



# IFJ South Asia Media Bulletin

## 15 February 2021

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

### **IN FOCUS: India restores high speed internet in J&K**

The Government of India finally restored high speed internet to Jammu and Kashmir on February 5, 2021. After a dark period of control lasting more than 17 months, the region's population can once again use 4G internet – a right that should never have been revoked. The globally-condemned controls were implemented when the Indian government revoked Article 370 of the constitution of India on August 5, 2019, resulting in the imposition a total communications lockdown on Jammu and Kashmir. According to Top10VPN's annual report *Global Cost of Internet Shutdown*, India topped the leader board on internet shutdowns by restricting its citizens' internet access more than any other country in the world. The shutdowns in 2020 are now estimated to have cost the economy USD 2.8 billion, almost double that of 2019. While the most intense controls on communications were gradually lifted from March 2020, restriction on high speed 4G internet continued long after the Indian Supreme Court's ordered to review the restrictions on January 10.

The arbitrary arrest of Kashmiri lawyers, rights activists, political leaders and students continued during the shutdown, while the far-reaching controls had a dire impact on media and severely affected the work of journalists.

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and South Asia Media Solidarity Network (SAMSN) steadfastly raised opposition to the shutdown and launched a

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inspectors general of police in Jammu and Kashmir divisions to “closely monitor the impact of lifting of restrictions” thereby raising doubt on the permanence of the decision.



### In this bulletin:

- **South Asia Governments curb Covid-19 reporting**
- **Five sentenced to life imprisonment for Bangladeshi journalist's murder**
- **Nine Indian journalists charged for reporting farmer protest**
- **Nepali journalists receive Covid-19 vaccine**
- **Pakistan announces support package for newspaper-hawkers**
- **IFJ launches Covid-19 vaccine media coverage guideline**

### The Region

#### **Battling misinformation with South Asia's Covid-19 vaccination roll-out:**

While authorities continue to [clamp down](#) on South Asia's media by controlling the public narrative on Covid-19 and targeting journalists for their reporting, another challenge is emerging in the region. It comes as Chinese authorities announced this month there was “no place for malign competition” on the issue

being used in South Asia, to questioning the efficacy of Indian and Western vaccines. India started its Covid vaccination programme on 16 January, and various claims about vaccines have run the gamut on social media ever since. In response, India launched an awareness campaign including Bollywood resources to counter Covid-19 vaccination fears, as thousands fail to arrive for their jabs. Tech platforms Facebook and Twitter announced plans to quickly pullout fake news related to vaccination, but India's real challenge is to prevail over other spurious mediums particularly WhatsApp, which by far remains the biggest source of misinformation in the country.

The need for accurate reporting on the Covid-19 vaccines now being rolled out is now more important than ever - but sadly comes against a backdrop of South Asian governments taking it upon themselves to misuse existing laws to punish and persecute media for reporting amid the pandemic. Read and share [Guidelines for reporting on Covid-19 vaccines](#).

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## National Issues

**Afghanistan:** Afghanistan Ministry of Information and Culture [condemned](#) an attack on Zohra Radio in the north eastern province of Kunduz on January 15. A mob of nearly a dozen people led by the imam of a local mosque [attacked](#) the radio station damaging radio equipment and vandalizing the office.

**Bangladesh:** Five men were [sentenced](#) to life imprisonment for the murder of journalist Humayun Kabir Balu, sixteen years after he was killed in a targeted explosion in Khulna in 2004. Court [ordered](#) Nazrul Islam alias Khora Nazu, Masum alias Jahangir (fugitive), Rimon alias Asaduzzaman, and Zahid Hossain alias Sabuj alias Zahidur Rahman of life imprisonment. All of the convicts were leader of East Bengal Communist Party ML-People's War. The Special Tribunal Judge Md Saifuzzaman Hero also [fined](#) the convicted murderers each Tk10,000 (USD110).

**Bhutan:** Misinformation related to

**India:** At least nine journalists have

right to accurate health-related information. Due to a rise in misinformation on Covid-19, both the mainstream media and health ministry's official social media handles have been inundated with requests for clarity and information. Meanwhile, the Media Council of Bhutan (MCB) has [issued](#) an advisory to refrain from circulating such fake news.

**Maldives:** The UN Human Rights Council on its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) has [recommended](#) the Maldives government to take measures to promote and protect freedom of expression and to enhance the safety of journalists. The Maldives government is requested to respond to these recommendations before the 46th session of the Human Rights Council scheduled to take place from February 22 to March 19, 2021.

