



IFJ South Asia Media Bulletin

15 July 2022

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



Protestors participate in mass anti-government demonstrations outside the President's office in Colombo on July 9. Credit: AFP

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In Focus: Sri Lankan media amid the political upheaval: Press freedom and the rights of journalists and media workers have been increasingly under threat in Sri Lanka since the country began its descent into political and economic turmoil in 2019. Following [mass public protests](#) on July 9 2022, political tensions rapidly escalated as President Gotabaya Rajapaksa resigned, fleeing to the Maldives and transferring power to the acting President Ranil Wickremesinghe. The government declared a state of emergency on July 13 and has continually used its power to suppress dissent. Many journalists and media workers have been attacked and harassed while covering the protests and the safety of journalists in Sri Lanka is likely to further deteriorate.

However, Rajapaksa's resignation does offer some hope for Sri Lanka's media community. The Rajapaksa family were known for their suppression of press freedom and disregard for the rights of journalists. Between 2005 and 2015, under the presidency of Gotabaya's brother Mahinda Rajapaksa, [dozens of journalists](#) were killed, abducted and tortured and at least 60 fled the country out of fear, with most still living in exile. Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, who was defence minister during his brother's rule, led a unit accused of assassinating former Sunday Leader newspaper editor Lasantha Wickrematunge. Gotabaya has denied all charges.

Gotabaya's election as president in November 2019, saw a continued failure to investigate past crimes against journalists and media organisations. The IFJ's [South Asia Press Freedom Report 21-22](#) documented incidents of intimidation, harassment, and abduction of journalists, with internet restrictions and censorship common as the nation fell into economic crisis. As a new president takes power, the direction of the Sri Lankan media landscape relies on media organisations and unions taking strong stands on press freedom, the safety of journalists and addressing impunity for crimes against media workers.

In this bulletin:

- **Afghanistan journalists and activists at increased risk**
- **Twitter sues the Indian government**
- **Pakistan journalist protests against media rights violations**
- **FNJ discusses workplace safety of women journalists**
- **IFJ organised project management training in Pakistan**

The Region: Afghanistan's media in economic crisis

Since the Taliban seized control of Afghanistan in August 2021, media houses

spoke to the Afghanistan National Journalists' Union (ANJU) executive director, Hadi Rashed, about how media rights violations, draconian restrictions and economic collapse have [impacted](#) the media industry. Following the Taliban takeover, funding from international organisations and private and government advertising stopped, leading to financial devastation and mass media closures. The media houses that continued operating have not been able to pay their staff.

Many Afghan journalists and media workers have [lost](#) their jobs and are struggling financially. Local media [report](#) that journalists have resorted to alternative professions such as daily wage labourers, street food sellers and agricultural workers, among others. ANJU said that humanitarian support, food and interim transition support need to be provided to struggling journalists to mitigate the current economic crisis.

A [survey](#) conducted by ANJU in February 2022 found that 318 media outlets across 33 provinces have closed since 15 August 2021. The number of television, radio, newspapers and online media in Afghanistan has continued to decline each month, with 51 out of 132 television stations and 132 out of 293 radio stations shuttering as of February 2022.

National Issues

Afghanistan: Following the Taliban's takeover in August 2021, Afghan journalists and humanitarian actors are increasingly subjected to [human rights violations](#), a Civicus [report](#) has found. During his May 2022 visit to Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan, [reported](#) frequent cases of intimidation, harassment, attacks, arrests as well as killings or disappearances of journalists and other civil society actors. Bennett [highlighted](#) the ongoing extrajudicial and revenge killings of former

Bangladesh: Under the 2020 amendments to the National Online Media Policy, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission [began](#) shutting down unregistered news portals on September 28, 2021. Information and Broadcasting ministry secretary Maqbool Hossain stated that online news portals need to be registered to halt the dissemination of fake news and misuse of online media. On June 16, Hossain [predicted](#) that more than 250 additional news portals will be registered by July 2023. Media unions and journalists'

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currently facing significant human rights challenges.

