



News & Recognitions

➤ **Asiaville's** mini-documentary film – Ennore Documentary - has garnered huge visibility and earned a spot at the Thinnai Talkies festival. The festival provides a platform to watch short documentaries on diverse topics followed by discussions with the makers of the documentaries. The film was screened online as part of the festival on April 09, 2021.

➤ Kabita Sharma, Sr Managing Editor of **Sikkim Chronicle**, was felicitated on Women's Day for her contribution to Sikkim journalism by the **Drishti Foundation**.

➤ In November 2020, **Khabar Lahariya's** live and detailed reporting from Hathras, on the caste violence and the farmers' protests resulted in a wide following on social media and being commissioned by other independent media to produce long-form deep-reported content.

➤ **ThePrint's** journalists Fatima Khan and Jyoti Yadav won the 10th edition of **The Laadli Media Awards**, supported by The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), for their reports in the Gender Sensitivity (Regional) category in 2018-19.

➤ To build a high-quality discourse on Aatmanirbhar Bharat, **Swarajya**, in association with Vedanta Resources Limited, initiated a 10-part webinar series titled 'The Road To Atmanirbhar Bharat'.

➤ **IDR** has launched a podcast series titled 'On the Contrary (OTC)', which features conversations between two people who are otherwise 'unlikely to be together in such a discussion'. Anchored by Arun Maira, it spans guests across business, government, academia and development sectors who deliberate on themes like agriculture and dissent, education, caste, markets, informal labour and environment.

Grantees Build Strong Presence Through Videos

With the number of smartphone users in India estimated to reach 760 million in 2021, content publishers are seeing a rapid shift in news consumption with consumers spending more time on video news programming. The Foundation's grantees have been keeping pace with this trend and video programming constitutes a significant portion of their content mix.



Many online independent news channels including that of grantees such as **Khabar Lahariya, Asiaville, The News Minute, The Print, Mojo Story**, etc are now meeting the thirst for quality content by filling in the breach created due to viewers' increasing disenchantment with mainstream TV Channels.

The presence of individual influencers and known faces have been a key factor in helping grantees build an audience on platforms like YouTube. Programmes anchored by journalists like Shekhar Gupta, Barkha Dutt, Karan Thapar, Vinod Dua, Arfa Khanum Sherwani and many others are drawing hundreds of thousands of subscribers on their channels. For many in search of news and views that they can trust, these channels have become compulsory viewing.

While Shekhar Gupta's "Cut The Clutter" is popular with viewers looking for a well-researched take on subjects like strategic affairs and foreign policy,

Barkha Dutt's **Mojo Story** offers daily discussions with a balanced panel of experts. Arfa Khanum Sherwani has helped **The Wire** draw large Hindi-speaking audiences looking for her take on current affairs.

A few of the Independent journalists who have moved out of mainstream news organisations have succeeded in carrying their fan-following to their individually operated YouTube channels. Hindi Journalists like Punya Prasun Bajpai and Abhisar Sharma in a short duration have managed to build a large subscriber base.

The Foundation has also been encouraging grantees like **Max Maharashtra, EastMojo** and **Janjwar** among others that already have high-quality video stories and teams to build engaging video programmes.

The move has also helped the grantees build better distribution and reach out to younger and newer audiences, expanding their ability to build revenues directly from readers. ●



IT Intermediary Rules Add to Digital News Media Challenges

The new Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules aim to regulate content in digital platforms - digital intermediaries, social media, publishers of news, current affairs and curated content.



The new Rules seek to place greater compliance constraints on them compared to what traditional publishers and content producers operating in print, television and film have to. More importantly, the government notification clubs social media and news websites under the same lens. A common regulatory framework that seeks to club the two platforms which operate on very different lines seems to be unfair to online news media which have their own self-imposed checks and balance mechanisms in line with traditional/mainstream media.

Concerns of Independent online media publishers

The nascent digital news media industry will now be formally regulated by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting through a three-tier oversight mechanism starting with the publisher at the lowest level, a self-regulatory body consisting of industry members at the intermediate level and a committee constituted by the central government at the highest level. Digital new media publishers are concerned that:

- The self-regulating body will have to be approved by the government, greatly expanding its role in overseeing digital content.
- While the mechanism is an attempt to address the type of content available online, by subjecting publishers

to established ethics and codes of journalism set out by the Press Council Act and the Cable Television Networks Regulation Act, it gives government-appointed bureaucrats extraordinary powers to meddle with content on specious grounds.

