

IFJ South Asia Media Bulletin

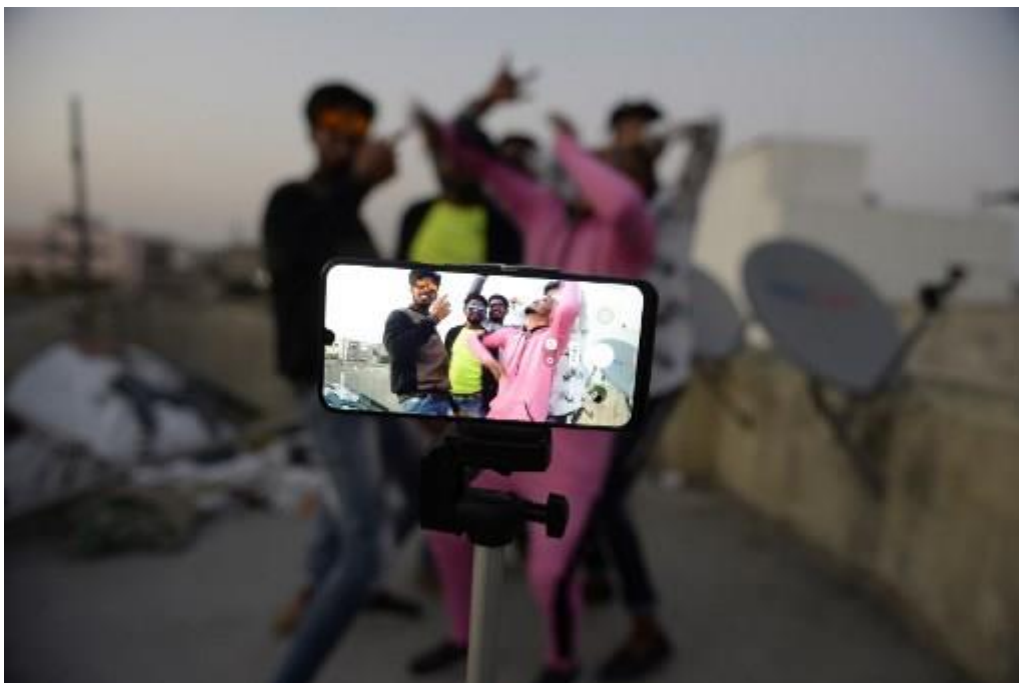
15 October 2020

Welcome to the IFJ's monthly media bulletin for South Asia's Media Solidarity Network (SAMSN)

IN

TikTok Ban in Pakistan follows US and India retaliations: On October 9, the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) banned Chinese owned short-form video app TikTok claiming the app failed to remove "immoral" and "indecent" content. The PTA said in its release that despite its warnings to Beijing-based ByteDance, the company had failed to block the offensive content on the app. But according to some [experts](#), the decision to ban TikTok could be rooted in Pakistan's desire to emulate its neighbour and make use of the "Chinese model of media control", rather than act as an attack on China. "This could be taking a page out of the Chinese playbook. We know how heavy censorship regimes are in China," said Usama Khilji, director of the Pakistani digital rights group Bolo Bhi. Pakistan's increasing attempts to control freedom of expression go back to the blocking of YouTube from 2012 to 2016. In 2016, it enacted a controversial cyber security law that gave authorities power to block content for a various reasons including in the "interest of the glory of Islam or the integrity, security or defence of Pakistan."

FOCUS



Youth act in front of a mobile phone camera while making a TikTok video. India banned the app on June 29 citing national security concerns. Pakistan banned the app on October 9. Credit: NOAH SEELAM / AFP

In this bulletin:

- Freedom of expression under attack in India
- Democracy concerns for Bhutan amid social media misuse
- Nepalese journalist struggle intensifies with protests
- Respect for women journalists in Afghanistan's Taliban negotiation

