



IFJ South Asia Media Bulletin

15 May 2021

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

IN FOCUS: The death toll of India's media frontline

As a second wave of Covid-19 ravages South Asia, India has become the world's new ground zero as the worsening pandemic crisis intensifies and the country struggles to deal with mounting cases, shortages of oxygen and incapacity to adequately deal with the dead. For journalists and media workers at the frontline, it has also become an industry crisis. Senior Journalist Shesh Narayan Singh [died](#) on May 7 due to Covid-19 . He is one of [235 journalists](#) who [lost their lives](#) due to Covid-19 over the past year, according to a [list](#) compiled by the Network of Women in Media. It says nearly 60 of those deaths came in the last month alone – an average of three a day. Most were based in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha. The Switzerland based [Press Emblem Campaign \(PEC\)](#) has put India in the top three countries globally in terms of journalist [deaths](#) to Covid-19 citing 178 cases up to May 12. The Indian Journalists Union (IJU) is of the opinion that as some cases are missed in the list, the number of dead journalists is even higher. "Large numbers of journalists are infected while performing professional duties. Further, there is no proper medical facility available for the treatment, leading to higher numbers of journalist deaths," said Geetartha Pathak, the president of IJU. IFJ's Indian affiliates the Indian Journalists Union (IJU) and the National Union of Journalists- India (NUJ-I) have advocated for the safety of

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Covid-19 insurance, financial assistance and compensation to the families of deceased journalists. The affiliates also demanded free vaccination be given to journalists on a priority basis.



Burning pyres of victims who lost their lives due to the Covid-19 coronavirus at a cremation ground in New Delhi. Credit: AFP

In this bulletin:

- **IFJ report launched: Truth in a Time of Contagion**
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- **Escalating crisis for media in Bangladesh**
- **Sri Lanka green lights fake news laws**
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The Region

Truth in a Time of Contagion: The IFJ and South Asia Media Solidarity Network (SAMSAN) members jointly launched 19th annual South Asia Press Freedom Report 2020-2021 on World Press Freedom Day on May 3. Entitled '*Truth in a Time of Contagion: The Viral Frontline*', the 2020-21 report goes inside the key media issues of the Covid-19 pandemic and documents the stories of struggle, courage and resistance of a media industry in crisis and

Supported by UNESCO, NED, the British and Foreign Development Office Commonwealth and the Norsk Journalistlag, the report was launched in an online form for the first time. The year's report highlights how controlling the flow of information seemed to be an overriding preoccupation of governments across the region. From reigning in the burgeoning independent digital media and clamping down on critical voices on social media, governments and social media platforms fell short of upholding freedom of expression at a critical juncture. The report features country analysis, interviews with journalists and union leaders in South Asia and a comprehensive list of [violations](#) and [detained journalists](#) in South Asia. These figures highlight more than 180 violations on media workers, including 27 journalist killings, one death in custody, 58 journalist arrests or detentions and 52 violations of minority, regional and rural journalists.

Read the online report: [Truth in a Time of Contagion: The Viral Frontline](#)

National Issues

Afghanistan:

The Taliban [issued](#) a threat to Afghanistan journalists on May 5, accusing them of taking the side of Afghanistan's intelligence agency. Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid warned journalists not to present "one-sided news in favor of Afghanistan's intelligence" or face the consequences.

Bhutan: Bhutan's media fraternity [expressed](#) concern to a recent notification from the Thimpu Thrombde to establish a protocol mandating media professionals to seek written permission to obtain information. In its editorial on April 15, *Kuensel* [called](#) for the revocation of the rule and criticized the

Bangladesh: Nine human rights and media advocacy organization [submitted](#) a letter to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, on May 3 calling attention to escalating human rights violations against the media freedom of expression perpetrated by the Bangladesh government.

India: Amid increased clampdowns by governments and police against information shared on social media by families seeking medical help, on April 27 the Supreme Court [warned](#) state machinery on its actions. The bench led by Justice DY Chandrachud [termed](#) the second wave of the pandemic as a "national

officials.

Maldives: Media in the Maldives is suffering from a massive loss of revenue under Covid-19. Research by Maldives Media Council (MMC) [reveals](#) that the income of some media declined between 60 to 80 per cent due to the cancellation or suspension of advertising. Only 35 per cent of journalists have received a full salary, while nearly 65 per cent have faced pay cuts.

Nepal: The Supreme Court of Nepal [ordered](#) the release Ujjayalo Network journalists Anish Tamang and Prabhat Tamang. The pair were [arrested](#) on April 25 and charged with crimes against the state and offences related to forged documents after publishing a report about Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli.

