



IFJ South Asia Media Bulletin

15 June 2022

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



Indian paramilitary troopers stand guard during a random search in Srinagar on June 3, 2022. Credit: Tauseef Mustafa / AFP

In Focus: Silence in Jammu and Kashmir

Journalism in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) is increasingly under threat. With mounting incidents of detainment and legal action as local authorities retaliate against critical reportage, journalists and media workers in the region work in fear of an ever-growing target on their backs.

On June 2, the interim editor of The Kashmir Walla, Yashraj Sharma, was summoned in regard to an opinion article published on the online news portal by Abdul Aala Fazili, a PhD student at the University of Kashmir on November 6, 2011. The article titled '[The Shackles of Slavery Will Break](#)' was published when Sharma, who joined The Kashmir Walla in 2018, was just 12 years old. The State Investigation Agency of J&K's police filed a case against The Kashmir Walla, the article's author, and The Kashmir Walla's principal editor Fahad Shah. Shah, who has [faced](#) multiple charges since his initial arrest on February 4 and was sentenced under Jammu and Kashmir's Public Safety Act (PSA) on March 14, has already been questioned about the article. As the region's PSA [allows](#) up to two years detainment without trial, it is unclear when Shah will be released.

Since August 5, 2019, when the Indian Government [revoked](#) Article 370 of the Indian Constitution acknowledging the special status of the J&K state, the region has seen an intensification of attempts to silence critical voices within the media, with widespread attacks, arrests, intimidation, and legal harassment. With the fear of reprisal threatening, one prominent Kashmiri journalist said that they did not wish to be named in any publication, including by the IFJ. This fear has forced dozens of Kashmiri journalists to [flee](#) the valley in recent months.

January's shutdown of the Kashmir Press Club (KPC), the largest elected trade body representing the region's journalists, was another [blow](#) that lowered the confidence of the journalists in the region. With the KPC shuttered, the J&K government successfully moved to silence many critical voices within the region's independent media. A [fact-finding committee](#) of the Press Council of India (PCI) said that "news media in the Jammu and Kashmir region and especially in the Valley is slowly being choked, mainly because of the extensive curbs imposed by the local administration", in a report published in March.

The India chapter of the IFJ's [South Asia Press Freedom Report](#) 2021-22 found that "a fear psychosis gradually grew with the 'taming' of the media through a lethal cocktail of the use and misuse of laws." These included the Disaster Management Act during the pandemic, Section 124A (sedition) and Section 153A (promotion of communal hatred) of the Indian Penal Code, the draconian Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), the National Security Act, the defamation law, and the Information Technology (Guidelines for Intermediary and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules of 2021.

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Past Issues

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- **The Federation of Asia-Pacific Journalists (FAPaJ) formed**
- **Taliban enforces strict dress code women broadcasters**
- **IFJ conducts Gender Equity and Safety training in Pakistan**
- **FNJ observes 20th Memorial Day for murdered journalist Krishna Sen 'Ichchuk'**
- **Civic space and press freedom shrinking in the Maldives**



The newly elected FAPaJ Executive Committee at the IFJ World Congress in Oman. Credit: IFJ

The Region

Federation of Asia-Pacific Journalists (FAPaJ) formed: The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) formed the Federation of Asia-Pacific Journalists (FAPaJ) on May 31, comprising members of IFJ affiliates from the Pacific, Western Asia, Eastern Asia, Southern Asia and Central Asia. This is the fourth IFJ regional group of the IFJ, after the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), the Federation of African Journalists (FAJ) and the Federación de Periodistas de América Latina y el Caribe (FEPALC). Sabina Inderjit, General-Secretary of the India Journalists Union (IJU) and IFJ Vice President, was elected as the first FAPaJ president. Salem Al Jahwari was elected as FAPaJ Vice President unopposed, with Mousa Abdul Nour, Ali Yousef, Mohammad Alhammadi, Leigh Tonkin, Jonathan De Santos and Badri Sigdel elected as

on the press in countries in the region including Afghanistan, Nepal, India, Myanmar, and Hong Kong. The FAPaJ also expressed its commitment to protecting the right to free speech, strengthening free expression online and fighting against laws which lead to internet shutdowns.

