

Pakistan's Foreign Policy

JOURNALISM

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The 'Sindh Protection of Journalists and Other Media Practitioners Bill, 2021' received the provincial governor's assent formalizing the bill's passage into law. The legislation marks a rare but significant achievement for a country that has consistently ranked among the most dangerous places for journalists in the world. At least 158 journalists have been killed in Pakistan since 2000 and hundreds more report facing threats and attacks each year.

The law makes it theoretically possible to counter impunity in crimes against journalists. Under the law, an inclusive and autonomous commission will be established to monitor threats to media workers, conduct inquiries into cases of violence against journalists and suggest punishments for perpetrators. The commission will also be able to open investigations into heinous crimes committed against journalists in the past.

The provincial legislation is remarkable because it follows a liberal interpretation of the term 'journalist' by including information practitioners and freelancers in its safety net. In doing so, it acknowledges the digital transformation of Pakistan's media sector.

The law also articulates the demands of the journalist community by incorporating principles from the UN Plan of Action on the safety of journalists and affirming the right to life for Pakistani journalists under Article 9 of the country's constitution.

Acts against Journalists in Pakistan:

The state of impunity in crimes against Pakistani journalists remains absolute. According to Pakistani media rights watchdog Freedom Network, a partner of IMS in defending the freedom of expression and offering assistance to journalists in distress, not a single killer of journalists killed has been delivered punishment.

A Freedom Network study, supported by IMS, shows not a single perpetrator was convicted in the murder investigations of 33 Pakistani journalists killed between 2013-18. Threat actors who intimidate, harass, abduct and attack journalists enjoy similar total impunity for their crimes.