



**Committee Against Assault on Journalists
(CAAJ)**

CAAJ Statement condemning attacks on media-persons during anti CAA-NRC protests in India

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New Delhi**

As students and young people across India have taken to the streets to peacefully protest the amendment to the Citizenship Act (CAA) and the manner in which the Narendra Modi government intends putting together the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the National Population Register (NPR), police personnel have responded violently against media-persons who have been reporting and recording audio-visual evidence of the agitations by the youth across the country. The condemnable high-handed behaviour by the police is a clear attempt at attempt at suppressing and censoring independent reportage.

The actions of those responsible for law and order – but who have been complicit with particular state governments – represent a clear instance of “shooting the messenger.” It is noteworthy that the worst attacks against both the protesters as well as media-persons have taken place in states ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party, in particular, Uttar Pradesh where most deaths have taken place. In their insidious attempts to paint peaceful students as violent destroyers of public property, police personnel have registered false cases against many of them, including those belonging to the minority community. This explains the attempts by the police to prevent journalists from performing their professional duties in an unbiased manner. Media-persons working with international news organisations as well as those in news agencies that are usually supportive of the government, have not been spared the heavy hand of the police.

The actions of the police are in keeping with the intolerance displayed by the Modi government over the last four and a half years. Not only has much of the media been reduced to advertising agencies and public relations offices of the ruling regime, the small section of journalists that are still willing to hold truth to power, and the news organisations employing them or supporting them, have been financially squeezed and sought to be bludgeoned into

submission. Never since the days of Indira Gandhi's Emergency that lasted 19 months between June 1975 and January 1977, has the right of the media to uphold the fundamental right to free expression of each and every Indian citizen that has been enshrined in Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution, been sought to be so brutally put down as it is at present. Making matters worse, the social media has been weaponised and converted into a propaganda tool for disinformation, almost invariably favouring the ruling regime.

Every right-thinking person in the country must strongly condemn the police action against media-persons and uphold their rights and responsibilities to report and record the truth as it is unfolding on streets every day across the length and breadth of India. Otherwise, we should stop describing ourselves as a democracy – that too, the world's largest one – as attempts are made by those in power to ruthlessly stifle dissenting voices in authoritarian, majoritarian and Fascist ways.

Committee Against Assault on Journalists condemns police action upon journalists covering anti CAA-NRC protests in all possible terms and urges the journalist fraternity to come out and defend their Right to Freedom of Expression and Speech as enshrined in the Constitution of India.

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