

# Journalism, Press Freedom and Covid-19 Pandemic during State of Emergency Worldwide (A Study of Indian Print Media and World Print Media)

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## Abstract

This study examines how domestic alternative media reported the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada. It pays special attention to whether the Conversation Canada, as an emerging not-for-profit journalism organization founded on the premise of “explanatory journalism”, has taken a different approach to COVID-19 reporting than three long-standing Canadian alternative media: Canada’s National Observer, Rabble, and Tyee. A combination of quantitative content analysis and qualitative discourse analysis found that the pandemic’s far-reaching impacts gained the main emphasis in the surveyed media. These media also provided slightly divergent accounts of what precipitated the pandemic’s disastrous results. Additionally, the way the Conversation Canada framed COVID-19 expressed a close resemblance to academic writing, especially in terms of the strategic use of in-text citations for making compelling arguments. These findings highlight the indispensable role that progressive alternative media play in the effective public communication of COVID-19.

**Keywords:** Alternative media • COVID-19 pandemic • Explanatory journalism • Risk and crisis communication • Fakenews/misinformation • Press freedom • State of emergency worldwide

## Introduction

The official names COVID-19 and SARS-CoV-2 were issued by the WHO on 11 February 2020. WHO regarding the current outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) that was first reported from Wuhan, China, on 31 December 2019. COVID-19 is caused by a virus. Antibiotics do not work against viruses. If you also develop a bacterial infection as a complication, antibiotics may be recommended. Advice for the public. Your questions answered. Official WHO website. Learn about Coronavirus.

## Methods

We present here the first case of COVID-19 infection reported in Kerala, India. On January 27, 2020, a 20 year old female presented to the Emergency Department in General Hospital, Thrissur, Kerala, with a one-day history of dry cough and sore throat.

Student from Thrissur district was studying in Wuhan; her condition is stable.

India, on Thursday, reported its first positive case of the novel Corona Virus (nCoV) from Kerala with a student, who was studying in Wuhan University and had travelled to India, testing positive for the virus.

A Union Health Ministry statement said the “student is in isolation at the hospital. The student is stable and is being closely monitored.”

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Following the first case, the government has announced that all persons who have come from China after January 15 will be tested for the virus as it has an incubation period of 14 days. It has also prescribed a 14-day home isolation regimen and advised that trips to China should be avoided.

“India till date has screened 234 flights and 43,346 passengers. Worldwide we have a total of 7,711 confirmed cases and 170 deaths,” a senior Health Ministry official said.

Director of the Indian Council of Medical Research-National Institute of Virology, Pune, Dr. Priya Abraham, said: “Forty-nine samples have been tested till now and one sample has tested positive. Now a next test known as “next gen sequencing test” will be done on the sample and the final result will be declared by Friday evening.”

WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on Thursday reconvened the emergency committee on the novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) under the International Health Regulations (IHR 2005). The committee will reconsider declaring nCoV outbreak a global public health emergency and also advise on recommendations to manage the outbreak.

Thrissur in Kerala has been put on high alert after one of the four persons admitted to the isolation ward of the district general hospital with symptoms of novel Corona Virus infection (nCoV), tested positive. The other three persons tested negative for the virus. The condition of the patient is stable, according to Health Department sources.

A 24-hour control room has been set up at the District Medical Office and the district Collectorate.

The student had reached Kolkata from Wuhan, China, on the night of January 23. She travelled to Kochi the next day from where she went to her hometown in Thrissur.

