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Why Every Journalist Should Learn OSINT

Journalism has always been about asking questions, building sources and verifying facts. Those fundamentals have not changed. What has changed is the range of tools available to reporters. One of the biggest shifts over the last decade has been the rise of Open Source Intelligence (OSINT). OSINT simply means gathering and verifying information from publicly available sources. It is not hacking or accessing confidential databases. It involves using satellite imagery, flight and ship tracking websites, company records, court documents, archived webpages, social media posts and other open records to investigate a story. Individually, these sources may seem insignificant. Together, they can reveal facts that are difficult to ignore. The term "open source intelligence" was once associated mainly with intelligence agencies and security analysts.

Today, it has become an essential part of investigative journalism. Some of the strongest investigations no longer begin with leaked documents or anonymous sources. They often start with publicly available information that requires patience, verification and the ability to connect the dots. Few organisations have demonstrated the power of OSINT better than Bellingcat. The investigative collective has used publicly available videos, photographs and satellite imagery to identify military units, verify attacks and expose disinformation. Its work has shown that open information, when carefully analysed, can produce investigations that stand up to scrutiny. The BBC Africa Eye team has also produced remarkable investigations using OSINT. By combining mobile phone videos, satellite images and geolocation techniques, its journalists have reconstructed incidents and verified eyewitness accounts. The New York Times Visual Investigations team follows a similar approach. From conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza to police shootings and natural disasters, it pieces together digital clues to establish what happened. OSINT is useful far beyond conflict reporting. Satellite imagery has helped expose illegal mining, deforestation and changes in land use.

Flight tracking platforms such as Flightradar24 and ADS-B Exchange help reporters understand aircraft movements during major incidents. Ship tracking services like MarineTraffic and VesselFinder have been used to monitor vessels linked to sanctions, conflict zones and global trade. Google Earth, Sentinel Hub, the Wayback Machine and reverse image search have also become valuable reporting tools. India offers enormous opportunities for OSINT-based reporting. Environmental violations, infrastructure projects, election funding, public procurement, illegal construction and disaster reporting can all benefit from open-source research. Government databases, company filings and court records contain valuable information that often goes unnoticed. Combined with field reporting and interviews, these resources can make stories stronger and more credible. OSINT is not a replacement for traditional journalism. A satellite image cannot replace a conversation with a source.

A ship tracker cannot explain the motives behind a decision. Public records still need context, verification and reporting on the ground. The best investigations combine digital evidence with old-fashioned reporting. As newsrooms continue to adapt to new technology, OSINT is becoming an essential reporting skill rather than a specialised one.

Free Frank Fearless



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**“If journalism
is good, it is
controversial
by its nature.”
— JULIAN
ASSANGE,
publisher and
founder of
WikiLeaks**



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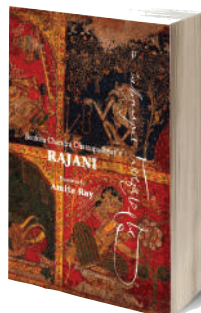
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IJU condemns murder of Andhra Jyothi journalist, seeks thorough probe

The Indian Journalists Union (IJU) has strongly condemned the brutal murder of journalist Jagan Mohan Reddy, a senior reporter with Andhra Jyothi, at Venkatagiri Kota in Andhra Pradesh's Chittoor district.

In a statement issued on Tuesday, IJU President Balwinder Singh Jammu and Secretary General D. Soma Sundar said the horrific incident took place in the early hours of April 28 while the journalist was on his morning walk.

According to the statement, unidentified assailants attacked Jagan Mohan Reddy with knives, killing him on the spot.

The IJU noted that the journalist had recently published reports on the sandalwood mafia operating in Chittoor district.

Expressing serious concern over the murder, the journalists' body demanded a thorough investigation into the incident and the immediate arrest of not only the perpetrators but also those who allegedly masterminded the crime.

The IJU also urged the Andhra Pradesh government to enact a separate law for the protection of journalists and take measures to prevent such incidents in the future.



Who Is a Real Journalist in the Digital Age?



**Devulapalli
Amar**

*Steering Committee
Member, IJU*

or a long time now, there has been an intense debate in the country, particularly in the Telugu states, over the credibility of the media. The discussion revolves around whether the media should have a Lakshman Rekha. If it should, who should draw that line? Should the media impose limits on itself through self-regulation, or should someone else regulate it and ensure it does not cross the line?

Since what we today describe as press freedom is an extension of the broader principle of freedom of expression, many have consistently argued that external control over the media is undesirable and that self-regulation alone is healthy and appropriate.

The debate has now moved beyond media credibility. A more fundamental question is being asked: What exactly is journalism? Who is a journalist? Who deserves to be recognised as a genuine journalist?

On July 1 every year, Karnataka observes Press Day to mark the publication of the first Kannada daily in 1843. This year, a seminar was organised in Bengaluru on the theme, "Who is a Real Journalist in the Digital Age?" The Chief Minister, along with several prominent personalities, participated in the discussion.

Similar debates are also taking place in several states during National Press Day, observed across the country on November 16 at the initiative of the Press Council of India.

Why did the question of who is a journalist arise in the first place? To answer that, we need to revisit the past.

Traditionally, anyone engaged in journalistic writing was considered a journalist. The Working Journalists Act, enacted under the framework of the Indian Constitution, defines a journalist quite clearly. Under the Working Journalists and Other Newspaper Employees Act of 1955, any person whose principal occupation is journalism, and who works either full-time or part-time for a

newspaper, is considered a working journalist.

But circumstances changed. Nearly three decades ago, newspapers began falling behind in the race as electronic media surged ahead with the arrival of 24-hour news channels. As a result, the law governing working journalists gradually lost much of its relevance.

Twenty-four-hour news channels function under a set of established guidelines and regulations. These include norms evolved by industry bodies as well

The debate has now moved beyond media credibility. A more fundamental question is being asked: What exactly is journalism? Who is a journalist? Who deserves to be recognised as a genuine journalist?



as rules prescribed by the Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Information published or broadcast through the digital and online platforms associated with newspapers and television channels also comes under the ambit of the Information Technology Rules, 2021.

With such elaborate regulations already in place, why has the question of who is a journalist resurfaced?

The answer lies in the fact that the media's journey did not end with newspapers giving way to television news. Technology continued to evolve, and in recent years the explosive growth of social media has made this debate unavoidable.

The rise of social media has led to the launch of several lakh

YouTube channels across the country. Estimates suggest that nearly 20 lakh YouTube channels are currently operating in various Indian languages. Around 15,000 of them reportedly have at least one million subscribers. The same estimates also indicate that Indian YouTube channels are expanding rapidly in the global market.

One argument is that YouTubers should also be recognised as journalists because they disseminate information to the public. Another view is that journalists and YouTubers are fundamentally different, and that everything said on YouTube cannot automatically be classified as journalism.

The reality is that these lakhs of YouTube channels operate outside any institutional framework. They

publish whatever they choose, in whatever manner they choose, without any editorial filtering. News media does not function that way. Whether it is a newspaper report or a television broadcast, every piece of information passes through multiple layers of scrutiny before reaching the public.

At the same time, there are those who argue that it is precisely these editorial filters that often dilute or even bury the truth. According to them, YouTube channels flourishing under the umbrella of social media are able to deliver unfiltered truth directly to the people. This is certainly an issue that deserves discussion.

Journalism, by its very nature, carries responsibility. Freedom must always be accompanied by

responsibility. While exercising the right to free expression, one cannot forget the obligation to act responsibly.

Had the mainstream media consistently upheld these principles, perhaps YouTube channels would not have mushroomed the way they have today. But society has changed. Life has become faster, and we have entered a digital era where YouTube channels and digital news platforms have become an inevitable part of the information ecosystem.

The massive flow of information pouring into society through YouTube channels raises important questions. Is it beneficial or harmful? What exactly should we call it? Whether or not we classify it as journalism, the information shared through these platforms must first be viewed as an exercise of freedom of expression.

At the same time, it must be remembered that while every citizen enjoys the constitutional right to free expression, that freedom cannot be used to infringe upon the rights of others or damage another person's reputation.

A recent incident has reignited the debate over whether YouTubers are journalists. For the past few days, social media has been flooded with discussions on the issue.

The controversy involves Joseph, better known by his YouTube name "Ravana." He was arrested by the Andhra Pradesh Police on allegations of personally abusing Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan. After securing bail, he was repeatedly arrested in different cases and taken from one police station to another across the state. Strangely, very few have questioned why multiple

cases were filed over essentially the same allegation.

The charge is that during a public meeting he criticised Pawan Kalyan using language that Pawan Kalyan himself had used on earlier occasions. This has sparked another debate. Should Joseph be treated as a journalist, or should he simply be regarded as a YouTuber with no connection to journalism?

Joseph, also known as Ravana, was arrested after a Jana Sena activist filed a complaint alleging that he had made objectionable remarks against the Deputy Chief Minister at a Dalit meeting in Eluru.

