti-CAA poem at the function held in January 2020 which was shared in social media by the journalist. On the basis of a complaint filed by a BJP functionary, they were booked under section 505 of the IPC (statements conducing to public mischief).<sup>6</sup>

### **Case 4: Pawan Choudhary, Bihar**

On 6 April 2020, Pawan Choudhary (30 years), a journalist for an online portal, was arrested in Munger, Bihar on the charges of spreading misinformation about death of a COVID-19 patient. He was sent to Munger jail.<sup>7</sup>

### **Case 5: Damodharan, Tamil Nadu**

On 7 April 2020, Damodharan, a TV journalist, was arrested by the police after he shot visuals of a pharmacy staff handing out medicines to patients without a doctor's prescription at Minjur Primary Health Centre (PHC) in Minjur, Tamil Nadu. He was labelled a 'fake journalist. Acting on a complaint filed by a doctor of the PHC, the police booked him for charges, which included, cheating, forgery and preventing a public servant from discharging his duty.<sup>8</sup>

### **Case 6: Mushtaq Ahmad Ganai, Jammu & Kashmir**

On 11 April 2020, Mushtaq Ahmad Ganai (34 years), a prominent journalist working for *The Kashmir Observer*, was arrested for allegedly violating COVID-19 lockdown rules and detained for two days at Sumbal police station in Bandipore district, Jammu and Kashmir. Police intercepted his car despite showing documents including his press card. The Station House Officer (SHO) identified as Muneeb-ul-Islam allegedly slapped him several times and another policeman accompanying the SHO beat him with stick. He was granted bail by the local court after two days of detention.<sup>9</sup>

### **Case 7: Rahul Kulkarni, Maharashtra**

On 15 April 2020, Rahul Kulkarni, TV journalist with *ABP Majha*, was arrested by police in Mumbai, Maharashtra for allegedly spreading misinformation about a train for migrants leaving Bandra station during the COVID-19 lockdown. The FIR was filed against Kulkarni after a large crowd of migrants, stranded in the city due to the countrywide lockdown, gathered outside Bandra railway station on 14 April 2020 under the impression that a train was leaving for their hometowns in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. In August 2020, the police dropped the case against the journalist citing "mistake in facts".<sup>10</sup>

### **Case 8: Andrew Sam Raja Pandian, Jerald Aruldas and M Balaji, Tamil Nadu**

On 23 April 2020, Andrew Sam Raja Pandian, founder of news portal *SimpliCity*, was arrested by police in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu for publishing news reports related to COVID-19. The news portal had published two stories relating to



doctors facing shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE) kit at the Coimbatore Medical College Hospital and diversion of ration items by employees of Public Distribution System (PDS) shops. After the publication of the reports, M. Sundararajan, Assistant Commissioner (Personal) of the Coimbatore Corporation filed a complaint against the portal and Pandian saying the report was ‘false’ and ‘provocative’ and that it would cause unrest amongst doctors and ration shops’ employees. Based on the complaint, Pandian was questioned and later arrested under Sections 188 and 505(1) of the IPC and Section 3 of the Epidemic Diseases Act.<sup>11</sup> The police had also detained and questioned the photographers for the portal - Jerald Aruldas and M Balaji for nine hours. Pandian was released on bail on 28 April 2021.<sup>12</sup>

### **Case 9: Basant Sahu, Jharkhand**

On 24 May 2020, journalist Basant Sahu, working with a vernacular daily in Jharkhand, was arrested allegedly for asking from the Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Seraikela-Kharsawan district, A. Dodde about the first COVID-19 case in the district. The journalist had allegedly circulated the recording of the DC denying COVID-19 case in the district. He was sent to judicial custody at Seraikela Divisional jail.<sup>13</sup>

### **Case 10: Sushil Sharma, Chhattisgarh**

On 23 May 2020, Sushil Sharma, editor of *Bastar Bandhu*, was arrested after an FIR was registered against him for a report on corruption in Kanker, Chhattisgarh. He was later released on a personal bond of Rs. 5000.<sup>14</sup>

### **Case 11: Zubair Ahmed, Andaman & Nicobar Islands**

On 27 April 2020, Zubair Ahmed, a freelance journalist, was arrested by police in Andaman & Nicobar Islands for posting a tweet questioning the local administration’s quarantine policies. The tweet reportedly referred to a news article which reported that a family was quarantined as one of the members spoke to a COVID-19 positive person on phone. The administration stated that the journalist “posted an inciting, false and instigating tweet to disrupt public harmony, violating government order and to create panic among the public.”<sup>15</sup>

Zubair was charged under sections 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant), 269 (negligent act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life) and 505 (1) that relates to publishing or circulating any statement, rumour or report of the IPC, and under sections 51 (and 54 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005). He was released on bail by a local court on 28 April 2020.<sup>16</sup>

### **Case 12: Abhilash Padacherry, Kerala**

On 1 May 2020, journalist Abhilash Padachery of Kozhikode, Kerala was detained by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) along with two youths on the charges of having links with the Maoists in Kerala. The NIA claimed that several documents supporting Left-wing extremism and Communist Party of India-Maoist were recovered from them. Abhilash was released on the same day but was summoned again for questioning on the next day. Abhilash denied having any link with the Maoists.<sup>17</sup>

### **Case 13: Naresh Khohal, Haryana**

On the night of 7 May 2020, Naresh Khohal, a photo journalist with a Hindi daily in Jhajjar, Haryana informed the local police about stone pelting in his neighbourhood. When the police did not reach the spot, Khohal went to the Jhajjar City police station and returned with a police team. However, the police arrested him later for “creating nuisance” and booked him under sections 160, 188, 269 and 270 of the IPC and section 51 of the Disaster Management Act. The case was registered on the complaint of Sandeep Kumar, a head constable at Jhajjar City police station. A government enquiry found that the FIR against the journalist was “not appropriate”.<sup>18</sup>

### **Case 14: Dhaval Patel, Gujarat**

On the night of 11 May 2020, Dhaval Patel, editor of online Gujarati news portal, *Face of Nation*, was arrested for publishing a report on possible change in leadership in Gujarat due to criticisms over rising number of COVID-19 cases in the State. In his report, Patel claimed that Union Minister Mansukh Mandaviya was summoned by the BJP high command and that there was likelihood to replace

Chief Minister Vijay Rupani. He was booked under section 124A (Sedition) of the IPC and section 54 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005. On 6 November 2020, the Gujarat High Court quashed the sedition case after Patel filed an unconditional apology “without admission of any guilt” for the offending article. Patel had remained in Sabarmati Central Jail for 15 days.<sup>19</sup>

### **Case 15: Mohammed Irfan, Uttar Pradesh**

On 14 May 2020, Mohammed Irfan, a journalist with *Jansadesh Times*, was allegedly harassed, arrested and jailed for taking photographs at a Covid-19 screening centre for migrants set up at Harua block in Varanasi district, Uttar Pradesh. He was sent to Baragaon police station by the district officials, where he was allegedly questioned for two hours, photographs on his phone deleted and charged under Section 151 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. The journalist secured bail on 12 June 2020.<sup>20</sup>

### **Case 16: Shafikul Islam and Suraj Ali Khan, West Bengal**

On 28 June 2020, Shafikul Islam, editor and owner of *Arambagh TV* and reporter Suraj Ali Khan were arrested on the charges of alleged extortion by police at Arambagh in Hoogly district, West Bengal. Shafikul Islam’s wife Alima Khatun was also arrested. The journalists had covered corruption allegations in connection with relief funds for Cyclone Amphan.<sup>21</sup> On 14 August 2020, Shafikul Islam, Alima Khatun and Suraj Ali Khan were granted bail by the Calcutta High Court.<sup>22</sup>

### **Case 17: Veeramalla Satyam, Shiva and Venkateshwara Rao, Telangana**

On 6 July 2020, Veeramalla Satyam, editor of Telugu newspaper *Aaadab Telangana*, Shiva, a sub-editor from Hyderabad and reporter Venkateshwara Rao from Khammam were arrested for allegedly publishing fake news and spreading rumours about the health status of Chief Minister K. Chandrasekhar Rao. The newspaper had published a news report that the Chief Minister had tested positive for coronavirus. The police registered a case under Section 505 of the IPC and Section 54 of the Disaster Management Act against the publication and the editor based on a complaint filed by a person.<sup>23</sup>

### **Case 18: Rajiv Sharma, Assam**

On 16 July 2020, Rajiv Sharma, General Secretary of Dhubri Press Club and correspondent for a vernacular news channel *DY365*, was arrested by police for reporting against cattle smuggling in Assam. Sharma was arrested in a case (No 903/2020) registered at Dhubri police station under sections 389, 384, 385, 354 and 506 of the IPC on the basis of an FIR lodged by the Dhubri Divisional Forest Officer (DFO), Biswajit Roy.<sup>24</sup> Unable to bear the pain of his son's arrest, Sharma's 64-year-old father died of cardiac arrest on the same day. Following widespread condemnation, the Assam Police started a Crime Investigation Department (CID) investigation into his arrest.<sup>25</sup>

### **Case 19: Gammat Bhandari, Maharashtra**

On 22 July 2020, Gammat Bhandari, a publisher, editor and journalist of *Parshwabhooni*, was arrested by a police team from his office and taken to a police station in Beed, Maharashtra. He was booked under several sections including a few non-bailable charges of the IPC and the Epidemic Diseases Act for publishing a report about a police officer who violated lockdown restrictions. He was sent to judicial custody and released a day later.<sup>26</sup>

### **Case 20: Qazi Shibli, Jammu & Kashmir**

On 31 July 2020, Qazi Shibli, editor of *The Kashmiriyat*, an Anantnag based news website, was detained at Shergari police station in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir. He was summoned by the cyber police, Srinagar for questioning. The family of the editor also travelled along with him but they were told to return home as he was detained. He was booked under section 107 CrPC (Security for keeping the peace in other cases) and was sent to judicial custody at Srinagar Central Jail on 3 August 2020. Qazi was also arrested in July 2019 under the Public Safety Act and detained at a jail in Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh for nine months. He was released on 13 April 2020 after his detention was commuted during the decongestion of jails across India.<sup>27</sup>

### **Case 21: Rajesh Sharma, Uttarakhand**

On the night of 31 July 2020, Rajesh Sharma, a journalist, was arrested on the basis of an FIR filed by a doctor at the Nehru Colony police station in Dehradun, Uttarakhand. The complainant, Dr Harendra Rawat alleged that the journalist had tarnished his image and his wife Dr Savita Rawat by publishing fake news against them. Police booked Sharma under Sections 420, 467, 468, 469, 471, 120-B, 124-A (sedition) of the IPC. On 3 September 2020, the Uttarakhand High Court granted interim bail to Sharma. The High Court said that slapping sedition charge against the journalist was disturbing.<sup>28</sup>

### **Case 22: Prashant Kanojia, Uttar Pradesh**

On 18 August 2020, Prashant Kanojia, a Delhi-based freelance journalist, was arrested by the Uttar Pradesh Police from his Delhi residence in connection with two FIRs registered at Hazratganj police station in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh for sharing distorted posts about Ram Mandir in social media. He was booked under sections 153-A, 153-B, 420, 465, 468, 469, 500, 505(1)(b) and 505(2) of the IPC and section 66 of the Information Technology (Amendment) Act, 2008.<sup>29</sup> On 21 October 2020, the Allahabad High Court released him on bail.<sup>30</sup> Earlier on 7 April 2020, the Uttar Pradesh Police lodged an FIR against Prashant Kanojia for allegedly making ‘objectionable remarks’ against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on social media and booked him under sections 500, 501 and 505(1)(b) of the IPC and sections of the Information Technology Act.<sup>31</sup>

### **Case 23: Tsewang Rigzin, UT of Ladakh**

On 5 September 2020, Tsewang Rigzin, a correspondent from Leh for the Jammu-based daily *State Times*, was arrested by the Ladakh Police on the basis of a complaint lodged by Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) Member of Parliament (MP) Jamyang Tsering Namgyal. Rigzin was arrested as an administrator of the Facebook group, ‘*Ladakh in the Media*’ after a member, whom the police failed to trace, had posted a comment in the group on the BJP legislator on 3 September 2020. Rigzin was granted bail on the same evening.<sup>32</sup>

### **Case 24: Santosh Jaiswal, Uttar Pradesh**

On 4 September 2020, journalist Santosh Jaiswal was arrested on false charges of extortion and obstructing public servants from discharging their duty after he took photographs of some children mopping the floor at Oodpur primary school in Azamgarh district, Uttar Pradesh. The police took both the journalist and the school principal, Radhey Shyam Yadav to the police station, where the school principal lodged a complaint against Jaiswal alleging that he came to the school and ordered some school children to mop the floor and took their photographs.<sup>33</sup>

### **Case 25: Anuj Kumar and Yashpaljit Singh, Maharashtra**

In early September 2020, Anuj Kumar and Yashpaljit Singh, reporter and video journalist respectively with *Republic TV* were arrested along with their driver Pradeep Dilip Dhanavade for allegedly trespassing on the farmhouse of Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray at Bhilavale in Raigad district, Maharashtra. They were booked under sections 452, 448, 323, 504, 506 and 34 of the IPC.<sup>34</sup>

### **Case 26: Aakar Patel, Gujarat**

On 22 September 2020, journalist Aakar Patel was arrested by police in connection with an FIR filed by a BJP MLA in Surat, Gujarat for posting tweets. In his complaint, the BJP Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) alleged that Patel published three tweets that were objectionable to the Ghanchi community in Gujarat. The FIR was registered under Sections 153 A, 295 A, 505 (1) B, 505 (1) C, 499 and 500 of the IPC.<sup>35</sup> Earlier on 4 June 2020, an FIR was registered against journalist and human rights activist Aakar Patel by police in Bangalore, Karnataka for allegedly suggesting that marginalised groups like Muslims, Dalit, Advasis and women in India should emulate the protests being held in the United States against the police's killing of an African-American man named George Floyd. He was booked under sections 505(1)(b), 153 and 117 of the IPC.<sup>36</sup>

### **Case 27: Rajeev Sharma, Delhi**

On 14 September 2020, Rajeev Sharma (61 years), a freelance journalist, was arrested in an espionage case under the Official Secrets Act, 1923 for allegedly

passing on sensitive information to Chinese intelligence in exchange for money. Sharma was granted bail by the Delhi High Court on 4 December 2020.<sup>37</sup>

### **Case 28: Kishorechandra Wangkhem, Manipur**

On 29 September 2020, journalist Kishorechandra Wangkhem was arrested by police on the charge of sedition for his comment on a social media on the basis of a complaint filed by the Maram Women’s Union (MWU) at Senapati police station in Manipur. MWU accused the journalist of using “communally derogatory remark against the Maram tribe. Police booked him under sections 124-A (sedition), 153A, 503 of the IPC and 3(1)(r) of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. On 12 September 2020, the Senapati sessions court granted him anticipatory bail till 28 September 2020. But he was rearrested immediately after his bail expired.<sup>38</sup> He was lodged at the Senapati jail and released on bail by Special Judge, Senapati on 8 December 2020. Kishorchandra and his wife accused the State Government of Manipur of vendetta.<sup>39</sup>

### **Case 29: Siddique Kappan, Uttar Pradesh**

On 5 October 2020, Siddique Kappan (41 years), Secretary of the Kerala Union of Working Journalists (KUWJ) and working with Malayalam news websites like *azhimukham.com*, was arrested by Uttar Pradesh Police from a toll plaza in Mathura while he was going to Hathras to meet the kin of the deceased Dalit woman who was killed after gang rape by four upper-caste men in September 2020. Kappan was booked under the UAPA and charged with sedition for alleged links with the Popular Front of India and its students’ organisation, Campus Front of India.<sup>40</sup> He was denied bail and continued to be in jail at the year’s end.

