



IFJ South Asia Media Bulletin

15 March 2021

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

IN FOCUS: Demanding more for women in media

In this **International Women's Day** edition we look at some of the key stories about the situation for women in media in South Asia. The IFJ reported the mass exodus of women from media in **Afghanistan** in the wake of increased threats and targeting of female journalists in the country. The situation worsened after March 2, when three women from Enikass TV were shot dead in the eastern city of Jalalabad, in Nangarhar province.

Mask-wearing protesters marched in Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi demanding equal rights for women in **Pakistan**. Women wore the traditional Pakistani outfit Salwar Kameez, while others hung dresses on clothing lines across the street to symbolize domestic abuse issues. On March 14, Pakistani women journalists also called for a minimum 33 per cent allocation of seats for women in journalist unions and other decision-making and representative bodies such as the Pakistan Press Council and committees under the upcoming Journalist Protection Law. In **Sri Lanka**, a Media Gender Charter was launched to identify minimum standards, principles and actions needed to promote gender equality in media reporting as well as workplace policies in Sri Lanka's media sector.

The theme for 2021's IWD on March 8 was "Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world", but many critical challenges remain. IFJ figures

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positions – showing unions need to do more to represent and advocate on the issues that matter to women working in the media.

The IFJ [launched](#) is global [#PayMeEqual](#) [campaign](#) urging media across the world to conduct pay audits in their newsrooms and to act to tackle the gender pay gap.



Activists of the Aurat March gather during a rally to mark International Women's Day in Karachi on March 8, 2021. Credit: Asif HASSAN / AFP

In this bulletin:

- **Digital control in South Asia**
- **Postal ballot launched for Indian journalists**
- **Hostel for women journalists opened in Nepal**
- **Press law challenged in Sri Lanka**
- **Indian union calls for digital media policy**

The Region

South Asian government's inclination to digital control: Despite ongoing [protests](#) against the draconian Digital Security Act (DSA), **Bangladesh** law minister, Anisul Huq, [says](#) the government is firm in its intention not to 'scrap the DSA'. The minister's comments came after the suspicious [death](#) in police

Establishment attempts to curb digital media, including social media, continues to plague the region. In **India**, ‘Information Technology (Guidelines for Intermediaries and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021’ were [announced](#) on February 25 to regulate digital content and establish a Code of Ethics but are seen by critics as another means to squeeze digital and social media content. In **Pakistan**, the ‘Removal and Blocking of Unlawful Online Content (Procedure, Oversight and Safeguards) Rules 2020’ now [give](#) the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA) authority to remove and block content seen as creating ‘contempt, hatred or disaffection’ towards the ruling government.

National Issues

Afghanistan: Bangladesh’s Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) [arrested](#) a member of the youth wing of the country’s ruling [Awami League](#) on March 7 in connection with the murder of journalist Borhan Uddin Muzakkir in Noakhali in South Eastern Bangladesh on February 20.

Bhutan: Bhutan’s Media Council (BMC) [issued](#) a circular to on March 2 to regulate and curtail any harmful, offensive, illegal or antithetical content on the Internet and other ICT and media services.

Maldives: Maldives Police [attacked](#) a Channel 13 camera-person and harassed the channel’s chief operating officer and station deputy in two separate incidents during opposition-led protests in Male on February 19.

Bangladesh: Bangladesh’s Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI) [arrested](#) a member of the youth wing of the country’s ruling [Awami League](#) on March 7 in connection with the murder of journalist Borhan Uddin Muzakkir in Noakhali in South Eastern Bangladesh on February 20.

India: Advocacy from journalist’s unions and rights organizations paid off with the Election Commission of India (ECI) [introducing](#) a much-needed postal ballot facility for journalists assigned to report on elections in the country.

Nepal: Women journalists travelling for work in Nepal now have a [safe space](#) to stay in Kathmandu under a new initiative by the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ).

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Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) on March 10 for taking illegal action against [BOL News](#) to block its news transmission.

Council law, prompted the Free Media Movement (FMM) to [oppose](#) the decision as detrimental to media freedom.

Media Rights Violations

A total of 21 media rights violation were documented in South Asia from February 15 - March 15, including four murders, three attacks, five cases of harassment and nine cases of misuse of law. Three female journalists from Enikass TV of **Afghanistan** were shot dead in two separate horrific attacks on March 2 and two journalists were killed in separate attacks in **Bangladesh**. In **India**, police filed a First Information Report (FIR) against journalists Barkha Dutt and seven other Twitter users on February 20. A case was filed in **Pakistan** against Matiari-based Geo News' Reporter Abdul Razaq Memon accusing him of involvement in a [shooting](#). **Maldives** police attacked a Channel 13 reporter, gunmen attacked Bangladeshi journalist Shakil Ahmed, and the central offices of the Geo and Jang media group in Karachi, Pakistan, were vandalized. Indian freelance journalist Rakesh Raman faced harassment and two Sri Lankan journalists were blocked by police from visiting Iranathivu Island.

Violations by Type

Killing	4
Arrest/Detention	0
Attack	3
Censorship	0
Harassment	5
Internet Shutdown	0
Law	9
Economic Pressure	0

Violations by Country

Afghanistan	3
Bangladesh	1
Bhutan	0
India	10
Maldives	3
Nepal	0
Pakistan	2
Sri Lanka	2

Featured Action

Sri Lanka: Free Media Movement (FMM) has [begun](#) formally systematically documenting media rights violations in the country in 2021 and will publish a

of India to introduce digital media policy to address the issues of digital media workers.

Nepal: The 26th general convention of the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) on February 17 [determined](#) to launch continuous advocacy against the retrenchment of the journalist amid the Covid-19 pandemic in Nepal.

IFJ Blog

A Vindication for India's #MeToo Moment: The acquittal of senior journalist Priya Ramani of criminal charges of defamation brought by former editor and politician MJ Akbar is a landmark in the struggle against sexual harassment at the workplace in India. Laxmi Murthy [unpacks](#) the verdict.

IFJ At Work:

- IFJ [launched](#) its report on *Journalists and media staff killed in work-related incidents* on March 15, detailing 65 killings of media workers globally in 2020 – including 25 in South Asia.
 - The Maldives Journalists Association (MJA) [commenced](#) research on impunity for crimes against journalists under the ‘Stronger Media, Stronger Democracy project’, supported by the IFJ and the UK’s FCDO. It will assess journalist views, while also reviewing progress of the government-led commission into key deaths and disappearances.
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FROM THE MEDIA

- Hostility against women journalists by online trolls is ending up in physical attacks - from [Scroll. in](#)
- Twitter’s Clash With India Government Gives Boost to Local Rival - from [Bloomberg](#).
- Women journalists in Pakistan work in a hostile environment. Only the fittest can survive - from [my Republica](#)
- If there is one hope left for the Afghans, it is the media in Afghanistan - from [The Star](#) .
- Tasnuva Annan Shishir [made](#) her debut as Bangladesh’s first transgender news reader- from [Daily Bangladesh](#)

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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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