



# IFJ South Asia Media Bulletin

## 15 December 2020

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

### **In Focus: Media casualties mount in Afghanistan**

As the world marked 16 days of activism against gender based violence, broadcast journalist Malala Maiwand was on her way to work when gunmen opened fire on her vehicle in Nangarhar province. She and her driver were killed in the attack on December 10, with Islamic State later claiming responsibility. They allegedly targeted the 25-year-old journalist for her "pro-regime" position. Maiwand, a journalist with Enikass TV and Radio, was also a civil society activist and had previously spoken about the challenges of being a female journalist in the country. It was the first targeted killing since the NATO and EU issued a joint statement on December 7 condemning attacks on journalists and religious leaders. Hujatullah Mujadidi, vice president of the Afghan Independent Journalists Association (AIJA), said the unwillingness or inability of the Afghanistan government to punish perpetrators remains the biggest threat to journalism in the insurgency-battered country. Nai, an organisation that supports media in Afghanistan, said in a statement: "With the killing of Malalai, the working field for female journalists is getting smaller and journalists may not dare to continue their jobs the way they were doing before."



Mourners carry the coffin of Malalai Maiwand, who was shot dead by gunmen in Jalalabad. Credit: AFP

### In this bulletin:

- **South Asia Media Solidarity Network on Covid's impact**
- **Dissidents and journalists under fire in Bangladesh**
- **Rays of hope for Maldivian journalist unity**
- **A tragic month for media and journalists in South Asia**

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### The Region

**South Asian Journalists Unions Convene:** The situation for media and journalism in South Asia under Covid-19, brought nearly 70 journalists, activists and union leaders together for the first major online meeting of the South Asia Media Solidarity Network (SAMSAN) on December 2. Participants reflected on some of the key progress and achievements in 2020 towards addressing critical issues faced by the media and journalism fraternity.

Presentations from the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) and the Nepal Press Union (NPU) highlighted issues of professional safety and security of journalists and Covid-19's impact on professionalism. "Many journalists were fired and their personal, professional security was at risk," Sangharsha Panta, of FNJ, said, adding that 500 journalists were reported to be infected and five had died from Covid-19. According to Farida Nekzad, from the Afghanistan Independent Journalist Association (AIJA), nearly 20 percent of women

Viranjana Herath from the Free Media Movement (FMM) regime change in 2019 had seen that government trying to censor traditional media. IFJ's Indian affiliates, the Indian Journalists Union (IJU) and the National Union of Journalists (NUJ-I) highlighted the misuse of draconian law including sedition law to arrest and intimidate journalists, while Pulack Ghatak, a senior journalist from Bangladesh highlighted the misuse of Digital Security Act (DSA).

In addition to massive job losses in Pakistan, the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalist's Ihtsham Ul-Haq said journalists were now facing restrictions from Pakistan *Electronic Media* Regulatory Authority (*PEMRA*)'s interference and the misuse of Citizens Protection (Against Online Harm) Rules 2020.

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## National Issues

**Afghanistan:** Violence against women journalists [increased](#) in Afghanistan in 2020 compared to the data from last year. The data documented by the Center for Protection of Afghan Women Journalists (CPAWJ) reveals that violence against women is doubled this year compared to 2019. The Center's findings show that 13 female journalists faced violence from state and non-state actors up to November 1.

**Bhutan:** A two day workshop on media engagement for civil society organizations was [organized](#) in Thimphu from 26 to 27 November. The workshop aimed at increasing

**Bangladesh:** Seven rights groups, including Human Rights Watch (HRW), [allege](#) that the Bangladesh government is continuing to target dissidents including journalists and media workers with the Digital Security Act 2018, the Special Powers Act 1974, and other draconian laws in 2020. The rights groups said security forces frequently committed enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and torture with impunity while the ruling Awami League had used the pandemic to tighten the screws on critics and the free press.

**India:** Targeting of journalists in First Information Report (FIR) reports continued in India with Gujarat police [registering](#) an FIR against reporters Pritipalsibh Gohil, Mahedrasinh

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related issues. IFJ Bhutan affiliate, the Journalists Association of Bhutan (JAB) also awarded rural reporting fellowship to nine journalists to allow them to travel to remote parts of the country to pursue untold stories.

**Maldives:** The recently revived Maldives Journalists Association (MJA) is offering training on 'ethical journalism' to Maldivian journalists as one of its first initiatives since the organisation was reformed on September 5. The MJA has accorded analysis of media rights violations and documentation of cases of impunity for crimes against journalists as critical priorities. "By initiating these step, we will be developing a ground for collective advocacy on around media rights and impunity issues in Maldives," said Mohamed Hamdhoon, MJA's new president.