Getting to know about the alert the next day from the news media, she reached the nearest primary health centre at Mathilakam to inform the Health officials about her travel. As she had not shown any symptoms of flu, she was advised to remain home for 28 days and maintain personal hygiene besides wearing mask. She was also given a contact number in case she developed any fever or cough or other symptoms of flu. On January 27, she contacted the District Surveillance Officer when she developed flu symptoms. The district

**Table 1.** India cases-by-state.

State	Cases	Active	Recovered	Deaths
Maharashtra	81,01,119781	9,887746	79,42,9811,523	1,48,2514
Kerala	67,57,4191,476	9,562314	66,77,0231,159	70,8343
Karnataka	40,52,100546	5,3791,066	40,06,4781,612	40,243
Tamil Nadu	35,69,142485	5,09334	35,26,014519	38,035
Andhra Pradesh	23,37,00230	62279	23,21,647109	14,733
Uttar Pradesh	21,23,054301	2,202191	20,97,245491	23,6071
West Bengal	21,07,260210	2,418107	20,83,374314	21,4683
Delhi	19,99,888271	1,621391	19,71,795659	26,4723
Odisha	13,27,844187	1,62542	13,17,042228	9,1771
Rajasthan	13,09,113231	2,494167	12,96,992398	9,627
Gujarat	12,70,448182	1,59875	12,57,837255	11,0132
Chhattisgarh	11,73,856120	83342	11,58,911160	14,1122
Madhya Pradesh	10,53,51641	37820	10,42,36861	10,770
Haryana	10,52,344219	1,326211	10,40,334429	10,6841
Bihar	8,48,412131	81740	8,35,300171	12,295
Telangana	8,34,637159	1,406139	8,29,120298	4,111
Punjab	7,80,578112	942113	7,61,736225	17,900
Assam	7,44,45768	2,84626	7,33,57994	8,032
Jammu and Kashmir	4,77,931147	1,05140	4,72,098187	4,782
Uttarakhand	4,48,37170	1,32245	4,39,310115	7,739
Jharkhand	4,41,99113	14230	4,36,51943	5,330
Himachal Pradesh	3,11,104121	82474	3,06,078194	4,2021
Goa	2,56,22442	639112	2,51,622154	3,963
Mizoram	2,37,26082	5587	2,35,98075	722
Puducherry	1,72,90126	31525	1,70,61751	1,969
Manipur	1,39,7178	67	1,37,5038	2,147
Tripura	1,07,732	272	1,06,7672	938
Chandigarh	98,85638	26626	97,40964	1,181
Meghalaya	96,45710	80	94,75910	1,618
Arunachal Pradesh	66,70110	731	66,33211	296
Sikkim	43,74935	1424	43,11839	489
Nagaland	35,9216	214	35,1232	777
Ladakh	29,2257	3716	28,95823	230
Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu	11,5771	31	11,570	4
Lakshadweep	11,415	0	11,363	52
Andaman and Nicobar Islands	10,6092	17	10,4632	129

**Table 2.** COVID-19 India retrived on (09.09.2022) coronavirus outbreak | India cases.

Cases	Active	Recovered	Deaths
4,44,42,5076,166	59,2103,538	4,38,55,3659,685	5,27,93219

team reached her house and moved her to the isolation ward at the Thrissur General Hospital.

The same day, her body fluid sample was sent to the National Institute of Virology (NIV), Pune. On Thursday morning, the NIV informed that the case was positive.

People, who were in contact with the student have been put under house quarantine. The Health Department is also tracking and identifying persons who may have come into contact with her.

**Isolation rooms:** Special isolation rooms have been set up in government Medical College Hospital (MCH), Thrissur, to treat cases of nCoV infections. In all, 20 pay-ward rooms have been vacated to make the special arrangements. The isolation ward has been set up according to Standard Operative Procedure.

“The MCH is ready to take up the challenge. “A special medical team has been readied. Safety measures and medicines are in place. Steps have been taken to take care of safety of doctors and other workers,” according to RMO C.P. Murali.

The infected patient may be shifted to the MCH, Thrissur, on Thursday night after a Rapid Reaction medical team will reach there with the Health Minister, to examine her.

The Health Department has asked people, who returned from China, to report without any delay. The officials have asked people visiting general hospital and the area around it to wear masks.

Jugal Kishore, director professor and head of department-community medicine, Vardhman Mahavir Medical College (VMMC) said: “There is no vaccine or drug available against the virus. Only symptomatic treatment is available. We still don’t know how the virus will behave in the new population. Prevention and strict surveillance is very important in India.”

