



IFJ South Asia Media Bulletin

15 November 2020

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

In Focus: 17 murders in 2020, impunity rife: In another shocking year for crimes against journalists in South Asia, 17 journalists were killed in targeted killings, crossfire and bomb attacks up until November 15 and the vast majority of these cases remain unresolved. The killings include seven Pakistani journalists, five journalists who were murdered in Afghanistan, four in India and one in Bangladesh. The most recent deaths include Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty (RFE / RL) correspondent Elias Daei who was killed in a car bomb explosion on November 12 in Afghanistan. G. Moses, a reporter for Tamilian TV, was hacked to death in Tamil Nadu and Yama Siawash, a former TOLO news television journalist in Afghanistan, was killed on November 7 in a targeted explosion.

These killings come as the IFJ campaigns to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists. The IFJ notes that police investigations are too often slow and inconclusive, further hampered by corruption, weak institutional mechanisms and lack of political will. The IFJ #EndImpunty campaign continues to push for government action on dire records securing justice for attacks on journalists and calls for an end to the culture of impunity. The campaign will focus on India from November 16 -19, with the global campaign continuing through to November 23.



Credit: AFP

In this bulletin:

- India, Pakistan and Bangladesh government misuse law against journalists
- Bangladesh ranks fifth in coronavirus-related deaths
- The Jammu and Kashmir administration extends 4G ban
- Digital rights decline in Pakistan
- IJU and NUJ-I send letter to India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi to demand an end to impunity

The Region

South Asian governments misuse law against journalists: The Governments of India, Bangladesh and Pakistan continue to weaponise laws that enable them to assault, arrest and harass journalists. In India, over the past few months, a number of journalists have been charged under Section 124 A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), which punishes sedition with hefty jail terms. In a disturbing [example](#), Kerala-based journalist Siddique Kappan was arrested and charged with sedition October, on his way to interview the family of a rape victim in the Hathras district of Uttar Pradesh. In May, Dhaval Patel, editor and owner of Gujarati news portal 'Face of Nation', was [charged](#) with sedition and detained by the police for publishing a report that suggested there would be a change in political leadership in the state. In another case, noted

In Bangladesh, the government continues to misuse the draconian Digital Security Act (DSA) to arrest and harass journalists. Data from Bangladesh's government-run Cyber Crime Tribunal shows nearly 800 cases were filed under DSA in the first nine months of 2020. According to Amnesty International, authorities [targeted](#) at least 10 editors of national and regional dailies and online news platforms. The DSA imposes penalties of up to 10 years' imprisonment or life for alleged repeated offences. In Pakistan, the government has been misusing '*Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA)*' to arrest journalists whose reports are deemed to be critical of the government and political party leaders, as demonstrated in the [the arrests of](#) journalists Asad Toor, Bilal Farooqi, and Absar Alam who were detained on false charges of carrying weapons.

National Issues

Afghanistan: Afghan Police [raided](#) the home of female photo journalist Tahereh Rezaei on October 15 at midnight without any notice or search warrant, raising concerns on an increase in threats to women in public life. Police searched the house, including the bedrooms and drawers, [filming](#) the intrusion.

Bhutan: The Journalists Association of Bhutan [organized](#) a five-day training on long-form narrative and story writing from October 27 - 31, 2020 and applications are currently open for proposals for [the Rural Reporting Grant](#) which aims to enhance coverage of news and issues from rural pockets of Bhutan.

Maldives: Journalists Ahmed Azaan and Nahil Ahmed of Dhiyares were [harassed](#) and intimidated in Malé

Bangladesh: Bangladesh [ranks](#) fifth in coronavirus-related deaths among journalists. According to the Press Emblem Campaign, more than 26 media workers have died due to Covid-19 as of November 8. More than 1,000 media workers have so far been infected with the coronavirus in Bangladesh.

India: Despite the Indian Supreme court's order not to continue the ban on 4G coverage, Jammu and Kashmir police are refusing to lift the restriction. The Jammu and Kashmir administration has [prolonged](#) the ban on 4G internet services in the territory until November 26.

Nepal: The Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) has continued to protest in support of media workers,

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October. The journalists were verbally harassed and threatened with death. Police continue to investigate the case.

Pakistan: Digital rights have [continued to decline](#) with regressive internet policies and increased censorship. According to a Freedom Network [report](#) titled “Closing Spaces: Coercive Cyber Regulations Impede Online Journalism and Free Speech in Pakistan”, the Pakistan government’s [use](#) of the draconian ‘Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA)’ encourages censorship. The cybercrime law has also been repeatedly invoked against journalists and opinion makers.

