

Pakistan and press freedom: An attack on “Dawn” is an attack on us all’: Journalists rally against siege of Islamabad offices

Sunday 8 December 2019, by [BILAL Rana](#), [Dawn \(Pakistan\)](#), [KHATTAK Inamullah](#), [NIHAD Nihad](#), [Sirajuddin](#) (Date first published: 5 December 2019).

Journalists across various cities protested on Thursday against the siege of Dawn’s Islamabad offices by a mob earlier this week.

The mob on Monday had staged a demonstration against the publication of a news report regarding the origins of the London Bridge attacker who stabbed two persons to death last week. The charged mob, carrying banners and chanting slogans against the newspaper, had remained outside the office building for nearly three hours, besieging the premises and making the staffers hostage.

On Tuesday, dozens of people had also staged a protest demonstration outside Karachi Press Club against Dawn. The participants had threatened to besiege the offices of the media group if “prompt action was not taken against the management and outlets of the organisation for publishing false news.”

Today’s protests were held by the journalist fraternity in Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore, and Quetta outside the Dawn offices and local press clubs in a show of solidarity with the publication. Participants held banners inscribed with slogans in support of Dawn and strongly condemned the attack.

Participants in Karachi carried banners from the Karachi Union of Journalists, Hyderabad Union of Journalists and Sukkur Union of Journalists condemning the siege and pledging solidarity with Dawn.

Addressing the Karachi protest, Editor Dawn Zaffar Abbas said that “one by one, all of the media organisations are being suppressed” and called on all media houses to come together and remain united at such a time.

“When Geo is attacked, we remain quiet. When Dawn is attacked, most of us, again, remain quiet. When the distribution of Jang newspaper and The News is prevented, others seek to take advantage of the situation.”

Abbas said that the circulation of Dawn was also being stopped in certain cities once more. “We must understand, the editors as well as the owners, that when someone views it as an opportunity to cash in on greater sales in such times, then what has happened with us can happen with them too. That’s why we all need to stand together,” he said.

He asked of the authorities: “What is our fault? That we are publishing news reports? If we have violated any laws, if we have committed treason, there are laws for that. File a case against us, drag us into court, jail us, but what is this? You don’t like the newspaper, you don’t like the news it

publishes, so you gather government employees and stage a protest against it?"

Chants of "shame, shame" followed, after which he went on to say: "You stop our paper from distribution in parts of the country, you force cable operators to stop broadcasting our TV channel." Democracy will never be able to take flight in the country this way. If democracy has to flourish then freedom of expression and freedom of the press will have to be valued.

"If you do not value these, you will have to bear the brunt of the resulting loss."

In Islamabad today, banners from the Pakistan Union of Journalists and Human Rights Commission of Pakistan were seen in the protest.

Awami National Party leader Afrasiab Khattak addressed the gathering and vowed to "stand by freedom of the press at all cost". He said that "even Zia was not as harsh on the press as is the current regime".

In Lahore, a sizable number of the journalist community gathered outside the city's Dawn offices. Participants chanted slogans of "until the media is free, our fight will continue" and "an attack on Dawn, is an attack on us all". They called on the government to stop such attacks on media offices.

"We have come to express solidarity with Dawn and its workers," said a participant of the protest in Lahore.

"An attack on Dawn is an attack on media freedom. Journalism is the fourth pillar of the state," said another.

Senior journalist Zulfikar Mehto lamented that Dawn's offices were forcibly shut and "the editor was issued threats".

A protest in support of Dawn was also held outside the Quetta Press Club. Besides senior journalists, members of civil society from various schools of thought also participated.

"Times are worse today than when we had a dictatorship," said President Quetta Press Club Razaur Rehman. "All of the country's journalists will remain united in the future against such elements," he vowed.

Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) President Shehzada Zulfikar said that journalists, television channels and newspapers are not "enemies of the state". "There is a difference between creating disturbance and protesting," he said, adding that a difference of opinion over a news report is anyone's right.

Pakistan Union of Journalists President (PUJ) Ayub Tareen said that it was shameful to have asked journalists to apologise in front of the cameras. "Only with free media will civil society and political parties function effectively."

A large number of journalists also gathered on the call of Khyber Union of Journalists (KhUJ) to protest outside the Peshawar Press Club.

KhUJ President Fida Khattak addressed the crowd, condemning the restriction on media by the incumbent government.

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• Dawn.com, Updated December 05, 2019:

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1520606/an-attack-on-dawn-is-an-attack-on-us-all-journalists-rally-against-siege-of-islamabad-offices>

Mob besieges Dawn offices in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD: A few dozen unidentified people on Monday staged a protest outside Dawn offices over publication of a news report regarding the ethnicity of the London Bridge attacker who stabbed two persons to death last week.

The charged mob, carrying banners and chanting slogans against the newspaper, remained outside the office building for nearly three hours, besieging the premises and making the staffers hostage.

They prevented the employees from entering or leaving the building and demanded a written apology. Some of the protesters also misbehaved with the newspaper as well as Dawn TV employees when they arrived at the office.

Security guards at the media house had to lock the gates to prevent the protesters from entering the premises before police and officers of the capital administration arrived.

After lengthy negotiations with the newspaper management in the presence of an assistant commissioner, the protesters finally agreed to disperse after hurling warnings.

Meanwhile, the incident was widely condemned by leaders of various political parties, parliamentarians and journalist bodies.

Chairman of the Senate Functional Committee on Human Rights Mustafa Nawaz Kokhar has also taken notice of the besieging of Dawn offices by the unidentified persons and directed the inspector general of police Islamabad to submit a report on the issue to the committee by December 6. He had also sought details of the action taken by the police against those who had besieged the media house.

Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari in a statement condemned the incident, saying that “no one should be allowed to attack media outlets in the name of protest”.

Mr Bhutto-Zardari demanded “action against the crowd which attacked the newspaper office and vowed to side with the journalist fraternity”.

PML-N Information Secretary Marriyum Aurangzeb called for a high-level investigation into the incident to identify and punish the perpetrators.

In a statement, Ms Aurangzeb said it was imperative to set a precedent by awarding strict punishment to those who attacked the newspaper office so that it should act as a deterrent in future.

“Such actions are unacceptable in any civilised society,” she said, pledging that the people, politicians and media will join hands in the fight against such elements.

National Party (NP) Punjab president Ayub Malik termed it as an “attack on media freedom”. He also

called for strict action against the “unidentified persons” for holding the newspaper employees hostage. He asked the government to identify the people with the help of video footages available on social media.

Meanwhile, office-bearers of the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) and the National Press Club (NPC) also condemned the incident.

Newly-elected president of the PFUJ-Afzal Butt Group Shehzada Zulfiqar and secretary general Nasir Zaidi demanded an inquiry.

The incident, they said, was an eye opener for the government and must not be ignored.

NPC President Shakil Qarar, in a statement, said working journalists would not allow curbs on press freedom, and asked the government to take steps for the protection of media persons.

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<https://www.dawn.com/news/1520079/mob-besieges-dawn-offices-in-islamabad>
