Murder of a Journalist

Why in news?

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Gauri Lankesh, a journalist-activist, was recently murdered in her residence in Benagluru.

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Who is Gauri Lankesh?

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- Gauri Lankesh is the publisher and editor of the Kannada weekly Gauri Lankesh Patrike.
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- She is also an activist and came up against the establishment in multiple ways.
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- She was known for taking on right-wing Hindu fundamentalists with her sharp and stinging pieces.
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- She sought to bring naxalites to the mainstream, take up the cause of Dalits and farmers, raised consciousness on the creeping influence of Hindutva groups, gave moral support to progressive campaigns.
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Why was she murdered?

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- Her killers caught her outside her home and fired at point-blank range, hitting her on the chest and the temple.
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- This shows that it is a pre-meditated assassination.
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- The manner in which she was brutally murdered raises extremely worrying questions.

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- It was very similar to the cold-blooded murders of at least three other rationalist thinkers, Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare and MM Kalburgi, over the past few years.
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- Kalburgi was killed for his interpretation of Basavanna's teachings.
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- Dabholkar and Pansare lost their lives for encouraging rationalism, and challenging casteism and dogma.
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- These brutal attacks have the power to potentially scare off others from asking too many questions.
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What are the implications?

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- The death along with that of the journalist who exposed the Dera Sacha Sauda chief present a sobering picture about the status of free speech and the robustness of the free press.
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- The journalists working away from the metros and often working in language publications are harassed and abused by local power interests.
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- This is also a sign of growing strain of intolerance in the country, especially religious intolerance.
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- e.g Many in the social media claimed that Lankesh deserved this end for her anti-Hindu views.
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- As a result, India was ranked 136 out of 180 countries and placed in the "least free" category in the 2017 World Press Freedom Index.
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- The 2017 India Freedom Report, reports 54 reported attacks on journalists, and 45 sedition cases against individuals and groups between January 2016 and February 2017.
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- Laws such as the Chhattisgarh Public Security Act and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act are also often misused.
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What should be done?

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- A liberal society that values dissent and free speech is an essential component of a vibrant democracy.
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- Speedy action on prosecuting the previous assassins would have deterred such an episode.
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- It would have also bolstered the confidence of the common man in the police.
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- So the state police should now move expeditiously to solve this murder and restore some semblance of order.
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Source: The Hindu, Business Line

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