



IFJ South Asia Media Bulletin

15 May 2022

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

In Focus: Towards recovery

While the IFJ's 20th annual [South Asia Press Freedom Report](#) (SAPFR) for 2021-22 recorded numerous challenges for the media in South Asia, including increasing economic harassment, continued efforts by governments to introduce stringent and restrictive media legislation, censorship, attacks against media institutions, Covid-19 induced challenges, gender-based violence, and impunity for crimes against journalists, the report also tells the stories of persistence, new methods of sustainability and enduring media communities within the region. In partnership with the South Asia Media Solidarity Network (SAMSN), the report, titled *Solidarity and Survival: The Story of South Asia*, highlights the solidarity among media workers, unions and organisations in an effort to ensure the revival, stability and recovery of the South Asian media landscape in 2021 and 2022.

With Afghanistan's media unprecedentedly curtailed since the Taliban took power in mid-August 2021, with at least 300 media outlets shuttered and a dramatic slump in the number of working women journalists, IFJ affiliates, the Afghan Independent Journalists' Association (AIJA) and Afghanistan's National Journalists' Union (ANJU), have [campaigned](#) relentlessly alongside both national and international

Bhutan, which [suffered](#) repeated lockdowns that caused the media to struggle with an over-reliance on government advertising and content, has been trying to bounce back. The Nepali media houses which [exploited](#) journalists and media workers under the pretension of economic crisis after the pandemic have been [pressured](#) by the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) and Nepal Press Union (NPU) to reinstate discharged journalists and pay their overdue salaries. The organisations negotiated with media houses, staged protests, and used the courts to assert labour rights, with some success. Recent reinstatements of dismissed journalists signal that Nepal is gradually moving towards recovery.

In India, the Indian Journalists Union (IJU) [demanded](#) the enactment of a special law at federal level to protect journalists, already enacted by some Indian states. Sri Lankan affiliates [joined together](#) to defend the press freedom collectively, [campaigning](#) for the abolition of the existing Press Council, proposed the repressive Media Authority Act, and some draconian provisions of the Public Security Act and Data Protection Law.

In further positive news from the region, most mainstream media outlets in the Maldives [restored](#) salaries to pre-pandemic levels during 2021 as the economy bounced back. At the height of the pandemic, the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) [distributed](#) food packets and personal safety kits to media workers and lobbied for free health check-ups for journalists. A support fund of PKR 100,000 (approx. USD 550) for each affected journalist was negotiated while financial support of PKR 10 million (approx. USD 54,600) was agreed for the families of journalists who lost their lives to Covid-19. The PFUJ also filed a petition with the Islamabad High Court, seeking to eradicate illegal terminations for media workers and champion regular salaries and labour rights. The PFUJ's advocacy and the government's decision to release outstanding advertisement fees to Pakistani media houses also helped the media to recover gradually.



Afghan nationals residing in India and supporters of the Afghan Refugee Women's Association demand better rights for women in Afghanistan in New Delhi on October 30, 2021. Image taken from the IFJ's SAPFR 2021-22. Credit: Sajjad Hussain / AFP

In this bulletin:

- **Afghanistan tops list of media rights violations - IFJ SAPFR**
- **Editors Council calls for amendments to the DSA in Bangladesh**
- **Labour rights exploitation unabated in Nepal**
- **Pakistan announces harsh action against 'immoral' online content**
- **JAB releases 'Legal Guidebook' for journalists in Bhutan**

The Region

Afghanistan tops list of media rights violations in South Asia: An analysis of the [IFJ's media rights monitoring](#) since 2016, has revealed that Afghanistan is the most dangerous country in South Asia, according to the IFJ's South Asia Press Freedom Report for 2021-22. Out of a total of 1031 media rights violations recorded in the region since 2016, more than a quarter (296) were from Afghanistan. India, Pakistan, and Nepal followed Afghanistan, with 222, 208 and 131 violations, respectively. Bhutan had the lowest number of violations, with only five recorded in the period. Bangladesh recorded 74 incidents while Maldives reported only 23 violations since 2016. Nearly half of all journalist killings in the region were from Afghanistan, with a further quarter from India. 12 out of the 23 murders of journalists and media workers recorded

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following the Taliban's takeover in mid-August 2021.

