



IFJ South Asia Media Bulletin

16 February 2022

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

In Focus: Misuse of law against Kashmiri journalists in India

Detainments, attacks and killings of journalists and media workers continue to escalate in the Indian administered Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) region in 2022. Fahad Shah, founder and editor of local news portal The Kashmir Walla, was [detained](#) on January 29 for sharing 'anti-national content' on social media. The charges were laid under sections 124-A and 505 of the Indian Penal Code, which forbid sedition and public mischief respectively. If convicted, Shah could [face](#) life imprisonment under Section 124-A, three years under Section 505 or seven years under Section 13 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

According to the *India Press Freedom Report 2021* by New Delhi-based rights organisation, Rights and Risks Analysis Group (RRAG), J&K [topped](#) the 2021 list of Indian States and Union Territories for attacks on the media by state and government authorities. Out of a total of 121 media rights violations, J&K recorded 25 incidents of journalists or media organisations targeted and at least six journalists were summoned by J&K police for their journalistic work. Out of the 17 journalists arrested or detained in India in 2021, 5 were from J&K. "Jammu and Kashmir journalists often found themselves summoned to police stations, accused

According to Human Rights Watch, Shah's [arrest](#) is the latest attempt by the J&K administration to silence critical voices in the media. On January 5, Kashmiri journalist Sajad Gul, a reporter from The Kashmir Walla, was [arrested](#) for allegations of disseminating false information via social media to promote anti-government sentiment. According to the IFJ's documentation, 5 journalists were arrested in J & K in 2021. The majority of the arrests [were linked](#) to the publication, broadcasting and sharing on social media, of news reports critical of state and government authorities. J&K journalists [have been increasingly targeted](#), particularly after the abolishment of Article 370 on August 5, 2019, which acknowledged the autonomous status of the region.



Kashmiri journalists protest against government crackdowns on media. Credit: Outlook

In this bulletin:

- **South Asia tops IFJ's Killed List**
- **New Taliban directives further muzzle media**
- **Sri Lankan media call for action to end impunity**
- **FNJ calls for the reinstatement of journalists at Gorkhapatra Daily**
- **Union Federations campaign for the release of Nusrat Shahrin Raka**

17 journalists and media workers [lost](#) their lives during 2021 in South Asia, accounting for more than one third of all journalist killings worldwide. According to the IFJ's [Killed List 2021](#), nine media workers were killed in Afghanistan, one in Bangladesh, four in India and three in Pakistan. Afghanistan continues to be the Asia Pacific region's most deadly nation and one of the least secure locations for journalists across the globe. Journalists' safety in Afghanistan further [deteriorated](#) following Taliban's takeover on mid-August last year. Despite the highest number of killings, impunity for crimes against journalists in South Asia is rife. The IFJ has noted corruption, weak institutional mechanisms and lack of political will as key factors impeding the investigation and prosecution of these cases. 2022 has already seen the killings of two journalists in South Asia. Rohit Biswal, a reporter based in Odisha, was killed by an improvised explosive device (IED) allegedly planted by Maoist insurgents on February 5. Pakistani Journalist Hasnain Shah, a crime reporter for Capital TV, was gunned down by an unidentified armed group on January 24.

National Issues

Afghanistan: New Taliban directives have instructed Afghanistan's media to adhere to Islamic values. In a [statement](#) on Twitter on February 5, Taliban spokesperson, Zabihullah Mujahid, said, "The Islamic Emirate is committed to freedom of media, but the media are also required to be impartial and committed to Islamic and national values. We seek to remove obstacles to the media and urge them to comply with the law on media." Following the Taliban's takeover in mid-August, more than 257 media outlets have [shut down](#) and, according to [research](#) by the Afghanistan National Journalists Union (ANJU), at least 67% of journalists and media workers have been rendered jobless.

Bangladesh: Ahead of the anniversary of Facebook's launch on February 4, 2004, Bangladeshi experts and activists [said](#) that social media has become an alternative platform for human rights advocacy and political campaigns in Bangladesh, especially for stories that contradict 'official narratives'. Experts specifically [highlighted](#) the role of social media in attracting global attention toward "unjust acts" in Bangladesh and the country's "repressive" Digital Security Act. A decline in independent mainstream media due to business coercion, restrictive laws and extralegal measures has seen the role of social media grow dramatically.

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Bhutan (MCB) [has issued](#) an order to media organisations in Bhutan to disseminate Covid-19 related information more responsibly. In its notice released on January 29, the MCB [mentioned](#) that it observed frequent discrepancies and irregularities in the media's dissemination of Covid-19 related information, particularly via social media platforms. The notice also urges the media to acknowledge sources and abide by the Code of Ethics for Journalists.

Maldives: The Maldives Media Council (MMC) [held](#) a meeting with the High Commissioner of Bangladesh, Rear Admiral Mohammad Nazmul Hassan, on January 20 to discuss partnership and mutual collaboration to develop the skills of journalists in both countries. The meeting, held in the High commissioner's office in Hulhumale, agreed to allocate a quota for Maldivian journalists interested in pursuing academic qualifications in journalism and media studies in Bangladesh.

Pakistan: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) has [directed](#) the Ministry of Human Rights to submit its comment on provisions mentioned in Section 6 of the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act, 2021, which addresses the so-called 'good faith obligation of journalists and media persons'. Chief Justice Athar

[arrested](#) Siddhant Shrivastav, a salesman from Bhopal City, Madhya Pradesh, for sending rape and death threats to journalist Rana Ayyub on social media. Shrivastav harassed Ayyub on Instagram over one of her reports and had posted lewd comments concerning Ayyub online under a false name. Following Rana Ayyub's complain of getting rape and death threat, Mumbai police had registered the First Information Report (FIR) on February 1.

