



# IFJ South Asia Media Bulletin

15 August 2021

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

## **IN FOCUS: The long war ends as a media exodus begins**

For the world, the collapse of Afghanistan to Taliban militants happened swiftly and by surprise. But for many of the country's estimated 7,000 or more media workers, it was a long-held fear that became a reality – and one that will put their profession and lives at risk. Following months of heightened threats against journalists, the fall of Kabul on August 15 has signaled a death knell for the country's independent media which has flourished over the past two decades.

Since the Taliban began its offensive in May, the situation for journalists, media workers and freedom of expression activists plummeted. This week, the Afghanistan Independent Journalists Association (AIJA) said 98 per cent of the country's media has ceased publication and broadcasting in the wake of the Taliban advance. In early August, Taliban militants abducted Nematullah Hemat, a journalist affiliated with Gharghasht TV, and killed the director of Afghanistan's government media center and the militants' steady advance sent journalists fleeing from provinces for the relative safety of Kabul. By August 12, Voice of America reported the closure of more than 90 media outlets. Scores of women journalists had already fled the country and industry. "The unraveling humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan is deeply devastating and the IFJ extends solidarity to journalists, media workers and activists who have bravely conducted their work throughout the conflict," the IFJ said on August 16, as it called

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The IFJ is working urgently with its affiliates, the Afghan Independent Journalists' Association (AIJA) and Afghanistan's National Journalists Union (ANJU), to provide emergency support to help journalists take protective measures and seek safety. IFJ and its affiliates are continuing to lobby governments to provide emergency visas and logistical support to enable those most at threat to leave the country.

AIJA, ANJU and other journalist's group remain gravely concerned about journalists' safety and their future in the country under the Taliban.

IFJ has launched an international solidarity campaign and appeal to support Afghanistan's media. Donate [here](#).



Afghan people wait to leave the Kabul airport in Kabul on August 16, 2021, after a stunningly swift end to Afghanistan's 20-year war. Credit: Wakil Kohsar / AFP

### In this bulletin:

- **Covid-19 kills nearly 400 media workers in South Asia**
- **Bangladesh launches alternate 'Facebook' and 'WhatsApp'**
- **Petition filed against India's draconian IT Rules**
- **Pakistan tightens cyber security**
- **MJA to release new impunity research**
- **and FNJ Covid-19 reporting course launched**

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## The Region

vaccination, new documents reveal that Covid-19-related deaths of journalists in the region amount to a quarter of the world's Covid-19 related death for media workers. According to The Press Emblem Campaign (PEC), a Geneva based non-governmental organization, a total of 390 journalists have died from Covid-19 in South Asia since March 2020. At August 13, PEC [recorded](#) the deaths of 1,734 journalists internationally. India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal were among the 'most affected countries'. While figures vary, it recorded at least 270 journalist deaths in India, 64 in Bangladesh, 27 in Pakistan, and 19 in Nepal. The high number of deaths in South Asia is attributed to a lack adequate safety measures during reporting and vaccine delays.

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### National Issues

**Afghanistan:** The U.S. government [announced](#) on August 2 that it would provide Afghan nationals working at US-based media outlets and NGOs an opportunity to resettle as refugees in America. On July 21, the IFJ issued a [statement](#) welcoming the advocacy efforts of a group of news and press freedom organisations for media workers in Afghanistan.

**Bhutan:** Bhutan Media Foundation (BMF) [held](#) a two day workshop on August 2 with environmental journalists to discuss about ways to link climate change issues with public policies. Journalists presented climate change-related stories and shared reporting experiences, including challenges.

**Maldives:** The Maldives Media Council (MMC) [posted](#) quizzes during the month to test the country's

**Bangladesh:** Bangladesh's State Minister for Information and Communications Technology Zunaid Ahmed Palak [announced](#) on July 24 that the Bangladesh government will launch its own social media platforms. 'Jogajog' will be the nation's so-called alternative to Facebook, and 'Alapon', the alternative to WhatsApp.

**India:** Digital news portal '[The Leaflet](#)' and journalist Nikhil Wagle [filed](#) a petition in Bombay's High Court saying the provisions of the [Information Technology](#) (IT) Rules, 2021, were "vague" and "draconian" and would have a chilling effect on constitutionally-enshrined the freedom of press and expression.