[Dashain](#) festival, struggling journalists and [media right activists](#) criticized media management for non-payment of salaries and the treatment of workers.

Sri Lanka: The 20th amendment to the constitution was passed in parliament on October 22 despite strong criticism from media rights and advocacy organizations and human rights lawyers, including the [Free Media Movement](#) and the [International Commission of Jurists](#) (ICJ). The controversial amendment, which strengthens presidential power, is deemed to be a threat to democracy, human rights and freedom of expression.

Media Rights Violations

Three journalists were killed from October 15 - November 15: two from Afghanistan and one from India in South Asia. Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty (RFE / RL) correspondent Elias Daei and a founder of the Afghanistan Journalist Union (AIJA) was [killed](#) in an explosion in the Helmand province of Afghanistan on November 12. And Yama Siawash, former TOLO news television journalist was [killed](#) on November 7 in the targeted explosion in Kabul. The journalist killed in India this month was G. Moses, a reporter for Tamilian TV. He was [murdered](#) allegedly for his coverage of illegal land grabbing.

The rampant misuse of laws to harass journalists and to control the operation of media houses is another major violation recorded by the IFJ this month.

Pakistani authorities [suspended](#) satellite transmission of television channel News24HD from October 19 after it allegedly aired an opposition party political rally on YouTube. A further five journalists were arrested this month. The latest

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Killing	3
Arrest/Detention	5
Attack	1
Censorship	0
Harassment	1
Internet Shutdown	1
Law	8
Economic Pressure	1

Violations by Country

Afghanistan	2
Bangladesh	6
Bhutan	0
India	8
Maldives	0
Nepal	0
Pakistan	4
Sri Lanka	0

Featured Action

India: Indian affiliates of the IFJ, the Indian Journalists Union (IJU) and the National Union of Journalists – India (NUJ-I) sent a letter to the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi asking to ensure an end to impunity on violations against journalists in India. [The letter, sent](#) to mark International Day to End Impunity, emphasises that of 55 journalists and media staff have been killed in India between 2010 and 2020 with only one case resolved. Their letter also highlights that the majority of killings were related to news reports exposing crime and corruption. “Together with the IFJ, its affiliates in India, the Indian Journalists Union (IJU) and National Union of Journalists– India (NUJ-I) we demand that your government, judiciary and law enforcement agencies undertake complete and effective investigations of all violations of journalists’ rights and bring to justice the perpetrators of crimes against journalists,” the letter reads,

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:

member unions and journalists impacted by digital transformation and the decline in media freedoms and workers' rights during the pandemic. The meeting was attended by over 40 union leaders from 11 countries across the region.

- **IFJ Digital Organising Bootcamp:** Union activists in Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Indonesia have participated in a series of online trainings to build skills in digital organising for media unions in the Asia Pacific.
- **Nepal Press Union's discussion:** Nepal Press Union (NPU) organized a discussion on “Digital journalism, opportunities, problems and its challenges during Covid-19” on October 20 with the support of IFJ under the Union to Union Project.
- **New Project Launch in Pakistan:** The IFJ together with Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), Women’s Media Center (WMC) and Pakistan Council of Media Women (PCMW) this month launched a project entitled ‘*Promoting Labor Rights, Gender Equality and Freedom of Association in Pakistan’s Media*’ funded by National Endowment of Democracy (NED).

FROM THE MEDIA

- Attacks on media freedom can ripple throughout societies, decreasing trust, prosperity, and resilience, while increasing corruption. Given these effects, media freedom should be considered a lynchpin of human rights, and attacks on media freedom should rightly be considered attacks on human rights themselves- From [Dhaka Tribune](#) .
- The incumbent government’s attempts to “regulate” speech, ranging from hate campaigns on social media to financially squeezing media houses and police complaints to the “disappearances” of dissidents, have resulted in extensive self-censorship by journalists and editors from [The Diplomat](#)
- India, the world’s largest democracy, is one of the countries where freedom of expression and freedom of the press has faced serious challenges in the last few months. Despite many protocols and guidelines, journalists continue to face threats to their safety from [Telangana Today](#)

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Send the pitches for [Stanley Center](#) on the multimedia content of the pandemic.

Share the discussion on the [Global Platform for Quality Journalism](#)

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

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