National Issues

Afghanistan: In a further harsh restriction on Afghanistan's media, the Taliban [issued](#) a decree on May 19 instructing all female television anchors and broadcast journalists to cover their faces on air. The Taliban's Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice issued the decree effective from May 21, designating the regulation '[final and non-negotiable](#)'. The day following the new directive, female journalists from three Afghan media organisations defied the orders and broadcast with their faces visible but began to adhere to the order after threats from the Taliban.

Bhutan: 15 journalists [participated](#) in a two-day capacity development workshop that aimed to increase knowledge and understanding of the functioning of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), offering an insight into the integral role CSOs play within the media. The workshop, organised by the Bhutan Media Foundation, also discussed how CSOs can actively collaborate and

Bangladesh: Journalist Fazle Elahi, editor of Dainik Parbatya Chattogram and Pahar 24.com, was [arrested](#) on June 8 under Bangladesh's draconian Digital Security Act (DSA), before being [granted bail](#) the same day. The Rangamati Senior Judicial Magistrate granted instructed Elahi to appear before the Chattogram Cyber Tribunal within seven days. A new report, titled 'The Unending Nightmare: Impacts of Bangladesh's Digital Security Act 2018', [revealed](#) that an average of 32 people, including journalists and media workers, were detained each month between April 2021 and February 2022 month in 2021 and 2021.

India: Tripura police officer, Arindam Roy, was [suspended](#) on May 18 for allegedly torturing Nitai Dey, a journalist with a Guwahati-based news portal. Dey was arrested on May 17 while covering the impacts of the nation's fuel shortage, under Section 90 of the Tripura Police Act. The journalist filed a complaint following his release on bail, accusing the police of forcing him to drink alcohol to prove he was

Maldives: A recent monitoring report by CIVICUS has found the state of civic space in the [Maldives](#) is shrinking, on review of freedom of press and expression, media rights and human rights indicators. Incidents noted in the report include the June 1 intimidation of a VNEWS video journalist, the threatening of journalists and media workers on May 29 when a group [forcibly entered](#) the office of Maldivian news outlet Mihaaru, and police harassment of journalists 'India Out' campaign protest on May 18.

Pakistan: The Federal Ministry for Information and Broadcasting has [drafted](#) a proposal to increase the rates of advertisements for newspapers and magazines by 25 per cent. During a meeting with a delegation of the Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors on May 24, Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb said that the draft proposal had been sent to the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, and stated that the incumbent government believes in the complete freedom of press and expression, promising to resolve issues faced by the media.

Nepal: The Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) [held](#) a meeting to pay tribute to murdered journalist Krishna Sen 'Ichchuk' on the twentieth anniversary of his death. During the meeting, the FNJ president, Bipul Pokhrel, called for an end to impunity for crimes against journalists in Nepal. According to the FNJ's documentation, a total of 38 journalists have been killed since the Maoist insurgencies begin in Nepal in 1996. Khrishna Sen, the editor of Janadisha, a pro-Maoist weekly newspaper, was arrested by police on May 20, 2002, and was [held in custody](#) for one week before his death, with his body never returned to relatives.

Sri Lanka: Several members from the political party Sri Lanka Podujana Peramnua have been [accused](#) of confronting journalists during parliamentary events on May 17. Prageeth Perera, Chairman of the Sri Lanka Parliament Journalists Association, and journalist Kasun Samaraweera, filed a complaint with Welikada police, after the members allegedly harassed them and confiscated their mobile phones. Perera and Samaraweera claimed that footage they had shot during the day was deleted before their devices were returned by the Sergeant-at-Arms in Parliament.

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The IFJ recorded 20 media rights violations in the South Asia region from May 15 to June 15, including the killing of DBC News journalist Abdul Bari from Bangladesh on June 8 and the suspected murder of Indian journalist Subhash Kumar Mahto on May 20. Police are investigating both cases and the reasons for their murders are still unknown.

