



Prominent Pakistani Journalist Goes Missing in Islamabad

A prominent Pakistani journalist went missing in Islamabad earlier this week, following criticism he levied against the country's powerful military. Matiullah Jan was last seen outside of a government school in Islamabad before vanishing. He has since returned home, although there has yet to be an official explanation for his 12-hour disappearance. Pakistan's Information Minister Shibli Faraz said it was "clear" that Jan was kidnapped, although all the details were far from clear. CCTV cameras outside the school showed Jan being bundled into an unmarked vehicle after being cornered by a police car and an ambulance. Jan is a well-known journalist in Pakistan, and has come to notoriety through his criticism of the country's military.

Journalists in Pakistan regularly face discrimination and harassment, particularly when they are critical of the government or military. Censorship, intimidation, and harassment of journalists has increased in recent years, as media freedom in Pakistan has declined. Reporters Without Borders, a media rights organization focused on journalistic freedom, ranked Pakistan 145th out of 180 countries in its 2020 World Press Freedom Index. Last year, several Pakistani news outlets had their broadcasts forcibly suspended after airing an interview with opposition politician Maryam Nawaz. Media groups and journalists in Pakistan have accused Prime Minister Imran Khan and the Pakistani military of cracking down on dissent by silencing journalists.

Matiullah Jan himself has been the subject of prior harassment and physical attacks as a result of his journalism, according to Amnesty International. The rights group's South Asia division condemned Jan's kidnapping and called on Pakistan's authorities to establish his whereabouts immediately. Additionally, Pakistan's Human Rights Commission called Jan's kidnapping "an act of cowardice" and called on the government to immediately take steps to ensure the safety of journalists in the country. In 2018, Jan was fired from his position as an anchor of a popular news network after the network was pressured by Pakistan's military. He was also due to appear in court this week after the Pakistani Supreme Court ruled that he was in contempt of court for a tweet critical of the country's judiciary.

Since 1992, at least 61 Pakistani journalists have been murdered in connection with their work, both at home and abroad. Most recently, exiled journalist Sajid Hussain was found dead in Sweden, where he received political asylum after receiving death threats and fleeing Pakistan. Upon his release, Matiullah Jan was said to be in good condition but was unable to identify who abducted him, other than identifying them as men. He told his family that during captivity, he was blindfolded and repeatedly driven from one location to another. Jan was abducted outside of a college after dropping off his wife, with the incident being recorded by CCTV cameras. The footage was widely disseminated through social media platforms, sparking anger and outrage at the kidnapping. Local media reported that he was released some thirty miles west of Islamabad after being held for twelve hours, and that he was safe with his family following the ordeal.