- The rules are aimed at addressing grievances against specific news content, the new rules also place additional compliance costs on small independent publishers who will have to appoint full-time employees to handle grievances and publish periodic compliance reports.
- It also opens the door to harassment through frivolous complaints, all of which need to be addressed in a short span of time or face the prospect of having their content pulled down.

What are they doing about it?

According to legal experts, the move expands the scope of government regulation through executive action rather than parliamentary legislation and has prompted some digital media companies to take legal action.

Digital news publishers, including a few of the Foundation's grantees, feel that they have been unfairly burdened. Three separate petitions in the Delhi and Kerala High Courts challenging the rules and seeking interim protection from coercive

Contd. on Page 3

News & Recognitions

👉 Fellows at the Nieman Foundation for Journalism's class of 2021 at Harvard University have chosen **The Caravan** for the **2021 Louis M. Lyons Award for Conscience and Integrity in Journalism**. The Caravan was selected in recognition of its unique and uncompromising coverage of the erosion of human rights, social justice, and democracy in India.

▶ **The Caravan** has also been recognised by the **Fetisov Journalism Awards 2020**, winning second prize in the category 'Contribution to Civil Rights' for the story "How industry bodies are using the NCPDR and UNICEF to whitewash accusations of child labour" by Bhavya Dore, Ankush Kumar, Sadaf Aman and Petra Sorge.

👉 **Mojo Story** won eight awards spanning Best Digital Media News Channel, Best Anchor (Digital Media English), Best In-depth Series for COVID, Best Current Affairs (Hathras), Best Use of technology, Best Talk Show - We the Women (Digital Media English), Best Business Programme - Cement Factory Workers (Digital Media English) and the Best News Coverage of Delhi Riots (Digital Media English) at the 13th edition of the **Exchange for Media News Broadcasting Awards 2020**.

▶ **Mojo Story** has also been awarded the '**COVID19 India Prize**' by US-based Emergent Ventures. The award recognised the effort of Barkha Dutt and her team who travelled across India during the first Covid lockdown to report from the ground on the impact of the pandemic on lives and livelihoods.

👉 The Ivy Plus Libraries Confederation selected **Feminism in India** website (feminisminindia.com) for inclusion in its South Asian Gender and Sexuality Web Archive. The

Archive is an initiative developed by librarians at leading universities, under the auspices of the Ivy Plus Libraries Confederation, to amplify the voices of those fighting against long histories of patriarchal dominance in South Asia.

▶ Nishtha Shanti from **Feminism in India** won the **Orange Flower Award** by Women's Web in the Best Short Film category for her short film on Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS).



Contd. from Page 2

action that may be taken under them have been filed.

- **The News Minute's** Dhanya Rajendran and the Foundation for Independent Journalism, the trust which publishes **The Wire**, challenged the new rules through a petition in the Delhi High Court and have also sought protection against action that may be taken against them under these rules. The court will hear the petition soon and asked the petitioners to approach it in case coercive action is taken against them.
- **The Quint**, a digital news publication headed by media entrepreneur Raghav Bahl has also filed a petition in the Delhi High Court challenging the new rules, seeking a stay on them.
- Separately, legal news website **Live Law** filed a petition in the Kerala High Court seeking protection against

coercive action that may be taken against it.

Media experts believe that Indian media, in any case, operates in a regulated environment, which includes statutory legislation as well as self-regulation. Further, the Press Council of India has oversight on media and ensures that it adheres to professional standards.

The governments stated objective is to curb misinformation and fake news on social media. Hence clubbing online news media with social media instead of seeking to extend the same regulatory framework that the mainstream media falls under, only serves to impact press freedom. Small and independent digital news publishers operate on a shoestring budget and find it challenging to build strong sources of revenue. They need to be encouraged and incentivised. ●

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➤ In February, **The India Forum** published its collections of 24 essays, "*India and the Pandemic: The First Year*", on the medical, health, legal, political, economic and social aspects of Covid-19.

➤ Vaishnavi Rathore, Environment Lead, was awarded the **Behanbox Fellowship** to cover Women's Land and Forest Rights in Gujarat.

▶ **The Bastion** is now part of an international coalition of organisations led by Climate Tracker to investigate cross-border environmental stories. The grantee is the only publication from India as part of this coalition.

▶ **The Bastion** has been selected for the mentorship stage of IIM-Bangalore's accelerator, NSRCEL.

