



World Association
of News Publishers

For the attention of:

The Honourable Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India
C/O the Prime Minister's Office
South Block
New Delhi
Pin – 110011

[Via email]

Paris, France
10th February 2021

Dear Mr Prime Minister,

We are writing on behalf of the World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) and the World Editors Forum, representing 60 national membership associations, 18,000 titles and 3,000 media organisations in over 120 countries, to express our concern at recent legal proceedings against journalists – actions that threaten to undermine press freedom in the country.

We are particularly alarmed by the increasing use of First Information Reports (FIRs), the application of section 124A of the Indian Penal Code (a colonial-era 'sedition law'), and the recourse to broader criminal charges to punish journalists simply for doing their jobs.

In the most recent case – requiring the Supreme Court to step in on 9th February to provide interim protection from arrest - FIRs were filed against journalists Zafar Agha, Vinod Jose, Ananth Nath, Paresh Nath, Mrinal Pande and Rajdeep Sardesai over the same allegations across multiple states, including Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh.

The journalists were charged with sedition on 28th January, with the accompanying FIR stating that they had "shared misinformed news and instigated violence" via Twitter messages sent as part of their coverage of demonstrations by farmers opposed to agricultural reforms which took place on 26th January.

More broadly, and according to best-available reports, we estimate that since the beginning of 2020 at least 50 journalists at the local, regional and national level have been subjected to legal jeopardy as a result of their reporting, with an even higher number facing criminal action under other pretexts.



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We are deeply concerned that such persistent recourse to legal action suggests a systematic and barely disguised attempt to criminalise professional journalism, a claim evidenced by the growing pattern of legal cases, personal threats and intimidation against independent news media organisations, individual editors, journalists and freelancers.

Furthermore, we interpret the consistency of these actions as severely contributing to the undermining of critical, independent reporting in a way that risks unleashing a chilling effect across the profession.

Mr Prime Minister, we urge you to reiterate the fundamental right of journalists to report freely, fairly and critically, and to ensure local government and law enforcement professionals acknowledge the essential role of a free press in contributing to democratic discourse.

In the interests of safeguarding the right to information for all, we respectfully call on you to denounce the targeting of journalists and independent news organisations and to condemn those who do so as having no place in a society that values freedom of expression.

We look forward to a response at your earliest convenience.

Most respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'F. Yarza'.

Fernando De Yarza Lopez-Madrado

President, WAN-IFRA

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Warren Fernandez'.

Warren Fernandez

President, World Editors Forum