**Nepal:** The Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) [met](#) with the country's newly-appointed finance

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it said, was to [sensitize](#) and educate Maldivian citizens and journalists about its role. The MMC was first established in 2010.

**Pakistan:** Pakistan's government [approved](#) the country's new national cyber security policy on July 27. The policy, which tackles cyber security and cyber offences, [aims](#) to address issues related to so-called malicious use of information and communication technologies in cyberspace and boldly promises to ensure privacy of online data and information.

media and media workers in Nepal. During the meeting, the minister said relief could be managed in a way to support small and mid-scale media.

**Sri Lanka:** IFJ affiliates, the Free Media Movement (FMM), the Federation of Media Employees' Trade Unions (FMETU) and the Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association (SLWJA) issued statements on August to [condemn](#) government crackdowns on civilians, including union leaders, student union leaders and civil society activists.

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## Media Rights Violations

A total of 16 media rights violations were recorded by IFJ in the period, including the arrest of two Pakistani journalists under the Cybercrime Act on August 7 and investigations launched into reporting by three Bangladeshi journalists under the country's Digital Security Act. In Afghanistan, Danish Siddiqui, an Indian photojournalist with Reuters, was killed in Kandahar province on July 16 while reporting on a battle between Afghan security forces and Taliban militants. The fighting provoked employees from local Radio Najrab, a radio station in Najrab district of Kapisa province in Afghanistan, to cease broadcasting from July 20 – one of as many as 90 outlets silenced in the month. In India, Chennakeshavalu, an Andhra Pradesh reporter who worked for EV5, was killed on August 8 by a police constable and his brother allegedly in response to a story on the police officer's involvement in the illegal sale of Gutkha, a tobacco product, and Matka gambling. Authorities in Sri Lanka [interrogated](#) Selvakumar Nilanthan, a freelance Tamil journalist and secretary of the Batticaloa District Tamil Journalists Association.

### Violations by Type

Killing	2
Arrest/Detention	7

### Violations by Country

Afghanistan	8
Bangladesh	5

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	Harassment	3	Maldives
	Internet Shutdown	0	Nepal
	Law	0	Pakistan
	Economic Pressure	0	Sri Lanka

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### Featured Action

**Afghanistan:** The *Afghanistan* National Journalists' Union (ANJU) and Afghanistan Independent Journalists Association (AIJA) are working to help evacuate and rescue journalists in direct danger as a result of the Taliban offensive across the country. AIJA and ANJU are calling on international agencies and diplomatic communities to manage the safe relocation of Afghani media workers both outside and inside the country. ANJU informed that some journalists were evacuated by the organization together with their families and most of them had taken refuge in Kabul – now taken over by Taliban militants since August 15.

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### IFJ At Work:

#### Maldives: IFJ and MJA launch impunity research report

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the Maldives Journalists Association (MJA) will launch the country's first major impunity report on August 22. The report [documents](#) a history of attacks on journalists in the Maldives, assesses the status of cases and reviews progress on the government-led commission into key deaths and disappearances.

#### Nepal: IFJ and FNJ launches Covid-19 reporting course

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) together with the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) [launched](#) a course on 'Reporting on Covid-19 : Safety' into Nepali language. The course originally developed by Reuters Thompson Foundation, was translated and contextualized by the FNJ in support from the IFJ. The course was developed drawing the examples, challenges, lesson learned from the coverage of previous epidemics and pandemics such as Sars and Ebola. Interested journalists can access the course free of cost clicking the link [here](#).

#### Pakistan: Union strengthening webinars

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working conditions. The discussions, part of the IFJ's national Pakistan program on working conditions and gender equality, were supported by the National Endowment for Democracy.

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### FROM THE MEDIA

- We Do Not Have Data On Internet Shutdowns: Ministry Of Communications In Parliament' – from [MEDIANAMA](#)
  - British media calls for special UK visa for Afghans – from [The Guardian](#)
  - Misinformation through a feminist lens from [The Hindu](#).
  - Pakistan Sees Surge in Silencing of Mainstream and Social Media from [The Diplomat](#)
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### TAKE ACTION!

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

**Enroll** on [Product Strategies for Journalism: Free online course teaches how to align editorial, audience, business and technology](#)

**Pitch a story** to [Science for the People](#)

**Call for Entries** for the [Hainan Island International Film Festival \(HIIF\) 2021](#)

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

**Apply** to commission [stories on climate change and human health](#)

**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](#)

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