When action is taken against someone accused of committing an offence, the law does not distinguish between journalists and non-journalists. If a person has committed an offence under the law, it makes no difference whether that individual is an ordinary citizen, a journalist, a senior official, a politician or a wealthy person. The language Ravana allegedly used against Pawan Kalyan at the Eluru meeting was, in fact, language that Pawan Kalyan himself has used on several occasions against his political opponents. However, there is another dimension to this issue. There is a section that engages in smear campaigns against political opponents and

later attempts to shield itself under the cover of journalism.

If standards in the media have declined, and if confusion has deepened, the political system must accept a share of the responsibility. Today, almost every major political party, cutting across ideological lines, is either directly running or indirectly supporting hundreds and even thousands of proxy YouTube channels.

There is nothing wrong if these platforms present facts, offer constructive criticism or explain the activities of their respective parties. The problem arises when they descend into abusive language and engage in character assassination.

As a result, the small section of honest individuals genuinely trying to bring neglected information before the public often ends up becoming collateral damage.

In the early days, newspapers devoted considerable importance to readers' letters on the editorial page. Later, some newspapers appointed Readers' Editors, while others called them ombudsmen. At one stage, the idea of citizen journalism also gained prominence. All these initiatives were intended

to bring the public closer to journalism and help uncover the truth. ❏



EGI Protests Deletion of R. Rajagopal's Name From Voter List

The EGI statement said that if this could happen to someone like Rajagopal, who is a known public figure, the fate of others who have similarly been disenfranchised by a bureaucratic stroke of the pen, and lacking the voice to seek redressal can only be imagined.

The Editors Guild of India (EGI) has condemned the deletion of the name of R. Rajagopal, former editor of The Telegraph from the electoral rolls and the subsequent non-renewal of his passport by authorities. In a statement issued on Sunday (June 28), the EGI demanded that Rajagopal's identity as a voter be restored at the earliest.

"The Editors Guild of India condemns the manner in which Mr R. Rajagopal, a former Editor of The Telegraph, a leading Kolkata-based daily, is being treated by the bureaucracy that gets to decide who is an Indian citizen and who is not," said the EGI statement issued by its president Sanjay Kapoor, general secretary Raghavan Srinivasan and treasurer Teresa Rehman.

"Mr Rajagopal, despite decades of work in the public domain as a journalist and editor, today finds himself not only disenfranchised as a voter due to the deletion of his name from the electoral rolls, but also unable to renew his passport since more than 100 days, allegedly due to an 'adverse report' from the Kolkata Police, who must have been very familiar with Mr Rajagopal as the Editor of one of the city's leading dailies," added the statement.

The EGI statement added that the police verification appears to have been denied on the basis that



Rajagopal's name no longer figured on the electoral rolls. "Mr Rajagopal's plight highlights the misery that millions of Indians are being put through due to the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls being carried out by the Election Commission of India," said the EGI.

The EGI statement said that if this could happen to someone like Rajagopal, who is a known public figure, the fate of others who have similarly been disenfranchised by a bureaucratic stroke of the pen, and lacking the voice to seek redressal can only be imagined. "The EGI calls on the EC to display common sense - and sympathy - and restore Mr Rajagopal's identity as a voter at the earliest - and extend similar consideration to all those who have suffered a similar fate," said the EGI in its statement on Sunday. In a piece for The Wire, Rajagopal has highlighted his plight ever since his name was deleted from the electoral rolls, as a result of which he couldn't vote in the West Bengal assembly elec-

The Indian Journalists Union (IJU) has condemned the deletion of former The Telegraph Editor R. Rajagopal's name from the electoral rolls and the withholding of his passport renewal, calling it harassment. In a joint statement, IJU President Balwinder Singh Jammu, Secretary General D. Soma Sundar and Vice-President Y. Narender Reddy demanded the immediate restoration of Rajagopal's voting rights and the renewal of his passport. The IJU said Rajagopal's name was deleted during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) in West Bengal despite submitting his matriculation certificate and other supporting documents. It said he was later denied police clearance for passport renewal because he was not a registered voter, which prevented him from attending his daughter's wedding in the United States. The union said the case exposed serious flaws in the SIR process and expressed concern that if a senior journalist could face such a situation, the fate of the nearly 27 lakh people with pending appeals before electoral tribunals remained uncertain. The IJU urged the Government and the Election Commission to restore Rajagopal's voting rights and renew his passport without further delay.

tions earlier this year. Subsequently, officials cited the deletion of his name from electoral roles as reason to not renew his passport, as a result of which Rajagopal also missed the wedding of his daughter in the US.

— Courtesy The wire

A Journalist's Guide to Job Hunting in the Age of AI

Don't just show that you know how to use AI as a tool; show that you can do what AI cannot, say journalism experts

J

**Diana
Sierra**

Journalists are leaning on AI more than ever to polish their CVs, portfolios and interview prep. But hiring managers still want the final application to sound like a real person wrote it. So how do journalism graduates cut through?

We spoke to Mark Frankel (head of public affairs at Full Fact) and Nick Wrenn (partnerships consultant at NCTJ) and drew on research from Shangyuan Wu, a journalism researcher at the National University of Singapore, whose study looks at whether AI is causing journalists to "deskill". Here's what they had to say about the skills employers actually want, how to use AI well, and the mistakes that can sink an application.

AI is great for picking the right keywords, structuring a CV, and tailoring it to a specific employer, says Wrenn. But the CVs that stand out are still the ones written in the candidate's own voice.

Companies can spot an AI-written application a mile off, he warns, so it's worth the extra effort to sound like yourself. Wrenn also encourages graduates to talk up

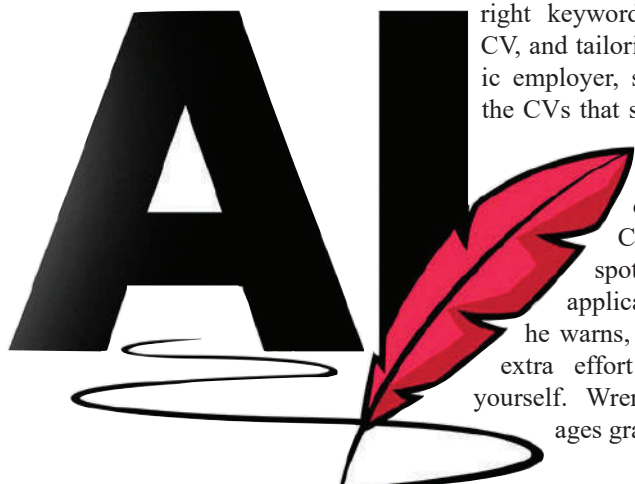
their experience with confidence, even if it was gained as part of a team. Research, background prep, production support: it all counts as real journalistic experience.

Frankel says he's more interested in how well a candidate can read data and statistics in an interview. The strongest candidates, he reckons, blend tech know-how with proper journalistic judgement: knowing how to question, verify and contextualise information before putting it in front of an audience.

A portfolio is your chance to show off original work. Wu stresses the value of coming up with your own story ideas and doing your own interviews. Digging up original stories, gathering your own information, and finding your own voice all matter.

Frankel agrees that a portfolio should show curiosity and initiative. Nobody expects a graduate to be an expert, but employers want to see an inquisitive mind and some sign that you can dig into a story.

Newsrooms increasingly want journalists with AI skills. Wrenn says those who know their way around tools like Claude, or who can "vibe code", have a real edge over those who don't. Wu points to prompt-writing as a key skill too: a





well-written prompt is the difference between generic AI output and something genuinely useful.

Frankel highlights verification and fact-checking as increasingly vital. Journalists should understand OSINT (open-source intelligence), SynthID (Google's watermarking system for AI content), geolocation, reverse image search and video verification.

But the human skills matter just as much as the technical ones. Frankel says journalists still need to nail the basics before any verification work begins: who, what, when, where, why and how. They also need curiosity, an open mind, and the ability to think laterally.

Wu adds that personal branding and storytelling are in demand too. AI might spot patterns, but it's still down to journalists to interpret information, do the research, and weave the evidence into a story that makes sense.

All three agree that human judge-

ment can't be replaced. Journalists need to trust their own instincts when weighing up information and making editorial calls. AI should support the process, not run it.

Being upfront about using AI can actually help your application stand out, says Frankel. If you've used AI to research or write a story, say so. He also recommends staying on top of the ethical and legal side of things by reading journalism publications, industry blogs and academic research.

Wrenn says journalists need to use AI tools creatively and responsibly, and to get sharp at telling real information from fabricated content, especially as AI-generated material becomes more common.

Frankel's found that a lot of misleading images aren't AI-generated at all. They're real photos, just presented out of context. A genuine picture attached to the wrong event, place or date can be just as misleading as a fake one. That's why verify-

ing the origin and history of visual content matters so much.