### **Case 30: Ramesh Rath, Odisha**

On 15 October 2020, Ramesh Rath, senior reporter of *Odisha Television* (OTV), was arrested by police in Keonjhar district, Odisha. He was allegedly charged with having circulated an obscene video in 2019.<sup>41</sup> OTV alleged that the journalist was targeted after OTV telecast an expose on Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik’s claims of an aerial survey of the flood-hit areas of the state, which was based on

information gathered through Right to Information Act. The channel reported that Patnaik's flying time was just 19 minutes. Rath was later released and asked to report to a police station in Keonjhar district on 21 October 2020.<sup>42</sup>

### **Case 31: Arnab Goswami, Maharashtra**

On 4 November 2020, Arnab Goswami, Editor-in-Chief of *Republic TV*, was arrested by the Mumbai Police in connection with abetment of suicides of an architect and his mother in 2018 that was reopened by the Maharashtra Police.<sup>43</sup> He was released from Taloja Central Jail on interim bail granted by the Supreme Court on 11 November 2020.<sup>44</sup> Earlier on 22 April 2020 and 2 May 2020 respectively, two FIRs were registered against Arnab Goswami, Editor-in-Chief of the *Republic TV*, by the Mumbai Police under Sections 153-A and 295-A of the IPC in connection with a TV show aired on 29 April 2020 regarding his comments on migrants gathering outside Bandra railway station on 14 April 2020. Further, multiple FIRs were filed against him in various States including in Maharashtra over a TV show aired on 21 April 2020, wherein he questioned Congress President Sonia Gandhi regarding the mob lynching of two *sadhus* (Hindu priests) and their driver in Palghar, Maharashtra.<sup>45</sup> On 19 May 2020, the Supreme Court stayed the multiple FIRs filed against him except the initial FIR registered in Nagpur, Maharashtra.<sup>46</sup>

## **3.2. Registration of FIRs**

Apart from the arrested journalists, First Information Reports were registered against 64 journalists and media organisations across the country during 2020. These included FIRs against 63 journalists and one (1) FIR against an unnamed media organisations. In some cases, multiple FIRs were lodged against some journalists in different states.

Uttar Pradesh reported the highest number of FIRs registered against journalists with 17 including one FIR against media institutions; followed by Maharashtra (8); Himachal Pradesh (7); Gujarat and West Bengal (5 each); Chhattisgarh, Karnataka and Rajasthan (4 each); Jammu and Kashmir and Madhya Pradesh (2 each); and Assam; Bihar; Kerala; Meghalaya; Punjab; and Telangana (1 each).



Journalists were booked for exercising their fundamental right to freedom of expression and opinion while reporting or making comments in social media. Some of the reasons for which journalists across the country were booked included sting operations conducted to expose corruption by officials, politicians and hospitals; for reporting communal violence or expressing opinions about communal violence; comments against CAA; taking pictures and videos of tribals wearing masks made of palm leaves because of the lack of masks; exposing denial of food ration to migrant workers; reporting on hunger and starvation during COVID-19; reporting about politicians and political parties; using pictures of a particular place along with news stories; spreading what the authorities termed as “fake news”; uploading alleged anti-national posts in social media; allegedly indulging in unlawful activities; allegedly hurting religious sentiments; alleged defamation; reporting on the mismanagement and negligence at quarantine centres; reporting regarding problems faced by Home Guards during Covid-19; reporting about the condition of hospitals during COVID-19; or for simply expressing opinions on certain matters.

*During 2020, police registered FIRs against 63 journalists across the country. Uttar Pradesh reported the highest with 17 FIRs. In some cases, multiple FIRs were lodged against a journalist within a State or in different states.*

**Table 4 : List of journalists against whom FIRs were filed**

Name of journalists	State	Charges	No. of journalists
Bhupendra Pratap Singh, Abhishek Singh, Hemant Chowrasia, Ayush Kumar Singh and Umesh Kumar Sharma	West Bengal	Alleged extortion	5
Sridharan Siddhu	Telangana	Section 153-A IPC	1

Manjit Mahanta	Assam	Sections 120-B, 121-A, 121, 294, 353, 505 and 34 IPC	1 1
Three unnamed journalists	Chhattisgarh	Section 188 IPC	3
KK Saxena	Madhya Pradesh	Sections 188, 269 and 270 IPC	1
Jagat Bains	Himachal Pradesh	Sections 188, 269 and 270 IPC	1
Om Sharma	Himachal Pradesh	Section 54 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005 and Sections 182, 188, 269 and 336 IPC, and Section 188 of the IPC and Section 66 of IT Act, 2000	1
Siddharth Varadarajan	Uttar Pradesh	Sections 188 and 505(2) IPC	1
Ashlin Mathew	Gujarat	Sections 295, 505-1 (B), 35 and 120 B IPC	1
Ashwani Saini	Himachal Pradesh	Section 188, 451, 504 and 506 IPC and Section 54 of the Disaster Management Act, and Sections 192 and 196 of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988	1

Vishal Anand	Himachal Pradesh	Accused of misrepresentation	1
Four unnamed journalists	Uttar Pradesh	Sections 505(1)(b) and 188 IPC	4
Masrat Zahra	Jammu & Kashmir	Section 13 UAPA and section 505 IPC	1
Gowhar Geelani	Jammu & Kashmir	Accused of indulging in unlawful activities through social media that are “prejudicial to the national integrity, sovereignty and security of India	1
KN Nagegowda, Sunil, HS Mahesh and Madan	Karnataka	Alleged assault and abuse of an MLC	4
Gauri Shankar	Himachal Pradesh	Accused of spreading fake news by the SDM	1
Sudhir Chaudhary	Kerala	Section 295A IPC	1
Gulshan Kumar Mitho	Bihar	Accused of disturbing public order	1
Ajay Bhadauria	Uttar Pradesh	Accused of circulating false news	1
Somdev Sharma	Himachal	Accused of writing a false report	1
Rahul Zori	Maharashtra	Penal sections for obstructing a public servant from doing his duty, defamation,	1

		publishing matter that is known to be defamatory	
Ravindra Saxena	Uttar Pradesh	SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act and Disaster Management Act	1
Aashish Avasthi	Uttar Pradesh	FIR filed for reporting about problems being faced by Home Guards in Uttar Pradesh	1
Jai Singh Chibber	Punjab	Section 188 and 505 IPC and Section 67A of IT Act	1
Tansen Tiwari	Madhya Pradesh	Section 294 and 500 IPC and Section 67 of IT Act	1
Veerendra Rajpurohit	Rajasthan	Sections 388, 116, 500, 501, 506 IPC and IT Act	1
Vinod Dua	Himachal Pradesh, Delhi	Sections 290, 505, 505(2) and 124A IPC	1
Supriya Sharma	Uttar Pradesh	Sections 269, 501 IPC and Sections 3 (1)(d) and 3(1)(r) of SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act	1

Amish Devgan	Rajasthan	Sections 295A, 153A, 505 and 34 IPC	1
Unnamed media institutions	Uttar Pradesh	Sections 188, 505 and 288 IPC; Section 23 of POCSO Act, Section 74 of Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 and Section 3 of Epidemic Diseases Act	1
Six journalists of Divya Marathi	Maharashtra	Alleged mis-reporting and rumour-mongering	6
Patricia Mukhim	Meghalaya	Section 153A, 500 and 505(3) IPC	1
Amitabh Rawat	Uttar Pradesh	Sections 506, 504, 389, and 385 IPC and Section 67 of IT Act	1
Sankalp Neb	Uttar Pradesh	Epidemic Diseases Act and IT Act	1
Manish Soni	Chhattisgarh	Sections 153-A, 153-B and 504 IPC	1
Ashish Tomar, Shakil Ahmed, Lakhan Singh, Aamir Khan and Moin Ahmad	Uttar Pradesh	Sections 153A, 268 and 503 IPC and Section 66A of IT Act	5
Sharat Kumar and Lokendra Singh	Rajasthan	Alleged circulating wrong or non-verified news, conspiracy and under IT Act	2

Pradeep Bhandari	Maharashtra	Sections 353, 188 IPC	1
Mahendrasinh Jadeja, Pratipsinh Gohil, Prakash Rameshbhai and Imran Hothi	Gujarat	IT Act, obstructing public servant in discharging public functions, etc	4
<b>Total</b>			<b>64</b>

The details of FIRs lodged against 64 journalists including one case against an unnamed media institution across India during 2020 are given below.

### **Case 1: Bhupendra Pratap Singh, Abhishek Singh, Hemant Chowrasia, Ayush Kumar Singh and Umesh Kumar Sharma, West Bengal**

On 2 January 2020, Kolkata Police registered an FIR against four senior TV journalists namely Bhupendra Pratap Singh, Abhishek Singh, Hemant Chowrasia and Ayush Kumar Singh after they carried out a sting operation to videograph state ministers and Trinamool Congress MLAs allegedly taking bribes. The police claimed the journalists were trying to extort money from the politicians. Later, name of another senior journalist Umesh Kumar Sharma was added to the FIR. On 10 February 2020, the Supreme Court restrained the West Bengal Police from arresting them.<sup>47</sup>

### **Case 2: Sridharan Siddhu, Telangana**

On 31 January 2020, Sridharan Siddhu, a Hyderabad-based journalist, was booked by police on charges of spreading religious hatred for his report on the communal violence that took place on the night of 12 January 2020 in Bhisna town in Adilabad district, Telangana. The FIR (No. 49/2020) against the journalist was registered under section 153-A of the IPC after he posted an investigative video report on his Facebook account on 29 January relating to the communal violence.<sup>48</sup>

### **Case 3: Manjit Mahanta, Assam**

In February 2020, a sedition case was registered against senior journalist Manjit Mahanta at Tinsukia police station in Assam for his comment against the CAA at a rally at Panitola in Tinsukia district. Police suo motu registered the case (No 158/2020) under sections 120-B, 121-A, 121, 294, 353, 505 and 34 of the IPC. The police sent a summon to him with the direction to appear before Gitanagar police station in Guwahati. The journalist was also booked for sedition for his comments on the citizenship bill in January 2019.<sup>49</sup>

### **Case 4: Three unnamed journalists, Chhattisgarh**

In March 2020, the Chhattisgarh police registered a case against three journalists (names not disclosed by the police in the FIR) for taking pictures and videos of tribals wearing masks made of palm leaves during COVID-19 at Amabeda village in Kanker district, Chhattisgarh. The journalists were booked under section 188 of the IPC at Amabeda police station after the pictures went viral in social media.<sup>50</sup>

### **Case 5: KK Saxena, Madhya Pradesh**

On 27 March 2020, an FIR was lodged in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh against journalist KK Saxena for having attended Congress leader Kamal Nath's last press conference as chief minister on 20 March 2020 despite her daughter being a Covid suspect.<sup>51</sup> The journalist was booked under sections 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant), 269 (negligent act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life) and 270 (malignant act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life) of the IPC.<sup>52</sup>

### **Case 6: Jagat Bains, Himachal Pradesh**

In March-April 2020, three FIRs were registered against Jagat Bains (34 years), a reporter with *News18 Himachal*, for his reporting on COVID-19 related issues including denial of ration to the migrant workers in Solan district, Himachal Pradesh. On 30 March 2020, the police registered an FIR against him for reporting about rations not reaching to migrant workers in parts of Nalagarh subdivision in Solan district. His curfew pass was also revoked. Another FIR was registered for his report dated 25 April 2020 about denial of rations to the

migrant workers in Sallewal village in the district. The report made desired impact as the district administration supplied ration the next day but Bains was booked under Sections 188, 269 and 270 of the IPC. The third FIR was filed against Mr Bains for a report he did on 23 April 2020 where he had reported on private vehicles mysteriously crossing the sealed borders in Baddi subdivision on the night of 22 April 2020. The FIR stated that Bains “Press reporter Bains circulated videos of the administration without any reason. He also violated lockdown guidelines.”<sup>53</sup>

### **Case 7: Om Sharma, Himachal Pradesh**

In March-April 2020, three FIRs were registered against journalist Om Sharma (38 years), a reporter for *Divya Himachal*, for his reporting on the COVID-19 related issues in Himachal Pradesh. On 29 March 2020, police filed an FIR against Sharma for reporting live on Facebook from Baddi, an industrial town in Solan district, about hunger faced by the migrant workers who were protesting on the roadside. The FIR termed Sharma’s reporting as “sensational/fake news on social media” and he was booked under section 54 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005 and sections 182, 188, 269 and 336 of the IPC. Subsequently, two more FIRs were registered against Sharma. On 26 April 2020, police registered an FIR against him for sharing a report from the Hindi daily *Amar Ujala* on Facebook which claimed that the government had ordered businesses to close down for a few months in case any employee tested positive for the corona virus. He was booked under Sections 182 and 188 of the IPC and Section 54 of the Disaster Management Act. Another FIR was registered on 27 April 2020 for criticizing the administration of Solan district for creating confusion with respect to curfew relaxation, and he was booked under Section 188 of the IPC and Section 66 of the Information Technology Act, 2000.<sup>54</sup>

