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IFJ South Asia Media Bulletin

18 March 2022

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



Afghan women march as they chant slogans and hold banners during a women's rights protest in Kabul on January 16, 2022.

In Focus: Standing in solidarity with Afghan women journalists

On International Women's Day, the IFJ joined voices with its Afghanistan affiliates to recognise the continued efforts of Afghan women journalists to uphold a free and independent media despite censorship, harassment and violence. A [new survey](#), titled "*Working conditions of women journalists under the Taliban regime in Afghanistan*", by the Afghan National Journalists' Union (ANJU) has revealed a dramatic slump in the number of working women journalists and a significant rise in discrimination since the Taliban takeover. The survey investigated the safety situation for Afghan women in media, psychologically, physically, and digitally, and found that 87 per cent of women journalists have [experienced gender discrimination](#) during the Taliban regime, with 79 per cent saying they had been insulted and threatened. Of those women journalists still working under the new regime, 91 per cent were the sole economic support of their families.

The Taliban have moved quickly to deteriorate women's rights in Afghanistan. According to [Human Rights Watch](#), since August 2021, the Taliban have closed most avenues of education and paid employment to women, abolished the Ministry of Women's Affairs, restricted women's movement and dismantled systems of protection against gender-based violence.

Despite these immense challenges, the bravery and dedication of Afghan women journalists continues to be recognised worldwide. On March 5, Afghan journalist Zahra Joya was named one of Time's [women of the year](#) for 2022. Joya, who now lives as a refugee in the United Kingdom, continues to operate her news agency, Rukshana Media, remotely, with reportage focusing on life for women under Taliban rule. Rukshana media champions the journalism of a team of female reporters who remain in Afghanistan.

In this bulletin:

- **Women journalists face harassment and abuse across South Asia**
- **Bangladeshi activists call for abolishment of the Digital Security Act**
- **Indian media guidelines restrict press freedom**
- **PFUJ submits petition decrying PECA ordinance**
- **Commencement of new IFJ project in the Maldives**