**Pakistan:** Pakistan's federal minister for information and broadcasting, Shibli Faraz, [announced](#) a support-package for the newspaper hawkers. Each newspaper seller will be provided free medical support of up to Rs 600,000 (approximately USD 3,775) and an interest-free loan of Rs60, 000 (approx. USD 375).

[charges](#) over their reporting and online posts about the [farmers' protest](#) that reached at the climax on January 26, with death of a protestor Navreet Singh. Vinod K Jose, the editor of *The Caravan*; and Siddharth Varadarajan, of *The Wire*; were among those to have cases [filed](#) against them for allegedly misreporting the killing of a protestor Navreet Singh.

**Nepal:** Nepal's government [began](#) administering Covid-19 vaccines to journalists from February 8. Vaccinations for journalists and media workers were made possible following a request by the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ).

**Sri Lanka:** Sri Lanka media organizations and media unions once again [commemorated](#) the annual "Black January" protests to remember their killed colleagues and condemn impunity for crimes against journalists. Between 2005 and 2015, dozens of journalists are [reported](#) as being killed, abducted and tortured and at least 60 journalists fled the country as a result of the ongoing civil conflict from 1983 to 2009.

## Media Rights Violations

High numbers of media rights violations were recorded in the month including ten incidents of attacks on journalists and media persons, nine arrests and six cases of a misuse of law. **India** topped the region (with 20 violations) including 9 journalist arrests, 3 cases of misuse of law and five attacks on journalists. In **Nepal**, violations also increased with government attacks and harassment of journalists [reporting](#) protests against Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli's abrupt move to dissolve Parliament on December 20.

In **Bangladesh**, police charged three journalists under the Digital Security Act for publishing material alleged to have the potential to 'destroy communal harmony and create unrest', while in **Pakistan**, a US-based website propagating the faith of Pakistan's minority Ahmadis was shut down. Pakistan's Supreme Court also ordered the release of Ahmad Omar Saeed Sheikh, who was convicted for the 2002 murder of *Wall Street Journal* correspondent Daniel Pearl.

### Violations by Type

Killing	0
Arrest/Detention	9
Attack	10
Censorship	2
Harassment	6
Internet Shutdown	0
Law	6
Economic Pressure	2

### Violations by Country

Afghanistan	2
Bangladesh	3
Bhutan	0
India	20
Maldives	0
Nepal	8
Pakistan	2
Sri Lanka	0

## Featured Action

**Maldives** : Maldives Journalists Association(MJA) is set to establish its first physical office and hire staff to implement the new IFJ project 'Stronger Media For Stronger Democracy' in the Maldives. MJA, founded in 2009, held an important place among the Maldivian media fraternity in organizing journalists, fighting for their professional rights, facilitating trainings and ensuring a safe and free space for their working environment. However, following a split in its membership, [it collapsed](#) in 2014. It was revived in September 2020 with continuous initiations from the Maldivian journalists and encouragement from the IFJ and its South Asia Media Solidarity Network (SAMSN).

journalists with ‘Transparency International Nepal- Reconstruction and Rehabilitation’ fellowship in recognition of their ground breaking news reports about the reconstruction and rehabilitation initiatives following the mega earthquake measured 7.8 rector scale on April 25, 2015 in Nepal. The awardees are from 14 of the hardest- hit districts in Nepal.

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## IFJ Blog

**Why January remains black for journalists in Sri Lanka:** Black January has traditionally also been used to highlight impunity for these crimes. But it is also important to look at continuing violations, [writes](#) Ruki Fernando.

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## IFJ At Work:

- The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) [published](#) a set of guidelines, tips and resources to help improve media coverage on vaccines and the vaccination strategies.
  - The International Federation of Journalists and its South Asian affiliates [condemned](#) the Myanmar military’s [imposition](#) of power on February 1 and expressed solidarity with the Myanmar journalists.
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## FROM THE MEDIA

- Civic and political groups have revealed that the government is taking steps to suppress social media and electronic media outlets - from [News First](#)
  - Afghan journalists forced to run a murderous gauntlet - from [gantara.de](#)
  - 400,000 “Jobs of Tomorrow” to be created as Media Entrepreneurs and Content Designers - from [EIN Presswire](#)
  - Bangladesh vaccination drive marred by misinformation - from [DW](#)
  - Defying the Indian government could put Twitter officials in jail. But not doing so would mean enabling a crackdown against free speech. – from [BuzzFeed News](#)
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**Read and share:** [Journalist and Media Workers Killed – IFJ](#)

**Apply for the** [Orange Knowledge Programme](#) for master's programs and [short journalism courses](#) at the [Radio Nederland Training Centre](#) (RNTC) and [other institutions](#).

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

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