### **Case 8: Siddharth Varadarajan, Uttar Pradesh**

On 1 April 2020, the Uttar Pradesh Police registered an FIR against Siddharth Varadarajan, one of the founding editors of news website, *The Wire*, under Sections 188 and 505(2) of the IPC for reporting that State Chief Minister Adityanath had attended a public religious event in Ayodhya on 25 March 2020 after the



Prime Minister had announced a national lockdown to deal with the Coronavirus. The FIR was filed in Faizabad based on the complaint of an individual.<sup>55</sup>

### **Case 9: Ashlin Mathew, Gujarat**

On 14 April 2020, Ashlin Mathew, news editor of National Herald newspaper, was booked along with former Indian Administrative Service officer Kannan Gopinathan and senior advocate Prashant Bhushan by Rajkot police, Gujarat for posting and retweeting a tweet on 28 March 2020. As per the FIR lodged at Bhaktinagar police station based on a complaint by an army veteran, the tweet “insulted a religion with intention to create fear or alarm among people”. The FIR was filed under sections 295 (injuring or defiling place of worship with intention to insult the religion of any class), 505 (1) (B) (intent to cause fear or alarm among public), 35 (acts done by several persons in furtherance of common intention) and 120B (criminal conspiracy) of the IPC.<sup>56</sup>

### **Case 10: Ashwani Saini, Himachal Pradesh**

In April 2020, five FIRs were registered against journalist Ashwani Saini in Mandi district, Himachal Pradesh. On 8 April 2020, Saini, who contributes video reports for the Facebook Page *Mandi Live* and freelances for Dainik Jagran, was booked under Section 188 of the IPC and Section 54 of the Disaster Management Act for reporting on the failure of the administration to supply rations to migrant workers in Bharajwanoo village under Sundernagar subdivision in Mandi district. The FIR was filed by Rahul Chauhan, Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) of Sundernagar, who accused Saini of spreading ‘fake news’. Saini wrote letters to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and State Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur, accusing the SDM of trying to ‘gag the press’. On 13 April 2020, three FIRs were registered against Saini when he and another reporter from Divya Himachal did video reports on brick kilns in Sundernagar, which were operating despite lockdown. Following Saini’s reports, the police stopped the work at the kilns and filed FIRs against the kiln owners. But the police also booked Saini under Sections 451, 504, 506 and 188 of the IPC. Further, his car was seized by the police on 14 April 2020 to deter him from traveling and reporting and he was booked for the fifth time under Section 188 of the IPC, and Sections 192 and 196 of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988.<sup>57</sup>

### **Case 11: Vishal Anand, Himachal Pradesh**

In mid-April 2020, Vishal Anand (49 years), a journalist associated with a national news channel, was accused of misrepresentation and booked for using pictures of Gandhi Chowk in Dalhousie for a story on Covid-19 in Chamba district, Himachal Pradesh. There was no basis for the FIR as Dalhousie falls in Chamba district. Soon after the first FIR, he told a media outlet that lodging such complaints only indicated that “some officials are misusing power and trying to intimidate journalists” and for this comment, another FIR was filed against him.<sup>58</sup>

### **Case 12: Four unnamed journalists, Uttar Pradesh**

On 13 April 2020, an FIR was registered at Gopiganj police station in Bhadohi district, Uttar Pradesh against four journalists for reporting that a woman had thrown her five children into a river because of lockdown-induced hunger. The FIR only mentioned editors and reporters from news agency Indo-Asian News Service (IANS) and Business Insider without naming them. The four journalists were booked under sections 505(1)(b) and 188 of the IPC.<sup>59</sup> On 10 July 2020, the Press Council of India (PCI) took suo motu cognizance and called for comments from the Uttar Pradesh government regarding registration of FIR against the four journalists.<sup>60</sup>

### **Case 13: Masrat Zahra, Jammu & Kashmir**

On 18 April 2020, the Jammu and Kashmir Police booked Masrat Zahra (26 years), a freelance photojournalist, under the UAPA for her alleged “anti-national” posts in social media. The press release issued by the police said “*Cyber Police Station received information through reliable sources that one Facebook user namely Masrat Zahra is uploading anti-national posts with criminal intention to induce the youth and to promote offences against public tranquility.*” An FIR (No. 10/2020) was registered against her under section 13 of the UAPA and section 505 of the IPC at Cyber Police Station, Kashmir Zone in Srinagar.<sup>61</sup>

### **Case 14: Gowhar Geelani, Jammu & Kashmir**

On 21 April 2020, Gowhar Geelani, journalist and author, was booked by police for allegedly “indulging in unlawful activities” through social media that are

“prejudicial to the national integrity, sovereignty and security of India”. The police claimed that Geelani had been glorifying terrorism in the Kashmir Valley through his social media posts and an FIR was registered against him at the Cyber Police Station in Srinagar.<sup>62</sup>

### **Case 15: KN Nagegowda, Sunil, HS Mahesh and Madan, Karnataka**

On 29 April 2020, an FIR was filed against four journalists identified as K N Nagegowda, Sunil, H S Mahesh and Madan based on a complaint filed by Krishik Gowda, son of Member of Legislative Council, KT Srikantegowda in Mandya, Karnataka. The complaint alleged assault and abuse of Srikantegowda by the four journalists at Ambedkar Bhavan during COVID-19 tests on the journalists.<sup>63</sup>

### **Case 16: Gauri Shankar, Himachal Pradesh**

In the last week of April 2020, a complaint was filed against Gauri Shankar, a *Dainik Bhaskar* reporter based in Kullu district, Himachal Pradesh for reporting that migrant workers in the district were starving as a result of the lockdown.<sup>64</sup> The journalist was accused of spreading fake news by the SDM even though his story was proven to be true.<sup>65</sup>

### **Case 17: Sudhir Chaudhary, Kerala**

On 7 May 2020, the Kerala Police filed an FIR against Sudhir Chaudhary, Editor-in-Chief of *Zee News* under non-bailable sections for presenting a controversial programme that allegedly offended the Muslim religion in his prime-time show Daily News and Analysis. The FIR read, “On 11 March 2020, Zee News TV channel broadcast DNA programme. The accused presented a programme that is offending the Muslim religion.” Chaudhary had presented a “jihad chart” detailing different “types of jihad” in a flowchart. The case was registered under Section 295A of the IPC following a complaint by advocate P Gavas, State Secretary of the All India Youth Federation, an organisation affiliated to the Communist Party of India.<sup>66</sup>

### **Case 18: Gulshan Kumar Mitho, Bihar**

On 20 May 2020, an FIR was registered against journalist Gulshan Kumar Mitho by police in Sitamarhi district, Bihar for reporting mismanagement at a

quarantine centre set up in a school. He was accused of provoking patients to post a picture in his newspaper, which disturbed public order. Kumar had reported that the patients were not given proper food for hours and that the toilets were inadequate for large number of patients.<sup>67</sup>

### **Case 19: Ajay Bhadauria, Uttar Pradesh**

On 13 May 2020, an FIR was registered against journalist Ajay Bhadauria (57 years) for a tweet in which he pointed out that a community kitchen was closed down at Vijaypur in Fatehpur district, Uttar Pradesh. The police booked him for circulating false news based on a complaint by the SDM. In a press note released on 7 June 2020, the Fatehpur District Magistrate claimed that Bhadauria, who has been a journalist for 32 years, “is not associated with any print or electronic media in the year 2020” and accused Bhadauria of using “his personal Twitter account to besmirch the administration by tweeting one-sided, delusional rumours.”<sup>68</sup>

### **Case 20: Somdev Sharma, Himachal Pradesh**

On 16 May 2020, police booked Somdev Sharma, a correspondent for *Punjab Kesari*, after he reported on the administration’s laxity in quarantining inter-state travellers in Kullu district, Himachal Pradesh. Gaurav Singh, Superintendent of Police, Kullu district stated that Sharma had falsely written in his report that a person entered the district illegally without a pass and hence created panic.<sup>69</sup>

### **Case 21: Rahul Zori, Maharashtra**

On 16 May 2020, police booked Rahul Zori, reporter with news channel *TV9 Marathi*, for reporting on irregularities in management of Hadakhed relief camp for migrants at Shirpur tehsil in Dhule district, Maharashtra. The FIR was filed on a complaint by a Tehsildar, who accused Zori of defaming him by alleging corruption at Hadakhed camp as well as trying to obstruct official work by questioning him. Zori was booked under penal sections for obstructing a public servant from doing his duty, defamation, publishing matter that is known to be defamatory. Zori stood by his story.<sup>70</sup>

### **Case 22: Ravindra Saxena, Uttar Pradesh**

On 18 May 2020, an FIR was registered against Ravindra Saxena, a journalist with *Today-24* news portal, for reporting mismanagement at a quarantine centre in Sitapur district, Uttar Pradesh. In a video report, Saxena spoke to people at a quarantine centre in Maholi tehsil in the district, who alleged that they were served rotten rice. The FIR was registered on the complaint of district administration filed through a Scheduled Caste employee at the SDM office accusing the journalist of violating the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act and the Disaster Management Act.<sup>71</sup>

### **Case 23: Aashish Avasthi, Uttar Pradesh**

In May 2020, an FIR was lodged against Aashish Avasthi, editor of *Media Break*, for a report regarding problems being faced by Home Guards in Uttar Pradesh during COVID-19. On 20 May 2020, the PCI sought a report from the State Government with respect to the FIR.<sup>72</sup>

### **Case 24: Jai Singh Chibber, Punjab**

On 22 May 2020, Jai Singh Chibber, a reporter with *Punjabi Jagran* newspaper, was booked by police for writing a news report about an unnamed Congress minister in Punjab following the suggestions of astrologers. Police registered a case against Chibber under Sections 188 and 505 of the IPC and Section 67A of the Information Technology Act.<sup>73</sup> On 9 July 2020, the PCI took suo-motu cognizance and sought a report from the State Government.<sup>74</sup>

### **Case 25: Tansen Tiwari, Madhya Pradesh**

On 24 May 2020, Tansen Tiwari (66 years), a veteran journalist, was booked by Madhya Pradesh police for allegedly referring to BJP leaders as *gappu* (braggart) and *tadipar* (externed) in a social media post. Police registered the case after a local BJP leader and advocate, Awdesh Singh Bhadauria, reported the matter to Gola Ka Mandir police station. The complaint alleged that on 22 May 2020 Tiwari wrote a post on Facebook which indirectly described Prime Minister Narendra Modi as *gappu* and other party leaders as *tadipar* and *balatkari* (rapist). However, Tiwari's social media post did not name any BJP leader. He was booked

under sections 294 and 500 of the IPC and section 67 of the Information Technology Act.<sup>75</sup>

### **Case 26: Veerendra Rajpurohit, Rajasthan**

In early June 2020, Veerendra Rajpurohit, who runs *News 30 Rajasthan*, an online news portal, was booked for defamation in Pali district, Rajasthan after he questioned and allegedly used offensive language against local police over the death of a labour leader in judicial custody. The FIR was registered on a complaint by a police officer. The case was registered under sections 388, 116, 500, 501, 506 of the IPC and the Information Technology Act.<sup>76</sup> On 14 June 2020, the Rajasthan High Court granted temporary protection from arrest to the journalist.<sup>77</sup>

### **Case 27: Vinod Dua, Delhi and Himachal Pradesh**

On 5 June 2020, the Delhi Police registered an FIR against senior journalist Vinod Dua for allegedly misreporting the communal violence between supporters and opponents of the Citizenship Amendment Act in Delhi in February 2020 and spreading fake news through “*The Vinod Dua Show*” on YouTube. The case was filed under sections 290, 505 and 505(2) of the IPC on the complaint of BJP spokesperson Naveen Kumar.<sup>78</sup> On 10 June 2020, the Delhi High Court stayed the investigation against Dua.<sup>79</sup>

However, on 12 June 2020 the Himachal Pradesh Police summoned Dua in connection with a sedition case registered in Shimla on 6 June 2020 on the basis of a complaint filed by BJP leader Ajay Shyam in connection with his Youtube show. The complaint alleged that Dua, in his show, accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of using “deaths and terror attacks” to get votes.<sup>80</sup> On 3 June 2021, the Supreme Court quashed sedition and other charges that were registered against Dua. The Court said, “*Every journalist is entitled to the protection under the Kedar Nath Singh case (which defined the ambit of offence of sedition under Section 124A IPC).*” However, the Supreme Court refused the second prayer made by Vinod Dua seeking the formation of a committee to verify allegations against journalists before an FIR is lodged. He had said that no FIR should be registered against a journalist with experience of over 10 years unless the committee approves it.<sup>81</sup>

### **Case 28: Supriya Sharma, Uttar Pradesh**

On 13 June 2020, the Uttar Pradesh police registered an FIR against Supriya Sharma, Executive Editor of *Scroll.in* on the basis of a complaint by Mala Devi, who Sharma had quoted in a report titled ‘In Varanasi village adopted by Prime Minister Modi, people went hungry during the lockdown’, published on Scroll.in on 8 June 2020. Scroll.in had interviewed Mala Devi at Domari village in Varanasi on 5 June 2020, but she alleged that the journalist had misreported her and filed an FIR.<sup>82</sup> The FIR was registered under sections 269 and 501 of the IPC and sections 3(1)(d) and 3(1)(r) of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act.<sup>83</sup>

### **Case 29: Amish Devgan, Rajasthan**

On 17 June 2020, an FIR was registered against *News18* TV anchor Amish Devgan for hurting religious sentiments by allegedly referring to Sufi saint Moinuddin Chisti in derogatory terms during a programme. Devgan, on his show on 15 June 2020, had used the term ‘Lootera Chisti’ (Chisti the robber), inviting furious reactions from the Muslim community throughout the country. He tendered an apology saying he was actually referring to Muslim ruler Alauddin Khilji and inadvertently named Chisti,<sup>84</sup> Several FIRs were lodged against Devgan in different states, including Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh and Telangana. The Supreme Court had granted protection to the journalist from any coercive action. However, the Supreme Court on 7 December 2020 refused to quash the FIRs and transferred all FIRs to Ajmer in Rajasthan for trial.<sup>85</sup>