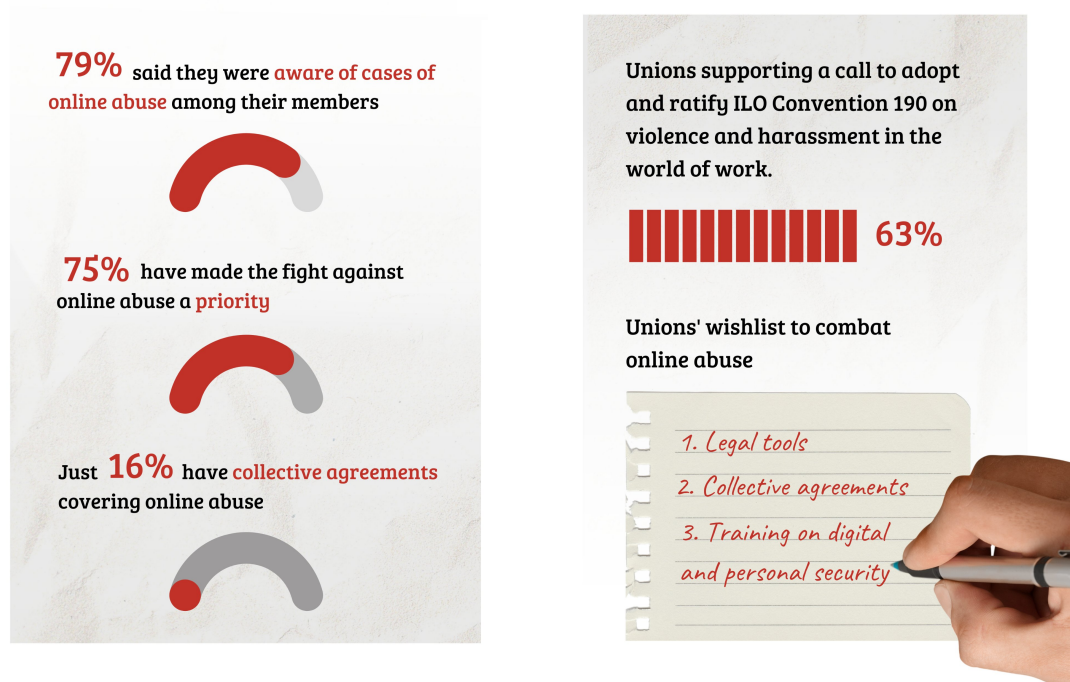
The Region

Women journalists and media workers across South Asia continue to be face

receiving a “barrage of hate” that included rape and death threats. On March 5, Mumbai cyber police arrested two suspects from online media platform *The Scoop Beats* in connection with the case. In Bangladesh, journalist [Rozina Islam](#), known for her investigations into the country’s Covid-19 pandemic response, appeared before court again on March 2. Press freedom organisations have repeatedly called for the dropping of all charges against the journalist. Since her initial arrest in May 2021, Islam has [faced](#) multiple sets of court dates with no evidence presented. On International Women’s Day, the IFJ [launched the results](#) of two studies conducted in early 2022 to assess the work of trade unions and media organisations in tackling online abuse of women journalists, [finding](#) that 79 per cent of IFJ unions and associations said they were aware of cases of online abuse among their members and only 20 per cent of media employers had adopted a protocol to allow women media workers to report online abuse and receive support.

IFJ Survey results

IFJ survey on online abuse - Response from journalists' unions and associations



National Issues

Afghanistan: District and provincial media in Afghanistan have faced

Bangladesh: Civil society members have [called](#) for the abolition of

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unreported, according to [new research](#) by Human Rights Watch. Interviews with 24 media workers in 17 of Afghanistan's provinces found that the Taliban actively monitor and censor the contents of reports and publications, disallowing any material that contradicts Taliban policies. The lack of reporting on these issues has caused many rural outlets to self-censor or shut down completely.

Bhutan: A new [research report](#) by the Royal Institute of Management, Thimphu, has found that Bhutan's government reacted positively to the spread of misinformation on social media regarding the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, using official social channels as legitimate sources of health information. The study found that while the government's response to the dissemination of 'fake news' in Bhutan diverted time and funds from the pandemic response, it built public confidence in the legitimacy of news shared on social media by official accounts.

Maldives: The Maldives Broadcasting Commission has conducted a number of consultative meetings with media stakeholders to build the capacity of the media workers and strengthen freedom of press and expression in the country. The Commission, which is [mandated](#)

seminar held on February 17. Hosted by the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS), the webinar [revealed](#) that journalists accounted for [over nine per cent](#) of those accused of violating the DSA between January 1, 2020 and January 30, 2022. According to Bangladeshi human rights organisation Ain-O-Salish Kendra, a total of 1,134 people [were charged](#) under the DSA in 2021 alone, compared to 130 cases in 2020.

India: Indian journalists [have expressed](#) dissatisfaction regarding a number of provisions within the newly released [Central Media Accreditation Guidelines](#) issued by the Press Information Bureau of India. According to the Editors Guild of India, the [new guidelines](#) contain various new clauses which can revoke a journalist's accreditation for acting "in a manner prejudicial to the sovereignty and integrity of India.. public order, decency or morality", and intend to restrict critical and investigative reporting of government affairs.

Nepal: The Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) has [expressed](#) serious concern over the [approval](#) of a new amendment to the National Broadcasting Rules without any consultation with media stakeholders. The new rules include a provision that internet-based

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met with the Maldives Information Commissioners Office, and the Saudi Arabian and Pakistani ambassadors to the Maldives, to discuss partnership in the development and capacity building of a Maldivian broadcasting sector.

Pakistan: Following criticism from Pakistan's journalist community and media rights organisations, the Pakistani government has [agreed](#) to amend the 2022 ordinance to the [Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act \(PECA\)](#). The amendment was condemned for a provision which made defamation a non-bail able offence, and increased the maximum prison term, if convicted, from three to five years. Media rights organisations feared that the new amendment, originally passed on February 18, would serve to [silence freedom of expression](#) on the pretext of combating misinformation and cybercrime.

USD4079), with ambiguous definitions of 'video on demand' and 'online television' that could be used to curtail freedom of expression, according to FNJ.