The Region

India's seditious slide: Freedom of expression in India continues to remain under attack amid Covid-19 with increasing incidents of legal action being waged against citizens, including journalists. Almost every state in India has fallen foul to weaponising and twisting existing laws such as sedition to silence the critics through false charges and accusations. Among them is Delhi-based journalist Siddique Kappan, who was on his way to meet the family of a gang-rape victim on October 4, when he was arrested near Hathras in Uttar Pradesh. A day later he was charged with sedition under India's draconian anti-terror Unlawful Activities

(Prevention) Act or UAPA. Police allege Kappan and three others were connected to the Popular Front of India (PFI). Police claim the Kerala-based Muslim organisation is an extremist outfit planning to create disturbances. But Kappan's colleagues said it is a collusive attempt at blocking coverage of the rape by members of the powerful Thakur class. Between March and September, a media watchdog report [said](#), 55 journalists in India "faced arrest, registration of FIRs, summons or show cause notices, physical assaults, alleged destruction of properties and threats" for reporting on Covid-19.

National Issues

Afghanistan: Women journalists in Afghanistan [urged](#) the negotiating team of the Afghanistan government and Taliban to accord freedom of speech and right of journalists as priority and urged the negotiating parties to respect right of women journalists.

Bangladesh: Elias Mia, a correspondent of [Daily Bijoy](#), was hacked to death on October 12 by miscreants in Narayanganj district. Mia was [allegedly murdered](#) for exposing a criminal nexus in gas line distribution and is the second journalist to be killed in Bangladesh during 2020.

Bhutan: Activists and lawyers in Bhutan expressed concern at the misuse of social media with Netizens becoming both judge and jury on social media. As one lawyer argues, vested interest and hominem arguments are [posing](#) threat to the freedom of speech and expression Bhutan.

India: Jammu and Kashmir Police [registered](#) a First Information Report (FIR) on October 4 against the [Kashmirfight](#) after it published a list of journalists and activists allegedly funded by the Indian government for the purpose of provoking fear and violence.

Maldives: As the Maldives government prepares to [propose](#) a new bill on defamation to the People's Majlis, the Attorney General's Office argued the bill would not target media institutions. The message was aimed to address concerns

over by media fraternity including by [Maldives Journalists Association \(MJA\)](#).

Nepal: Abdhesh Kumar Jha, a reporter for Kantipur was [barred](#) from reporting at district police office at Saptari where he attended to cover a delegation of women right activists demanding legal action against the perpetrators of gender-based violence.

Pakistan: The president and assistant vice president of BOL Network, Nabeel Jakhura and Shabi Al Hassan respectively, were abducted in Karachi on October 8 and [released](#) after two days. The motive for the abduction is not known.

Sri Lanka: Journalists Shanmugam Thavaseelan and Kanapathipillai Kumanan, correspondents for the Tamil Guardian, were [attacked](#) by timber smugglers on October 12 when the journalist duo were working on a story on illegal deforestation and timber smuggling in the Murippu forest area in the Mullaitivu district.

Media Rights Violations

Two journalists were killed in South Asia in September and October. Bangladeshi journalist Elias Mia, a correspondent of *Daily Bijoy*, was murdered on October 12 by miscreants for allegedly exposing a criminal nexus in gas line distribution. Pakistani journalist Abid Hussain Abidi, who was affiliated with local newspaper Jurm-o- Saza, was shot dead in Mandi Bahaudin in the Malikwal district on September 25. Accusation on false charges and misuse of law to detain, arrest and harass journalists is saw five journalists arrested in the past month. The IFJ documented the arrests of Indian journalists Siddique Kappan and Rajeev Sharma and Pakistani journalists Ehtisham Kiyani, Asad Toor, Bilal Farooqi and Absar Alam. Seven attacks on journalists for their news reporting were also documented.