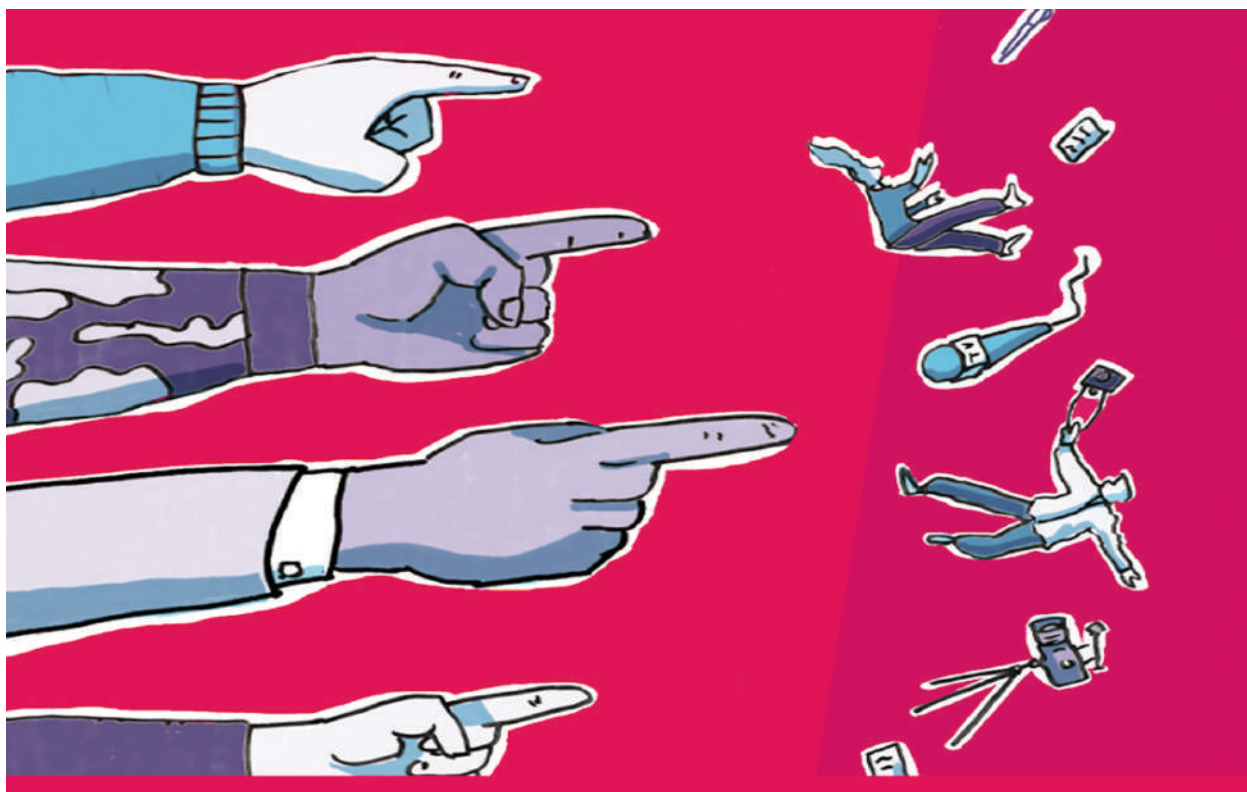
Staying current isn't optional any more. Wrenn says journalists need to keep learning and keep their digital skills up to date as AI spreads through the industry.

For Frankel, being a journalist today means knowing how to spot false positives, understanding how content gets manipulated, and knowing how to properly verify a story. It comes down to working out what can actually be proven.

Wu's research points to something bigger: journalism's future will hinge on how well journalists can show their "humanness". That means writing in their own voice, guiding the machines rather than the other way round, holding onto ethical principles, and still coming up with original, creative ideas.

What do you think will define journalism in the future? Let us know in the comments. 

— *Courtesy Journalism UK*



New RSF Report: National Security as a Weapon Against Journalism



What do Saudi journalist Turki al-Jasser, Philippine journalist Frenchie Mae Cumpio and Chinese journalist Zhang Zhan have in common? All were prosecuted in the name of "national security" between 2020 and 2026. Al-Jasser was executed and the other two imprisoned simply for doing their jobs. They are far from isolated cases. From Gaza to Hong Kong, from Moscow to Managua, hundreds of journalists are now being targeted with accusations of terrorism, espionage, treason or harming state interests for providing citizens with reliable news.

The past few weeks alone have pro-

vided further evidence of this pattern. In Russia, the independent news outlet Crimean Solidarity was added to the government's stigmatising list of "foreign agents" for documenting Russian repression in occupied Crimea. In the United States, the Department of Justice issued subpoenas compelling journalists from The Washington Post and The Wall Street Journal to testify before a grand jury investigating national security leaks. On 1 July 2026, just days before the report was published, the Chinese regime brought a new law into force that dangerously expanded the range of

activities considered "terrorism". This legislation can be used to target exiled journalists, notably those from the persecuted Uyghur minority. In Hong Kong, media owner Jimmy Lai has now spent more than 2,000 days in detention on national security charges as the founder of one of the territory's most prominent independent newspapers, Apple Daily.

On 8 July, the Paris Court of Appeal is due to rule on the case of French investigative journalist Ariane Lavrilleux. She was prosecuted for "compromising national defence secrets" and revealing information likely to identify a "protected agent" after her 2021 investigation revealed that a French intelligence mission had allegedly been diverted by the Egyptian authorities to target civilians. In 2023, the Disclose journalist was held in police custody for 39 hours, her home was searched and she was placed under surveillance. Even though the case against her was dismissed in October 2025 by an investigating judge who found that her reporting clearly served the public interest and contributed to democratic debate, the Public Prosecutor's Office is now seeking to reopen the investigation and her formal indictment, summon her co-authors to a hearing and impose the removal of the published articles and an accompanying documentary.

Twenty-five years after the US-led "war on terror" heightened security measures around the globe, the 2026 RSF World Press Freedom Index points to the continued overreach of national security legislation as its legal indicator deteriorated in more than 60% of countries between 2025 and 2026. The criminalisation of journalism through the circumvention of press law and the misuse

of emergency or ordinary legislation is a global phenomenon.

The growing number of armed conflicts and the advance of authoritarianism have fuelled this trend. The report highlights, in particular, how Palestinian journalists in Gaza and the occupied West Bank are being arrested, detained and deprived of their fundamental rights by the Israeli military under the pretext of fighting terrorism and national security. It also examines how the media is being silenced and pres-

I have spent much of my career defending journalists and whistleblowers prosecuted in the name of national security. But when I appeared in court at the beginning of the century for refusing to hand over my sources, I believed I was witnessing an exceptional clash between national security and press freedom.

— **Martin Bright**
Director of Journalism,
University of Essex and
Contributing Editor,
Index on Censorship

sured into disseminating "patriotic news coverage" across the Sahel region of sub-Saharan Africa. More broadly, it documents the international spread of these repressive practices, from "foreign agent" laws inspired by the Russian model to digital surveillance and censorship systems developed by China.

Democracies are not immune to

this trend. Increasingly, legal and security precedents are eroding the safeguards that protect press freedom. Examples include the tougher penalties journalists could face for working with whistleblowers under the United Kingdom's 2023 National Security Act, the conviction of Finnish journalist Juha Mäntylä, the surveillance scandal involving journalist Thanasis Koukakis in Greece, and the prosecution of Julian Assange under the US Espionage Act.

Taken together, these cases reflect a broader trend: the expanding use of national security and state secrecy as the basis for legal action against journalists. Allegations of espionage, terrorism, the dissemination of "false information" and harming state interests are now routinely invoked to justify arrests, arbitrary detention, unlawful surveillance and censorship. Such charges are increasingly brought against journalists simply for covering protests in Iran, reporting on the COVID-19 pandemic in Tanzania, or investigating environmental matters, as illustrated by the cases of Rupesh Kumar Singh in India and Shin Daewe in Myanmar.

In Latin America - from Nicaragua to Brazil, from Colombia to Mexico to Chile - abusive national security charges often stem from the legacy of political turmoil caused by "internal enemies" and takes several forms today: accusations of terrorism, treason and propaganda; illegal surveillance; restrictions on access to information; and the use of security-related narratives against journalists investigating security forces, armed groups, organised crime, corruption and environmental issues.

— **Courtesy RSF**

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION SUBPOENAS NYT OVER AIR FORCE ONE COVERAGE

Outlet said journalists subpoenaed to testify before grand jury after story detailed security concerns with Qatar-gifted plane



"The administration's embarrassment" over the reported security concerns "does not supersede the need for a free and independent press", Stern's statement also said.

The Trump administration has issued subpoenas to several New York Times journalists after the newspaper reported on security concerns with the president's new plane, according to the outlet.

The Times said its journalists were subpoenaed on Friday by the US justice department to testify before a federal grand jury in Manhattan five days later, marking the latest effort by the Trump White House to compel testimony from journalists under the threat of penalty. Agents delivered some of the subpoenas to the Times reporters at their homes, the paper added.

