

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/india-two-photographers-badly-beaten-by-23-08-2011,40821.html>

Asia - India

Beatings

Two photographers badly beaten by Srinagar police

23 August 2011

Reporters Without Borders condemns the beatings that two news photographers received from local police and members of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) while covering clashes between police and demonstrators on 19 August in the Nowhatta old town district of Srinagar, the capital of the northern state of Jammu and Kashmir.

"By directly attacking journalists covering these clashes, the police are trying to suppress coverage of the events taking place in Srinagar," Reporters Without Borders said. "We urge the Indian government to order an immediate halt to this outright persecution of journalists. The authorities must allow journalists to cover demonstrations and must protect them from any violence that could be directed against them."

A group of young people gathered outside the historic Jamia Masjid mosque in Nowhatta after Friday prayers on 19 August in response to a call for a Martyrs Day march by Syed Ali Shah Geelani, the chairman of one of two factions of the Hurriyat Conference, a political alliance formed in the 1990s that wants self-determination for Kashmir. Police and CRPF units intervened quickly, using batons and slingshots to disperse them.



(photo by: Faisal Khan)

Showkat Shafi, a freelance photojournalist employed by *Al-Jazeera* who helped produce an *Al-Jazeera* special report available online, "[Kashmir: the forgotten Conflict](#)", was beaten by police officers and taken to the Nowhatta police station.

A photographer who was with Shafi at the time told the [Greater Kashmir](#) online daily: "The

police and CRPF appeared and shouted at us. We got scared and ran away from there. They caught hold of Showkat and beat him up with plastic and bamboo canes. They also kicked him and dragged him along the road."

Narciso Contreras, a Mexican photographer who works for the California-based Zuma Press agency, was also arrested and beaten by police officers. **Rajesh Iyer**, a journalist who was present said: *"They used abusive language and beat him up with canes. They also kicked him. They dragged him and put him in the police station."* Police violence was becoming "the norm," he added.

The two photographers were hospitalized after being released that evening. A Nowhatta police spokesman disputed these accounts, insisting that no one was injured during the incidents.

Reporters Without Borders also condemns the suspension of a religious programme on 92.7 *Big FM*, a privately-owned radio station based in Srinagar, without prior warning on 17 August. The programme, targeted at young people and dealing with social issues, was presented by Mohammad Umar Farooq, a religious leader and chairman of the other Hurriyat Conference faction.

"If the order came from a higher level than the Jammu and Kashmir state government, an explanation must be provided," Reporters Without Borders said. "It would be unacceptable if the federal government interfered – covertly and without giving any reasons – in the programming of the only privately-owned radio station broadcasting from Srinagar."

The programme is reportedly back on the air but Farooq is still banned from presenting it. Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Omar Abdullah denied having any role in the ban. *"I have not given any instruction that he should be stopped,"* he said.

Farooq blamed the federal authorities. *"They said the decision had been taken by the higher-ups outside the state,"* he said.

India is ranked 122nd out of 178 countries in the 2010 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index.



(photo: Narciso Contreras, by: Yawar Nazir/Kashmir Dispatch (Zuma Photojournalists))