More than a quarter of media rights violations in South Asia happened in **Afghanistan**

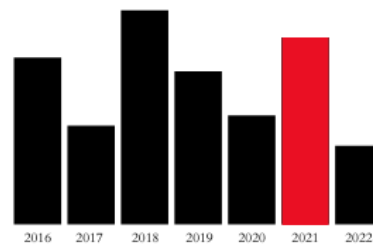


Nearly half (43%) of all cases of killings of journalists were reported from Afghanistan



Over the last 6 years, 296 cases of violations were reported, nearly 19% (55) of which were in 2021

Nearly 30% of the cases involved non-fatal threats against journalists



In 2021, 15 of the 25 killings of journalists in South Asia were reported from Afghanistan



Source: South Asia Press Freedom Report

Note: South Asian Press Freedom Reports are released in May each year and include data from preceding year's May to April. For 2020, the data is as of April 30, 2022.

National Issues

Afghanistan: The Afghanistan media community [expressed](#) concern over increased media restrictions, lack of access to

Bangladesh: On World Press Freedom Day, Bangladesh's [Editors' Council](#) urged the nation's government to amend the Digital

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Press Freedom day on May 3 2022. Afghanistan media leaders shared that they are continuously [fighting](#) for press freedom despite the closure of nearly 40 per cent of Afghan media outlets , with approximately 80 per cent of women and 60 per cent of men in the media rendered jobless. Many urged for the establishment of a Commission of Media Violations (CMV) as the first step towards improving media freedoms in Afghanistan.

Bhutan: Prime Minister of Bhutan, Dr Lotay Tshering, [launched](#) the Journalists' Association of Bhutan's (JAB) annual report, 'Bhutan Press Mirror', on May 3, 2022. The report's fourth edition documents the experiences of Bhutanese journalists during the pandemic, rural stories supported the JAB, and the JAB's activities over the past two years. During the launch, Prime Minister Tshering [claimed](#) that no media or media persons were attacked in Bhutan between 2021 and 2022, however, JAB reported a higher level of media censorship and lack of access to information in Bhutan.

Maldives: Despite the IFJ's SAPFR 2021-22 [reporting](#) culture of impunity, abuse of female journalists, control of critical voices and attacks on media workers as key issues in the Maldives, the nation's President Solih [claimed](#) that his administration

of the press. In 2021, there was an almost [nine-fold increase](#) in cases filed under the DSA compared with 2021, for perceived online criticism of government officials. According to Ain-O-Salish Kendra, more than 1,134 DSA cases [were lodged](#) in 2021 against journalists and alleged government critics compared to 130 cases in 2020.

India: The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has recommended a mandatory 'carriage fee' to be paid to cable channels by news broadcasters. The News Broadcasters Association (NBA) has [condemned](#) the decision and urged the Indian government and the TRAI to scrap the proposal. In a statement on May 2, the NBA said that the TRAI had legitimised the charging of the fee, previously an [unregulated](#) domain and widely believed to be a virtual tool for the extortion of broadcasters.

Nepal: Monitoring by the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) has [revealed](#) that illegal dismissals of journalists, leave without pay, wage reductions and delayed salary payments are rampant issues within large media houses in Nepal. The

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commitment towards Press Freedom. However, the People's Majili, a unicameral legislative body of Maldives, expressed [concern](#) at the growing of trend of state control of Maldivian media through sponsorship.

despite continuous advocacy to protect and promote the labour rights of journalists. "It is not acceptable for the FNJ that those media organisations which receive subsidised loans after recommendation from the FNJ, remains reluctant to address labour rights issues of journalists and media workers", FNJ's statement [said](#).

Pakistan: Following former prime minister Imran Khan's claim that his opponents [have](#) "hired companies that are preparing for his character assassination using social media," Pakistan's Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah [announced](#) on May 6 that the government had decided to take harsh action against those involved in spreading vaguely defined "immoral" content on social media. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also urged the citizens of Pakistan not to tolerate online humiliation and report harassment to the authorities.

Sri Lanka: In commemoration of World Press Freedom Day, UNESCO New Delhi organised a [regional event](#) in Colombo, Sri Lanka on May 4, aimed at providing a common platform for advocacy and engagement with media stakeholders in South Asia. Keynote speeches were delivered by Eric Falt, Director and UNESCO Representative to Bhutan, India, the Maldives and Sri Lanka, and Denis Chaibi, Ambassador of the European Union for Sri Lanka, among many others, and Umesh Pokharel, the IFJ's South Asia Coordinator, launched the South Asia Press Freedom Report 2021-22.