Four attacks on journalists and the media were recorded including the assault of Afghan journalist Reza Shahir on June 3, the intimidation of journalists associated with Maldivian news outlet Mihaaru on May 29, and the attacks to media workers in Pakistan during protests by members of the Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf party on May 25 and 26. Six arrests and 5 incidents of harassment were documented; in Afghanistan, Taliban intelligence agencies detained three media workers in Kabul and Herat for their reporting while two Afghan journalists, Ali Akbar Khairkhwa and Jamaluddin Deldar reportedly 'disappeared'. Bangladeshi journalist Fazle Elahi, the editor of Dainik Parbatya Chattogram, was **arrested** on June 8 under the nation's Digital Security Act. Cases of harassment included the summoning of Caravan journalist Shahid Tantray by Jammu and Kashmir police, threats against Laxman Sunar of the FNJ Parbat branch in Nepal, harassment of journalists in the Maldives during the 'India Out' campaign on May 18, and legal proceedings against the interim editor of The Kashmir Walla, Yashraj Sharma, on June 2.

The suspension of mobile internet services in parts of Srinagar was documented as an internet shutdown. The Taliban's enforcement of a new directive requiring all-female television broadcasters to cover their faces while on-air and an FIR against Alt News co-founder Muhammad Zubair were recorded as misuses of law.

Violations by Type

Killing	2
Arrest/Detention	6
Attack	4
Censorship	0
Harassment	5
Internet Shutdown	1
Law	2
Economic Pressure	0

Violations by Country

Afghanistan	7
Bangladesh	2
Bhutan	0
India	6
Maldives	2
Nepal	1
Pakistan	1
Sri Lanka	1

Featured Action

Nepal: The FNJ [conducted](#) a three-day workshop on 'Countering Misinformation and Disinformation' on May 20, 22 and 25. During the workshop, the participants and facilitators discussed identifying, dealing with, and avoiding misinformation. The training also discussed the impact of misinformation on both the media and the public, particularly in light of the Covid-19 pandemic.

India: The National Union of Journalists (India) [observed](#) the thirtieth Hindi Journalism Day with a discussion program titled 'Future of Indian Journalism', paying tribute to notable journalists and contributors to the media industry. Hindi Journalism Day is held on May 30 each year to celebrate the beginning of the first Hindi language newspaper in India, Udant Martand, which was first published in 1826.

Pakistan: The IFJ conducted a two-day 'Gender Equity and Safety Training' workshop in Pakistan on May 30-31, in partnership with Lahore Press Club, with 27 women journalists participating. The first day included a discussion of concepts and issues related to gender equity, journalists' rights, gender safety, and combating sexual harassment in the workplace, while the second day's program included safety in the field, and campaigning for equity and safety. The IFJ's Pakistan Gender Coordinator, Lubna Jerar Naqvi, and freelance journalist Fatima Zakir facilitated the training.

IFJ Blog

At the 31st World Congress of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), Sandhya Ekneligoda, the wife of the missing journalist, Prageeth Ekneligoda, spoke against impunity for the officials who are responsible for the disappearance of her husband. Read her speech in full [here](#).

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 media workers. The bulletin compiles key actions carried out by the IFJ and its affiliates all over the world, including in Pakistan, New Zealand, and India, to assist Afghanistan's media community in the aftermath of the Taliban's

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IFJ partners with ANJU on media rights monitoring: The IFJ and the Afghanistan National Journalists Union (ANJU) have partnered to implement a media rights monitoring project in Afghanistan from July 1, 2022, to October 15, 2022, supported by Norsk Journalistlag. The project aims to contribute to enhancing journalists' safety by improving media rights monitoring practices and advocating for media rights through research and publications.

FROM THE MEDIA

- India's draconian sedition law – [Modern Diplomacy](#)
 - Don't let technicalities get in the way of free press – [The Daily Star](#)
 - Reviewing Peca – [The News International](#)
 - 'Editor Missing': An insider's view of the division that has split India's national media – [Scroll.in](#)
 - Legal requirements for making a YouTube channel in India – [Lexology](#)
 - Whose Media Freedom? Whose Media Order? – [Newsclick](#)
 - Media in Balochistan – [Daily Times](#)
 - On India's 'sedition' legislation – [NEWAGE](#)
-

TAKE ACTION!

Register for [Digital Safety Snacks online workshop series for journalists](#)

Submit an entry for the [Science journalism contest](#)

Apply to become a [WPI fellow](#)

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

Apply for [human trafficking investigation grant](#)

Submit entry- [Banff Centre Mountain Book Competition](#)

Submit the proposal- [Science Journalism Forum 2022](#)

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

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IFJ Asia-Pacific**

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