**Evacuation from Hubei:** Meanwhile, stating that India is still awaiting necessary approval from China to evacuate Indians in Hubei province of China, External Affairs Ministry’s spokesperson Raveesh Kumar, on Thursday said: “We have established contact with over 600 Indians across the province and are individually ascertaining their willingness to be repatriated. We are

working round-the-clock on the ground to work out the necessary logistics. Arrangements are being put in place for people to travel to the airport.”

“We have made a formal request to the government of China for bringing back Indian nationals from the Hubei province in two flights. We are conducting regular review on the situation arising out of the outbreak of nCoronavirus in China,” Mr. Kumar added.

“People need not panic. But we need to take preventive measures. Wash hands with soap and water frequently. Cover mouth and nose with medical mask or tissue when sneezing or coughing. Avoid close contact with anyone who has fever or cough. Seek medical help in case of fever, cough or difficulty in breathing,” officials said.

The Health Ministry also advised that those with a travel history to China after their return should — for a period of 14 days sleep in a separate room, limit contact with other family members and avoid visitors and close contact with anyone with cold or flu like symptoms (maintain a distance of at least 1 meter from any individual).

“Thermal screening sensors are operational and few more such equipment is being procured. The immigration and other staff members at the airports have been sensitized and dedicated ambulances are placed at ports. We also held mock drill for checking preparedness and management of possible cases. Deployment of medical and para-medical staff is also being done for round-the-clock service,” the official said. He added that hospitals have prepared isolation wards while personal protection equipments and masks are available in adequate quantity in all the States/UTs.

Freedom of the press or freedom of the media is the fundamental principle that communication and expression through various media, including printed and electronic media, especially published materials, should be considered a right to be exercised freely. Such freedom implies the absence of interference from an overreaching state; its preservation may be sought through constitution or other legal protection and security. The Indian Constitution has also given the press the Right to Freedom of Speech and Expression, under Article 19. But also, there is a statutory warning that the Indian Press faces that if it is found guilty of reporting anything affecting the integrity or sovereignty of the nation then it would not be allowed to continue its practice. This constitutional right also applies in more cases where the media would be ceased to report under objectionable circumstances such as, when it

- (i) Endangers India's friendly associations with its neighbours or affect its external affairs.
- (ii) Interrupts public system
- (iii) Is found encouraging any sort of offence.

Further, the Indian Press is supervised and directed by specific laws like the Official Secrets Act.

Every year, 3 May is a date which celebrates the fundamental principles of press freedom, to evaluate press freedom around the world, to defend the media from attacks on their independence and to pay tribute to journalists who have lost their lives in the exercise of their profession. World Press Freedom Day was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in 1993.

Without respect to governmental information, any government may distinguish which materials are public or protected from disclosure to the public. State materials are protected due to either one of two reasons: the classification of information as sensitive, classified or secret, or the relevance of the information to protecting the national interest. Many governments are also subject to "sunshine laws" or freedom of information legislation that are used to define the ambit of national interest and enable citizens to request access to government-held information.

The United Nations' 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference, and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers".

This philosophy is usually accompanied by legislation ensuring various degrees of the freedom of the scientific research (known as the scientific

freedom), the publishing, and the press. The depth to which these laws are entrenched in a country's legal system can go as far down as its constitution. The concept of freedom of speech is often covered by the same laws as freedom of the press, thereby giving equal treatment to spoken and published expression. Freedom of the press was formally established in Great Britain with the lapse of the Licensing Act in 1695. Sweden was the first country in the world to adopt freedom of the press into its constitution with the Freedom of the Press Act of 1766.

A free press and access to information are a human right that contributes to a society built on accountability and transparency. In countries where laws restrict press freedom, IMS works with local media partners to promote laws that ensure better working conditions for journalists.

Protected by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, a free press helps maintain the balance of power in government. Numerous journalists worldwide have been killed while working to fulfill their essential role in free and open societies.

Common limitations to freedom of speech relate to slander, obscenity, pornography, sedition, incitement, fighting words, classified information, copyright violation, trade secrets, food labeling, non-disclosure agreements, the right to privacy, the right to be forgotten, public security, and perjury.

