JOURNALISTS CONCERNED FOR THEIR SAFETY WHILE COVERING FARMER PROTESTS
ABOUT US

The Coalition For Women In Journalism (CFWIJ) is a global organization of support for women journalists. The CFWIJ pioneered mentorship for mid-career women journalists across several countries around the world and is the first organization to focus on the status of free press for women journalists. Our network of individuals and organizations brings together the experience and mentorship necessary to help female career journalists navigate the industry. Our goal is to help develop a strong mechanism where women journalists can work safely and thrive.

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The Coalition For Women In Journalism (CFWIJ) has received reports from several women journalists worried about their safety and well-being while covering these events. We are especially concerned about gendered-based violations on the frontline of the ongoing farmers’ protests in India. CFWIJ demands Indian authorities to ensure the journalists’ safety.

Several women journalists have been attacked, along with multiple reports of threats to women reporters covering the farmer protests on the ground. Women of television and public media are exposed heavily to online trolling, as well as disinformation campaigns that target many journalists who cover the unrest in India.

Indian farmers’ protests against the three farm bills passed by the Indian Parliament have been ongoing since September 2020. The legislatures have been described as "anti-farmer laws" by many trades and unions. Also, politicians from the opposition claim that it would leave farmers at the "mercy of corporates". The government maintains they will make it effortless for farmers to sell their produce directly to big buyers, and stated the protests are based on misinformation. There is great outrage at these new laws as farmers believe they are not serving their best interests and will harm their business. Farmers say they will continue to protest until the government changes reforms to their benefit. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) defends these reforms as necessary to increase farm incomes and productivity.
The protests in India also negatively affect journalists. Journalists are targeted by farmers because of the mainstream media supported by the government. According to news outlet PlIndia, the demonstrators heckled two female journalists from Zee News and Republic Bharat, while covering the protests on the roads of the Singhu Border.

The video shows the journalists being bullied by the demonstrators. The angry crowd was shouting at the journalists and preventing them from doing their jobs. The protesters were heard in the video shouting “Zee News go back”, “down with Modi media” and other slogans. Modi media refers to the media supported by the Indian government.
Republic Bharat journalist Shazia Nisar was also confronted by a mob of implacable protesters, who heckled and prevented her from covering the ongoing farmers’ protests. Shazia can be seen in the video trying to placate the protesters, but her efforts were futile as they continued yelling slogans at her, forcing her to retreat. On her Twitter account, she said, “The scenes in the video were shocking for the Singhu border. After seeing what happened here, maybe your attitude towards the farmers movement may change.”

Another video went viral from the Singhu Border. In the footage, a female journalist is harassed by the farmers while interviewing them in the field. The video shows her struggle while the demonstrators were shouting and bullying her.

The news outlets are also airing, covering and commenting on the ongoing demonstrations. The India Today enumerated the unrest across the country. The newspaper published that “Thousands of farmers are still staying put at the Delhi border points demanding the repeal of the three farm laws that Parliament passed in September. The government, on the other hand, has maintained that the farm laws are good for the farmers while indicating its willingness to amend the wordings of the laws to allay fears among the farmers.” The statement continued, “As the farm stir continues, Prime Minister Narendra Modi reached out to the farming community to clear the air.”
According to The Hindu, protests continue amid a stalemate over farm laws. A reporter for the news organization Priscilla Jebaraj has been covering the demonstrations in New Delhi. “Protesting farmer leaders have threatened to close the Delhi-Noida border crossing at Chilla on Wednesday if three contentious agricultural reform laws are not repealed. On the 20th day of protest, both the protestors and the Centre reiterated their positions and dialed up the rhetoric, but made no concrete efforts to resume negotiations.” the news outlet described.

Caravan Magazine published an article entitled “When those in power get arrogant, they lose:” UP farmers join protests”. The magazine interviewed various union and organization leaders about the demonstrations. Rana, the leader of Kisan Adhikar Andolan, a farmers’ organisation, said, “Our farmer brothers have agreed to fight this war. The farmer is preparing to fight this cheat government; he is willing to leave the harvesting of his sugarcane, the wheat sowing and even marriages to take part in the protests.” describing the farmers’ commitment to the protests demanding reform.

The Coalition For Women In Journalism is closely monitoring the ongoing protests in India with great concern. Many women journalists are facing continuous harassment on the ground. Journalists should be able to work in a peaceful and safe environment. We urge Indian authorities to ensure journalists’ safety throughout their coverage of the protests.
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