### **Case 30: Unnamed media institutions, Uttar Pradesh**

On 23 June 2020, an FIR was filed against unnamed media institutions on publication of news item about Government Girl Shelter Home, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh where 57 girls were infected with COVID-19. The FIR lodged at Swarup Nagar police station in Kanpur district accused the media institutions of spreading fake news and booked under Sections 188, 505 and 288 IPC, Section 23 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, Section 74 of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 and Section 3 of the Epidemic Diseases Act.<sup>86</sup> On 25 June 2020, the PCI took suo-motu

cognizance on the FIR lodged against unknown media institutions and called for a report from the Government of Uttar Pradesh.<sup>87</sup>

### **Case 31: Six journalists of Divya Marathi, Maharashtra**

On 24 June and 25 June 2020, *Divya Marathi*, the largest newspaper in Aurangabad district, Maharashtra, published two critical reports on district administration's claims about handling the COVID-19 pandemic in the district. However, the Aurangabad police registered two separate cases against six reporters and photographers of Divya Marathi newspaper for mis-reporting and rumour-mongering.<sup>88</sup>

### **Case 32: Patricia Mukhim, Meghalaya**

On 6 July 2020, a criminal case was registered against veteran journalist Patricia Mukhim, a Padma Shri awardee and editor of *The Shillong Times* by the Meghalaya Police based on a complaint filed by Lawsohtun Village Council head Lurshai Shylla. The complaint alleged that Mukhim through a Facebook post had incited communal tension between tribals and non-tribals. In her social media post, Mukhim had criticized the village council for failing to identify the masked miscreants who had attacked five non-tribal boys on a basketball court at Lawsohtun village on 3 July 2020.<sup>89</sup> Mukhim was booked under Section 153A, 500 and 505(3) of the IPC and summoned by the police under Section 41A CrPC requiring her to appear before the Investigating Officer. She approached the Meghalaya High Court which on 10 November 2020 refused to quash the criminal case lodged against her.<sup>90</sup> While dismissing the petition, the High Court said, "*The author has gone on to assuage the feelings of the non-tribals by posing a question as to why they should live in perpetual fear in their own State when they have a right to call Meghalaya their state as the indigenous tribal does. Again, on going through the said Facebook post and as observed above, what can be deduced is that there is an attempt to make a comparison between tribals and non-tribals vis-à-vis their rights and security and the alleged tipping of the balance in favour of one community over the other. This, in the opinion of this Court would fall on the mischief of Section 153 A (a) IPC as it apparently seeks to promote disharmony or feelings of enmity, hatred or ill-will between two communities.*"<sup>91</sup>



### **Case 33: Amitabh Rawat, Uttar Pradesh**

In August 2020, an FIR was registered against journalist Amitabh Rawat for allegedly maligning the image of the State Government of Uttar Pradesh after he shared in social media a video of a minor girl cleaning the floor in the female ward of the District Hospital, Deoria. He was booked under Sections 506, 504, 389, and 385 of the IPC and Section 67 of the Information Technology Act.<sup>92</sup>

### **Case 34: Sankalp Neb, Uttar Pradesh**

On 4 August 2020, journalist Sankalp Neb was booked in Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh for allegedly sharing an unverified post on Twitter about the administration's handling of Covid-19. The FIR was registered under provisions of the Epidemic Diseases Act and the Information Technology Act based on a complaint by Chief Medical Officer, Saharanpur. Neb said that he had merely re-posted another person's allegations in the form of a screenshot and alleged that he was targeted for reports that were not in favour of the administration.<sup>93</sup>

### **Case 35: Manish Soni, Chhattisgarh**

On 16 August 2020, Manish Soni, a freelancer who runs a regional channel at Ambikapur in Surguja district, Chhattisgarh, was booked under sections 153-A, 153-B and 504 of the IPC on the basis of a complaint filed by local BJP worker Alok Dubey. The complainant objected to Soni's Facebook post published on 25 March 2020 in which he had shared the pictures of District Reserve Guards personnel who were killed in a Maoist attack on 18 March 2020. Soni alleged he was targeted because of his reports on a custodial death of a tribal.<sup>94</sup> On 22 October 2020, another FIR was registered against Manish Soni after he reported how the municipal corporation's anti-encroachment drive team used an earth digging machine to destroy the paddy crops of some farmers in Ambikapur in Surguja district. He was booked under section 294 IPC and Information Technology Act following a complaint lodged by Ambikaur Mayor Ajay Tirkey of the Congress party, for allegedly using "explicit and derogatory language" in a viral video which on social media.<sup>95</sup>

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**Case 36: Ashish Tomar, Shakil Ahmed, Lakhan Singh, Aamir Khan and Moin Ahmad, Uttar Pradesh**

On 7 September 2020, the police booked five journalists identified as Ashish Tomar, Shakil Ahmed, Lakhan Singh, Aamir Khan and Moin Ahmad<sup>96</sup> after they reported that a Dalit family was allegedly prevented from drawing water from a hand pump by some people at Basi village in Bijnor district, Uttar Pradesh.<sup>97</sup> Cases were filed under Sections 153A (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony), 268 (public nuisance) and 503 (criminal intimidation) of the IPC and Section 66A of the Information Technology Act. The FIR had charged Ashish Tomar and Shakil Ahmed of trying to vitiate social amity by circulating fake news. The journalists stood by their story and the district administration had to take back the case after an action committee of journalists lodged a protest.<sup>98</sup>

**Case 37: Sharat Kumar and Lokendra Singh, Rajasthan**

On 1 October 2020, Sharat Kumar, a journalist for *Aaj Tak* and Lokendra Singh, media advisor of former deputy Chief Minister Sachin Pilot, were booked by police for spreading fake news about the alleged phone tapping of MLAs during political crisis in Rajasthan in July 2020. The two were charged with circulating wrong or non-verified news, conspiracy and under provisions of the Information Technology Act.<sup>99</sup>

**Case 38: Pradeep Bhandari, Maharashtra**

On 9 October 2020, Pradeep Bhandari, a journalist with *Republic TV*, was booked for allegedly gathering a crowd during the demolition of Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut's house. The police registered a case against the reporter under sections 353 (assault or criminal force to deter public servant from discharge of his duty), 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) of the IPC at Khar police station.<sup>100</sup>

### Case 39: Mahendrasinh Jadeja, Pratipalsinh Gohil, Prakash Rameshbhai and Imran Hothi, Gujarat

On 5 December 2020, four journalists of vernacular daily Divya Bhaskar identified as Mahendrasinh Jadeja, Pratipalsinh Gohil, Prakash Rameshbhai and Imran Hothi were booked for exposing ‘VIP treatment to accused’ in a case of fire accident that killed five coronavirus patients at a hospital in Gujarat. The FIR was filed on the basis of a complaint lodged by a police constable that alleged the journalists entered the prohibited lockup room without seeking permission and taking photographs. They were booked under various sections of Information Technology Act, for obstructing public servant in discharging public functions, among other charges.<sup>101</sup>

#### 3.3. Summons/show cause notices

At least 13 journalists and one newspaper were issued show cause notices/summons including two journalists by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) for their journalistic work during 2020. They were Naseer Ganai, Haroon Nabi, Peerzada Ashiq, Fahad Shah and Auqib Javeed in Jammu and Kashmir; Vijay Vineet, Subhash Rai and Manish Pandey in Uttar Pradesh; Mahender Singh Manral and Prashant Tandon in Delhi; Neeraj Shivhare in Chhattisgarh; Anirban Chattopadhyay in West Bengal; Manash Jyoti Baruah in Assam and KV Kurmanath in Maharashtra. In addition, notice was served to *Dainik Sambad*, a vernacular daily by the Tripura government for its report on COVID-19.

*In some instances, journalists were summoned without issuing formal notices and threatened with legal action for non compliance.*

The reasons for summons were the journalists’ reports on hardships faced by the common people including starvation and poverty during COVID-19 lockdown, alleged factual inaccuracies in stories published, reporting on leaked official letter on sub-standard PPE kits supplied to hospitals, reports on alleged doctored audio clip of a religious leader, reporting on communal riots, alleged role in anti-CAA protests and alleged role in provoking violence.

**Table 5 : List of journalists issued summons/show cause notices**

<b>Name of journalists</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Charges</b>	<b>No. of journalists /media</b>
Naseer Ganai and Haroon Nabi	Jammu & Kashmir	Summoned for questioning for publishing and circulating a statement of banned group	2
Vijay Vineet and Subhash Rai	Uttar Pradesh	Show cause notice issued in connection with a report	2
Peerzada Ashiq	Jammu & Kashmir	Summoned to explain alleged inaccuracies regarding a report	1
Neeraj Shivhare	Chhattisgarh	Show-cause notice for alleged publishing of false news	1
Manish Pandey	Uttar Pradesh	Summoned to clarify the source of an official letter quoted in a report	1
Mahender Singh Manral	Delhi	Summoned for questioning for a report	1
Manash Jyoti Baruah	Assam	Summoned by NIA for questioning on his role in the violence during anti-	1

		CAA movement	
Fahad Shah	Jammu & Kashmir	Summoned for questioning in connection with the gunfight	1
Anirban Chattopadhyay	West Bengal	Summoned for questioning in connection with a story lack of PPEs	1
Prashant Tandon	Delhi	Questioned about Delhi riots	1
KV Kurmanath	Maharashtra	Summoned by NIA for questioning in connection with Bhima Koregaon case	1
Dainik Sambad newspaper	Tripura	Notice issued by DM to submit evidence for publishing a report	1
<b>Total</b>			<b>14</b>

The details of the summons/notices issued to journalists are given below.

### Case 1: Naseer Ganai and Haroon Nabi, Jammu & Kashmir

On 9 February 2020, Naseer Ganai of the weekly *Outlook* magazine and Haroon Nabi of the *Current News Service* (CNS) agency were summoned by police in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir. They were questioned for publishing and circulating a statement by a banned Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front.<sup>102</sup>

## Case 2: Vijay Vineet and Subhash Rai, Uttar Pradesh

On 26 March 2020, the District Magistrate (DM) of Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh sent a show-cause notice to journalist Vijay Vineet and Editor-in-Chief Subhash Rai of *Jansandesh Times* after the newspaper carried a story that members of the Musahar community, a Dalit sub-caste, were surviving on grass at Koiripur village in the district due to COVID-19 lockdown. The village fell under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's parliamentary constituency of Varanasi. The report was accompanied by photographs of children eating grass. In the notice, DM stated that he had got the matter investigated by an Additional District Magistrate-level officer and found that the report was fabricated one. The DM claimed that the Dalit children were not eating grass but ankari dal (wild pulses) that grow along with wheat in the fields. The notice asked the newspaper to refute its story in the next edition on 27 March 2020 failing which an inquiry shall be initiated against them. But journalist Vijay Vineet stood by his report.<sup>103</sup> On 10 July 2020, the PCI took suo motu cognizance and called for comments from the state government of Uttar Pradesh.<sup>104</sup>

## Case 3: Peerzada Ashiq, Jammu & Kashmir

On 19 April 2020, senior journalist, Peerzada Ashiq of *The Hindu* was summoned by the Cyber police headquarters in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir to explain the alleged factual inaccuracies in a story that was published in *The Hindu* on the same day. Police termed the story regarding an encounter between militants and security forces at Shopian as “fake news” and said, “The said news was published without seeking confirmation from the district authorities.” The senior journalist was later asked to travel to south Kashmir, some 40 km away, to present himself before a police officer in Anantnag district for further questioning.<sup>105</sup>

## Case 4: Neeraj Shivhare, Chhattisgarh

On 26 April 2020, the State Government of Chhattisgarh issued a show-cause notice to Neeraj Shivhare, a journalist with *Bastar ki Aawaz*, for reporting on the plight of a woman who had to sell her household items to arrange food during the COVID-19 lockdown. The authorities said the report had “damaged the image of the administration”. The notice asked Neeraj Shivhare to appear before

the authorities in Dantewada and provide an explanation for his report dated 25 April 2020. The report referred to in the notice pertained to an interview with a woman from Geedam who alleged that she was forced to sell household items including a refrigerator for Rs 2,000 to buy ration as the family had not received assistance from the administration during the lockdown. The notice issued to the journalist stated, “Given that the whole country is facing the coronavirus pandemic, this kind of post spreads fear among the people and spoils the image of the administration,” and further threatened to file an FIR against him. The woman reportedly stood by the interview she had given to the journalist.<sup>106</sup>

### **Case 5: Manish Pandey, Uttar Pradesh**

On 30 April 2020, Manish Pandey of *News1 India*, a Hindi news channel, was summoned (without serving a notice) before the Special Task Force headquarters in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh by Assistant Superintendent of Police, Vishal Vikram Singh. On 1 May 2020, Singh interrogated Pandey for nearly an hour regarding the source who leaked an official letter published by Pandey. On 17 April 2020, Pandey broke the story of a letter sent by the Directorate General of Medical Education and Training, Uttar Pradesh to bureaucrats in the State’s medical education department. The letter said that the PPE kits supplied to eight hospitals and medical colleges in the State did not meet the required quality standards.<sup>107</sup>

### **Case 6: Mahender Singh Manral, Delhi**

On 10 May 2020, the Delhi Police issued notice to *The Indian Express* journalist Mahender Singh Manral asking him to appear before it on the same day after he reported that the police had found that there was a possibility of an audio clip of leader of *Tablighi Jamaat* Maulana Saad may have been doctored. On 13 May 2020, the Editors Guild of India (EGI) criticised the Delhi Police for its highhandedness for threatening the journalist with legal action if he did not join the investigation. The EGI noted that Manral was not charged under any law but threatened with legal action under Section 174 of the IPC with punishment of a prison term and fine if he failed to join the investigation.<sup>108</sup> The PCI also intervened on the issue and sought a report from the Commissioner of Police, Delhi.<sup>109</sup>