Bhutan: On June 28, the Bhutan Broadcasting Service [organised](#) a discussion regarding the 'Legal Guidebook for Bhutanese Journalists', jointly developed by UNESCO and the Journalists Association of Bhutan, which aims to protect Bhutanese journalists from legal harassment. The [guidelines](#) cover a broad range of issues including fundamental rights, defamation, defence to defamation, invasion of privacy, use of intellectual property, covering elections, confidentiality of sources, access to information, and access to court proceedings, among others.

Maldives: On June 26, Maldives Police Service [arrested](#) three suspects in connection with the abduction and murder of journalist Ahmed Rilwan and the murder of blogger Yameen Rasheed. The arrested suspects include Ahmed Ismail, Ahmed Muaz, and Ismail Abdul Raheem. According to the Presidential Inquiry Commission on Disappearances and Deaths, Rilwan was [abducted](#) in 2014 and killed five years later in 2019. Rasheed was fatally stabbed on 23 April 2017.

Pakistan: Journalists in the Parliamentary Reporters Association (PRA) [staged](#) a walkout from the

attempt to restrict media freedom.

India: Social media platform Twitter [sued](#) the Indian government in the Karnataka High Court on July 5 for arbitrarily ordering the removal of several tweets. This marks the first legal challenge by Twitter since the [introduction](#) of the Information Technology Rules 2021, which allows the authorities to demand that critical or anti-government posts or accounts be hidden from Indian users. Article 19, Access Now, and other international organisations [claim](#) that the law undermines citizens' rights to freedom of expression.

Nepal: On June 26, Maldives Police Service [arrested](#) three suspects in connection with the abduction and murder of journalist Ahmed Rilwan and the murder of blogger Yameen Rasheed. The arrested suspects include Ahmed Ismail, Ahmed Muaz, and Ismail Abdul Raheem. According to the Presidential Inquiry Commission on Disappearances and Deaths, Rilwan was [abducted](#) in 2014 and killed five years later in 2019. Rasheed was fatally stabbed on 23 April 2017.

Sri Lanka: Media rights violations have increased following anti-government protests in March 2022.

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journalist and the attempted abduction of another female journalist. The protesting journalists also demanded the implementation of a journalist's protection bill. Senator Irfan ul Haq Siddiqui [assured](#) the journalists that concerns over the safety and security of journalists would be discussed in parliament.

assaulted by security forces and police personnel while covering the [anti-government protest](#) outside the Prime Minister's residence in Colombo. A team from Newsfirst were assaulted including, journalists Sarasi Pieris, Judin Sinthujan, Janitha Mendis and camera operator Warun Sampath.

Media Rights Violations

The IFJ recorded 21 media rights violations in the South Asia region from June 15 to July 15, including the killing of Bangladeshi journalist Hashibur Rahaman Rubel on July 7 and the murder of two Pakistani journalists, Iftikhar Ahmed and Ishtiaq Sodharo, by unidentified assailants on July 1 and 2 respectively. The reasons for their murders are unknown.

Nine attacks on journalists and the media were recorded including an attack on eight Sri Lankan media workers covering an anti-government protest outside Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's residence in Colombo and an attack on senior Pakistani journalist Ayaz Amir on July 1.

Four incidents of misuse of law and three arrests were been documented, including the legal case against Pakistani TV anchor Imran Riaz Khan on July 5, the police summons of Sri Lankan journalist Tharindu Uduwaragedara on June 28, the Maldivian parliament's attempt to introduce the 'Evidence Bill' and First Information Reports registered against Indian journalists Navika Kumar and Saba Naqvi. The two arrested journalists were Mohammed Zubair and Teesta Setalva, both from India.

Two cases of harassment were recorded, including Indian journalist T P Nandakumar's alleged harassment of a female co-worker and Indian immigration authorities barring Kashmiri Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist, Sanna Irshad Mattoo, from travelling to France. One case of censorship was documented, with the Twitter account of prominent Indian journalist Rana Ayyub removed.