Pakistan: Women journalists, writers and academics taking part in the online conference 'From Attire to Desire' [slammed](#) Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on April 17 for his controversial statement linking the rape of women in Pakistan with their dress.

Sri Lanka: The Sri Lankan Cabinet of Ministers [granted](#) consent for a proposal by the country's justice and media ministers to enact laws against the spreading of fake statements online. Earlier, Justice Minister Ali Sabry had [argued](#) that some online posts were painting the wrong image of Sri Lanka, referring to the country as an unlivable place.

Media Rights Violations

A total of 19 media rights violation were documented in South Asia from February 15 - March 15, including two murders, six cases of detention, four attacks, five cases of harassment and two cases of misuse of law to intimidate journalists and media houses. Former television journalist Nemat Rawan was killed by gunmen in Afghanistan on May 6 and in Pakistan journalist Abdul Wahid Raisani, a sub-editor of *Daily Azadi* was killed on April 24. In **Nepal**, among seven violations recorded was the arrests of two *Ujjayalo* Network journalists. In **Bangladesh**, recorded violations included an attack on the office of *Daily Amar Habiganj*, the arrest of television journalist Abu Tayyab and an assault on journalist Jahangir Alam Shahin. Police brutality against two

[Subscribe](#)[Past Issues](#)[Translate ▼](#)**Violations by Type**

Killing	2
Arrest/Detention	6
Attack	4
Censorship	0
Harassment	5
Internet Shutdown	
Law	2
Economic Pressure	0

Violations by Country

Afghanistan	2
Bangladesh	5
Bhutan	0
India	1
Maldives	2
Nepal	7
Pakistan	1
Sri Lanka	1

Featured Action

Nepal: The Federation of Nepali journalists announced it will [build](#) a ten-bed Covid-19 isolation ward in its central office in Kathmandu. Roshan Puri, FNJ's general secretary said: "We provide much needed oxygen and other medical facilities to journalists kept in the isolation ward, in partnership with the Kathmandu Medical College, Sinamangal."

Maldives: A new study has found that Maldivian journalists are still not prepared to report media rights violations to formal justice services, including police. The joint study of Maldives Journalists Association (MJA) and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) reported the main reason was a lack of trust in law enforcement agencies with 41 per cent of respondents saying they do not believe police take violence against journalists seriously.

India: The Indian Journalists Union (IJU) has [urged](#) India's government to create a special safety law for journalists to affirm the importance of information as a public good. In a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Ram Nath Kovind, the IJU contended that the government must bolster and support India's media by officially making journalists 'frontline workers' and providing media workers free vaccinations.

IFJ Blog

Blocking media access and rights in Northern Sri Lanka: The people of the

IFJ At Work:

IFJ releases report on expanding China media strategy: New IFJ research, which polled 54 journalist unions from 50 different countries and territories, highlights China's increasing global media influence amid the Covid-19 pandemic. The International Federation of Journalists released its report [*The COVID-19 Story: Unmasking China's Global Strategy*](#) on May 12. The report also analyses China's approach on issues such as vaccine diplomacy.

Remembering the dead, fighting for the living: The IFJ and UNESCO launched the campaign '[*Remember the Dead, Fight for the Living*](#)' as part of its World Press Freedom Day events and as a tribute to journalists who have died of Covid-19. An event on May 1 commemorated those lost, but also highlighted the important of health and safety issues. It shared practices from unions that have successfully fought the pandemic – including getting journalists priority vaccines, distributing PPE and securing new types of sick pay.

FROM THE MEDIA

- Threats to Afghan Media by Warring Sides Spark Outrage- From [*Voice of America*](#) .
 - Covid: Foreign media just won't let Modi sleep in peace- From [*The Telegraph*](#)
 - Capitalist trap? Pandemic severely weakens collective bargain of labour movements- From [*Counter View*](#)
 - Pakistan subjected to increased muzzling of media content during 2020-2021- From [*Pakistan Christian Post*](#)
 - Freedom of Expression : Where Do We Stand- From [*GROUNDVIEWS*](#)
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TAKE ACTION!

Take part: [*How to report safely: Strategies for women journalists and their allies*](#) course

Nominate: [*Fetisov Journalism Awards 2021*](#)

Apply and share: [*Everyday Projects Grant*](#)

Submit your entries for [*The AAAS Kavli Science Journalism Awards*](#)

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Take part: Reporting in a time of misinformation [survey](#).

Take part: *UNESCO Massive Open Online Course* (MOOC) “Covering the COVID-19 Vaccine: what journalists need to know” [course](#)

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IFJ Asia-Pacific**

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