A US justice department statement responding to a request for comment about the subpoenas mentioned investigating "breaches of national security".

"To be clear, reporters are not the targets, those leaking classified information are," the statement said, in part.

Trump switches back to flying on older Air Force One for England trip instead of new Qatari jet

"We ... are not going to ignore the law and stop investigating the people who work in the administration and think it's OK to leak classified information impacting national security."

Meanwhile, press freedom advocates condemned the subpoenas.

A statement from the Washington DC-based National Press Club said federal prosecutors' "decision to subpoena journalists at the New York Times should alarm every American because it threatens the public's constitutional right to an independent press".

"The National Press Club calls on the justice department to immediately withdraw these subpoenas and reaffirm a principle that has long distinguished the United States: a free and independent press serves the people, not the government," the organization continued.

Seth Stern, the Freedom of the Press Foundation's director of advocacy, said in a separate statement that "when the government claims it needs to investigate journalists to protect national security, it really means its own reputational security".

"The administration's embarrassment" over the reported security concerns "does not supersede the need for a free and independent press", Stern's statement also said.

Times lawyer David McCraw said in his own statement that "the appearance

of federal law enforcement agents on the doorstep of news reporters should shock the conscience of any American who believes in the [US] constitution and the press freedom it protects".

Jennifer Griffin, Fox News's chief national security correspondent - whose network is generally aligned with Trump - echoed McCraw and the National Press Club in a post on X.

"This action by the US government to subpoena reporters for reporting legitimate news on security concerns about Air Force [One] should alarm every American," Griffin wrote.

The airplane at the center of the Times report was provided by Qatar as a \$400m gift. It took Donald Trump to North Dakota on its 1 July maiden voyage, and it more recently flew the president to a Nato summit in Turkey. But Trump then flew part of the way back to the US on an older-model Air Force One presidential jet. That happened amid the collapse of a ceasefire with Iran, which shares a border with Turkey and which the US and Israel launched war against in late February. Amid speculation that the president's Qatari-gifted jet lacked certain security systems, the Times - citing anonymous sources - then reported that the new Air Force One lacked antimissile capabilities as well as other protective features that older models are equipped with. The Times further reported that Trump flew some of the return trip from Turkey on an older Air Force One at the request of the Secret Service.

Trump subsequently denied any security concerns, telling reporters who were accompanying him that no safeguard-related worries factored into the decision to fly only part of



Donald Trump disembarks from the Qatar-gifted Air Force One after his first flight on the aircraft, in Bismarck, North Dakota, on 1 July 2026

the way home in the new Air Force One. The president additionally brushed off a question about whether Iran had subjected Air Force One to any credible threats.

"I have a threat all the time," Trump replied. "I'm No 1 on their list."

The White House also denied that the new Air Force One had any shortcomings in terms of security, calling it "state-of-the-art".

"The new Air Force One ... has been fitted with high-level security protocols that ensure the safety of the president and his staff," White House spokesperson Steven Cheung said in a statement. Cheung's statement then suggested Trump had not flown the whole way back to the US from Turkey on the new Air Force One because it was a "misdirection" against potential threats.

The New York Times reported that prior to publishing its article on the security concerns and the plane, a senior FBI official contacted the paper and asked it to withhold its piece for national security purposes - while declining to provide details.

After going forward with its reporting on the plane, Julian E Barnes, Eric Lipton, Tyler Pager and Eric Schmitt were among the Times journalists who received subpoenas for grand jury testimony, according to the newspaper. The White House Correspondents' Association (WHCA) and the NewsGuild of New York labor union, which represents Times journalists, each provided statements pledging their support for Barnes, Lipton, Page and Schmitt. The WHCA's president, Weijia Jiang, said her organization "condemns any act of intimidation against journalists, including attempts to pressure them into revealing sources".

Reports in June indicated that justice department officials purportedly investigating national security leaks had similarly subpoenaed journalists from the Wall Street Journal and Washington Post. However, the justice department withdrew the subpoenas after the outlets contested them in sealed court filings. 

— *Courtesy The Guardian*

CNN's Uncertain Future Claims its First Major On-Air Talent

Paula Reid is leaving for MS NOW after reportedly raising concerns about Paramount Skydance's pending takeover of Warner Bros. Discovery



aramount hasn't yet taken over Warner Bros. Discovery and CNN. Bari Weiss isn't overseeing CNN - at least not yet. But CNN has already lost a major on-air talent.

Paula Reid, the network's chief legal affairs correspondent, is leaving to join MS NOW. Variety's Brian Steinberg reports Reid is leaving CNN "in part due to the uncertainty of its future as its parent company, Warner Bros. Discovery, is acquired by Paramount Skydance. Reid turned down a chance to renew her current contract at CNN, according to two people familiar with the situation, in part because CNN's next era appears chaotic."

The news comes during a week when Reid featured prominently on CNN, talking about the various Supreme Court decisions handed down as the court's term came to a close.

On Tuesday, Status' Oliver Darcy wrote that Reid was expected to leave CNN. Her contract is set to expire this summer. CNN made a "strong push" to retain Reid because executives viewed her as "a rising on-air talent," Darcy reported. Reid has, indeed, filled in as

an anchor during her time at CNN. Despite all that, she wanted to move on.

Darcy wrote, "As she has mulled her decision, Reid has had candid conversations with CNN executives in which she has raised concerns about Paramount's pending \$111 billion acquisition of CNN parent company

Darcy wrote, "Ultimately, Reid decided the uncertainty surrounding the merger was too great and I'm told that she concluded it wasn't worth rolling the dice on an organization facing such an unsettled future."

Warner Bros. Discovery. In those private conversations, I'm told that Reid has expressed discomfort with the takeover and the uncertainty it has cast over CNN's future."

We still have no idea what would happen with CNN if and when Paramount gains control. And we also do not know for sure if Weiss will eventually oversee CNN, as she does

now with CBS News.

But that uncertainty, apparently, was enough for Reid, 43, to see MS NOW as a better option for her career. Reid joined CNN from CBS News in 2021.

Darcy wrote, "Ultimately, Reid decided the uncertainty surrounding the merger was too great and I'm told

that she concluded it wasn't worth rolling the dice on an organization facing such an unsettled future." Reid will be the first major on-air talent to leave CNN ahead of the impending merger of Paramount and Warner Bros. Discovery, but there are a few other names worth keeping an eye on.

There have been rumors that Anderson Cooper, who left CBS's "60 Minutes" not long after Weiss took over CBS News, is wary of working under her should she take over CNN. In addition, CNN contributor Kara Swisher has flat-out said she would leave CNN once Paramount takes over.

At an awards ceremony at Syracuse University back in March, Swisher said, "I don't think they'll be good owners. I don't. I think they've already shown several times, including editorial choices ... that they have no interest in journalism. And I refuse to work for an organization that doesn't respect journalists."

Darcy wrote, "(Paramount boss David) Ellison has hamstrung CNN management by not telegraphing his plans for the news organization post-merger, including whether (CNN CEO Mark) Thompson will remain as its top boss. That uncertainty has made it difficult for network executives to have candid contract renewal conversations with its journalists, given they do not know what is around the corner. Many CNN journalists have watched in horror as Ellison has allowed Weiss to upend CBS News and have little interest in working under her." One more thing worth mentioning is that Reid is a great hire for MS NOW, which continues to stock its roster with excellent talent since splitting away from NBC News late last year.

This has been quite the week for



news organizations retracting stories.

First, there was the whole NPR mess, where veteran journalist Nina Totenberg mistakenly reported that Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito was retiring. (He is not retiring).

Now comes this story involving ESPN, NFL free-agent defensive lineman Michael Pennel Jr. and a homicide investigation. In April, ESPN reported that Pennel was a "person of interest" in the investigation into the death of a woman in the Dominican Republic. ProFootballTalk's Mike Florio wrote, "Among other things, the story cited unnamed sources to support the notion that Pennel knew the woman whose remains were found on property he previously owned."

But the ESPN story has since been removed from the website. On June 18, ESPN ran another note under the headline: "ESPN update to Michael Pennel Jr. story." The note said: One of the more interesting tidbits that came up in the whole Nina Totenberg-Samuel Alito story was that NPR had a prewritten story for

when Alito does retire.

As I wrote in Wednesday's newsletter, it is quite common for news organizations to have prewritten stories about famous or important people for when they retire or die. My Poynter colleagues Kristen Hare and Fernanda Camarena write about this topic in "Why do journalists prewrite stories?"

