



## MEDIA FREEDOM REVIEW- MARCH 2026

The monthly '**Media Freedom Review**' is a publication of the Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG). It is produced by monitoring and reporting on freedom of expression, press freedom, internet freedom, digital and online rights, and the safety and security of journalists in Sierra Leone.

In March 2026, MRCG monitored the arrest and detention of Alhaji Amadu Bah (alias LAJ). It also followed up on the arrest and detention of the Secretary General of the Main Opposition All People's Congress (APC), the arrest and detention of Zinab Sheriff, the intimidation of journalist Lamarana Bah, the alleged threat to a journalist, the withdrawal of frequency by the National Telecommunications Authority from **G8 Media Group**, the alleged physical assault on two journalists, the verbal threat against a journalist, the murder of a journalist in Waterloo, and the barring of Melvin Tejan Mansaray from entering Sierra Leone's Parliament.

On 24 March 2026, a popular musician, Alhaji Amadu Bah (LAJ), was charged in court in Bo, Southern Sierra Leone, with three counts, including: count 1, cyberbullying contrary to section 44(1)(b) of the Cyber Security and Crime Act 2021; count 2, cyberbullying contrary to section 44(2)(b) of the Cyber Security and Crime Act 2021; and count 3, insulting conduct contrary to section 3(2) of the Public Order Act of 1965. The accused was arrested on 30 March 2026 at the Freetown International Airport. His lawyer, Madiou Sesay, confirmed that his client had been arrested and detained at the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) in Freetown before being transferred to Bo, where he is being tried.

The matter of the National Secretary General of the All Peoples Congress (APC) Party, Lansana Dumbuya Esq, came before the Pademba Road Magistrate Court No 1 in Freetown on 5 and 19 March 2026. On 5 March 2026, the prosecutors played a 45-second video in court, which they alleged contained statements directed at President Julius Maada Bio. After viewing the video and cross-examining the witness, the lead defence counsel, Afrikanus Sesay, requested an adjournment to make a no-case submission, indicating their intention to challenge whether the prosecution had presented sufficient evidence to proceed with the trial. On 19 March 2026, the defence counsel applied for an adjournment to file a no-case submission, which the prosecutors did not object to. The matter was adjourned until 2 April 2026. Lansana Dumbuya Esq was arraigned on 12 February 2026 before Magistrate Brima Jah at the Pademba Road Magistrate Court No 1 in Freetown on three counts of Incitement, Insulting Language, and behaving in an insulting manner, contrary to Section 12 (a) of the Public Order Act of 1965, Act No 46 of 1965, as amended by the Public Order (Amendments) Act No 2 of 1973. The offence stated alleged that the accused, on 31 January 2026, at the Brima Atouga Mini Stadium, in Freetown, committed an unlawful act by encouraging his supporters to refer to the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, His Excellency Dr Julius Maada Bio, as a thief.

The case of Zainab Sheriff was heard at Pademba Road Magistrate Court No. 1 in Freetown on 4, 11, 18, 25, and 31 March 2026. On 4 March, Yusuf Isaac Sesay, the lead prosecution lawyer, presented a video in court along with other evidence marked as exhibits. Lawyer RSV Wright, on behalf of the accused, challenged the admissibility of the video evidence, arguing that there was no competent witness to confirm its authorship. Magistrate Brima Jah, however, allowed the video evidence and other exhibits to be admitted in the case. On 11 March 2026, the prosecutors concluded their case after presenting two witnesses and tendering several

exhibits. The defence requested an adjournment to seek further instructions from their clients. During the proceedings, one of the defence attorneys, Basita Michael Esq., on behalf of the accused, stated that the accused expressed deep regret for the language she used in the alleged statement. However, the magistrate did not grant bail to the accused, and the matter was adjourned. On 18 March 2026, there were counter-statements between the state counsel and the defence counsel regarding how the defence planned to conduct their case. After both sides agreed to proceed, Rowland Wright requested an adjournment to determine their position. On 25 March 2026, the defence submitted a no-case statement, arguing that the charges against their client were unlawful and that neither count disclosed a known offence, and should therefore be dismissed. The prosecutor dismissed the no-case submission and maintained that the prosecution had established a 'prima facie' case against the accused. The matter was adjourned until 31 March 2026, for a ruling on whether to uphold or dismiss the no-case motion. On 31 March, Magistrate Brima Jah dismissed the defence's no-case submission and ordered the defence to open their case. The accused was given two options: to comment on the charges or to have witnesses testify on her behalf. She chose to comment on the charges. In her statement, she described herself as a patriotic Sierra Leonean, adding that her remarks aimed to deter election rigging rather than incite violence or insult anyone. The case was then adjourned until 7 April 2026. Zainab Sheriff was arraigned before Magistrate Brima Jah at the same court on 23 February 2026, on two counts: incitement contrary to law and threatening language contrary to section 30(1) of the Public Order Act of 1965. The charges stated that she made statements on 31 January 2026, at the Brima Atouga Mini Stadium in Freetown, allegedly encouraging the killing of individuals accused of rigging elections.

There were no new developments in the alleged intimidation of journalist Amadu Lamrana Bah, presenter of the 'Morning Devotion' programme on *Truth Radio*, by Admire Bio on 14 October 2025, after public comments on the devastating impact of "Kush" on Sierra Leone's youth. Kabbah Lavalie, an officer attached to the Cyber Unit at CID and in charge of the investigation, told MRCG that the investigation was ongoing.