➤ **Suno India** was awarded the **Orange Flower Award 2021** for the most empowering podcast, "Pinjra Tod Kar" that profiles the work done by Shaheen, an organisation that helps vulnerable women. The grantee was also nominated for the award in the same category for a mini-series titled "Tales from the coast" reported by Sharada Balasubramanian for their Climate Emergency podcast.

New Grantees

YouTurn (<https://youturn.in/>)



YouTurn, a dedicated nonpartisan fact-checking website in Tamil and English. It fact checks and debunks fake

news and misinformation shared on social media and mainstream media on subjects spanning politics, health and medicine.

Article14 (www.article-14.com/)



Article14 provides intensive research and reportage, data and varied perspectives and addresses threats to and

failures of justice and deficiencies in the legal system. It tracks successes that can be built upon and discerns trends and patterns that require to be brought to the widest public attention.

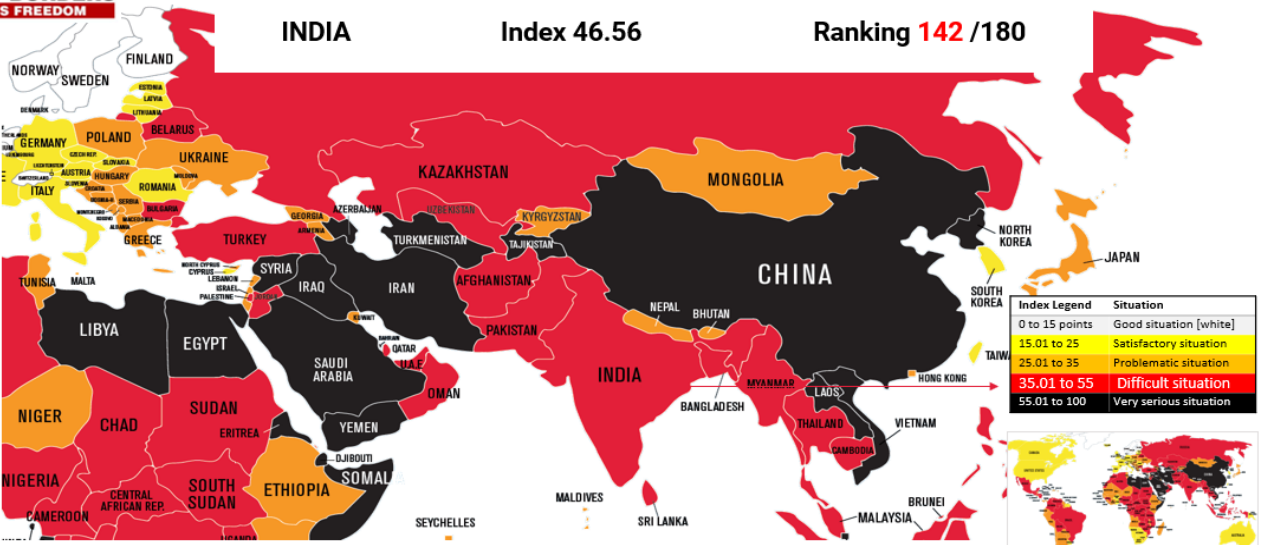
REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS
FOR PRESS FREEDOM

Press Freedom Index 2021

INDIA

Index 46.56

Ranking 142 / 180



The Press Freedom Index – Scores measured on seven indicators

(1) Pluralism, (2) Media Independence, (3) Environment and self-censorship, (4) Legislative framework, (5) Transparency, (6) Infrastructure and (7) Abuses.

Rankings – Comparison over five years	Year	Norway	Australia	UK	USA	Sri Lanka	Myanmar	India	Pakistan	B'desh	China	N.Korea
	2021	1 ↑	25 ↔	33 ↑	44 ↓	127 ↑	140 ↑	142 ↓	145 ↑	152 ↓	177 ↓	179 ↔
	2016	3	25	38	41	141	143	133	147	144	176	179



Grantee Impact

» **Down To Earth's** story on the death of over 800 Olive Ridley turtles in Odisha's Gahirmatha Marine Sanctuary on February 4 led the state High Court to take suo moto notice, ordering the filing of a case of negligence against the officials of the forest and fisheries department.

» **Asiaville** Tamil's 'Kutty documentary' on Ennore's marginalised communities, who have been severely affected by North Chennai Thermal Power Station (NCTPS), owned by the Tamil Nadu government, garnered over 1.20L views on Instagram and was taken note of by the state government. Dumping coal ash in Ennore for nearly 25 years, the plant polluted groundwater, increased air pollution levels and destroyed the Kosasthalaiyar river, resulting in both physical and mental health consequences for local communities. It was screened on the Thinnai Talkies platform on March 20, 2021, as a 'social documentary that made a difference'.