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		violations by type	violations by Country
	Killing	3	Afghanistan 0
	Arrest/Detention	2	Bangladesh 1
	Attack	9	Bhutan 0
	Censorship	1	India 6
	Harassment	2	Maldives 1
	Internet Shutdown	0	Nepal 0
	Law	4	Pakistan 4
	Economic Pressure	0	Sri Lanka 9

Featured Action

Nepal: The Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) [sent](#) a letter to Janata Television and Bodhi Television on June 14, expressing concern about the nonpayment of due salaries to its current and former staffers. The FNJ urged the media companies to pay the outstanding salaries which, according to staffers, were not paid for many months. “We will come up with a protest program if the due salary is not paid,” the FNJ said.

Sri Lanka: The Free Media Movement (FMM) organised a ‘media dialogue’ on July 12, 2022, with Professor Arjuna Parakrama discussing the ‘Role of Journalism as the Fourth Pillar of Democracy amidst the Political-Economic Instability in Sri Lanka’ and human rights activist Philip Dissanayake presenting on ‘Human Rights Violations and Role of Journalism’. The online discussion was moderated by FMM convener Lasantha De Silva.

IFJ Blog

Journalist Hujatullah Mujadidi was one of many journalists who decided to stay in Afghanistan despite the Taliban’s hostility. Masood Farivar, former chief of Voice of America’s (VoA) Afghan Service, interviewed Mujadidi and other journalists about why they stayed and how their work has changed. Masood Farivar’s article published on VoA has been republished as a blog on the IFJ website. Read the blog [here](#).



Participants take part in the IFJ's project management training in Islamabad, Pakistan, supported by NED. Credit: IFJ

IFJ At Work:

Project management training in Pakistan: The IFJ, with support from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), conducted a Project Management Training on June 20-21 in Islamabad, enabling Pakistani journalist unions to develop leader capacities to organise and deliver union-strengthening projects. With a curriculum created and delivered by project management specialist Adnan Rehmat, the program included 12 participants from 6 organisations including the Pakistan Federation Union of Journalists, Karachi Union of Journalists, Rawalpindi Islamabad Union of Journalists, Quetta Union of Journalists, Khyber Union of Journalists, Young Journalists Forum Lahore, and the Digital Media Alliance of Pakistan.

IFJ to implement union strengthening projects: The IFJ has begun work with select affiliates in the Asia-Pacific region to implement a number of Union Strengthening projects, supported by Union to Union. The projects will commence in July and aim to strengthen media unions in a range of critical areas, including digitalisation, recruitment of young journalist leaders, and developing union democracy.

FROM THE MEDIA

- Journalist forced to sell food on street to survive amid economic crises in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan – [Mirror Now](#)

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- Why are so many journalists being killed in Bangladesh? – [Al Jazeera Media Institute](#)
- Stop govt interference with freedom of speech: Ex-civil servants tell Apex Court – [Counterview](#)
- Sri Lankans turn to social media for help as economic crisis bites – [Thomson Reuters Foundation](#)
- Press freedom chilled in Kashmir as reporting is ‘criminalized’ – [NBC News](#)
- Need For Innovative Journalism – [The Rising Nepal](#)
- India’s overbroad content takedown powers threaten internet freedom – [Thomson Reuters Foundation](#)

TAKE ACTION!

Apply for the [News Equity Fund](#)

Apply for [the Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellows Program](#)

Submit an entry for the [Young Journalist Awards](#)

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

Submit article on "[Youth, gender identity and power in digital platforms](#)."

Sign up for [‘Become a digital investigative pro’ training](#)

Take the survey [Journalism and the Pandemic Project: Assessing and Responding to COVID-19’s Long-Term Impacts](#)

Register for the [Webinar on Digital innovation and Trade Unions](#)

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

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