Regarding *G8 Media Group's frequency issue*, Thomas Dixon, Co-owner of the Group, told MRCG that, with the availability of resources, they now intend to go digital, since there have been no positive outcomes regarding their frequency. The NaTCA withdrew the frequency of *G8 Media Group* on 30 July 2025, just days before their planned launch. The Co-Owner also said that he had engaged all relevant stakeholders, including NaTCA, the Minister of Information and Civic Education, and the Chief Minister, but there has been no positive response.

There were no new developments regarding Tejan Sheikh Rogers in March 2026. Tejan Sheik Rogers, a lecturer at Milton Margai Technology University, had appeared in court on 17 March 2025 on one count charge of cyberstalking under section 44(2)(b) of the Cyber Security and Crime Act of 2021, for allegedly using his WhatsApp number to create and post recorded audio and text messages in a WhatsApp group called "Maada Must Stay Campaign", which was deemed to have damaged the reputation of the university's Vice Chancellor and Principal, Dr. Philip Kanu. The matter had come up on 11, 13, and 20 June 2025 at the Pademba Road Magistrate Court No. 2. On 20 June 2025, Magistrate John Manso Fornah issued a bench warrant for the defendant, Sheik Tejan Rogers, for failing to appear before the court on 20 and 24 June 2025. On 1 July 2025, the accused appeared in court, and Magistrate John Manso Fornah committed the matter to the High Court for further hearing.

Regarding the matter of Melvin Tejan Mansaray, the journalist told MRCG that the Chief Minister of Sierra Leone, Dr. David Moinina Sengeh, had assured the journalist that he would engage the Speaker of Parliament regarding the journalist's ban. He also said he had yet to receive an update from the Minister of Information, Cherner Bah, on efforts to persuade the Speaker to rescind the ban. Melvin Tejan Mansaray, a member of the Sierra Leone Parliamentary Press Gallery, was barred by the Speaker of Parliament on 10 January 2025 on allegations of "malicious criticism." The journalist maintained that the Privileges and Ethics Committee had yet to set a date to debate his matter.

The murder trial of Journalist Samuel Brima Mattia, former *Deputy Station Manager of Voice of Peace and Development (VOPAD) radio FM 96.5*, was heard on 5 and 12 March 2026. On 5 March 2026, JA Kargbo Esq, in his cross-examination of Miss Mattia, a witness on behalf of the State, asked the witness if it was the same statement that she had made to the court regarding the second accused confessing to him that the first accused had hired the second accused regarding the death threat on Mattia at the police station. The witness confirmed that it was the same statement that she made to the police. JA Kargbo Esq applied that the statement be tendered to the court. Magistrate Mark Ngaba adjourned the matter until 12 March 2026 to tender the statement. On 12 March 2026, JA Kargbo Esq. further asked the witness whether the second accused had told her that he was hired by Mendeh Lamin. The witnesses also confirmed that it was true. Aruna Jalloh, Esq., on behalf of the State, told the judge that they believed their witness was credible and stood by her statement. He tendered the statement that she made to the police to the judge and told the judge that they had one final witness to close their case. Magistrate Mark Ngaba adjourned the matter until 26 March 2026. On 26 March 2026, there was no sitting on the matter, and it was further adjourned until 9 April 2026. Journalist Samuel Mattia was allegedly murdered on 16 January 2025 by his Station Manager, Joseph M Lamin, and others in Waterloo.

Regarding the matter of Journalist Umu Thoronka, the Independent Media Commission (IMC), in its ruling dated 25 February 2026, stated that the *Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC)* should compensate Umu Thoronka with a negotiable sum, taking into account her period of service to the corporation. The President of WIMSAL, Eastina Taylor, in a statement published on Facebook on 11 March 2026, said that the ruling is a clear affirmation that women in the media in Sierra Leone deserve fairness, dignity and respect in their workplaces. She called on the *SLBC* to swiftly honour its obligation and pay the rightful compensation due to its member, but told the MRCG that SLBC had yet to comply with the IMC ruling. The Deputy Director General of *SLBC*, Asmieu Bah, told the MRCG that the Corporation's legal retainer was reviewing the ruling and would advise them accordingly. Umu Thoronka was dismissed from work and allegedly attacked and harassed on social media regarding a TikTok [video](#) she posted about a lady's contribution at the Presidential Town Hall Meeting in Freetown on 23 July 2024. RFK Human Rights and WIMSAL had submitted a [petition](#) to the Community Court of Justice of the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS) on behalf of Umu Thoronka regarding the sexual harassment she received and her illegal dismissal at the SLBC.

The MRCG's initiative on freedom of expression and the press, internet freedom, digital and online rights, and the safety and security of journalists in Sierra Leone is funded by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in the United States of America. The MRCG seeks to strengthen democratic dialogue and accountability, consolidate peace, and ensure development through professional, independent, and sustainable media based on the right to freedom of expression and the press.

MRCG is the coordinating Secretariat for media reform, research and capacity building. It comprises Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), Independent Radio Network (IRN), Guild of Editors (GoE), Women in the Media Sierra Leone (WIMSAL), Sierra Leone Reporters Union (SLRU), Sport Writers Association of Sierra Leone (SWASAL), Mass Communication (Fourah Bay College), Ministry of Information and Communications (MIC), Independent Media Commission (IMC) and the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC).