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Asia - India

Spirit of Charlie

A drawing for every lash – Indian cartoonist's protest against Saudi blogger's sentence

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Reporters Without Borders (RSF) supports the launch of the online cartoon magazine Black and White: Strokes of Resistance (B&W) by the Indian cartoonist Aseem Trivedi and hails his campaign for the release of the jailed Saudi blogger Raif Badawi, which is highlighted in the first issue.

In January this year, **Trivedi** [announced he planned to launch a magazine of cartoons](#) in tribute to Charlie Hebdo. His first campaign is in support of Badawi, who was sentenced to 1,000 lashes and 10 years' imprisonment in September last year. The first [50 lashes were administered in public](#) outside Jeddah's Al-Jafali Mosque on 9 January. According to his wife Ensaf Haidar, his case had been referred to the Supreme Court, which could sentence him to death for apostasy.

"We hail the immense courage of Aseem Trivedi and back his campaign in support of Raif Badawi," said Benjamin Ismail, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Asia-Pacific Desk.

"His work embodies the spirit of Charlie Hebdo. We shall be keeping an eye open for any potential repercussions from the publication of the first issue and we hereby call on the authorities to be extra vigilant concerning the safety of the cartoonist."

Freedom of the press and religion in India

Trivedi is waging his fight for freedom of expression and information in a country where it is highly dangerous to criticise Islam. The subject of religion remains sensitive for journalists and bloggers. [Some religious groups come out with threats and aggressive condemnations](#), which their members then attempt to carry out arbitrarily while the authorities turn a blind eye.

The number of journalists killed has declined considerably, but self-censorship and the prevailing climate of insecurity and impunity are a cause for concern. The launch of *Black & White* is a breath of hope and a message to all enemies of freedom, which must be passed on.

After a break of two years, Trivedi resumed cartooning in the aftermath of the *Charlie Hebdo* killings, in the belief that the attack made his art more powerful.

"My aim is to use cartooning as a tool of activism," he told Reporters Without Borders. *"Through B&W, I want to campaign for the issues related to free speech, justice, equality and other human rights through my art."*

He added that every edition of [B&W](#) would be a campaign in itself, supporting a person or an idea that is being repressed or harassed. He also hoped to develop it as a platform for the "art of resistance" and planned to invite cartoonists from all over the world to contribute.

"In the first issue, I'm highlighting the case of Raif Badawi. I've published the first 25 cartoons from 'A Cartoon Against Every Lash', a series of 50 cartoons in support of Raif. I see Raif as a new symbol of free speech, facing a lot of torture and injustice for his freedom of expression."

"He is a real crusader, as he is fighting in the hardest circumstances. And it's our responsibility to help him in this fight of freedom. We couldn't do anything to save the victims of Charlie Hebdo attack. But we can help Raif, surviving through the injustice."

Reporters Without Borders launched a [petition for Badawi's release](#) that was handed in to the Saudi embassy in Paris on 15 January. So far it has gathered more than 45,000 signatures. RSF has also

organized a series of pro-Badawi demonstrations outside the Saudi embassy in Paris since January.

Click here to see the first issue of Black and White: <http://www.bandw.in/p/home.html>

Click here to visit Aseem Trivedi's website: <http://www.aseemtrivedi.in/p/index.html>