### **Case 7: Manash Jyoti Baruah, Assam**

On 15 May 2020, the National Investigation Agency summoned journalist Manash Jyoti Baruah, who works for a digital media house, at its Sonapur office in Guwahati, Assam for his role in the public protests against the CAA in December 2019.<sup>110</sup> He was interrogated for about five hours and also questioned about his relationship with peasant leader Akhil Gogoi who was arrested by the NIA. The Guwahati Press Club (GPC) wrote to the NIA expressing concern at the way journalists were being questioned without getting formal notices. Baruah was summoned via a phone call and without serving a formal notice.<sup>111</sup>

### **Case 8: Fahad Shah, Jammu & Kashmir**

On 20 May 2020, Fahad Shah, editor of *The Kashmir Walla*, was summoned by the police and questioned for over four hours for a report on a gunfight at Naawkadal in Srinagar, Jammu & Kashmir. On 9 July 2020, Fahad Shah was again summoned by police from Safakadal police station for questioning in connection with the gunfight. The summon reads “your presence is necessary for the purpose of enquiry into the offence committed under section 147, 307, 109, 501, 505 IPC”.<sup>112</sup>

### **Case 9: Anirban Chattopadhyay, West Bengal**

On 25 May 2020, Anirban Chattopadhyay (62 years), editor of Bengali-daily *Anandabazaar Patrika* was issued summon to appear before the Hare Street police station in Kolkata, West Bengal for questioning allegedly relating to a story on inadequate supply of PPEs to the staff of a hospital handling COVID-19 cases. He did not meet the police and resigned on 1 June 2020.<sup>113</sup> Later, the police opened an investigation against him following a complaint from a senior bureaucrat over the newspaper’s coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>114</sup>

### **Case 10: Prashant Tandon, Delhi**

On 10 August 2020, the Delhi Police Special Cell interrogated veteran journalist Prashant Tandon (54 years) in connection with communal riots that broke out in Delhi in February 2019. Tandon said that he was questioned for several hours in connection with an FIR on Delhi riots and his mobile phone was seized.<sup>115</sup>



### Case 11: KV Kurmanath, Maharashtra

On 9 September 2020, KV Kurmanath, Deputy Editor with *The Hindu-Business Line* was summoned by the NIA to appear before its office in Mumbai, Maharashtra in connection with the Bhima Koregaon violence case. K Satyanarayana, professor at the English and Foreign Languages University in Hyderabad was also summoned along with Kurmanath. Both of them are sons-in-law of revolutionary poet Varavara Rao who had been in jail after being arrested by the Maharashtra police on charges of links with the Maoists.<sup>116</sup>

### Case 12: Dainik Sambad, Tripura

On 14 September 2020, *Dainik Sambad*, a vernacular daily in Tripura, was issued notice by Sailesh Kumar Yadav, Magistrate of West Tripura district to submit documentary evidence based on which a story published on 3 September 2020 claimed that the situation at three COVID treatment centers – GBP Hospital, Shahid Bhagat Singh Youth Hostel and Hapania Industry Department auditorium were “indescribable”. The notice threatened legal action under the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897, the Disaster Management Act, 2005 and the IPC if it failed to submit documentary evidence.<sup>117</sup>

## 3.4. Physical attacks and intimidation by security forces and other public officials

*Out of the 42 journalists subjected to physical violence, 35 were allegedly beaten by police including five in custody. In most cases, they were assaulted despite identifying themselves as journalists.*

In 2020, at least 42 journalists were allegedly physically attacked by public officials including police, army, forest guards, Government Railway Police (GRP) and office bearers of a panchayat across the country. Out of the 42, 35 journalists were allegedly beaten by police, which include custodial torture of five journalists; three journalists allegedly by army personnel; two by forest guards; one by GRP and one by office bearers of a panchayat.

Of them, 10 were assaulted in Andhra Pradesh; Jammu and Kashmir (7); Delhi (5); Maharashtra (4); Karnataka and Odisha (3 each); Uttar Pradesh (2); and

Assam, Goa, Jharkhand, Nagaland, Punjab, Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Tripura (1 each). In most cases, the journalists were beaten or assaulted despite identifying themselves as journalists or the accused knew the victims were journalists.

**Table 6 : List of journalists assaulted by public officials**

Name of journalistss	State	Perpetrator	Number of journalist
Suhail Khan, Ashiq Mir and Mudasir	Jammu & Kashmir	Army	3
Ashish Mia	Tripura	Police	1
Soiru Komarpant	Goa	Police	1
Ashish Raje	Maharashtra	Police	1
Narsinha Ghone	Maharashtra	Police	1
Navin Kumar	Delhi	Police	1
Ravi Reddy	Telangana	Police	1
Uttkarsh Chaturvedi	Maharashtra	Police	1
10 journalists	Andhra Pradesh	Police	10
Gowhar Ali Wani	Jammu & Kashmir	Police	1
Samrat Pradhan	Karnataka	Police	1
Subrat Kumar Swain	Odisha	Police	1
Major Singh Punjabi	Punjab	Police	1
Ankit Singh	Uttar Pradesh	Police	1
Raghunath Bansode	Maharashtra	Police	1
Nolan Pinto and Prajwal Bhat	Karnataka	Police	2
Anand Dutta	Jharkhand	Police	1

Arun Paul	Assam	Police	1
Kamran Yousuf and Faisal Bashir	Jammu & Kashmir	Police	2
Auqib Javeed	Jammu & Kashmir	Police	1
Asad Rizvi	Uttar Pradesh	Police	1
Ahan Penkar	Delhi	Police	1
Fayaz Ahmad, Mudasir Qadri and Junaid Ahmad	Jammu & Kashmir	Police	3
Two journalists	Odisha	Forest Guards	2
Prasanjit Dutta	Nagaland	Government Railway Police	1
Ezhil	Tamil Nadu	Beaten by staff of a panchayat	1
<b>Total</b>			<b>42</b>

The details of the cases are given below:

**i. Assault by the army**

On 25 December 2020, three journalists identified as Suhail Khan (online editor of Kashmir Despatch), Ashiq Mir (Kashmir Crown) and Mudasir were allegedly beaten by Army while covering Jashn-e-Baramulla function in Baramulla district in North Kashmir. Army hosted Jashn-e-Baramulla, wherein Bollywood actor Amisha Patel was the chief guest and journalists were invited to cover the same. But when journalists requested Bollywood actress Amisha Patel for an interview, some army officials allegedly started beating them without any reason. The army officers also allegedly destroyed their equipment. Baramulla Working Journalist

Association (BWJA) and North Kashmir Journalists Association (NKJA) strongly condemned the attack on fellow journalists and urged Army top brass to initiate an inquiry into the matter.<sup>118</sup>

## **ii. Assault by the police**

At least 35 journalists were assaulted by the police, including five in custody, across India. Andhra Pradesh with 10 case topped the States; followed by Delhi (5); Jammu and Kashmir and Maharashtra (4 each); Karnataka (3); Uttar Pradesh (2); and Assam, Goa, Jharkhand, Odisha, Punjab, Tripura, Telangana, and Tamil Nadu (1). Of these, five journalists were subjected to torture in police custody.

### **Case 1: Alleged beating of Ashish Mia, Tripura**

On 1 January 2020, journalist Ashish Mia was allegedly assaulted by Officer-in-Charge (OC) Bishnupada Bhowmik at Kamalasagar bazaar in West *Tripura* district of Tripura. The journalist was heading towards Kamalasagar Bazaar area for his professional duty on his bike and was allegedly stopped by the OC and assaulted. Ashish received grievous injury on his head and other parts of the body.<sup>119</sup>

### **Case 2: Alleged beating of Soiru Komarpant, Goa**

On 13 January 2020, Soiru Komarpant, a photojournalist working with a Marathi daily, was allegedly assaulted by two police personnel in Margao town in South Goa district of Goa. The incident took place when the photojournalist was clicking pictures of a brawl between some tourists and an elderly woman near Margao bus stand. At that time, police driver Ujesh Naik and constable Mahendra Gosavi, attached to Fatorda police station, allegedly assaulted Komarpant.<sup>120</sup>

### **Case 3: Alleged beating of Ashish Raje, Maharashtra**

On 6 February 2020, Ashish Raje, a photojournalist and joint secretary of the Mumbai Press Club, was allegedly beaten up by the police while covering an anti-CAA protest in Nagpada area in Mumbai, Maharashtra. He was pushed and assaulted by two police personnel, resulting in injury to his thigh.<sup>121</sup>

#### **Case 4: Alleged beating of Narsinha Ghone, Maharashtra**

On 22 March 2020, Narsinha Ghone, President of Latur Press Club, was allegedly beaten up by a policeman when he stepped out in Latur, Maharashtra for reporting after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal for a day-long janata (public) curfew.<sup>122</sup>

#### **Case 5: Alleged beating of Navin Kumar, Delhi**

On 23 March 2020, Navin Kumar, a journalist with *Aaj Tak* news channel, was allegedly stopped and beaten up by three policemen on the order of Inspector Shivkumar near the All India Institute of Medical Sciences Trauma Centre in New Delhi. He was going to his office in Noida Film City when the incident took place. He was beaten despite showing his press identity card.<sup>123</sup>

#### **Case 6: Alleged beating of Ravi Reddy, Telangana**

On 23 March 2020, Ravi Reddy, Chief of Bureau (Telangana) of *The Hindu* was abused and beaten by two sub-inspectors and three constables near the Begumpet flyover in Hyderabad, Telangana. He was returning home from duty. He was beaten despite identifying himself as a journalist.<sup>124</sup>

#### **Case 7: Alleged beating of Uttkarsh Chaturvedi, Maharashtra**

On 25 March 2020, Uttkarsh Chaturvedi, Deputy News Editor with *ET Now*, a leading business news channel, alleged that he was beaten up by policemen while reporting on COVID-19 lockdown in Thane district, Maharashtra. The victim claimed he was beaten with sticks despite showing his press card.<sup>125</sup>

#### **Case 8: Alleged beating of at least 10 journalists, Andhra Pradesh**

On 25 March 2020, at least 10 journalists including Chalamashetty Srinivas, a local reporter from *Vaaritha* were allegedly beaten with sticks by a police officer at a security check post in West Godavari district, Andhra Pradesh. The journalists had gone to the check post after receiving information that the police were preventing people from entering the district during COVID-19 lockdown. As they were questioning the police, a police officer started beating them with a stick. Seven reporters allegedly suffered injuries in the attack.<sup>126</sup>

### **Case 9: Alleged beating of Gowhar Ali Wani, Jammu & Kashmir**

On 15 April 2020, Gowhar Ali Wani (21 years), a freelance journalist alleged that the police beat him up and arrested his father in Handwara in Jammu & Kashmir. The journalist claimed he had opposed the use of foul language by the Station House Officer (SHO) of Villagam police station, following which two policemen in civil dress came to his house and asked him to come with them. When he asked the reason, they slapped and assaulted him.<sup>127</sup>

### **Case 10: Alleged custodial torture of Samrat Pradhan, Karnataka**

On 20 April 2020, Samrat Pradhan (25 years), a business correspondent of a magazine and his cousin Amit Kar (25 years), working in a hotel, were allegedly tortured at Hennur police station in Bangalore, Karnataka. They had stepped out to buy medicines and groceries during COVID-19 lockdown when they were taken to the police station and allegedly tortured for over 15 hours.<sup>128</sup>

### **Case 11: Alleged beating of Subrat Kumar Swain, Odisha**

On 22 April 2020, Subrat Kumar Swain, correspondent with Odia daily *Sambad* was allegedly beaten up by a police sub-inspector identified as Ashutosh Mohanty while he was taking his ailing child to a hospital in Keonjhar district, Odisha.<sup>129</sup>

### **Case 12: Custodial torture of Major Singh Punjabi, Punjab**

On 22 May 2020, Major Singh Punjabi, a journalist with the *Rozana Pehredar* newspaper, was mercilessly beaten by the two Assistant Sub Inspectors (ASIs) of the Mohali police station phase-1 at Gurdwara Kalgidhar Sahib Singh Sabha situated in Phase-4, Mohali in Punjab. He went there to cover the meeting of two groups. Despite showing his identity as a journalist, the policemen forcibly pushed him in a private vehicle bearing a Haryana number and took him to the phase-1 police station at Mohali. About his ordeal Major Singh said, “Before, I could even step out of the vehicle, ASI Om Prakash started beating me with a stick. The duo dragged me to the lockup, where I was not only tortured, abused and humiliated but they also pushed away my turban. My repeated pleas not to touch my turban went unheard and they even threw my ‘kangha’ (wooden comb for the hair, part of the five symbols of Sikhism).”<sup>130</sup>

### **Case 13: Alleged beating of Ankit Singh, Uttar Pradesh**

On 22 June 2020, Ankit Singh, a reporter working for *Hindi Khabar*, was allegedly assaulted by the police when he was doing a story on a shelter home where 57 girls were found to be COVID-19 positive at Swaroop Nagar in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh. When his colleague, Shubham Shukla, tried to shoot the beating on his phone, the police snatched away the phone.<sup>131</sup>

### **Case 14: Alleged manhandling of Raghunath Bansode, Maharashtra**

On 1 August 2020, Raghunath Bansode, a senior journalist and owner of *Dainik Latur Prabhat*, was allegedly manhandled by the district deputy Superintendent of Police Sachin Sangle in Latur, Maharashtra. He had gone out for work. The police officer obstructed him and spoke in abusive language.<sup>132</sup>

### **Case 15: Alleged beating of Nolan Pinto and Prajwal, Karnataka**

On 11 August 2020, two journalists - Nolan Pinto, Special Correspondent with *India Today*, Prajwal of the *News Minute* were allegedly hit by the police while covering the riots that took place in east Bangalore, Karnataka in protest against an allegedly derogatory Facebook post about Prophet Muhammad.<sup>133</sup>

### **Case 16: Custodial torture of Anand Dutta, Jharkhand**

On 12 September 2020, Anand Dutta, a freelance journalist, was beaten up by police at Morabadi Maidan in Ranchi district, Jharkhand while he was at the vegetable market with his wife. Senior Station Inspector (SSI) Mohan Mehta allegedly asked why Dutta was carrying a “carry bag” and started slapping him and took him to the police station in Police Control Room. Dutta alleged that he was brutally beaten at the police station.<sup>134</sup>