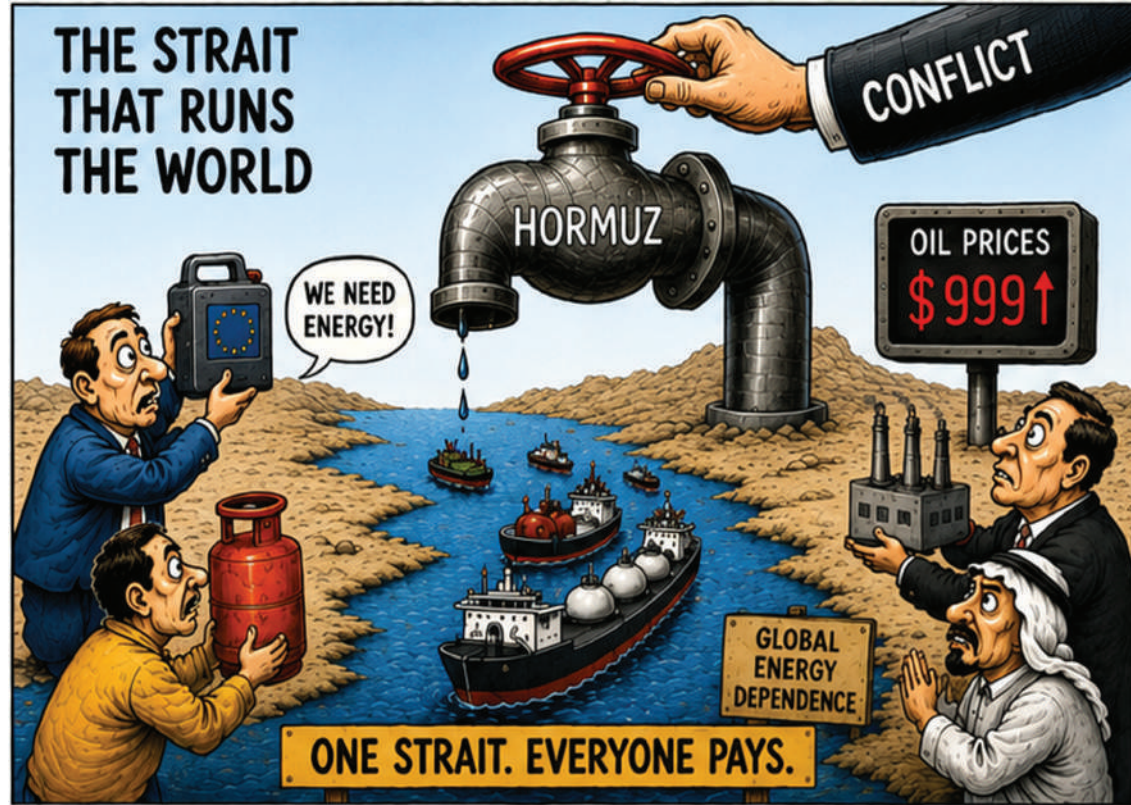
Hare and Camarena write about what kinds of stories could be prewritten and why.

While the NPR mistake wasn't because someone accidentally hit "publish" on a story before it was ready to go, there is always a risk of that happening. Hare and Camarena go over the safeguards news organizations can put in place to make sure that doesn't happen.

They add, "The NPR episode turned out not to be a cautionary tale about prewriting. But it was a reminder that no matter how much preparation goes into a story, the last and most important step is making sure the news has actually happened." ❏

— *Courtesy Poynter. 50*

CARTOONS OF THE MONTH



NPR Retracts Story About Alito retirement



**Kelly
McBride**

NPR had the lengthy story about Alito's retirement already written, because that's what newsrooms do in anticipation of significant retirements and even deaths.

PR legal affairs correspondent Nina Totenberg misheard an announcement about retirements as she was leaving the U.S. Supreme Court on Tuesday. As a result, an NPR headline erroneously claimed that Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito was retiring. The headline sat atop a lengthy story that recapped the conservative justice's tenure. The error was also reported on NPR's airwaves.

Alito is not retiring. The story was wrong. Here's how it happened.

Totenberg was reporting on the final day of the Supreme Court session on Tuesday. As she was leaving the court, Chief Justice John Roberts was announcing upcoming retirements. Totenberg wondered why everyone else wasn't leaving and asked someone outside the court. According to her interview that same day on All Things Considered, Totenberg asked a bystander what was going on, and the person replied "retirement announcements." But Totenberg heard the reply in the singular, "announcement," and assumed it was the notice that Alito was retiring.

NPR had the lengthy story about Alito's retirement already written, because that's what newsrooms do in anticipation of significant retirements and even deaths.

Totenberg spoke with both her intern, who was at the court with her, and NPR Executive Editor Krishnadev Calamur and told them what she heard. Calamur surfaced the story that NPR had previously prepared for the day Alito did announce his retirement and

published it. The information was also broadcast on NPR's airwaves. NPR was offering special live coverage of the court's decision on the birthright citizenship case.

"We profoundly regret the error and the confusion that this has caused and Nina has reached out to Alito to apologize personally," Calamur told me.

The story was published on NPR's website at 10:51 a.m. ET and it was live for about 5 minutes. It was up for longer periods on some member station websites. It was taken down and replaced with an editor's note by 10:57 a.m. The error was corrected on the broadcast at 11:07 a.m. ET.

In the minutes after it was published, Totenberg called Calamur to tell him she was mistaken.

"I was looking to see who else was reporting it, and nobody was reporting it, and then, basically, we realized that it was not true," Calamur said. "She called and said, 'I made a mistake,' and we rushed to make a retraction."

Totenberg is one of the most experienced reporters covering the Supreme Court. She's done so for NPR since 1975. Her status contributed to the error.

"She's the preeminent Supreme Court reporter in the courtroom," Calamur said. "So I'm assuming that's what she heard. ... She's in the room. It's like when we report opinions. I'm not waiting to see what the Times is reporting. It's when Nina says, here's what happened, and we do it. That's the trust you build up."

In a statement, NPR Editor-in-Chief Tommy Evans said: "Due to a misunderstanding, NPR's Supreme Court and Legal Affairs Correspondent Nina Totenberg incorrectly reported that Justice Samuel Alito had retired. Neither Justice Alito nor the Supreme Court Public Information Office has announced his retirement. As soon as the error was realized, the story was retracted and removed from NPR's website and an on-air correction was broadcast. We regret the error and any confusion this may have caused. This afternoon, Mrs. Totenberg will appear on All Things Considered to explain what happened. She has reached out to Justice Alito to apologize."

While, there's really no excuse for this kind of error, it was a result of an honest mistake and a rush to publish. Had it been true, NPR, The New York Times, The Washington Post and many other newsrooms all would have published their stories within minutes of each other. Totenberg was rushing back to NPR studios for their live coverage of the birthright citizenship decision. For most news consumers, the error is a blip, something that flashed across their feed or they heard on their radio. It was corrected quickly and will not have lasting consequences. For media watchers though, this error overshadows the special coverage NPR planned out for the last day of this Supreme Court session. There was rampant speculation across social media.

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The High Price Journalists Paid for LGBTQ+ Reporting, and How to Protect Yourself Now

As LGBTQ+ communities celebrate Pride this June, many journalists continue to face an ugly reality: simply reporting on this community can open them up to prosecution, physical attacks, threats, arrest, exile, and even death.



A vijit Roy, a Bangladeshi-born American who blogged about LGBTQ+ rights and free expression, was stabbed to death alongside his wife after receiving death threats related to his reporting in February 2015. About a year later, Xulhaz Mannan, who founded the first and only LGBTQ+ magazine in Bangladesh,

was stabbed to death in his home. Camera operator Aleksandre "Lekso" Lashkarava underwent surgery after defending a colleague from a group of about 20 anti-LGBTQ+ protesters in Georgia in 2021 who, according to that colleague, repeatedly kicked him in the head and left him in a pool of blood. Lashkarava was found dead at

his home six days later.

Although the official concluded the cause of death was heroin intoxication, family members said they lacked trust in the autopsy findings because international experts were not allowed to participate. Lashkarava's family, colleagues, and many members of the media accused the government of attempting to shift responsibility for its failure to ensure journalists' safety, or even cover up its complicity in stoking or condoning violence against the LGBTQ+ community and the press.

These are three among more than 70 journalists CPJ has documented who were attacked for reporting on LGBTQ+ issues over a period of two decades.

"Being a queer journalist and reporting on LGBTQ communities has very different degrees of danger depending on where you are and what you're doing," said Kae Petrin, president of the Trans Journalist Association, a mostly U.S.-based organization that has membership in Canada, South America, and Asia.

"In some of the education work I've done, [I've spoken to reporters who] may or may not be LGBTQ+, but are publishing in countries where there are already so many press freedom issues, and then there's new anti-LGBTQ legislation," Petrin told CPJ. "Many of those reporters can't even figure out how to publish stories about what's going on in their country safely, regardless of their identities."

Around the world, some governments are using every tool in their arsenal to suppress reporting on LGBTQ+ news, including vague, widely applied legislation.

In June 2013 in Russia, President Vladimir Putin passed legislation that legitimizes discrimination



US Ambassador to Hungary David Pressman speaks to journalists as he takes part in the Budapest Pride Parade in Hungary on June 22, 2024

against LGBTQ+ persons and subsequently discourages news coverage. Several countries have passed similar laws, including Uganda in 2023 and Georgia in 2024; Turkey proposed its version of the law in 2025. At the state and federal level, the United States legislators passed dozens of anti-LGBTQ+ laws in 2026 and proposed hundreds more.