Nepal: The Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) [submitted](#) a letter to the Chief Minister of the Karnali province, Jeevan Bahadur Shahi, on January 26, seeking an amendment to the Informational Technology and Mass Communications bill. It stressed the need to draft a bill in consultation with both journalists and media organisations that preserves press freedom in Nepal. In response, Chief Minister Shahi assured the FNJ that journalists' demands will be addressed gradually.

Sri Lanka: Sri Lankan media collectives have [called on](#) the nation's government to take sincere action to end impunity for crimes against journalists in an annual 'Black January' commemoration on January 28. A collective of Sri Lankan media and press freedom organisations [conducted](#) a protest in

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journalists' body. Section 6 of the act [states](#) that journalists and media professionals "must not produce material that advocates national, racial, ethnic, religious, sectarian, linguistic, cultural or gender-based hatred" and must not "engage in the dissemination of material known by such an individual to be false or untrue".

distributing leaflets and seeking public solidarity. "All the murdered journalists in Sri Lanka were assassinated for the sole reason that they were trying to uncover the truth and defend Sri Lanka's democracy. But so far no one has been able to bring justice to the families of any of these murdered journalists" their joint statement [reads](#).

Media Rights Violations

The IFJ recorded 15 media rights violations in the South Asia region from January 15 to February 15, 2022, including the killing of two journalists. Rohit Biswal, a reporter based in Odisha, India, was killed by an improvised explosive device (IED) allegedly planted by Maoist insurgents on February 5 while Pakistani journalist Hasnain Shah, a crime reporter for Capital TV, was gunned down by an unidentified armed group on January 24.

Six journalists were arrested during the period, five in Afghanistan and one in India. Taliban militants arrested Ariana News journalists Aslam Hijab and Waris Hasrat on January 31. Abdul Qayum Zahid Samadzai, a journalist for Pakistan-based 92News Media Group, was detained on February 1. British journalist Andrew North was one of several reporters detained and subsequently released on February 12, following heavy international pressure.. Fahad Shah, founder and editor of *The Kashmir Walla*, was detained on February 4 under India's sedition and anti-terror laws.

Afghan journalist Zaki Qais was attacked on February 15. Several journalists were injured during a clash between rival groups outside of Pakistan's National Press Club on February 4. Two Nepali journalists, Sudeep Puri, of Galaxy Television, and Jagatdal Janala BK, of www.ukera.com, were harassed by political leaders. Indian journalist Rana Ayyub received rape and death threats on social media after criticising the Government of Saudi Arabia's role in the ongoing Yemen war. Armed Taliban forces physically prevented journalists from entering a press conference due to take place on 26 January at the headquarters of IFJ affiliate, the Afghan National Journalists Union (ANJU). In

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Violations by Type

Killing	2
Arrest/Detention	6
Attack	2
Censorship	1
Harassment	3
Internet Shutdown	0
Law	1
Economic Pressure	0

Violations by Country

Afghanistan	7
Bangladesh	0
Bhutan	0
India	4
Maldives	0
Nepal	2
Pakistan	2
Sri Lanka	0

Featured Action

Nepal: The Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) [conducted](#) an advocacy meeting with the management of [Gorkhapatra Daily](#), a government run daily newspaper, on January 30, calling for the reinstatement of 29 staff. During the meeting, FNJ President Bipul Pokharel requested reinstate of the journalists who were laid off at the end of 2021. “The newspaper’s management reacted positively towards the FNJ’s request”, Pokharel said.

Afghanistan: The Afghan Independent Journalists Association (AIJA) observed World Radio Day on February 13, unveiling the findings of its study on radio broadcasting in Afghanistan. According to the AIJA, the number of radio stations operating has dropped dramatically to just 87 in December 2021, down from 300 radio station before the Taliban’s take over in mid-August 2021. AIJA also notes that a total of 3123 radio staffers, including 1392 women, have lost their jobs since the beginning of the Taliban regime.

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IFJ Blog

Afghan journalist Makia talks of her work and life in Afghanistan and the struggle she has endured since the Taliban takeover. Read the excerpt from “In their Own Words: Afghan Women Journalists Speak”, a report by the International Federation of Journalists and the Network of Women in Media, India, [here](#).

IFJ At Work:

IFJ administers survey on online abuse: The IFJ has been [conducting](#) a survey to identify best practices to counter online abuse globally. The findings will be used as a resource to determine the frequency of online abuse within the media and the most effectual methods in addressing this issue from nation’s across the world.

IFJ calls for the release of exiled Bangladeshi journalist’s sister: The IFJ [joined](#) 14 other press freedom and human rights organisations on January 27, to request Bangladesh's government to release Nusrat Shahrin Raka, sister of exiled Bangladeshi journalist Kanak Sarwar, from jail. Nusrat has been detained since October 5, 2021, [accused](#) of “destroying peace and order in the country by spreading false, defamatory and provocative information about the government and important personalities of the state on social media.”

FROM THE MEDIA

- 10 Women Journalists From India Who Broke The Glass Ceiling & Changed The Face Of Indian Journalism - [School Whoop](#)

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- Kashmir journalists say local newspapers erasing their work - [ALJAZEERA](#)
- Journalists Face Extraordinary Problems in Afghanistan: GIJN Report - [Hasht-e Subh Daily](#)

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Read and share the IFJ's report [Lights Out: Is this the End of Press Freedom in Hong Kong](#)

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

Read [Fair Game: The Endangered Media Space for Foreign Correspondents Inside China 2022](#)

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