### **Case 17: Alleged beating of Arun Paul, Assam**

On the night of 13 September 2020, Arun Paul, a journalist with Assamese daily *Dainik Asom* was allegedly attacked by a police constable and severely injured when he was returning home in Dhubri, Assam. The journalist was attacked with a sharp weapon by the constable following an argument. He received severe

head injuries and was initially admitted to Gauripur primary health center before being shifted to Dhubri civil hospital.<sup>135</sup>

### **Case 18: Alleged beating of Kamran Yousuf and Faisal Bashir, Jammu & Kashmir**

On 15 September 2020, Kamran Yousuf, a multimedia journalist working with news portal *Newslick* and Faisal Bashir, a freelancer, were beaten by policemen while covering a gunfight between militants and security forces in Marwal Kakapora village in Pulwama district, Jammu and Kashmir. Yousuf had to be hospitalized in Srinagar for treatment of injuries to his limbs, and the doctors told him that he had suffered a mild fracture in his right leg.<sup>136</sup> Earlier on the night of 16 February 2020, Kamran Yousuf was picked up from his home by the police in Pulwama and questioned about a Twitter account belonging to one Kamran Manzoor which the police suspected was operated by Kamran Yousuf. The police checked his phone and after finding nothing released him. He was detained for about two hours prior to his release.<sup>137</sup>

### **Case 19: Alleged custodial torture of Auqib Javeed, Jammu & Kashmir**

On 18 September 2020, Auqib Javeed, a Srinagar-based journalist, was allegedly slapped by a masked policeman during questioning by the Cyber Wing of the Jammu and Kashmir Police in Srinagar after he was summoned in connection with an article written by him on cyber bullying, or the alleged intimidation of social media users who posted anything seen as being critical of the government. The article was published in an online news portal, Article 14 on 17 September 2020.<sup>138</sup> Kashmir Editors Guild and Kashmir Press Club (KPC) condemned the behaviour of the police against journalist Auqib Javeed.<sup>139</sup>

### **Case 20: Alleged beating of Asad Rizvi, Uttar Pradesh**

On 2 October 2020, journalist Asad Rizvi, associated with *The Wire* and other media houses, was attacked by the police when he was covering a protest by the Samajwadi Party at Hazratganj in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh over the Hathras gang-rape and murder of a Dalit girl. The police snatched his mobile phone, hit



with *lathis* (sticks) and he was briefly detained. Before releasing him, the police warned him not to public the incident.<sup>140</sup>

### **Case 21: Alleged custodial torture of Ahan Penkar, Delhi**

On 16 October 2020, Ahan Penkar (23 years), a reporter working with the *Caravan* magazine, was allegedly beaten by a police officer and then detained while covering a story in north Delhi. Penkar was working on a story on the alleged rape and murder of a 14-year-old Dalit girl in the area. Caravan magazine claimed that Additional Commissioner of Police, Model Town, Ajay Kumar kicked and slapped Penkar inside the Model Town police station premises despite showing his press ID card and he was forced to delete the videos and photos from the phone.<sup>141</sup>

### **Case 22: Alleged beating of Fayaz Ahmad, Mudasir Qadri and Junaid Ahmad, Jammu & Kashmir**

On 10 December 2020, the police allegedly beat up three journalists while they were covering the fifth phase of the District Development Council (DDC) polling at Srigufwara village of Anantnag district, Jammu and Kashmir. The victims were identified as Fayaz Ahmad, a stringer of *ETV Bharat*, Mudasir Qadri of *News18* and Junaid Ahmad of *TV-9*. Fayaz alleged that Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP), Sandeep Chaudhary beat them up near the polling station. The police also seized their media equipment and asked the police to book them under the charges of instigating people for stone-pelting. They were detained by the police around 8:30 am.<sup>142</sup>

### **iii. Assault by other public officials**

During 2020, four journalists were physically attacked by other public officials including forest guards, Government Railway Police (GRP) and office bearers of a panchayat as given below:

On 3 May 2020, a reporter and camera men of *Kanak News* were attacked by a forest guard near Balukhand-Konark Wildlife Sanctuary in Puri district, Odisha. They had gone near the sanctuary for documenting a report related to cyclone FANI when the attack took place.<sup>143</sup>

On 8 May 2020, journalist Prasanjit Dutta, associated with *Nagaland Page*, was assaulted by a Government Railway Police (GRP) official while he was returning home from work near Dimapur Railway Station in Nagaland. According to Dutta, the GRP official asked if he was a Muslim. When Dutta replied that he was a Bengali, the official slapped him and said Nagaland was not his state and if he wanted to spread the coronavirus, he (Dutta) should go to his own state. After the accused official apologized to Dutta, the newspaper withdrew its complaint against the official.<sup>144</sup>

On 18 August 2020, Ezhil, a reporter working with Tamil news channel *Puthiya Thalaimurai*, was allegedly beaten up by office bearers of the Attupakam panchayat under Gummidipoondi police station in Thiruvallur district, Tamil Nadu. The reporter visited the place to report on the caste-based discrimination faced by Amrutham, a Dalit (Scheduled Caste) panchayat leader of Attupakam, who was not allowed to hoist the national flag at a school on Independence Day. The journalist said he was attacked by five people including the husband of vice-president and panchayat secretary and he suffered injuries to his eyes and chest.<sup>145</sup>

### 3.5. Censorship/denial of advertisement

*During 2020, self-censorship within the media remained an open secret. But, the Government of India also sought to increase regulation of the media, with media policies, funding and administrative mechanisms for online media. For example, the New Media Policy 2020 of Jammu & Kashmir gives unbridled power to the government to check content of news reports and decide what constitutes “fake, anti-national and unethical.” Any media that violates this policy can be banned from receiving any advertisements from the government in addition to facing legal proceedings.*

Several media houses, including TV channels and journalists in India have been accused of being soft on the ruling dispensation and have been termed as lap/Godi media. Many TV channels are perceived to be alleged mouthpieces of the ruling party at the centre.<sup>146</sup> Paradoxically, this perception has been used by some

Chief Ministers belonging to the opposition (vis-a-vis to the Central Government) as an excuse to target the media.

On 29 April 2020, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee warned journalists to behave “properly”, accusing many of them of running propaganda for the BJP by their “one-sided, negative” reports regarding the situation of COVID-19 in West Bengal. She threatened to take action against journalists under the Disaster Management Act.<sup>147</sup> On 27 May 2020, Banerjee had launched a tirade against the media in general and Anandabazar Patrika in particular, forcing Anirban Chattopadhyay (62 years), editor of Bengali-daily *Anandabazaar Patrika* to resign four days later after he was summoned to the Hare Street police station in Kolkata for questioning.<sup>148</sup> Later in June 2020, the police opened an investigation against him following a complaint from a senior bureaucrat over the newspaper’s coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>149</sup> The Kolkata police’s summon was widely believed to be reprisal against the newspaper’s critical reportage on the lack of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to hospital staff treating COVID-19 patients and the government’s unpreparedness in facing the onslaught from Cyclone Amphan.<sup>150</sup>

On 11 September 2020, Biplap Kumar Deb, Chief Minister of Tripura, warned that “*Some newspapers are trying to confuse people [regarding COVID-19 situation in the state], getting all over-excited. History will not forgive them, I shall not forgive them either*” during a public speech at Sabroom in South Tripura district.<sup>151</sup> Journalist organisations condemned the chief minister’s comments and said the journalists were working in ‘fear’ due to the ‘threat’.<sup>152</sup> On 25 September 2020, Tripura Assembly of Journalists (TAJ) stated that six journalists were attacked in the State since the 11 September warning.<sup>153</sup>

In October 2020, State government of Kerala amended the Kerala Police Act through an ordinance to allegedly gag the media in the name of controlling cyber attacks against women and children. The Kerala Police Amendment Act provided that if the government finds any media platform including social media producing, publishing or propagating content that could threaten, insult or harm an individual, they will be punished with a fine of Rs 10,000, imprisonment of five years or both. KP Reji, President of Kerala Union of Working Journalists

(KUWJ) expressed fear that the State government was planning to take control of the media in the disguise of controlling cyber bullying. Governor Arif Mohammed Khan signed the ordinance on 21 November 2020,<sup>154</sup> but following massive opposition, including from his own party leaders, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on 23 November 2020 put the controversial amendment ordinance on hold.<sup>155</sup>

The new “Media Policy-2020” of the Jammu and Kashmir administration introduced in June 2020 gives unbridled power to the government to check content of news reports and decide what constitutes “fake, anti-national and unethical”. The policy allows the Department of Information and Public Relations (DIPR) to monitor the media, and initiate action against an individual or an organisation. The policy states, “Any individual or group indulging in fake news, unethical or anti national activities or even plagiarism shall be de-empanelled besides being proceeded against under law.”<sup>156</sup>

On 7 July 2020, the Land and Development Office under the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs sent a notice to news agency Press Trust of India (PTI), asking it to pay over Rs 84 crore as a penalty for allegedly violating the terms under which the news agency was allotted the plot for its Parliament Street headquarters in New Delhi. The government’s notice to PTI came two weeks after national broadcaster Prasar Bharati threatened to cancel its subscription of the news agency for its “anti-national coverage” after PTI interviewed Chinese ambassador Sun Weidong amid the border standoff between India and China. In the interview, the Chinese diplomat had accused New Delhi of deliberately provoking the violent clash in Ladakh’s Galwan Valley on 15 June 2020, which led to the deaths of at least 20 Indian soldiers.<sup>157</sup>

*In Chhattisgarh, the state government, which is drafting a law to protect journalists in the State, failed to enact the law at the year’s end.*

On 13 January 2020, the Press Council of India served a notice to Rajasthan government over a statement by Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot at a press conference held on 16 December 2019 in which he allegedly said that if the media wanted government advertisements, they will have to show (positive)

news of the government. The PCI stated that such statement of the Chief Minister “undermines the freedom of Press.”<sup>158</sup>

# 4.

## Attacks on journalists by the non-State actors

*The year 2020 saw the highest number of murder of journalists for doing their professional works. At least journalists were murdered, with the highest in Uttar Pradesh with six deaths. Out of the 13 deaths, one murder was committed by police officials along with others, and the rest by the non-state actors. Apart from the murders, at least 55 journalists were physically attacked or subjected to harassment/theats online by the non-state actors.*

During 2020, at least 68 journalists were attacked by the non-State actors such as mob, unidentified miscreants, members/ supporters of political parties etc or online across the country. Of these, 13 journalists were killed and at least 55 journalists, including women, were physically attacked or harassed/ threatened online by the non-state actors during the year.

### 4.1. Killing of journalists

During 2020, at least 13 journalists were murdered for doing their jobs in India. Uttar Pradesh reported the highest death with six deaths, followed by Assam and Madhya Pradesh with two deaths each and Kerala, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu with one death each. One disturbing pattern that emerged was that prior to their deaths, some of the journalists had approached the local police seeking protection but the police failed to take action that could have saved their lives.

The details of killing of 13 journalists in the country during 2020 are given below :

**Table 7 : List of journalists killed**

Sl. No.	Name of journalists killed	State	Perpetrators
1	Shubham Mani Tripathi	Uttar Pradesh	Unidentified persons

2	Vikram Joshi	Uttar Pradesh	A group of men including one Ravi Kumar
3	Ratan Singh	Uttar Pradesh	Unidentified persons
4	Suraj Pandey	Uttar Pradesh	Some persons including two police personnel
5	Uday Paswan	Uttar Pradesh	Former village head, Keval Paswan and his sons
6	Rakesh Singh	Uttar Pradesh	Former village head, Ravi Chaudhary, Ram Surat and Babu Mishra
7	Sunil Tiwari	Madhya Pradesh	Unidentified persons
8	Syed Adil Wahab	Madhya Pradesh	Unidentified persons
9	Bijendeep Tanti	Assam	A woman
10	Parag Bhuyan	Assam	Unidentified persons
11	Isravel Moses	Tamil Nadu	A gang of drug dealers
12	SV Pradeep	Kerala	Unidentified persons
13	Abhishek Soni	Rajasthan	Unidentified persons

The details of the cases are given below.

### Case 1: Shubham Mani Tripathi, Uttar Pradesh

On 19 June 2020, Shubham Mani Tripathi alias Nikk (25 years), a journalist with a Hindi daily named *Kampu Mail*, was shot dead by unidentified persons near Doodh Mandi in Gangaghat area in Unnao district, Uttar Pradesh. He was returning home with his friend on a motorcycle when the incident took place. Prior to his death, Shubham Mani Tripathi was threatened by a woman identified as Divya Awasthi, who dealt with land businesses and was politically connected. He had filed an FIR against her but the police did not take any action. He then in

a Facebook post had expressed concern about his safety but the police did not take him seriously.<sup>159</sup> On 26 June 2020, the PCI condemned the killing and sought a report from the State Government.<sup>160</sup>

### **Case 2: Vikram Joshi, Uttar Pradesh**

On 20 July 2020, Vikram Joshi who worked for *Jansagar Today* was shot dead in front of his two minor daughters in Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh. Earlier on 16 July 2020, Vikram Joshi had submitted a complaint to the police, claiming that his niece was being sexually harassed by a group of men, including one Ravi Kumar. On 17 July, Vikram and his sister went to the office of the Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP), Ghaziabad and filed a second complaint against the group but the police did not take any action. The people against whom he had filed complaints allegedly killed him.<sup>161</sup>

*One disturbing pattern that emerged with respect to the murders was that prior to their deaths, some of the journalists had approached the local police seeking protection but the police failed to take action that could have saved their lives.*

### **Case 3: Sunil Tiwari, Madhya Pradesh**

On the night of 22 July 2020, Sunil Tiwari (39 years), a reporter for *Nai Duniya* newspaper, was waylaid by a group of seven or eight persons, beaten and then shot dead in front of his brother Ashish in Niwari, Madhya Pradesh. Earlier on 25 May 2020, Sunil Tiwari had uploaded a video on his Facebook page, appealing to the Superintendent of Police (SP), Niwari, Collector, Niwari, and SP, Jhansi for help as he and his family had received death threats for the past one year after he exposed the “illegal activities” of three men namely Avdhesh Tiwari, Narendra Tiwari and Anil Tiwari. But police did not register his FIR.<sup>162</sup>

