



Journalist Khalil Afridi was gunned down in an ambush on June 18. (Photo from Facebook)

INDO-PACIFIC

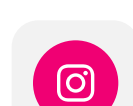
Prominent Pakistani Journalist Assassinated in Pashtun Heartland

 Wilder Davenport

Updated on: Jun 20, 2024, 19:30



Follow Us



On June 18th, Khalil Afridi, a Khyber News journalist, was assassinated in the Mazarina area of Landi Kotal Tehsil, in the Khyber district of northwestern Pakistan. In response to his death, journalists protested yesterday, and more protests have been planned for this weekend. Khalil is the sixth journalist to have been killed in Pakistan since January.

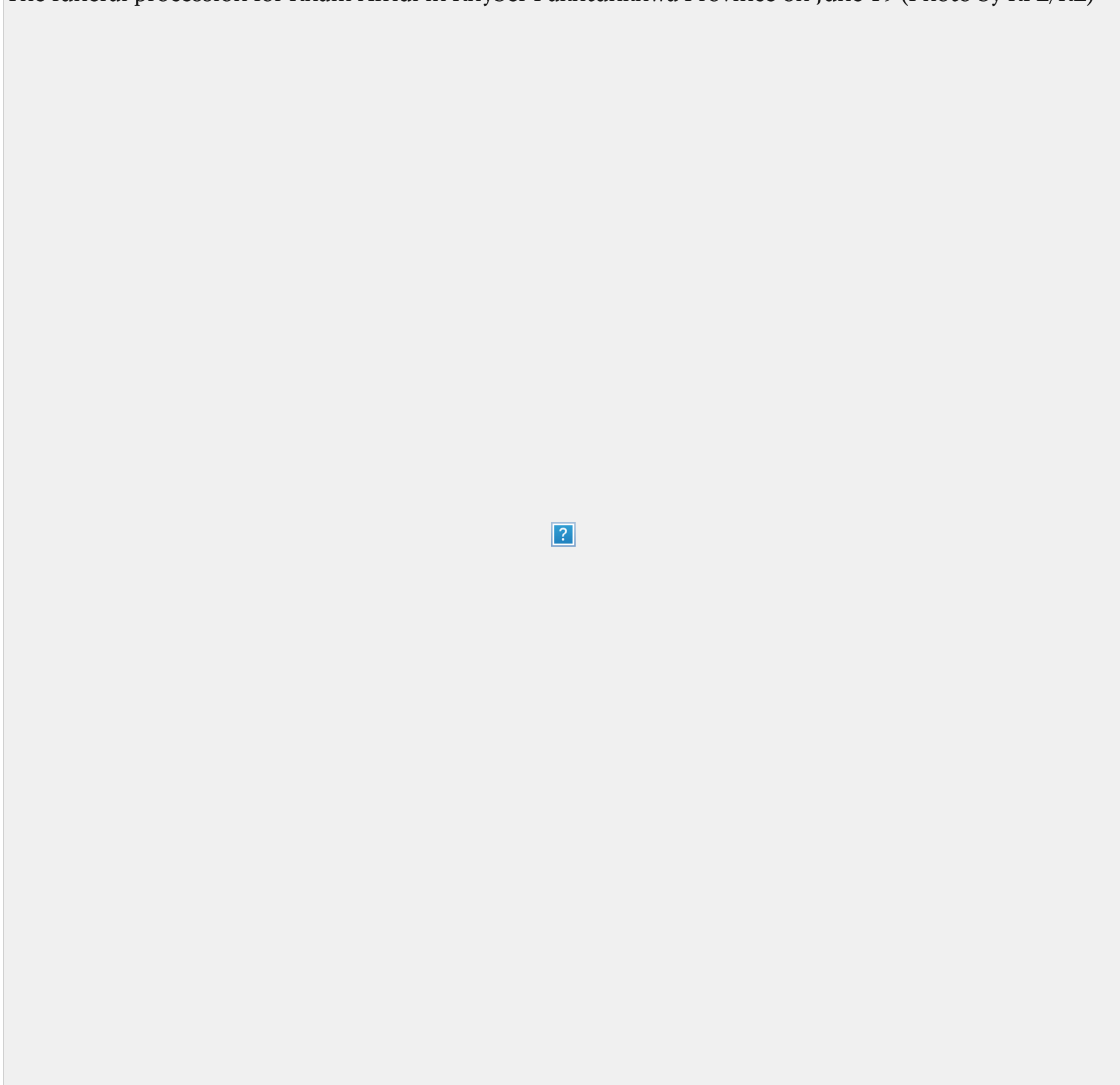
The Details

Khalil worked for Khyber News, a Pashto-language news outlet. He was in the car with three others, returning from his home village of Sultan Khel in Punjab Province, when the car was stopped by militants, and Khalil was forced to get out, before being gunned down by unidentified attackers. Local media also reported that Khalil's body lay on the street for approximately an hour before being taken to a local hospital.

Khalil was also a civil society activist and oftentimes reported on local militancy with the assistance of governmental sources. He reportedly received threats from militant groups before over his reporting, and according to his family, he was the victim of a grenade attack and a car bomb in 2017. Local journalists were reported to be advocating for the establishment of a commission to investigate the murders of journalists by militants who go unpunished. It's currently unclear if Khalil was one of these advocates.

Before the funeral prayers for Khalil, his body was taken to the Pak-Afghan highway to block traffic in protest. Protestors demanded that the area be rid of militants, and called for justice against Khalil's killers. His funeral in Landi Kotal was attended by around one thousand local residents.

The funeral procession for Khalil Afridi in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province on June 19 (Photo by RFE/RL)



The funeral procession for Khalil Afridi in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province on June 19 (Photo by RFE/RL)

Journalists and Militants in Pakistan