» **Khabar Lahariya's** reporting on Facebook Live on the severe unavailability of gunny bags for farmers to fill their stock in Chitrakoot, Madhya Pradesh, forced the agricultural department to provide the required gunny bags immediately.

» **Sikkim Chronicle's** The One Family One Job story made the government speed up the process of identifying those who were legally eligible for the scheme.

» Alagammai Meyyappan's article on The Big Fat Company: Exploring Body Politics Through Theatre was featured in Mona Eltahawy's **Feminist Giant** Newsletter.

» **Imphal Free Press (IFP)** story highlighting the acute shortage of medical professionals and healthcare centres across the state in general, and the limited number of MBBS seats in JNIMS Imphal in particular, led the Manipur High Court to direct the state to take steps to increase the number of seats for MBBS course in JNIMS from the academic year 2021-22.

The Manipur High Court suo moto took up an **Imphal Free Press** story published on December 12, 2020, 'Mother loses hope as justice eludes rape, murder of daughter' and ordered the police to open a separate wing to deal with crime against women.

» **The Caravan's** coverage of the farmers' protest helped create a discourse about the

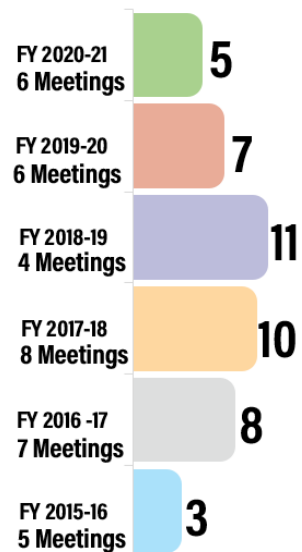
ongoing farmers' protest and the interferences happening around it. **The Caravan** published a personal account of Mandeep Punia, a contributor to The Caravan, who was arrested by Delhi Police while reporting the Farmers' protest.

» "The Three Farm Bills" was published by **The India Forum** in October 2020 and then supplemented with a podcast with the author Sudha Narayanan, a well-known agriculture economist. The podcast offered a clear and detailed analysis of the content and meaning of the farm laws in the light of the Punjab farmers' agitation. The story was strongly circulated on social media and retweeted by a range of prominent commentators.

» **EastMojo** reported on the displacement of tribals from their lands in Assam as a result of solar power project. The story forced the company executing the project, Azure Power, to clarify its position on the project which was eventually stayed by the High Court.

» **IDR's** article on Community Mental Health: Not a Silver Bullet is now part of the course material of the University of Edinburgh's new medical anthropology MSc in Global Mental Health.

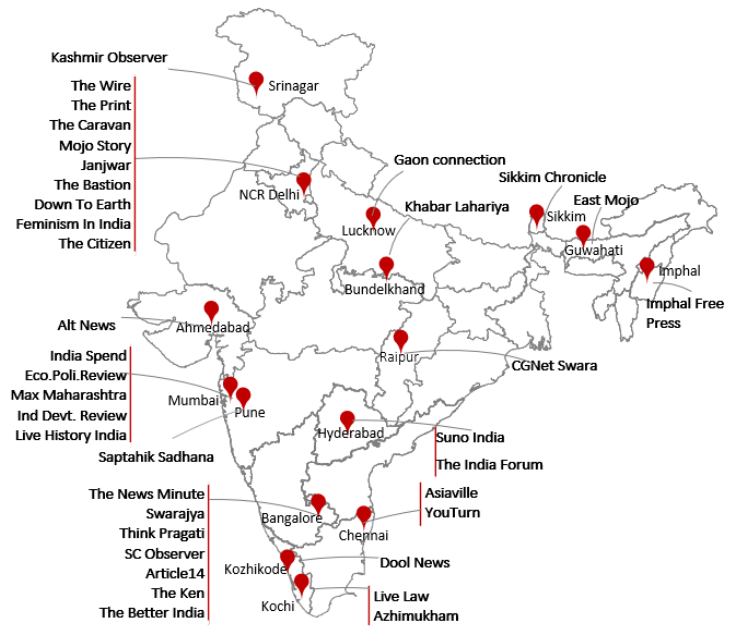
Board Meetings New Grants



44 Grantees

₹ 79 Cr Grant commitment

Grantees across India



Discontinued 7 Grants excluded from the map. Stories Asia, Satyagrah, Media Vigil, WTD News, Samachara, The Lede and Ippodu.