



IFJ South Asia Media Bulletin

15 January 2021

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

IN FOCUS: Deadly toll in South Asia

A resurgence in journalist killings in 2020 put South Asia in the global spotlight with 33 journalists and media workers killed. IFJ launched its annual 'Journalist and Media Staff Killed' monitoring report on December 31, 2020, revealing a return to a parlous environment for journalists in the region. IFJ Asia-Pacific recorded 9 killings in Pakistan, 11 in Afghanistan, 8 India and one murder in Bangladesh.

In Afghanistan, armed groups claimed responsibility for most of its killings, while in Pakistan and India most journalists were killed in targeted in attacks. One journalist died in a road accident while covering a Covid-19 story. IFJ research reveals corruption, weak institutional mechanisms and lack of political will as key factors contributing to denial and delay of justice in the region. Many of the accused involved in the killings and attacks in South Asia continue to come from armed militant groups, government agencies, security forces, political party members, religious sects, student political groups, criminal gangs and local mafia among others.



Family members and relatives take part in the funeral procession of Afghan journalist Rahmatullah Nekzad at Khoja Omari district of Ghazni province, on December 22, 2020. Credit : AFP

In this bulletin:

- **Unions condemn economic harassment of journalists**
- **Afghanistan president orders investigation into journalist killing**
- **Bangladeshi photojournalist Kajol released**
- **IFJ launches 'Stronger Media For Stronger Democracy' project in the Maldives**

The Region:

Unions condemn economic harassment of journalists: With an alarming death toll of journalists while reporting through Covid-19, financial hardship continues to plague the region's media workers. Economic penalties including retrenchments, pay cuts, forced leave without pay and shutdowns of media houses are being strongly criticized by the IFJ's south Asia affiliates who are continuing calls for relief packages and stronger actions to protect the economic rights of journalists.

In Pakistan, the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) **negotiated** a Covid-19 relief package in Punjab province to provide Rs100,000 (USD 600) in the case of the death of the journalist due to Covid-19 as well as monthly

The Indian Journalists Union (IJU) and National Union of Journalists (India) campaigned for the Indian government to introduce relief packages. As a result of those efforts, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting [announced](#) Rs 5 lakh (USD 6,846) compensation to families of journalists, who lost their lives to [Covid-19](#) in the line of duty.

In Nepal, the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) has also been [successful](#) in signing agreements with media houses to restore sacked journalists and to address the issues around economic harassment. The Afghan Independent Journalists' Association (AIJA) and Sri Lanka affiliates including the Free Media Movement (FMM), the Federation of Media Employees' Trade Union (FMETU) and the Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association (SLWJA) told the IFJ they have continued to raise their voice against economic harassment of journalists. Seetha Ranjane, the convener of FMM, said: "Our one of the major priorities in 2020 was to fight against economic exploitation to the journalists amid Covid-19 pandemic."

National Issues

Afghanistan: With the Afghanistan government facing increased criticism for the country's climate of impunity for journalist killings, on December 22 President Ashraf Ghani [ordered](#) an investigation into the murder of prominent Afghan journalist Rahmatullah Nikzad. The contributor for Associated Press and Al-Jazeera was murdered on December 21 and was the fifth reporter to be killed in the country in less than two months, with a total of 11 journalists killed in the year.

Bangladesh: After more than eight months in prison, photojournalist Shafiqul Islam Kajol was [released](#) from Dhaka Central Jail in Keraniganj on December 25 after being granted bail by the Bangladesh High Court on December 17. Kajol has faced a relentless campaign of harassment for his work and initially [went](#) missing on March 10, 2020, after being charged under Digital Security Act(DSA). He was located by authorities in early May and formally arrested on May 3. Since his arrest, he remained behind bars until his release.

Bhutan: : IFJ affiliate the Journalist

India: India's Supreme Court

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Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) to develop and [translate](#) a new 'Investigative Journalism Manual' and [translate](#) it into local Dzongkha language to increase Bhutanese journalists' understanding of investigative journalism approaches and issues. The manual has [eight chapters](#) to guide journalists from issue identification to story composition.

Maldives: The Maldives Journalists Association (MJA) [hosted](#) a panel discussion on challenges in reporting corruption at the Maldives Transparency and Anti-corruption Conference held from December 7 to 9. Ahmed Naif, General Secretary of the MJA moderated the panel discussion with Maldives' information minister, Hussain Fiyaz Moosa; Moosa Latheef, the editor of Mihaaru news; Al-Jazeera journalist Zaheena Raseed and journalist Mohamed Sharafuddin.