Konstantin Iablotskii, a Russian LGBTQ+ rights defender who died in 2024, told CPJ in 2013 that laws like these mean that violence against the LGBTQ+ community is not being reported on because of fear that their journalism would be conflated with producing "gay propaganda."

These moves serve not only to punish journalists and outlets, but the issues they were trying to document. When journalists cannot safely report on LGBTQ+ people, those voices are lost to the public record. Crimes committed against them go undocumented. Their humanity remains unobserved.

"Reporters are often the first step in actually verifying information...and the people who are paying the most attention to what's happening to queer communities in terms of hostile legislation and populist governments funding transnational anti-LGBTQ policy work," Petrin told CPJ. "The harder it becomes to access an audience, to access government buildings, to access public space, the harder it becomes for the reporters who are often most invested in telling these stories to chase them down and to be able to do quality and novel reporting."

Although CPJ does not carry specific data on the experiences of journalists who identify as LGBTQ+, a look through our archives illustrates, from 2003-2025, the price of bearing witness for this community. These incidents began more than 30 years after the first Pride marches took place:

— Courtesy CPJ

Azerbaijan: towards a Ministry of Information 2.0



Azerbaijan is on the verge of establishing a media "super-regulator" with unprecedented powers. The bill creating a Media and Broadcasting Council - examined by Parliament at its second reading on Tuesday, 30 June - would concentrate the regulation, funding, training and oversight of the entire media sector in a single institution. For Reporters Without Borders (RSF), the reform amounts to the return of a Ministry of Information, designed to strengthen state control over the last spaces where independent information still circulates, particularly digital platforms.

Presented as a simple administrative reform, the creation of the Media and Broadcasting Council marks a turning point. The Azerbaijani parliament is set to merge the country's two main media regulators into a single institution with unprecedented powers. The government says it wants to adapt the regulatory framework to an environment in which the boundaries between the press, broadcast media and digital platforms have disappeared. It has also cited the need to defend "national information security" and the "economic independence of the media".

But Azerbaijani experts say the reform has another objective: to strengthen the state's ability to control a media landscape in which the main spaces for independent information have shifted to digital platforms.

The creation of the Media and Broadcasting Council is part of a broader takeover of the media that began when Ilham Aliyev came to power in 2003. Through successive reforms, the legal framework has become more restrictive and regulatory bodies have gradually lost their independence to the executive. Today, their leaders are appointed directly by the authorities, while independent media are denied access to the advertising market, foreign funding and

The creation of the Council would concentrate within a single institution powers that have been divided among several bodies:

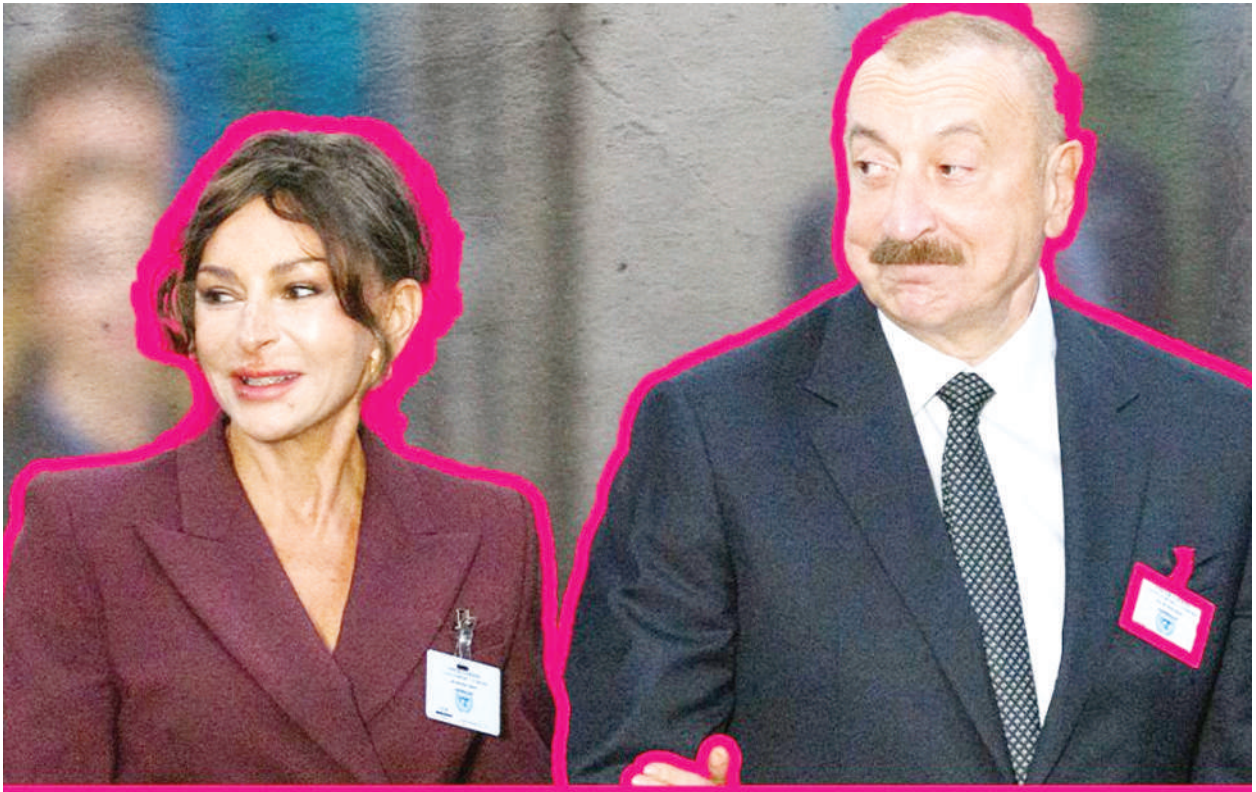
REGULATORY power over all media, whether broadcast, print or digital;

FINANCIAL power, through the management of economic support mechanisms for the sector;

PROFESSIONAL influence, by organising training, competitions, educational programmes and activities aimed at journalists;

CONTENT oversight, notably in the name of combating disinformation and protecting information security

THE power to define public media policy, with direct integration into the state executive.



“This bill does not create an independent regulator; it completes the State’s takeover of the media by establishing an information command centre serving the executive. While the last independent journalists are being imprisoned, forced into exile or reduced to working clandestinely, the authorities are choosing to place every lever of control over the sector in their own hands.

Regulation worthy of the name protects pluralism; it is not used to consolidate political power.

— **JEANNE CAVELIER**
Head of RSF’s Eastern
Europe and Central
Asia Desk

official sources.

Institutional concentration has also accelerated. Created by presidential decree in 2021, the Media Development Agency replaced the Media Support Fund with expanded powers. In 2022, the Audiovisual Council replaced the former National Television and Radio Council. In March 2026, the Social Research Centre was integrated into the Media Agency, a further step in this centralisation, which many Azerbaijani experts have denounced.

At the same time, repression of independent journalists has intensified. Since November 2023, a wave of arrests has targeted the last newsrooms that continued to resist censorship, including Abzas Media, Toplum TV and Meydan TV, as well as a journalist from Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). At least 25 journalists are currently

detained. In 2026, Azerbaijan entered the bottom 10 countries in RSF’s World Press Freedom Index, ranking 171st out of 180 countries.

In this context, the future Council appears less like an administrative reform and more like the culmination of a strategy to centralise control over the media. For several Azerbaijani experts, the new Council is a modern revival of the former Ministry of Press and Information, abolished in 2001 as part of media liberalisation reforms. There is one major difference: control no longer focuses only on the press, television and radio, but also on digital platforms - YouTube, Telegram, Facebook and Instagram - which have become the main channels through which Azerbaijanis can still access independent information.

— **Courtesy RSF**

Students Expose Flaws in Mainstream Indian Journalism

Teenagers' scoop on awarding of educational software contracts is ignored or downplayed by many large outlets



**Vidya
Krishnan**

ne of the biggest and most wide-ranging recent news scoops in India, exposing alleged government misdeeds in the awarding of educational software contracts, was broken on social media by students with no journalism training.

On May 22, three teenagers - Nisarg Adhikari, Vedant Srivastava, and Sarthak Sidhant, all in their final year of schooling - scooped education reporters across India by posting on social media allegations of malpractice following their own investigations into the way the country's Central Board of Secondary Education awarded contracts for its new on-screen marking system. The system is used to grade the so-called Class 12 exams that over 1.7 million Indian students take each year to determine where they qualify to seek university admission.

The three students, all 17-years-old, had found discrepancies in their own answer sheets, which prompted them to independently investigate problems in the evaluation system. Sarthak looked at the bidding process through which the government chose a private operator to get the contract, Nisarga found cybersecurity vulnerabilities in the system, and Vedant discovered instances where students' answers had been mixed up.