### **Case 4: Bijendeeep Tanti, Assam**

On 8 August 2020, journalist Bijendeeep Tanti (32 years), who worked for a private TV channel *News Time Assam*, was found dead at his rented office room at Tinsukia town in Assam.<sup>163</sup> According to police, the journalist was murdered in the night of 6 August. The prime accused was arrested.<sup>164</sup>



### **Case 5: Ratan Singh, Uttar Pradesh**

On the night of 24 August 2020, Ratan Singh (43 years), a journalist working for a Hindi news channel, was shot dead near his home in Ballia district, Uttar Pradesh. He was reportedly chased and shot dead by three men. According to police, the journalist was killed over a property dispute. However, the deceased's father Binod Singh rejected the claim of the police.<sup>165</sup>

### **Case 6: Syed Adil Wahab, Madhya Pradesh**

On 8 November 2020, Syed Adil Wahab (35 years), a TV journalist, was found dead in a patch of jungle in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. His head and face were smashed. According to the police, he was killed elsewhere and the body was dumped in the forest.<sup>166</sup>

### **Case 7: Isravel Moses, Tamil Nadu**

On 8 November 2020, Isravel Moses (27 years), a TV journalist, was called out of his house and beaten to death by a gang of drug dealers in Kancheepuram district, Tamil Nadu. The deceased's father Gnanaraj alleged that the police did not take any action on his son's complaint that his life was in danger. Moses had received death threat after he reported on anti-social activities including sale of ganja.<sup>167</sup>

### **Case 8: Parag Bhuyan, Assam**

On the night of 11 November 2020, a senior journalist Parag Bhuyan (53 years) was killed by a speeding truck on the NH-15 near his residence at Kakopothar town in Tinsukia district of Assam. Bhuyan who was the Kakopothar correspondent of *Pratidin Time* had received threats for exposing corruption a few days before being killed. Nitumoni Saikia, Editor-in-Chief of *Pratidin Time*, in a statement alleged that the journalist was murdered as he has been doing series of reporting exposing illegalities and corruption around Kakopothar.<sup>168</sup>

### **Case 9: Suraj Pandey, Uttar Pradesh**

On 12 November 2020, the body of journalist Suraj Pandey (25 years) who worked for a local Hindi daily was found on a railway track in Unnao district,

Uttar Pradesh. Police claimed that the journalist committed suicide. However, the police lodged a case on charges of murder, criminal conspiracy and criminal intimidation against some persons including two police personnel identified as Sub-Inspector Suneeta Chaurasia and Constable Amar Singh on the basis of a complaint by Suraj's mother. The complaint alleged that Suraj was killed by the accused and the body was thrown on the track to project it as suicide.<sup>169</sup>

### **Case 10: Uday Paswan, Uttar Pradesh**

On 16 November 2020, Uday Paswan, a correspondent with a Hindi daily, was beaten to death at Barwadih village under Kone police station in Sonbhadra district, Uttar Pradesh. Uday Paswan had a land dispute with the former village head identified as Keval Paswan. There had been threat to their life in connection with the land dispute since 2016 and they had been demanding police protection. However, no police protection was provided. On 16 November, Uday Paswan and his wife, Sheetla Paswan had gone to the police station to seek police protection in view of threat. While returning, the Keval Paswan and his sons had brutally beaten Uday and his wife. Uday died on the spot, while his wife succumbed to her injuries in a hospital later.<sup>170</sup>

### **Case 11: Rakesh Singh, Uttar Pradesh**

On 27 November 2020, Rakesh Singh (27 years), a journalist with a local newspaper, and his friend Pintu Sahu (34 years), died of burn injuries after the house of the journalist was set ablaze by a former village head identified as Ravi Chaudhary, Ram Surat and Babu Mishra at Kalwari village in Balrampur district, Uttar Pradesh. Pintu died on the spot, while the journalist died at hospital. In his dying statement, Rakesh Singh named the three accused and said that he was targeted for writing against corrupt practices of the former village head.<sup>171</sup> On 3 December, PCI took suo motu cognizance and sought a report from the government of Uttar Pradesh.<sup>172</sup>

### **Case 12: SV Pradeep, Kerala**

On 15 December 2020, journalist SV Pradeep was killed after a vehicle hit his scooter near Karakkamandapam, Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala. Pradeep's wife Sreeja S Nair alleged that her husband faced threats over his reportage and there

was pressure on him to withdraw his plea before the court for a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe into the honey-trap case involving a minister. She also expressed her disappointment at the police's preliminary findings that there was nothing suspicious about the accident.<sup>173</sup>

### **Case 13: Abhishek Soni, Rajasthan**

On 23 December 2020, Abhishek Soni (27 years), a video journalist, died after he was attacked with iron rods by three persons for trying to save his female journalist friend from molestation in Jaipur, Rajasthan. The attack took place on 8 December 2020 when Soni was at a local eatery along with his friend. Three persons came on a motorcycle at the eatery and tried to molest the female journalist. When Soni tried to save his friend, he was brutally attacked with batons and iron rods. He was taken to the hospital where he died. Police registered a case under various provisions of the IPC including for murder.<sup>174</sup>

## **4.2. Physical attacks or threats by the non state actors**

- *55 journalists were subjected to physical violence or online harassment/threats during 2020.*
- *The attackers comprises vigilantes/mob, unidentified miscreants or members/ supporters of political parties.*
- *In some cases, ouses of journalists were attacked/demolished and family members were beaten up.*

At least 55 journalists, including women, were physically attacked or harassed/ threatened online by the non-state actors during 2020. These included 11 journalists who were allegedly attacked by members/ supporters of political parties; at least 37 journalists who were physically attacked by vigilantes/mob and unidentified miscreants; and six journalists who were subjected to online harassment/threat. Houses of journalists were also attacked/ demolished.

### **i. Political parties**

At least 14 journalists were targeted including houses of two journalists were demolished by alleged members/supporters of political parties during 2020.

**Table 8 : List of journalists targeted by political parties**

Name of journalists	State	Perpetrator	Number of journalist/s
M Karthi	Tamil Nadu	Suspected supporters of AIADMK	1
Arnab Goswami and Samyabrata Ray Goswami	Maharashtra	Alleged members of Youth Congress	2
Aathi Suresh	Tamil Nadu	Alleged members of MDMK	1
Hussan Lal	Punjab	Congress Sarpanch	1
Naveen Kumar Chintapandu	Telangana	TRS activists	1
Naveen Singh	Uttar Pradesh	BSP leaders	1
Kamal Shukla	Chhattisgarh	Congress supporters	1
Satender Chauhan	Chandigarh	Alleged Youth Congress workers	1
S Sam Pradeep	Tamil Nadu	Alleged AIADMK supporters	1
Chandanpreet Kaur and Surendra	Punjab	Congress leader	2

Demolition of under-construction house of Mr Paramesh	Telangana	Municipal Commission supported by TRS MLA	1
Vandalisation of house of Mr Venkata Narayana	Andhra Pradesh	YSR Congress	1
<b>Total</b>			<b>14</b>

The details of cases of physical attacks by alleged members/supporters of political parties are given below:

### **Case 1: M Karthi, Tamil Nadu**

On the night of 3 March 2020, M Karthi, a journalist with Tamil magazine *Kumudam Reporter*, was attacked by assailants in Sivakasi in Virudhunagar district, Tamil Nadu. He was injured in the attack and had to be admitted at a hospital in Sivakasi.<sup>175</sup> The police arrested two persons who claimed that they were upset with the reports of the journalist on an intra-party feud in the ruling All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK).<sup>176</sup>

### **Case 2: Arnab Goswami and Samyabrata Ray Goswami, Maharashtra**

On 23 April 2020, Arnab Goswami, Editor-in-Chief of *Republic TV* and his wife Samyabrata Ray Goswami, were allegedly attacked by Youth Congress workers on their way back from the TV news studio in Mumbai, Maharashtra. Republic World reported that the attack took place barely 500 metres away from Arnab Goswami's house while he was returning home along with his wife. In a video, Arnab Goswami blamed Congress leaders for the attack.<sup>177</sup>

### **Case 3: Aathi Suresh, Tamil Nadu**

On 23 April 2020, Aathi Suresh, a reporter with *Velicham TV*, was attacked with iron rods and knives in Villupuram, Tamil Nadu. The reporter sustained serious injuries on his head. The attack was committed by a group allegedly led by a local functionary of Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK). The police detained 30 men in connection with the attack.<sup>178</sup>

#### **Case 4: Hussan Lal, Punjab**

On 22 May 2020, Hussan Lal, a reporter with *PTC Channel*, was allegedly attacked by a Congress sarpanch at Bhogpur in Jalandhar district, Punjab for reporting about a fight.<sup>179</sup>

#### **Case 5: Naveen Kumar Chintapandu, Telangana**

On 12 July 2020, independent journalist Naveen Kumar Chintapandu alias Teenmaar Mallanna, who ran a YouTube channel called Q News, was attacked by alleged Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) activists near Indalwai toll plaza in Nizamabad district, Telangana. At the time of attack, Teenmaar Mallanna was with his advocate Umesh Chandra in the car and they were going to Armoor police station in compliance of the notice served on him in connection with a case registered against him for criticising Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao.<sup>180</sup>

#### **Case 6: Naveen Singh, Uttar Pradesh**

On the night of 26 August 2020, journalist Naveen Singh and his family members were attacked allegedly by a leader of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and two others at Jagriti Vihar colony in Meerut district, Uttar Pradesh. According to Singh, he received a call from BSP leader named Raviraj and when he went out of his house, Raviraj started hitting him. Soon, Prince Yadav and Anshu Yadav, who lived in the neighborhood, helped Raviraj in assaulting Singh. When the journalist's elder brother Avinash tried to intervene the attackers also hit him on his head.<sup>181</sup>

#### **Case 7: Kamal Shukla, Chhattisgarh**

On 26 September 2020, senior journalist Kamal Shukla, who is editor of *Bhunkal Samachar* magazine and head of the Patrakar Suraksha Kanoon Sanyukt Sangharsh Samiti, was beaten allegedly by local Congress leaders/workers in Kanker (North Bastar) district, Chhattisgarh. The incident took place when Shukla went to the local police station after hearing that a journalist, Satish Yadav was assaulted by local municipal corporators belonging to the ruling Congress party. Shukla alleged that inside the police station, Ghaffar Memom, a representative of the local Congress MLA, Shishupal Shori, waved a pistol at him, saying Kamal

Shukla should be killed as he was the real culprit. Shukla said he was targeted because he had written about Shori's involvement in sand smuggling.<sup>182</sup> On 12 October, PCI sought a report on the incident from the Chhattisgarh government.<sup>183</sup>

### **Case 8: Satender Chauhan, Chandigarh**

On 2 December 2020, Satender Chauhan, a deputy editor at *Aaj Tak*, suffered a head injury after men at an Indian Youth Congress rally allegedly stone-pelted at a contingent of journalists in Chandigarh. He was covering the Youth Congress demonstration against Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar in Sector 15 in Chandigarh.<sup>184</sup>

### **Case 9: S Sam Pradeep, Tamil Nadu**

On 19 December 2020, journalist S. Sam Pradeep was manhandled allegedly by AIADMK supporters while covering an AIADMK meeting near TVS toll gate in Trichy, Tamil Nadu. Some AIADMK cadres beaten a man outside the meeting venue and Pradeep recorded it with his mobile phone. The AIADMK cadres turned towards him and grabbed his mobile phone. They deleted the videos recorded by the reporter and verbally abused him.<sup>185</sup>

### **Case 10: Chandanpreet Kaur and Surendra, Delhi**

On 22 December 2020, two journalists - Chandanpreet Kaur (25 years) and her cameraman Surendra (41 years) of *RPD 24*, a Canada-based news channel, was allegedly manhandled by Jasbir Singh Gill, a Congress Member of Parliament from Khadoor Sahib in Punjab, while protesting against the new farm laws at Jantar Mantar in Delhi. Gill accused the journalists of being anti-farmer. Surendra alleged that Gill and about six or seven of his associates manhandled them and tried to forcefully delete the footage of the interview from the camera. The next day, the Delhi police registered a complaint against Gill at the Parliament Street police station.<sup>186</sup>

### Case 11: Demolition of the house of Paramesh, Telangana

On 22 May 2020, an under-construction house of Paramesh, a journalist working with Telugu news channel V6, was allegedly demolished by the Narayankhed Municipal Commission in retaliation to his reportage on an MLA's violation of lockdown rules by celebrating his birthday with over 500 supporters in Telangana. The journalist had reported on the birthday celebrations of Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS) MLA Mahareddy Bhupal Reddy which violated lockdown rules by involving a large number of people.<sup>187</sup>

### Case 12: Vandalisation of house of Venkata Narayana, Andhra Pradesh

On 30 August 2020, the house of a reporter Venkata Narayana working with a Telugu daily was vandalised allegedly by men of a YSR Congress Party leader at Palamanar under Punganur police station in Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh.<sup>188</sup> However, the police said the attack was carried out not by any political party activists but by the family of a sexual assault survivor as the reporter allegedly tried to mediate between the survivor and the man who assaulted her. A video clip of a man smashing household appliances, gas cylinders, a plastic chair etc in the house of the journalist went viral on social media.<sup>189</sup>

#### ii. Attacks by vigilantes, unidentified persons or mob

*Delhi with 10 attacks reported the highest number of attacks against journalists by vigilantes, unidentified persons or mob during 2020, followed by Tripura (9); Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh (4 each); Odisha (3); Bihar (2); and Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, Haryana, Kerala, Maharashtra and Punjab (1 each).*

At least 39 journalists were physically attacked, including in which house of one journalist was attacked and his two family members beaten up, in the line of duty by vigilantes/mob and unidentified miscreants during 2020.

Of them, 10 were attacked in Delhi, followed by Tripura (9); Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh (4 each), Odisha (3); Bihar (2); and Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Gujarat, Haryana, Kerala, Maharashtra and Punjab (1 each).