Pakistan is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists. Six journalists have been killed this year, adding to a total of 97 killed in the past 50 years. Despite outrage from international and local journalist associations, the murders are labeled as "unsolved" by the government, which prompts critics to accuse the government of treating the militants with impunity. However, the number of killings pales in comparison to the number of kidnappings of journalists since 2011: 3,500. According to the International Federation of Journalists, from August 2022 to August 2023, 37.5 percent of journalists in Pakistan were either harassed or faced physical violence. Since 2008, Pakistan has topped the list of the most dangerous countries to be a journalist, behind Somalia, Iraq, Mexico, the Philippines, and India, all of which, including Pakistan, have been on the index every year since its inception, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists.

So far, no arrests have been made in connection with Khalil's murder, and it's unclear what militant group targeted him.

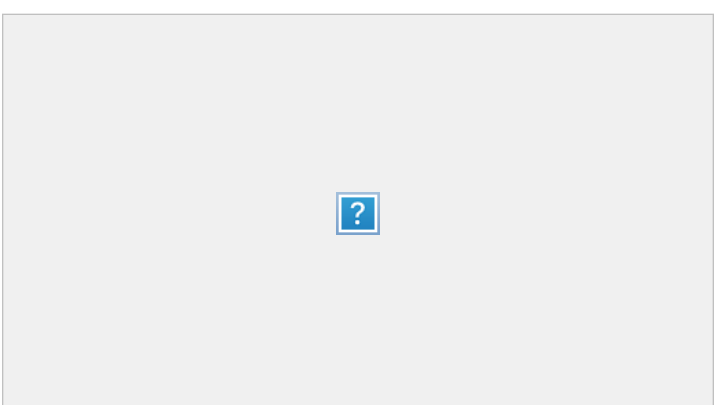
Militant attacks in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa area have surged in recent years. For example, on May 21st, Kamran Dawar, a prominent journalist and activist, was killed in the province. Reportedly, the increase in militant violence is in part due to the Taliban's takeover of the Afghan government in 2021 and the end of a ceasefire between the Pakistani Taliban—also known as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, or TTP—and the Pakistani government in 2022.

The Pakistan Coalition of Media on Safety was created after Pakistan endorsed the *UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity* in 2013 to protect Pakistani journalists. But there are no provincial laws to protect journalists in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, or Punjab, as media outlet Dawn has noted. Additionally, kidnappings are not currently criminalized in Pakistan. The Pakistani government doesn't take appropriate action against militant attacks, and is ill-equipped to punish abductions. The protests over Khalil's death, in part, hope to change that.