Nisarg, a self-described "ethical hacker," detailed how he was able to bypass government security protocols to access the CBSE's website and servers and view personal information from students and teachers. Nisarg said he was also able to see digitized answer sheets assigned to examiners, and modify and tamper with the papers. Vedant exposed what he said were discrepancies in the

grade marking system. And Sarthak revealed in a social media post that the "password for a superadmin account with full read/write access to national exam data [was] literally 123456." Sarthak also discovered, by scouring procurement guidelines and looking through financial clauses, how education officials in the administration of Prime Minister Narendra Modi had allegedly manipulated the contracting process to favor one company, the Hyderabad-based Coempt

Eduteck. The company then ran into significant operational issues with the roll-out of the system, including students' answer sheets reportedly being mixed up, digital marks that didn't match the original sheets, and entries that were blurred so they couldn't be properly scanned or graded.

For journalists, it is hard to know

The three students, all 17-years-old, had found discrepancies in their own answer sheets, which prompted them to independently investigate problems in the evaluation system.

whether this saga is more ridiculous or shameful. It represents one of the most consequential recent exposés in the education sector, a revelation of remarkable scale, made all the more striking by the fact that the story was cracked open by schoolchildren with no affiliation even to a student-run publication. Their social media posts about it went viral, triggering a flood of similar complaints from students all over the country about errors, and resulting in over 4 million requesting copies of their answer sheets to verify how accurately they had been marked. Students also demanded that the education minister, Dharmendra Pradhan, be removed.

In Modi's three terms as prime minister, this has seemingly become the only investigation to which his administration has responded at least in part in good faith. Sarthak was invited by a parliamentary standing committee to submit his findings, and the chairman and the secretary of the CBSE were transferred in gestures meant to appease the students (though they were not suspended). These slaps on the wrist hardly represent substantial disciplinary action, but for a government known for protecting its ranks, it marks an unusual concession. Political analysts say the government is keen to avoid a youth backlash, as it has kept a close eye on the Gen Z protests that went viral on social media, spreading across South Asia and toppling governments in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal over the past two years.

During the tumultuous week that this scandal was unfolding in India, if anyone turned to legacy media seeking explanations for what was happening, they were bound to be disappointed. India's mainstream journalists - barring a few independent outlets like The Wire and The



New Minute - if they covered the story at all, did so by characterizing it as teenagers making mischief with headlines like "CBSE vs. Students," rather than covering the newsworthy scandal itself. NDTV, the country's biggest television news channel, which is owned by billionaire Gautam Adani, did not have a single report about the scandal on its homepage through the week. One had to search the "education" tab on the channel's website to find brief reports that repeated the government's narrative, including statements justifying the contracting process. While the media dithered, the robust propaganda machine of the government - led by Ashok Shrivastav, journalist and prime-time host at the state-funded channel Doordarshan News - accused the students of being "Pakistanis." Internet "troll armies" labeled them "anti-national Soros agents," and in one case, even called them "terrorists." Parents were alarmed enough to take to social media to defend their children.

A week after the exposé, when the CBSE had admitted to the vulnerabilities in the system that had been highlighted by the students, a few newsrooms were finally covering the story. But several did so by branding the investigative work that had been done by the students as their own "exclusives," prompting Sarthak to call out CNN News18 and Times Now for not giving him proper credit.

After more than a decade under the rule of a prime minister who has made a point of repressing independent media, I no longer expect anything from legacy outlets except madness, meanness, and mendacity. However, to me the cowardice on the media's part to not cover a story with such a huge impact on schoolchildren - who themselves had already done the work of investigating it - is a new low. The state of journalism in India now represents an intellectual violence so predatory that it seemingly does not mind wounding its own children. ❏

— *Courtesy Nieman Reports*

'RAJANI': CASTE, CLASS & DESIRE IN THE 19TH CENTURY

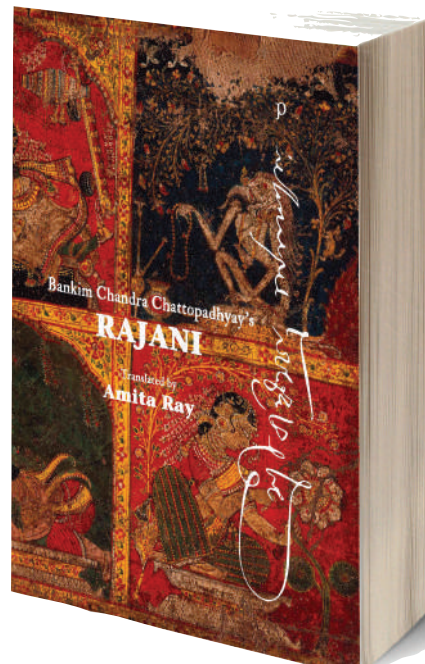
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o a 21st-century reader, *Rajani* (1877) by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, at first, comes across as a novel on caste and flowers. Rajani, a "low-born", blind girl of 19, makes a living by selling flowers. She frequents Ramsaday Mitra's mansion in Kolkata to sell flowers to his wife, Labangalata. Seeing her for the first time, Labangalata's stepson, Sachindra, a medical student, asks about her:

Later in the novel, when Amarnath rescues Rajani on a riverbank, he immediately concludes that the person tormenting her is a vile, low-caste person. Entering into the forest deeper I found a monstrous man forcibly assaulting a young woman... On seeing them I instantly understood that the man was a scoundrel belonging to the inferior caste, presumably a dome or a siuli.

I felt that I was enshrouded with flowers, flowers on my head, flowers on my feet. I was draped in flowers, flowers in abundance in the core of my heart... I felt as if the petals of a lotus blooming in a pleasant morning had entwined my arms, as if someone had garlanded my hands with rose flowers... Maybe I wished to hang with Sachindra, transformed as two flowers, thus coalesced from the stalk of a wild tree. Chattopadhyay's language, replete with metaphors, similes and breathlessly beautiful compound words, has an efflorescent quality. It is impossible to translate that effect in English, especially at this age when readers prefer a comprehensive, free-flowing narrative style. Perhaps that is the reason the prose in Amita Roy's translation, often rambling but always lucid, gives a sense of agency and intention. If the question is what remains if that mellifluous quality of Chattopadhyay's language cannot be retained in translation, the answer is, a lot: two female narrative voices, Rajani's and

Paulami
Sengupta



BOOK REVIEW

Labangalata's; the neat structure of the novel wherein each of the main characters share their backstory in first person; Rajani's growth as a confident, resilient woman and her healing journey and the curious characters of her suitors Sachindra and Amarnath.

Rajani's parents arrange her marriage with Gopal, a married man. So, she runs away from home. However, she is escorted home by Hiralal, a publisher of vulgar magazines. When Rajani turns down his marriage proposal, he abandons her on the bank of the river Hooghly. Rajani hurls a broken staff at Hiralal with success, underlining that she is a damsel who fights in distress. Later, when Rajani tells Amarnath about her love for another man, she says she cannot share much as she is a woman.

Labangalata, the other young woman in the story, is devoted to a husband who is much older than her. Such is her devotion that she punishes her admirer, Amarnath, by inscribing "thief" on his back when he comes to visit her in secret. She is fond of Rajani, so she is the one who works out a similar match for her, with Gopal, so that she could bear him a child. Labangalata whisks Rajani out of her room when she refuses to marry Gopal; her intentions may be kind but her resolutions are bound by the rules of gender and caste.

A wanderer, an empath and a scholar, Amarnath has his flaws. As he confesses, he is not sure whether the eradication of the caste system would bring about any positive change in society. He grew up with stigma as one of his aunts had eloped, and he made the mistake of trying to break into married Labangalata's chamber, though for love. He falls in love with Rajani but



Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay

steps back after knowing her mind. His sense of responsibility and his subsequent sacrifice attribute a different dimension to the novel. Sachindra, the man Rajani chooses, likes Rajani but is dismissive of her as she belongs to a lower class and is blind. As the plot develops, Rajani's upper caste lineage and wealth come to the fore, with Amarnath's effort. Nevertheless, Sachindra resists the marriage proposal. This resistance seems like an imposition of his social conditioning. Sachindra falls ill, his disease exacerbating the debilitating effects of caste and a society not willing to accept disabled individuals. On the other hand, Rajani's blindness is cured by a hermit, proving that it is not a lifelong condition but a curable disease.

If we consider Rajani a fairytale, then Rajani's character is never questioned. She always manages to stay out of scandal. Perhaps the author wanted her to fight a patriarchal, ableist and casteist society with superhuman strength. Amarnath, Sachindra and Labangalata outgrow their rigidities in the course of the novel. Chattopadhyay, like Amarnath, does not do away with caste. Rajani turns out to be a lady from an upper-caste family. This is

where the novel disappoints, but it is also promising that Labangalata later realises that society, with its barriers and stigma, can be crippling for men as well as women. In a touching moment, she apologises to Amarnath for her harsh act of judgment.

