

Reporters Without Borders

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Asia - India

Media blackout

News media and Internet totally censored in Kashmir

12 February 2013

Reporters Without Borders condemns the government's suppression of all news outlets – including TV news channels, newspapers and mobile Internet service – in the Kashmir Valley since 9 February, when Kashmiri militant Mohammad Afzal Guru's execution in New Delhi revived political tension in the troubled region.

Arrested shortly after the December 2001 terrorist attack on the Indian parliament, Afzal Guru was hanged for his role in the attack as a member of Jaish-e-Mohammad, a Kashmiri armed separatist group based in Pakistan.

"We demand the unconditional restoration of communications in the region and a firm government undertaking not to resort to such methods again," Reporters Without Borders said.

"Use of such generalized censorship has increased in recent years and shows that the authorities have no qualms about isolating an entire segment of the population in an attempt to prevent protests. In so doing, they are guilty of grave discrimination against the Kashmiri population's right of access to news and information."

TV news channels and mobile Internet were suspended in Kashmir immediately after Afzal Guru's execution on 9 February. Only local government offices using the state-owned Internet service provider Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) continued to have Internet connections.

Local newspapers were forbidden to publish without warning the next day, 10 February. The *Greater Kashmir*, one of the Kashmir Valley's biggest-circulation newspaper, posted an article on its website later the same day reporting that the ban was issued in the form of a unofficial government directive. This report subsequently appeared on the sites of other local media.

Kashmir Reader editor **Showkat Ahmad** said officials seized copies of the latest issues from the offices of Srinagar-based newspapers on the night of 9 February. No newspaper based in the valley has been able to print since then, and the authorities continue to keep a close watch on printers.

According to information obtained by Reporters Without Borders, the inhabitants of Srinagar residential districts such as Chanapora, Natipora, Hyderpora and Sanat Nagar were still able to receive some TV news channels on the afternoon of 10 February but privately-owned local TV stations had to suspend news programmes on the federal government's orders. No suspension of entertainment, sport and movie channels was reported.

Rural development minister Ali Mohammad Sagar told [The Tribune](#) newspaper on 10 February that the media and Internet restrictions would continue for the time being and that a decision would be taken when calm was restored in the region.

Government sources said it was unlikely that the curfew and ban on newspapers would be lifted before Friday prayers on 15 February, when more protests are feared.

Athar Parvaiz, the *Inter Press Service* correspondent in Kashmir, told Reporters Without Borders: "Without mobile Internet and TV news channels, the people are prisoners here in the valley. Freedom of information is being heavily suppressed."

This is the third time in five years that the government has suspended the publication of local newspapers. Mobile Internet has also been suspended in the past in an attempt to defuse protests. Telecommunication networks are systematically suspended every year on Republic Day (26 January) and Independence Day (15 August).

India is ranked 140th out of 179 countries in the [2013 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).

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