Report

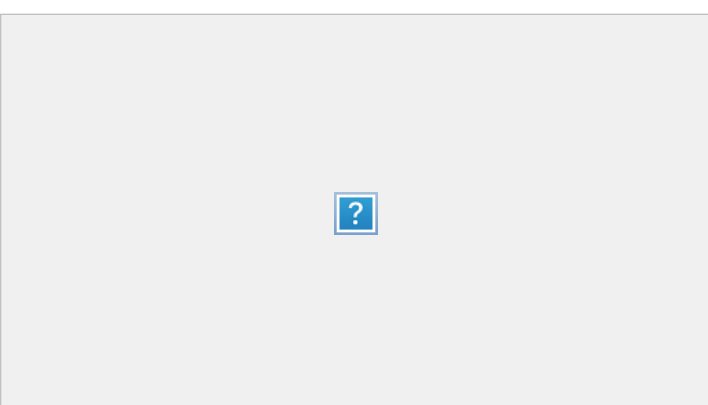
Show Comments

Related Stories



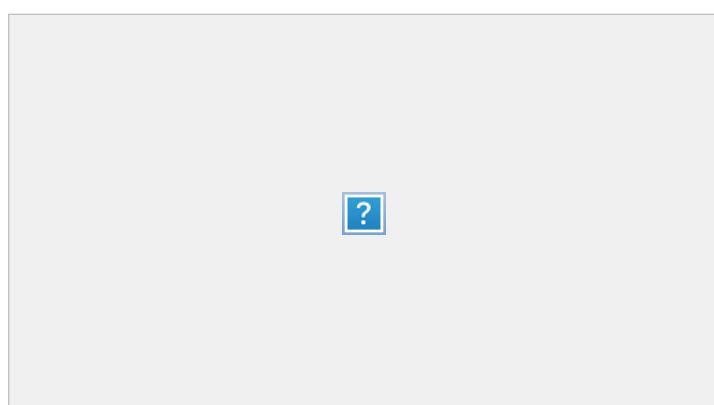
The Future of Green Resources

Ciaran Brownlee · Dec 04, 2024



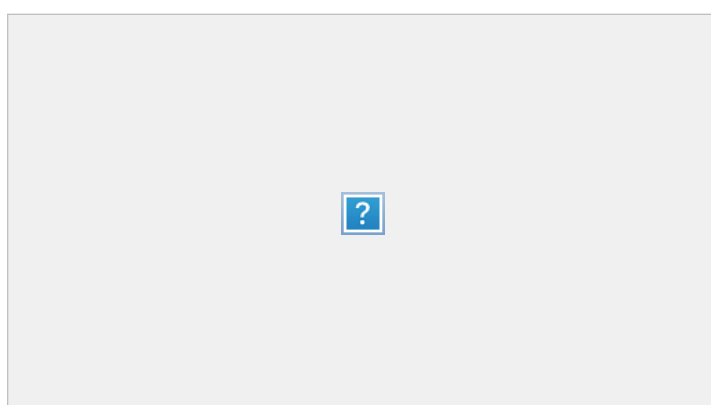
A Closer Look at the Next Round of Trump Tariffs

Daniel Murrah · Dec 01, 2024



Kim Jong Un is Not Willing to Talk to Trump: Here's What That Means

Daniel Murrah · Nov 28, 2024



G20 Summit Highlights: Trump's Shadow Looms as China Forge Stronger Ties With Global South

Stephen Beutler · Nov 27, 2024

ATLAS



Follow Us



Subscribe

NEWS

CONFLICT
NATIONAL SECURITY
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
POLITICS

REGIONS

NORTH AMERICA
MIDDLE EAST
EUROPE
SOUTH AMERICA
INDO-PACIFIC
AFRICA
CYBERSPACE

LISTEN | WATCH

Public Daily Briefing
(A)POLITICAL
BULLET POINTS
TRUCE OR DARE
BEHIND THE BYLINE

OTHER

Newsletter Sponsorships
Drop Us A Line | LinkedIn
Classified Intelligence