Ray's new translation of Rajani reintroduces a novel that documents and addresses the ambiguities of caste, class and desire in the 19th century. It is also a story of fighting labels of disability and other social dictates with introspection and resilience. Instead of an academic, annotated text, Ray's translation uses an easier, story-like format. I wish we could know Ray's thoughts on translating Rajani. Perhaps a translator's note in the next edition of the translation would be helpful.

Sanjukta Dasgupta's foreword to the translation is rich and comprehensive, bringing out the socio-cultural dynamics of the novel. It should also be mentioned that Rajani has been translated by Sreejata Guha in Bankimchandra Omnibus Volume 1 (Penguin, 2005); like Ray, Guha too has rendered the narrative in simple prose, thus highlighting the conceits of stories and characters more than the language itself. 

— *Courtesy Scroll.in*

' S A T L U J ' R E V I E W

A Harrowing Tale of Courage

Honey Trehan's film, previously titled 'Punjab '95', is out on Zee5.

H

oney Trehan's Punjab '95, which was in censorship purgatory for nearly four years, is finally out on the streaming platform Zee5. Punjab '95 has a new title - Satluj. Call the film by any name, it remains a harrowing, heart-rending chronicle of the consequences of unchecked state power.

The Hindi-Punjabi movie, which is led by Diljit Dosanjh, has been released on Zee5 without the numerous cuts that were demanded by the censor board. Satluj is based on the

disappearance of human rights activist Jaswant Singh Khalsa in 1995.

Khalsa was abducted while investigating enforced disappearances and extra-judicial killings by the Punjab police during anti-terrorism operations.

After several

years, a bunch of junior police officers was convicted for Khalsa's murder. His body was never found.

Satluj opens with a chilling night-time sequence, the first of many. Scenes of police vehicles driving past unlit fields in the still of the night, bearing innocents who will soon be corpses, create an effective metaphor of dark deeds carried out when nobody is looking. Later in the film, shafts of light in darkness signal a different set of travellers who bring hope, rather than misery.

Troubled by the disappearance of a friend and then his protesting mother (Jyoti Dogra), Jaswant (Diljit Dosanjh) begins investigating the mysterious increase in unclaimed bodies at morgues and crematoria. A policeman, Satnam (Saurabh Sachdeva), offers Jaswant some help.

Although Jaswant's campaign worries his wife Paramjit (Geetika Vidya Ohlyan), she remains supportive even after the family is subjected to scary phone calls and surveillance.

Despite threats masquerading as advice - why does the world need to know about our problem, a politician asks Jaswant -

**Nandini
Ramnath**



OTT REVIEW

the activist soldiers on. Sugga (Suvinder Vicky) and his odious posse of rogue policemen turn on the screws in the only way they know. One of the film's most nerve-shredding sequences takes place in Satnam's house, over a meal of saag.

After Jaswant goes missing, public pressure led by Paramjit forces politicians and the judiciary to intervene. A Central Bureau of Investigation team led by Samudra (Arjun Rampal) turns up in Punjab to understand what happened to Jaswant, and who was responsible.

Honey Trehan and co-writers Niren Bhatt and Utsav Maitra have crafted *Satluj* as a classic conspiracy thriller. KU Mohanan's rich camera-work and Sreekar Prasad's precise editing add layers to a forensic expose of a rot that goes all the way to the top. Despite its length - 163 minutes, and not all of them necessary - *Satluj* is a gripping, tension-filled affair.

Some of the radicalism of the courageous personality who inspired *Satluj* is undercut by the film's insistence on portraying Jaswant as a newcomer to politics as well as a spiritual man. The actual Jaswant Singh Khaira belonged to a family steeped in leftist politics.

In *Satluj*, Jaswant and other characters are motivated by religious beliefs. The larger civil society movement supporting Jaswant, and which continues his activism, isn't visible.

Rather than a straightforward biopic of Khaira, *Satluj* uses its hero to lay bare a horrific culture of impunity. The movie also emphasises the importance of bearing witness. *Satluj* uncovers - and pays tribute to - a conscience network that ensures justice.

The film is admirably measured in its outrage and powerfully per-



Another Perspective

While *Satluj* has been praised for its portrayal of alleged excesses during Punjab's insurgency years, some viewers may feel the narrative could have devoted greater attention to the suffering caused by militant violence as well. The violence of the 1980s and 1990s left deep scars on civilians, regardless of their background or affiliations. The film consciously focuses on one aspect of that turbulent period, which is a creative choice. A broader depiction of the conflict's human cost from all sides may have offered a more complete picture of one of India's most painful chapters.

formed across the board. There are few actors like Diljit Dosanjh to play an activist who can raise hell in quiet tones. Like the film itself, Dosanjh selflessly goes about his work without drawing attention to himself.

Dosanjh's massive impact is complemented by a cast that is one with the film's overall vision. Several actors among the ensemble make a mark: Geetika Vidya Ohlyan's strong-willed Paramjit, Vansh Bhardwaj's promotion-

obsessed cop, Saurabh Sachdeva's sad-eyed whistle-blower, Kanwaljit Singh's venal Bitta, Arjun Rampal's principled Central Bureau of Investigation officer, Varun Badola's committed lawyer. Suvinder Vicky's demonic Sugga is a Nazi in a Punjab Police uniform who embodies the banality of evil.

Despite some indulgent moments, especially in the latter sections, Honey Trehan deftly showcases an extensive cast and complex themes. Trehan's understanding of the circumstances that encourage the killing spree, as well as his clarity on human rights and moral probity, make *Satluj* one of the sharpest political films in recent memory.

There's no scope for whataboutery in *Satluj*, no quarter given to claims that the only way to fight terrorism was to let the police off the leash. Although laser-focused on Jaswant's travails, and exploring a specific period in Punjab's history, the movie could be about any other part of India governed by unquestioned authority.

In Bitta's dismissal of activism as a gimmick, or Sugga's acceptance of collateral damage in order to combat militants, *Satluj* goes beyond its immediate setting. The new title oddly suits the film: between Punjab '95 and *Satluj* lies the story of a country as it was and continues to be.

— Courtesy Scroll.in

Who Will Protect Independent Journalism?



Who will protect independent journalism in our country? The simple answer is the judiciary. But justice often takes so long that it becomes difficult for independent media organisations and journalists to survive prolonged legal battles. That ultimately weakens our democratic credentials. The Delhi High Court, while quashing the cases against NewsClick and its founder-editor Prabir Purkayastha, described them as "a gross abuse of the process of law," raising serious questions about the misuse of police and investigative agencies against the media.

The two cases against NewsClick and Purkayastha were registered by the Economic Offences Wing of the Delhi Police in August 2020 and the Enforcement Directorate in September 2020. The allegations included violation of FDI norms, siphoning of foreign investment, cheating, criminal breach of trust and criminal conspiracy. They stemmed from claims that NewsClick had received foreign investment from Worldwide Media Holdings LLC, a company associated with Neville Roy Singham. In 2023, after a New York Times report alleged links between NewsClick's funding and Chinese propaganda efforts, the Delhi Police registered another FIR, raided the NewsClick office and the homes of journalists and contributors, and arrested Purkayastha and Amit Chakravarty under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. Purkayastha spent about seven months in jail before the Supreme Court declared his arrest illegal, holding that he had not been furnished the grounds of arrest before being remanded. Justice Neena Bansal Krishna of the Delhi High Court found no material to support the allegations. The court observed that RBI correspondence itself indicated there were no FEMA violations. On the allegation of siphoning funds through salaries, consultancy and rent, it noted that such expenditure was natural for a digital media company. It also found no complainant to

sustain charges of cheating or criminal breach of trust and held that the Enforcement Directorate had failed to explain the basis of the alleged criminal conspiracy. The judgment underlined that criminal law cannot be invoked merely on suspicion or inference without credible evidence.

Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud had earlier reminded the police that "journalists are not terrorists" and that critical reporting does not amount to anti-national activity. Yet investigative agencies continued to treat NewsClick as though it had committed acts of terrorism. The High Court judgment exposes this misuse of law and raises larger concerns about the growing tendency to criminalise journalism. The power to investigate is essential in a democracy, but it must be exercised within the limits of the Constitution and not as a tool to intimidate independent media.

India's ranking of 157 out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index continues to suffer because of repeated use of stringent laws such as the UAPA and PMLA against journalists. Such laws raise the threshold for bail and shift the burden onto the accused. When journalists spend months in prison before courts eventually find no substance in the allegations, the process itself becomes punishment. Independent journalism cannot flourish if fear replaces freedom and prolonged litigation replaces fair investigation.

The judgment should therefore serve as an opportunity for introspection. Police officers must be held accountable for illegal arrests, investigative agencies must exercise greater restraint, and governments must recognise that criticism is not a crime. Protecting independent journalism is not merely about safeguarding reporters or media organisations; it is about protecting every citizen's right to receive information, question authority and participate meaningfully in a democratic society. 

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