Pakistan: Amid increased media rights violations, including the murder of 12 media workers in 2020, political leaders in Pakistan [voiced](#)

cartoonist Rachita Taneja for cartoons published on Twitter. Three cartoons are the target of the case with one parodying [an exchange of favors](#) between a judge and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, [another showing the flag](#) of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (the Indian right-wing, Hindu nationalist, paramilitary volunteer organisation) flying over the Supreme Court and [another related to a Supreme Court decision](#) over a journalist working with the pro-BJP *Republic TV* channel. If convicted, she faces imprisonment of up to six months.

Nepal: Annapurna daily newspaper published by Nepal News International [reinstated](#) five journalists who were sacked citing economic crisis following the [imposition](#) of lockdown by Nepal government on March 24, 2020 to control the possible spread of COVID-19. The reinstatement was possible with the continuous advocacy of the Federation of Nepali Journalists. On December 29, FNJ cancelled a planned protest program as a result of the reinstatements and with the media house agreeing to pay the due salary of the working journalists and media workers.

Sri Lanka: The murder case of senior journalist Lasantha Wickrematunge has been [postponed](#) yet again to June 2021. The

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People's Party (PPP) parliamentary leader in the Senate, Senator Sherry Rehman, opined the need for legislation in a discussion on January 9. A proposed bill, 'The Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Bill 2020', incorporates many of the recommendations of the [United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity](#), adapting them to the Pakistani context.

after his assassination in 2009 for his denouncement of human rights abuses in Sri Lanka. Wickrematunge, the former editor of *The Sunday Leader*, was critical of the governing Rajapaksa regime and was vocal against gross violations of human rights. He was assassinated on January 8, 2009.

Media Rights Violations

December marked a deadly month for journalists in Afghanistan – with five journalists killed. This included Bismillah Adil Aimaq who was [killed](#) by unidentified gunmen in Dara-e-Taimoor village in Ghor province of Afghanistan on January 1, 2021. The month also saw three detentions in Nepal, one arrest in Afghanistan and one detention in Bangladesh. During the period, four journalists were attacked: two Abb Takk television journalists from Pakistan and two journalists from Afghanistan. One Nepali journalist was also harassed and legal cases were filed against two Indian journalists.

Violations by Type

Killing	2
Arrest/Detention	5
Attack	4
Censorship	0
Harassment	1
Internet Shutdown	0
Law	2
Economic Pressure	0

Violations by Country

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

Featured Action

book provides insight on the history of the Sri Lankan media industry, media organizational structures, public service media as well as trade union issues in Sri Lanka. As well as outlining the issues, it also attempts to offer solutions to some of the existing problems faced by journalists in Sri Lanka and provides information's on role of trade unions to protect the journalists' rights. It is published in Sinhala, Tamil and English languages and FMETU said it plans to use the book as a reference document for union organizing in future.

IFJ Blog

Covid-19 pandemic further intensified the difficulties and worries to journalists and media workers in Pakistan, [writes](#) Lubna Naqvi.

IFJ At Work:

- IFJ together with the Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO) have launched a new project in the Maldives - 'Stronger Media for Stronger Democracy' together with the Maldives Journalists Association (MJA). The three month project starting this month, will work to improve the capacity of journalists and their representative organizations to support professional journalism and media rights. It will also seek to strengthen the role of journalists to engage and advocate for media reform. Institutional strengthening of the MJA, journalism and media rights training and monitoring and advocacy training are some of the activities under the project.
 - The Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) is being supported by the IFJ to contextualize and translate the Thomson Foundation's '*Covid-19 Safety Training Course*' for Nepal's media. With the contextualization and translation of the course content into Nepali, Nepali journalists can access the course content in their own language on the Thomson's [platform](#).
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FROM THE MEDIA

- 2021 predictions: The future digital media technology amidst the pandemic - *from* [ZDNet](#).
- BJP MP Tejasvi Surya criticises Twitter for deplatforming Trump, wants intermediary liability reviewed; MediaNama's take - *from* [MEDIANAMA](#)

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- State, Intellectuals and Dwindling Civic Space. The state of freedom of expression and academic freedom in Bangladesh - from [The Daily Star](#)
- Amid COVID-19, Pakistani journalists are looking for training to help them counter misinformation and stay safe while reporting - from [The Diplomat](#)

TAKE ACTION!

Read, share and submit entries for [One World Media Awards 2021](#)

Read and share: [Journalist and Media Workers Killed – IFJ](#)

Read and share IFJ's [White Paper on Global Journalism](#)

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

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](#)

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International Federation of Journalists
Asia-Pacific Regional Office (APRO)
245 Chalmers Street
Redfern, NSW, 2016
Australia

Contact IFJ Asia-Pacific:
www.ifj.org/regions/asia-pacific

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