Freedom of the press is the most important wheel of democracy. Without a free press, a democracy cannot exist. In fact, the press is a great medium that conveys the truth to people. However, it cannot function fully if the press is not free.

The Society declares these four principles as the foundation of ethical journalism and encourages their use in its practice by all people in all media.

Seek Truth and. Report It. Minimize Harm.

Act Independently.

Be Accountable and Transparent.

In this 21<sup>st</sup> Century we need to understand press freedom in India and around world. The function of press is different in India and around world in different situations, it all depends on government it will stop news which can effect and destabilize nation. During worldwide pandemic journalist where not allowed to organize press briefings. It was difficult for Journalist to get information from sources who were supposed to give them correct pandemic information like World Health Organization (WHO) The government all over the world wanted to show that they have controlled the pandemic but this was not the case many people around the world died, In India people died because they earlier had health record, old age, lack of medical facilities in hospitals, poor living conditions which made impossible to stop the virus chain as it was "social distancing" crowded cities are part of our life we can't stop it we have to move in crowd.

**Data India's press freedom ranking slips to 150, its lowest ever:** In the 2022 edition of the Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders, India ranked at the 150<sup>th</sup> position, eight positions lower than last year In the 2022 edition of the Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Borders, India fell to the 150<sup>th</sup> position, its lowest ever, out of 180 countries. In the last edition, India was ranked eight positions higher, at 142. The ranking is based on a country's performance in five broad categories: political context, legal framework, economic context, sociocultural context and safety of journalists. Of the five, India's ranking was lowest in the safety of journalist's category (163) and best in the legal framework category (120)

**Social media reports on pandemic:** (Alex Berry, Marcel Fürstenau) Press Freedom, Reporters Without Borders, Internet Freedom, Julian Assange, Hernandez, Anabel) Retrived on (14.12.2020) Journalists Jailed for COVID Reporting DW News.

## Results and Discussion

At least 387 people working in the media industry around the world had

been imprisoned by December 1 of this year, the German office of the press freedom NGO Reporters without Borders (RSF) announced in its annual report on Monday. Five countries were responsible for over half of all convictions: China led the pack with 117 jailed journalists, followed by Saudi Arabia (34), Egypt (30), Vietnam (28) and Syria (27). While the majority of imprisoned press workers were still men, the number of women arrested in 2020 increased by a third to 42.

Since the outbreak of the global coronavirus pandemic early in the year, over 130 members of the press, be they journalists or otherwise, have been arrested for reporting on the crisis. Some 14 of those were still in jail at the time of the report's publication, said the report. Reporters without Borders gave particular attention to Belarus, where at least 370 journalists have been arrested in the wake of the contested presidential election on August 9. Although most of those were released after a short period, the crackdown on journalists represents a reduction in press freedom [1-5].

India Cases-by-state (Table 1).

Coronavirus outbreak | India cases COVID-19 INDIA Retrived on (09.09.2022) (Table 2).

## Conclusion

The report also highlighted the detention of the Australian WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, currently in Belmarsh high-security prison in the UK. RSF claimed that the conditions had become much worse following a coronavirus outbreak in the prison and that Assange had been placed in de facto isolation. The report expressed concern for the health of those imprisoned journalists who have not received proper medical attention during the pandemic and who have been subjected to the psychological effects of increased isolation. Five journalists were facing death sentences as of December 1, one of whom Iranian journalist Ruhollah Zam was executed on December 12. The other four were in the custody of the Houthi rebels in Yemen.

RSF counted 54 media workers who had been kidnapped in Syria, Iraq and Yemen; some of them have not been heard from in years. Another four

journalists disappeared under unexplained circumstances in 2020 — one in Iraq, one in Congo, one in Mozambique and one in Peru. The NGO began issuing its yearly report in 1995. It includes cases of journalists and other professionals working in the field of journalism. The compilers only include data if it can be carefully confirmed, which sometimes leads to certain countries, such as Turkey, showing lower numbers than reported elsewhere.

## Acknowledgement

None.

## Conflict of Interest

None.

## Related websites

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