**Pakistan:** As news broke of the eminent sacking of journalists and media workers at *Dawn*, representatives of trade unions, political activists and journalists [organized](#) a major sit-in outside Dawn's office in Islamabad on November 26 to protest the forced resignations and pay cuts.

journalists were targeted for attempting to enter the Rajkot Taluka police station for an investigation on December 1. As many as 55 journalists were targeted in cases [filed](#) between March and May 2020 alone [according](#) the Rights and Risks Analysis Group (RRAG).

**Nepal:** Nepali civic space is [categorized](#) as 'obstructed' in CIVICUS's report on ongoing threats and attacks against journalists for their reporting, including on the COVID-19 pandemic. The report alleges that the Nepal government tried to impose restrictions on internet and media by misusing the Electronic Transaction Act. It also pointed out the attempt to bring in Public Service Broadcasting Bill and the Media Council bill were [aimed at](#) empowering government to exercise greater control over media and civic space.

**Sri Lanka:** Public outcry followed the BBC's [closure](#) on November 30 of its Sinhala Radio service broadcast, allegedly due financial crisis. The move will severely [impact](#) the right to information to free and impartial news in the local language of more than 833,000 listeners, representing around 7 per cent of the total Sinhala-speaking population of Sri Lanka.

As well as three targeted killings in the period November 15 to December 15, India led with region with 11 violations recorded in IFJ monitoring. Misuse of law is another trend that is continued this month.

#### Violations by Type

Killing	3
Arrest/Detention	1
Attack	8
Censorship	0
Harassment	1
Internet Shutdown	0
Law	4
Economic Pressure	2

#### Violations by Country

Afghanistan	1
Bangladesh	0
Bhutan	0
India	11
Maldives	0
Nepal	4
Pakistan	1
Sri Lanka	2

### Featured Action

**Nepal:** Amid the receipt of numbers of complains from journalists of being economically exploited by media houses, the Federation of Nepali journalists (FNJ) is set to establish a fully-fledged 'labor desk' to look at the issue with FNJ secretary Ram Prasad Dahal assigned to take responsibility as the coordinator of the Nepal labor desk. FNJ has recorded complaints of illegal sackings, pay cuts, delayed payment from economically exploited journalists and carried out the joint advocacy initiatives and, together with the affected journalists, carried out a series of protests, rallies and demonstrations, including in front of the Prime Minister's residence, demanding the reinstatement of sacked journalists. "The first phase of the protest program worked well, and we are entering into second phase of the protests where the FNJ together with the struggling journalists organizes sit in in front of the house of the media owners," said FNJ in a [press release](#). The FNJ's recent central committee meeting on November 27- 28 also determined to look the security issues of women journalists more seriously.

### IFJ Blog

Against the backdrop of killing, arrest and harassment of journalists, media freedom organisations continue to campaign against the scourge of impunity in Sri Lanka, [writes](#) Ruki Fernando.

### IFJ At Work:

- Union actions and responses to Covid-19 formed a key part of IFJ pilot projects, funded by Union to Union, which finalized in November. The IFJ and National Press Union (NPU)'s joint research report identified that the journalists and media workers didn't get either a regular salary or full salary after the Covid-19 pandemic with more than 80 per cent of respondent reporting the same. Seven per cent of respondents reported losing their job in the pandemic. Out of 515 respondents, 376 journalists said that a major problem was decline in the income source of media houses during the Covid-19 pandemic. Delays on salary payments and salary cuts triggered economic difficulties for journalists in Nepal. As many as 69 per cent journalists said they struggled to meet family expenses due to the Covid-19 pandemic and another 13 per cent said they failed to pay installments of loans after the lockdown.

- The IFJ [published](#) 'The White Paper on Global Journalism' to mark the International Day for Human Rights on 10 December. The report highlights issues for freedom of expression, working conditions, youth and gender equality and also documents the 2,658 journalists murdered since 1990, including 42 in 2020. It also lists the 235 journalists are currently in prison.

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### FROM THE MEDIA

- Physical violence against women has increased during the Covid-19 pandemic, in what is called the "[shadow pandemic](#)" - from [Scroll.in](#)
  - The Orissa High Court said that currently, there is no mechanism for a victim to be able to get their objectionable photographs deleted from social media platforms like Facebook - from [MediaNama](#)
  - Ultimate freedom for the media has become a distant dream in Pakistan where no-one can speak openly and write anything clearly. Under such a state of press freedom, there are still brave journalists like Hamid Mir and others who seem to be sharing and writing the truth – from [Freedom Network Pakistan](#)
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