



IFJ South Asia Media Bulletin

15 June 2021

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

IN FOCUS: Afghanistan's uncertain media future

As preparations commence for the impending withdrawal of NATO and US forces from Afghanistan, the IFJ continues to document a disturbing upward trajectory in violations against media workers in the country.

The spike in targeted killings, issuance of threats, attacks and cases of censorship has followed the signing of the peace deal between the Afghanistan government and the Taliban in September 2020 and the situation has further intensified since the April 13 announcement by US President Joe Biden that all remaining US troops would be withdrawn the country by September 11, 2021. The latest casualty was 27-year-old Mina Khairi, a presenter with Ariana News, who was injured in targeted explosion on June 3 and died the same day. She is one of six journalists killed between January and June. It is not yet clear if the attack on Mina Khairi was targeted.

The situation for journalists has grown increasingly parlous with threats coming from a range of sources including government officials, militant groups including Taliban, ISIS and others. Out of six journalists murdered in 2021, four were female. IFJ's South Asia Press Freedom Report 2020/2021 found that more than 300 Afghan female journalists quit their jobs in 2020.



A security personnel stands next to a damaged vehicle at the site of an explosion in Kabul on June 3, 2021.

Zakeria HASHIMI / AFP

In this bulletin:

- **Governments' Covid social media headache**
- **Maldivian journalists unhappy with media adjudicators**
- **Free medical treatment for journalists in Nepal announced**
- **Pakistan media stakeholders reject proposed media ordinance**
- **Journalists recognised in Bhutan awards**
- **IFJ AP set to launch 2021 Union to Union national projects**

The Region

Governments' Covid social media headache: Citing social media users [posting](#) content mentioning the “Indian variant” of the Covid-19 virus’, India’s information technology (IT) ministry on May 21 wrote to key social media companies, ordering them [to remove](#) ‘false information’ and posts from their site. The reaction in India followed a World Health Organization statement on May 11 that the coronavirus variant B.1.617, first identified in India last year, was being classified as a variant of global concern. Around the world, coronavirus variants have generically been referred to by doctors and health experts based on where they are identified. The sensitivity around Covid-19 is not confined to India either. Amid the increased critical posts about the Sri

monitor fake news in the country. Bangladesh regularly [files](#) criminal cases against citizens, including journalists, for their social media posts including that related to Covid-19's handling by the government, while Bhutan has criminalised the sharing of fake news via social media.

National Issues

Afghanistan: Amid increased targeting of journalists and [threats](#) against the lives of journalists in Afghanistan, Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid [accused](#) current the media of biased, insulting and abusive coverage. "We support freedom of press and media, but we do not believe that people should be insulted through the media," he said. IFJ and its affiliate AIJA condemn the threats to the media.

Bhutan: Bhutan's government on June 9 briefed officials and policymakers on its new social media policy "for use of emerging technologies for governance and development". Social media remains a tricky space in the country and follows a clampdown on fake news during the Covid pandemic under section 437 of the Information, Communication, and Media Act of Bhutan.

Maldives: With the Maldivian media facing a proposed merger of the Maldives Media Council (MMC) and Maldives Broadcasting Commission (BroadCom), a national survey by Maldives Journalists Association

Bangladesh: Five Bangladeshi and international organizations including Cartoonists Rights Network International (CRNI), Forum for Freedom of Expression and Cartooning For Peace (CFP) [wrote](#) a letter to Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina calling for concrete steps to ensure that journalistic freedom in the country is protected.

India: With tension between the Modi government and social media companies Twitter and WhatsApp in India increasing, the US-India Strategic Partnership Forum ([USISPF](#)) and the [Internet and Mobile Association of India \(IAMAI\)](#) [urged](#) the Indian government to ease its deadlock with the social media giants over the recently introduced [IT Intermediaries Guidelines](#).

Nepal: In its new budget for 2021/22, the Nepalese government [announced](#) free medical treatment for members of the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ). All journalists who are members of the

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Past Issues

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performance of the council, while 79 per cent said the MBC had not been able to adequately tackle issues affecting the media freedom in the country to date.

Pakistan: Pakistani media stakeholders including the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) called on the Pakistan government to repeal a proposed Pakistan Media Regularity Authority (PMDA) ordinance. The stakeholders say the ordinance will stop the flow of information in the country and restrict free, independent, and responsible media. Proposed in late May 2021, the ordinance also seeks to amalgamate all media regulatory structures.

budget, the government also announced it would bear 50 per cent of the cost of insurance premiums of accidental insurance for journalists up to Rs 700,000 (USD 4,800).

Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka's Ministry of Health issued a warning letter to some government departments and offices to refrain from making statements through the media and social media about the Covid-19 pandemic. The provision was condemned by media unions and activists, who argue the order was in direct violation of the public's right to information and freedom of expression.

Media Rights Violations

A total of 16 media rights violations were recorded in the period, including the killing of Afghanistan journalist Mina Khairi on June 3 and the suspicious death of journalist Sulabh Srivastava in Uttar Pradesh on June 13. IFJ monitoring also captured three cases of arrest, two attacks on journalists, eight cases of harassment and one case each related to censorship and the law. During the period, Al Amin Hossain and Khalilur Rahman from Bangladesh and Jangi Raghu, a journalist from India were arrested for alleged involvement in rioting. Bangladesh journalist Shahadat Hossain was attacked on June 1 while reporting a protest at Brahmanbaria railway station and Pakistani journalist Asad Ali Toor was attacked on May 25 by unknown assailants in his apartment in Islamabad on May 25 – alleged to be a retaliation against his critical news reporting on the Pakistan military. Also in Pakistan, talk show host Hamid Mir was suspended from his position at Geo News after alleged military pressure following public comments made by the journalist.

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	Arrest/Detention	2	Bangladesh
	Attack	2	Bhutan
	Censorship	1	India
	Harassment	8	Maldives
	Internet Shutdown	0	Nepal
	Law	1	Pakistan
	Economic Pressure	0	Sri Lanka

Featured Action

Bhutan: The Journalists' Association of Bhutan (JAB) on June 2 [awarded](#) 23 journalists for their outstanding performance in 2020- 2021. The award ceremony was supported by [Anti-Corruption Commission of Bhutan](#), [Bank of Bhutan](#), [Department of](#) Information and Media, Media Council of Bhutan, UN Bhutan and the [United Nations Democracy Fund \(UNDEF\)](#).

Sri Lanka: Media rights organizations including Free Media Movement (FMM), Federation of Media Employees' Trade Unions (FMETU), Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association (SLWJA), Sri Lanka Muslim Media Forum, Tamil Media Alliance and the Young Journalists Association [issued](#) a joint letter to Sri Lanka's media spokesperson in the Ministry of Health condemning a statement made in a June press conference where he opined that all the slain journalists were 'third-class journalists'.

IFJ At Work:

Maldives media project extended: IFJ's 'Stronger Media for Stronger Democracy in the Maldives' project has been extended to July 2021 and will include a launch of a national impunity report, a freedom of expression assessment and national discussions on critical media development.

Digital media research in Pakistan: The International Federation of Journalists has commenced work with a series of partners in Pakistan to explore the experience of digital journalists in Pakistan's media. With the issues of digital journalists not widely understood or given emphasis by media unions and other representative groups, the research will document the issues of digital media workers, with a focus also on young media and women. Based on

Endowment for Democracy (NED).

IFJ to launch new national pilot projects with Union to Union: The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) will soon launch its 2021 program of pilot projects in the Asia Pacific region as part of its regional union strengthening work. The projects will address some of the key issues faced by journalist representative organisations and unions as they confront digital disruption and the fallout of Covid-19.

FROM THE MEDIA

- Don't pen opinions based on falsehood and distortion of history - from [DhakaTribune](#).
 - Criminalising expression and the messy realities of public discourse - from [nation.lk](#)
 - Pakistan's electronic media — credibility crisis - from [Daily Times](#)
 - Why ordering internet shutdown is outrageous - from [Times of Indi](#)
 - Modi's 'contempt for press freedom' charted: Media repression in India - from [PressGazette](#)
 - Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 must be suitably amended in view of recent technological leaps - from [National Herald](#)
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TAKE ACTION!

Nominate: [Fetisov Journalism Awards 2021](#)

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

Submit your entries for [Association for International Broadcasting \(AIB\) award](#)

Enroll [Free, online course on newsletter strategies for journalists](#)

Read [Truth in a Time of Contagion – IFJ's 2020-21 South Asia Press Freedom Report](#)

Read [The Covid-19 Story: Unmasking China's Global Strategy](#)

Apply for an [Orange Knowledge Program scholarship](#)

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IFJ Asia-Pacific**

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