**Table 9 : List of journalists targeted by vigilantes,  
unidentified persons and mob**

<b>Name of journalists</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Number of journalists</b>
Deepak Chaurasia	Delhi	1
Jitendra Sharma, Neeraj Gaur and Qamar Khan	Delhi	3
Banti Das and Sevak Deb	Tripura	2
Akash, Arvind Gunasekar and Saurabh	Delhi	3
Balasaheb Navgire	Maharashtra	1
Priyanshu Kumar	Bihar	1
Hardik Joshi	Gujarat	1
Mahadev Nayak	Odisha	1
Haider	Uttar Pradesh	1
Bibhubhusan Pati	Odisha	1
Hofe Dada	Arunachal Pradesh	1
House of Mr Prasantha Charkavarti attacked and his family members beaten by a mob	Tripura	1
A journalist (unidentified)	Odisha	1
Shahid Tantray, Prabhjit Singh and a woman journalist	Delhi	3
Ravi Kumar PS, Pradeep KM and Rudresh BV	Karnataka	3
Gurnam Singh Sidhu	Punjab	1
Parashar Biswas	Tripura	1

Samir Kanti Debnath and Suman Nag	Tripura	2
Rajan Pandey	Bihar	1
Jomon V Xavier	Kerala	1
Vinay Tiwari	Uttar Pradesh	1
Milan Mahanta	Assam	1
A woman journalist	Karnataka	1
Akarshan Uppal	Haryana	1
Ravi Choudhary	Uttar Pradesh	1
Ashwini Nigam	Uttar Pradesh	1
Prangopal Acharya, Pintu Paul and Biswajit Debnath	Tripura	3
<b>Total</b>		<b>39</b>

The details of the cases of physical attacks on journalists by the non-state actors are given below.

On 24 January 2020, Deepak Chaurasia, *News Nation* editor, was heckled by a mob at a protest site in Shaheen Bagh in New Delhi. A man in a yellow jacket stopped Chaurasia from reporting, snatched away papers from his hand and heckled the *News Nation* team during live coverage of the anti-CAA protests at Shaheen Bagh. The miscreants allegedly destroyed their camera.<sup>190</sup>

On 30 January 2020, Jitendra Sharma, Senior reporter with *Zee News*, his associate Neeraj Gaur and cameraperson Qamar Khan were heckled and assaulted while covering anti-CAA protest at Sukhdev Vihar metro station in Delhi.<sup>191</sup>

On 20 February 2020, two journalists namely Banti Das and Sevak Deb were attacked by a miscreant identified as Nabarun Deb when they were covering an incident of arson in Jagat Bazar market in Agartala, Tripura.<sup>192</sup>

On 25 February 2020, Akash, a journalist with *JK 24x7* Channel, received a bullet injury while covering communal violence in the Maujpur locality in

northeast Delhi. Two reporters namely Arvind Gunasekar and Saurabh from *NDTV* were beaten by rioters while covering the riots. Gunasekar reportedly lost three teeth in the attack.<sup>193</sup>

On 11 April 2020, journalist Balasaheb Navgire (35 years) was allegedly attacked by a mob at Panegaon in Ahmednagar district, Maharashtra for publishing a report about some families who had been home quarantined for suspected exposure to coronavirus. The attackers believed that due to the report, their employers did not allow them to work and turned them away. The police filed a case against the attackers.<sup>194</sup>

On 15 April 2020, Priyanshu Kumar, a TV journalist, was allegedly threatened with death with a gun pointed on his head by a group of people in Samstipur, Bihar. The journalist had reported on lack of social distancing in markets in Samastipur. Kumar filed an FIR against five persons for the threat.<sup>195</sup>

On 17 May 2020, Hardik Joshi, a reporter for *ABP Asmita*, was attacked in Rajkot district, Gujarat. The TV news channel claimed the assault was carried out by protesting migrant workers whom Joshi was reporting on. He was seriously injured. Three police personnel were also allegedly attacked.<sup>196</sup>

On 23 May 2020, a journalist identified as Mahadev Nayak was held hostage at a temporary medical centre, a quarantine centre for COVID-19 at Korua panchayat under Naugaon block in Jagatsinghpur district of Odisha. He had published reports in his newspaper of how the sarpanch Aranya Nayak in quarantine was provided food and clothes by his family every day in violation of COVID-19 guidelines. When Mahadev reached the spot, the Sarpanch allegedly snatched his mobile phone, gold chain and cash of Rs 10,000 from him and asked the quarantined returnees in the medical centre to hold him hostage. The journalist was rescued by the officials after six hours and had to be sent to another quarantine facility at Alanahat village under the same block as he had come in contact with the returnees.<sup>197</sup>

On 15 June 2020, Haider, a journalist in the electronic media, was attacked by one Anand and his associates in the Puranpur area in Pilibhit, Uttar Pradesh in

connection with some stories published by him. The victim was hit with the butt of a revolver and dragged for 100m by a car.<sup>198</sup>

On 21 June 2020, journalist Bibhubhusan Pati was attacked by two miscreants at Sarei village under Champua Tehsil in Keonjhar district, Odisha. When the journalist was returning home from the market on a scooty, two bike-born miscreants waylaid him and threatened him by showing a gun. They hit him on his head with the gun when he protested and broke one of his fingers.<sup>199</sup>

On 29 June 2020, Hofe Dada (29), a reporter of ‘*Gyoloo News*’, a digital media house based in Itanagar, Aruanchal Pradesh was assaulted by four men of the Smelting factory at Lekhi village in Papum Pare district while he was covering a story on the pollution caused by the factory. One person was arrested in the case.<sup>200</sup>

On 6 July 2020, a mob of more than 100 unidentified persons attacked the house of Prasantha Charkavarti, senior journalist and General Secretary of Tripura Union of Working Journalists, at Agartala, Tripura and destroyed the entire house. As Prasantha Charkavarti was not present at the house, the mob beat up his brother and sister.<sup>201</sup> On 13 July, the PCI took suo-motu cognizance of the case and issued notice to the Chief Secretary, the Home Secretary and the Director General of Police, Tripura.<sup>202</sup>

On 31 July 2020, a journalist working for a web portal was attacked for capturing the visuals of gross violation of COVID-19 norms at Durga Nursing Home in Kendrapada town in Odisha. The journalist was allegedly verbally abused, brutally thrashed and then thrown out of the hospital by the hospital staff. A Sub Inspector who was sent to investigate the matter was also attacked by the hospital owner’s sons and his associates including two doctors. The next day the police arrested eight people, including two doctors of the private nursing home.<sup>203</sup>

On 11 August 2020, a mob assaulted three journalists working with *The Caravan* magazine identified as Shahid Tantray, Prabhjit Singh and a woman journalist in Subhash Mohalla, in North Ghonda neighbourhood in northeast Delhi, while reporting on a follow up story concerning the Delhi riots of February 2019. The journalists were attacked, subjected to communal slurs, threatened with

murder, and sexually harassed. The journalists were taking photographs of saffron flags that had been flown in the area, when some men approached and told them to stop. One of the men, who was wearing a saffron *kurta* and had a bandage on his arm, identified himself as a “BJP general secretary.” He asked Tantray for his identity card. The mob launched their attack upon realising that Tantray was Muslim.<sup>204</sup> On 25 August 2020, the PCI sought a report from the Chief Secretary, the Commissioner of Police and the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Delhi.<sup>205</sup>

On 11 August 2020, Ravi Kumar PS, Chief of the Crime Bureau at the Kannada news channel *Suvarna TV* and his colleagues Pradeep KM (reporter) and Rudresh BV (cameraman) were assaulted by the rioters while covering the riots that broke out in east Bangalore, Karnataka in protest against an allegedly derogatory Facebook post about Prophet Muhammad.<sup>206</sup>

On 12 August 2020, Gurnam Singh Sidhu, reporter of *babushahi.com* was beaten up by eight persons led by one Amit in the premises of the Press Club in Ferozpur, Punjab. Sidhu was working in the club, when Amit along with other accused entered and started thrashing him. To save himself, Sidhu ran to the roof but he was followed by Amit who picked up a brick and hit him on his head.<sup>207</sup>

On 12 September 2020, Parashar Biswas, a journalist from Ambassa of Dhalai district, was assaulted by 6-7 people at his residence and Ashok Dasgupta, a television reporter from Belonia of South Tripura, was beaten up by some persons after he tried to cover drinking water shortage at Matai in South Tripura district.<sup>208</sup>

On 25 September 2020, two journalists were allegedly beaten up when they were clicking photos of vandalism at Barpathari market in South Tripura district of Tripura. The victims were identified as Samir Kanti Debnath, reporter of a local daily, and Suman Nag, a TV journalist.<sup>209</sup>

On 29 September 2020, Rajan Pandey, a journalist working with a Hindi daily, was shot at by three men in Manjagadh police station area in Gopalganj district of Bihar. Police claimed that Pandey was attacked due to personal enmity.<sup>210</sup>

On 31 October 2020, Jomon V Xavier, a journalist of *Janayugam* newspaper, the mouthpiece of Communist Party of India (CPI), was attacked by miscreants with hockey sticks at Karimannur in Thodupuzha in Idukki district of Kerala.

The seriously injured journalist was admitted to a private hospital in Thodupuzha.<sup>211</sup>

On 7 November 2020, journalist Vinay Tiwari (40 years) was allegedly beaten up with sticks by a village head identified as Babita Mishra and her sons, Vivek Mishra, Abhishek Mishra and Aryan Mishra at Dhaura village in Lalitpur district, Uttar Pradesh. The attack took place when Vinay Tiwari, who works for a local news channel, Bundelkhand Times TV, when he was taking photographs of MGNREGA work done by machines instead of labourers. The journalist's mobile phone, motorcycle and cash were also taken away. An FIR was lodged against the four accused under Sections 394 (voluntarily causing hurt in committing robbery), 307 (attempt to murder), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt), 504 (Intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of the peace) and 506 (criminal intimidation) of the IPC.<sup>212</sup>

On 15 November 2020, Milan Mahanta, a journalist with leading Assamese daily *Pratidin*, was tied to an electricity pole and beaten by five men at Mirza near Guwahati, Assam. The victim suffered injuries to his neck, head and ears. In his FIR filed at the Palash Bari Police Station, the journalist stated that he had reported about gambling in rural areas of Assam ahead of Diwali and that the attackers were gamblers.<sup>213</sup>

On 1 December 2020, a woman journalist was attacked by a mob at Pension Mohalla in Hassan district of Karnataka after she reported the existence of illegal cow slaughters in the area.<sup>214</sup>

On 7 December 2020, Akarshan Uppal, a journalist with *IBN24*, was brutally attacked with lathis (sticks) and sharp weapons in Karnal, Haryana for reporting on a drugs case. He suffered head injuries and admitted to a hospital in a critical condition. Following his report, one Gurmeet Singh was arrested by the police and he died in prison custody. After Singh's death, Akarshan and his family allegedly received life threatening calls from Gurmeet Singh's elder brother identified as Ghelu who suspected Akarshan was involved in his brother's arrest.<sup>215</sup>

On 7 December 2020, Press Trust of India (PTI) photojournalist Ravi Choudhary was allegedly attacked by 5-6 men in Ganga Canal Road in Ghaziabad,

Uttar Pradesh. The journalist alleged that the attackers came in a BOLERO car (No: UP 14 DN 9545) with “bharat sarkar” written on it. He further alleged that Muradnagar police refused to lodge FIR. Choudhary’s photograph of a farmer being beaten by a police officer during the farmers’ protest had gone viral some days prior to the attack on him.<sup>216</sup>

On 10 December 2020, Ashwini Nigam who works for *R9 TV channel* was attacked with rods by unidentified persons when he tried to pacify two clashing groups under the Kalyanpur police station limits in Kanpur Nagar, Uttar Pradesh. Two men were arrested in this case.<sup>217</sup>

On 20 December 2020, three journalists identified as Prangopal Acharya, Pintu Paul and Biswajit Debnath were allegedly attacked by unidentified persons while they were covering a clash between ruling BJP and opposition Communist Party of India-Marxist workers at Khayerpur under Bodhjungle police station in West Tripura district of Tripura. In a police complaint, the journalists stated that they were threatened with dire consequences and the attackers tried to snatch their cameras.<sup>218</sup>

### iii. Online threats/harassment

- *This reported documented six journalists who were harassed, abused and threatened online in 2020.*
- *Four out of six were female journalists.*
- *The threats include assault, rape and murder.*

A number of journalists were harassed, abused and threatened with rape and murder online during 2020. Some of the cases are given below:

#### Case 1: Vidya Krishnan, Maharashtra

On 27 March 2020, journalist Vidya Krishnan wrote a report on the government’s ‘callousness’ response on COVID-19 pandemic. Following the report, Vidya was constantly subjected to sexist insults and threatened with assault, rape and murder on social media.<sup>219</sup>

## **Case 2: Nisha Purushothaman, Kamalesh KG and Prajula Kamalesh, Kerala**

In August 2020, three journalists of Kerala namely Nisha Purushothaman (Chief News Producer of *Manorama News*), Kamalesh KG (Principal Correspondent with *Asianet News*) and Prajula Kamalesh (News Editor with *Asianet News*) filed a police complaint after they were harassed on social media by alleged sympathisers of the Communist Party of India-Marxist. These journalists, and others working with the two channels, alleged that during the coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic, the gold smuggling case and the floods in the state, they and their families were targeted online.<sup>220</sup>

## **Case 3: Tongam Rina, Arunachal Pradesh**

Tongam Rina, Associate Editor of *The Arunachal Times*, received several threats of physical violence online for her article published on 23 April 2020 under the caption “*wildlife hunting on spike, says a forest official*” published in *The Arunachal Times*. On 19 May 2020, the PCI expressed concern and sought a report from the Government of Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>221</sup>

## **Case 4: Rana Ayyub, Maharashtra**

In July 2020, journalist Rana Ayyub tweeted about Kashmir issue. The tweets resulted in rape and death threats against her across social media platforms. Mumbai police took cognizance of the online threats.<sup>222</sup>





# 5.

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The Rights & Risks Analysis Group (RRAG) is an independent think-tank based in New Delhi. It conducts risks analysis to prevent violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms with a specific focus on the threats to the rule of law and democracy. It provides early warnings on impending conflicts and analysis of policies and programmes of the State and non-State actors contributing to the proliferation or perpetuation of conflicts. Its special focus remains to change the current narrative on counter-terrorism.

The RRAG believes that risks to rights can be addressed through effective engagement with the stakeholders and independent and incisive analysis of the issues and situations for their effective interventions for the prevention of violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms.



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