Media Rights Violations

The IFJ recorded 11 media rights violations in the South Asia region between April 15 and May 15, 2022, including the killing of Pakistani journalist Ziaur Rehman Farooqi, the arrests of four journalists, attacks on four journalists and one incident each of censorship and misuse of law. 7 News reporter Ziaur Rehman Farooqi was murdered in the Khanewal district of Punjab province on 28 April. Three media workers were arrested including Indian journalist Abdul

began following News18 India television anchor [Aman Chopra](#) to detain him in connection with a case filed against him. Indian journalist Govind Gurjar and Afghan television journalist Moheb Jalili were attacked for their news reporting while the Dadheldhura branch of the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) was vandalised by unknown assailants on May 6. Online portal Onlinekhabar.com was attacked by supporters of one of the mayoral candidates in Kathmandu metropolitan city. Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa declared a second state of emergency with increasing violations against journalists and a dramatic curtailing of press freedom. Pakistan's Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) also initiated an inquiry against Bol anchorperson Sami Ibrahim, recorded as a misuse of law.

Violations by Type

Killing	1
Arrest/Detention	4
Attack	4
Censorship	1
Harassment	0
Internet Shutdown	0
Law	1
Economic Pressure	0

Violations by Country

Afghanistan	3
Bangladesh	0
Bhutan	0
India	3
Maldives	0
Nepal	2
Pakistan	2
Sri Lanka	1

Featured Action

Nepal: The FNJ [launched](#) its report, 'Press Freedom and Journalists Safety', on World Press Freedom Day, detailing media rights violations in Nepal from May 4, 2021 to May 3, 2022. The report includes an analysis of key media laws in Nepal within the federal context and provides a comprehensive list of the complaints the FNJ received regarding non or part or delayed salary payments, illegal terminations, dismissals and economic exploitation of journalists and media workers. The FNJ also organised a photo exhibition and conducted a discussion program to mark World Press Freedom Day. Speaking at the report launch event, the FNJ president Bipul Pokhrel emphasised the need for media stakeholders to collectively resist the government's introduction of stringent media laws.

Sri Lanka: On May 3, Sri Lankan journalist unions, including IFJ affiliate the Sri

killing journalists during the Rajapaksha rule, that were destroyed by security officers in April. To mark World Press Freedom Day, the SLWJA and other journalists also marched from the International Media Centre in 'GotaGoGama' to the Presidential Secretariat in Colombo.

Bhutan: The Journalists' Association of Bhutan (JAB) has [released](#) an online copy of its 'Legal Guidebook for Bhutanese journalists' on May 3, 2022. The guideline includes legal provisions surrounding defamation, libel, invasion of privacy, use of intellectual property, coverage of elections, confidentiality of sources, right to information, access to palaces, and access to courts and court proceedings, among others. The guidelines are available [here](#).

IFJ Blog

Pakistan has become a dangerous place for journalists and media workers, with ever-increasing incidents of attack, harassment and restrictive legislation, [writes](#) Lubna Jerar Naqvi.



IFJ At Work:

IFJ releases special Afghanistan newsletter: On April 20, the IFJ released a [special newsletter](#) telling the story of eight months of solidarity with Afghan

assist Afghanistan's media community in the aftermath of the Taliban's takeover.

IFJ launches 20th South Asia Press Freedom Report: On World Press Freedom Day on May 3, the IFJ, together with the South Asia Media Solidarity Network (SAMSN), launched its 20th annual South Asia Press Freedom Report 2021-22 (SAPFR), titled *Solidarity and Survival: The Story of South Asia*. The SAPFR 2021-22 includes analysis of the situation of press freedom and freedom of expression in every South Asian country, lists of detained and killed journalists, details of media rights violations and interviews with journalist union leaders in South Asia. The report highlights key regional stories including journalists in exile, the battle being waged to maintain an open digital space open in South Asia. In a story of survival, the media's transformation and growth out of the immense challenges of the pandemic is documented, with the media industry forced to find new and sustainable ways of telling the stories of this diverse region.

The SAPFR21-22 is now available online:

[Solidarity and Survival: The Story of South Asia](#)

Individual country chapters are also available to download below:

[Afghanistan](#)

[Bangladesh](#)

[Bhutan](#)

[India](#)

[Maldives](#)

[Nepal](#)

[Pakistan](#)

[Sri Lanka](#)

FROM THE MEDIA

- Democracy without free media is no democracy – [Kuensel](#)
- Outnumbered, outgunned, public-interest journalism losing to identity politics – [EastMojo](#)
- Journalism can't thrive under digital siege – [Straights Times](#)

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- Taliban Intensify Attacks on Afghan Media – [Human Rights Watch](#)
- Safeguarding the Fourth Pillar of Democracy – [Dhaka Tribune](#)
- Journalists as Endangered Species – [Leadership](#)
- Media industry in South Asia: Fostering digital safety of journalists – [The Himalayan Times](#)

TAKE ACTION!

Read the IFJ's South Asia Press Freedom Report 2021-22 - [Solidarity and Survival: The Story of South Asia](#)

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