Violations by Type

Killing	2
Arrest/Detention	5
Attack	7

Censorship	1
Harassment	2
Internet Shutdown	0
Law	3
Economic Pressure	0

Violations by Country

Afghanistan	0
Bangladesh	1
Bhutan	0
India	5
Maldives	0
Nepal	4
Pakistan	8
Sri Lanka	2

Featured Action

Protests for Working Journalists Act: The Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) is waging joint struggle for affected journalists and media workers in Nepal with a series of protests demanding the reinstatement of sacked journalists. In its actions, the FNJ demanded full payment of monthly salaries and an end to the psycho-social harassment of journalists in Nepal. On October 13 at a rally in front of the Prime Minister's residence, journalists demanded implementation of Nepal's Working Journalists Act as a means of publicizing media house failures to pay full salaries. The protest called on government to cease government advertising with offending houses and to bar media owners from traveling abroad. The FNJ and the joint struggle committee organized a five-day relay fast from October 1 in New Baneshwor, Kathmandu. Relay fasts and sit-in protests were held in front of media houses including the Kantipur Media Group, Annapurna Post, Annapurna Television, Karobar Daily and Nagarik Daily Nepal Aaja among others in different dates. According to FNJ general secretary, Ramesh Bista, the FNJ plans to call on

the international community to blacklist exploitative media houses.

Wage Board battle begins in Pakistan: The Implementation Tribunal for the Newspaper Employees (ITNE) had its first hearing of 7th Wage Board Award (WBA) cases in Karachi this week, with some hearings also conducted in Islamabad. The majority of the cases in the three-day hearing from October 13-15, included employees of Jang, The News, Daily News, Awam, Nawa-i-Waqt and some smaller papers. Observed by the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), the next hearing is set for December. It was a breakthrough moment for labour rights in Pakistan, particularly since the Wage Board has not been implemented in the newspaper industry despite a passage of almost two decades. The 8th WBA has been announced but is still waiting implementation.

IFJ Blog

Teleworking amid Covid-19 in the Maldives: Considering the benefits of teleworking, work from home might become a new trend in the media. Interview with Mohamed Hamdhoon, assistant editor of Mihaaru News and president of newly revived Maldives Journalists Association (MJA). Read more [here](#)

IFJ At Work:

- **When home becomes your newsroom:** To mark the International Day for Decent Work on October 7, [the IFJ published guidelines for IFJ members](#) to ensure journalists' labour rights are protected when working from home and to push national governments to develop a guarantee-based teleworking framework. Read more [here](#).
- **Online workshop on Covid-19's impact on journalists in Sri Lanka:** The Federation of Media Employees Trade Unions (FMETU) conducted online workshops in Sri Lanka to discuss the challenges journalists are facing in Sri Lanka and to devise response strategies. Supported by Union to Union, the Sri Lanka pilot project with FMETU also supported strategic planning

and the draft of a periodic strategy for FMETU.

- **Sri Lankan dialogue on the right to information:** The Free Media Movement (FMM) led a national dialogue on the achievements and challenges of Sri Lanka's Right to Information Act on September 28 to mark the International Day of Universal Access to Information.

FROM THE MEDIA

- China's increasing heavy-handedness toward international media, both on its soil as well as in other countries raised eyebrows in India when China brazenly issued Taiwan guidelines for India's media - from [*The Diplomat*](#)
- If there is anything new that has been normalised this year, it is arbitrary governance and media bashing. Perhaps the Tripura chief minister's unprecedented threat to newspapers and subsequent attacks on journalists is in tandem with the "new normal" -from [*The Wire*](#)
- Women experts were largely "drowned out" by men in news expertise pieces; women were rarely the primary subject of news stories; and Covid19 coverage through a gender lens was largely missing in the top news outlets in six countries, including India - the [*Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation*](#)
- A safer social media environment will provide huge benefits not just for advertisers and society but also to the platforms themselves - from [*National Herald*](#)

TAKE ACTION!

Read and share: When home becomes your newsroom – [The IFJ guide](#) to ensure your rights at home #RIGHTSATHOME #SAFETELEWORK

Apply for the [Sixth Global Media Competition on Labor Migration and Fair](#)

Recruitment

Apply for [Legal Defense: Emerging challenges in press freedom and international legal framework](#)

Subscribe to the [IFJ and its weekly Covid Newsletter](#)

Read and share: [IFJ Covid-19 and Women Journalists Survey](#)

Share the discussion on the [Global Platform for Quality Journalism](#)

**In Solidarity,
IFJ Asia-Pacific**