Sri Lanka: The Sri Lankan Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), initially approved in 1979 as a 'temporary' measure, is [still being used](#) as a weapon to target and harass minorities, activists and journalists. According to Amnesty International's recent [report](#), the PTA has been used as a weapon to enforce arbitrary detentions and violate detainee's rights to a fair trial. The report [notes](#) that despite assurances to amend the problematic legislation, proposed amendments have fallen severely short of safeguarding rights protected by international human rights law and the Constitution of Sri Lanka.

Media Rights Violations

The IFJ recorded 25 media rights violations in the South Asia region from February 15 to March 15, 2022, including the detention of five journalists. Indian journalist Nilesh Sharma, editor of news site Indiawriters, was arrested on March 2 for a piece of political satire. Umakanta Pandey, a Nepali journalist living in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), was arrested on February 15 by UAE police for publishing social media posts that criticised the Nepali Embassy in Abu Dhabi. Other journalists arrested during the period included Indian Journalist Fahad Shah on March 5, Pakistan based journalist, Jinnah Mohsin

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During the period, 3 cases of harassment and 13 attacks on journalists, including 12 in India, were recorded. Nepal Police's Cyber Bureau harassed journalist Umesh Shrestha on February 23, while Nepali senior journalist Babita Basnet and human rights activist and former journalist, Bandana Rana, faced online harassment for their articles and social media posts.

Radio Tajla, a private Afghan radio station in ceased broadcasting due to financial issues. Concerns were raised by the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) regarding the Nepali government's [approval](#) of a new amendment to the National Broadcasting Rules and Indian journalists' were dissatisfied with new provisions of within the country's [Central Media Accreditation Guidelines](#).

Featured Action

Nepal: The Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) [submitted](#) a Memorandum to the Minister of information and Communication Technology, Gyanendra Bahadur Karki, regarding the impact of Covid-19 on Nepal's journalism sector. During the meeting, the FNJ explained the impact of the pandemic on journalists, media organisations and media sustainability. The FNJ stressed the need for government relief packages for small enterprises and digital media houses.

Pakistan: On February 22, the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) submitted a [petition](#) to Pakistan's high court [challenging](#) the government's new Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) amendment ordinance. The union expressed its concern over the ordinance, claiming that it is an effort by the government to "[muzzle the media](#)". The petition further outlined the PFUJ's concerns at the increasing criminalisation of free speech in Pakistan, which PFUJ says the PECA law will [contribute](#) to.

IFJ Blog

Afghanistan - Is journalism mission impossible?: How would you keep reporting when government officials threaten you regularly? How would you run your news program when it's almost impossible to access public information? Would you publish your story when you face arbitrary detention or repression



Journalists and IFJ trainers attend the gender Equity and Safety Workshop, supported by NED, at Karachi Press Club in November.

IFJ At Work:

NED continue to support Pakistan's journalists: The IFJ has signed an agreement with the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) to continue implementation of the second phase of its current Pakistan project, titled 'Promoting Labor Rights, Gender Equality and Freedom of Association in Pakistan's Media'. The project, that commenced implementation from February 2022, aims to promote the professional rights of journalists in Pakistan and create a more representative and diverse media. The IFJ is working with the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), and other partners in Pakistan, to implement the project.

Enhancing democracy and human rights in the Maldives: Together with Internews and the Maldives Journalist Association (MJA), the IFJ has commenced implementation of a new project, 'Protecting Freedom of Expression in the Maldives'. Funded by the European Union, the project will span over 27 months and seeks to address issues surrounding hate speech, fake news, and disinformation, to protect journalists from digital, physical and psychosocial risks and threats.

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- Pakistani media remains hostage to repressive tactics, says rights commission - from [The Print](#)
- COVID-19 and the Media in South Asia - from [DW](#)
- Music As Means Of Communication - from [The Rising Nepal](#)
- How Muslim women in India resist online abuse - from [TwoCircles.net \(TCN\)](#)
- Government must promote freedom of the press or face infodemic - from [KUENSEL](#)
- Social media poses 'existential threat' to traditional, trustworthy news - from [UNESCO](#)

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Read and share – [IFJ 2021 Killed List](#)

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

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