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**Defending Rights of Journalists &
Freedom of Expression in South Asia**



September 2022

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



ARY News employees protest the disruption of the channel's broadcast on August 16. Credit: Asif Hassan / AFP

In Focus

Media censorship and repression in Pakistan: Amid the destruction of nationwide mass flooding, a series of media rights violations have swept across Pakistan in August and September, with journalists and media organisations suffering censorship, harassment and violence. On August 20, the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) banned the broadcast of speeches made by former Prime Minister Imran Khan. The regulatory body alleged the politician had made derisive marks toward law enforcement and the judiciary. Following the ban, the broadcasts of media outlets ARY News and BOL News were suspended on August 9 and September 5, prompting outrage among numerous media associations and press clubs. PEMRA claimed material from ARY News was “seditious” after the media organisation stated that the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz had initiated a media campaign to portray the Pakistan Tehreek-E-Insaf (PTI) and its leader, Imran Khan, as ‘anti-armed forces’. Journalists Ilyas Samoo and Jameel Farooqui were both detained for critical coverage of the ruling government, while Geo News journalist Waqar Satti was charged following allegations of blasphemy and defamation. On August 27, senior journalist and president of the Shorkot Press Club, Muhammad Younis, was killed in a violent attack by two unknown gunmen in the Punjab

maintained in accordance with the Constitution of Pakistan.

In this bulletin:

- **Attacks and restrictions on the media continue under Taliban rule**
- **Bangladesh Press Council Act amendment criticised**
- **Indian Journalist Siddique Kappan granted bail**
- **Nepal's controversial Media Council Bill sent to House of Representatives**
- **Freedom House report exposes Chinese influence in Sri Lankan media**
- **IFJ conducts a one-week mission in the Maldives**

The Region

Taliban praises censorship of Afghan media outlets: Despite the dangerous and repressive environment for media in Afghanistan, The Taliban has continued to praise the success of prohibitive media reforms' which prevent state and private television channels from airing material perceived to be 'indecent', or content critical of Islam or the Taliban. According to the Taliban, "ninety-five per cent of the visual and audio media outlets in the country have been reformed", with the establishment of a media monitoring office screening every broadcast to ensure compliance with the new regulations. It is perhaps unsurprising that the Taliban continues to deny claims that journalists have died under their leadership. A recent report by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) documented 173 media rights violations between August 15, 2021, and June 15, 2022. Violations ranged from harsh restrictions on media outlets to the killing or arbitrary arrest of journalists and civil society activists. Human rights organisations and journalist unions have united in condemning the Taliban's numerous media rights violations since its ascension to power in August 2021. In a recent statement, the South Asia Media Solidarity Network (SAMSN) called on the international community to intensify humanitarian efforts to support journalists facing unemployment or economic hardship. Key actions encouraged by SAMSN included increasing humanitarian emergency visa programs, reducing visa requirements, and expanding resources for resettlement schemes for Afghan journalists and media workers.

National Issues

Afghanistan: Following an investigation by the Taliban's so-called Ministry of Information and Culture into cultural and religious content, spokesperson Zabiulla Mujahid announced that 150 'media books' were found to be offensive to Islam and would be revised, while an additional 80 were still under review. Mujahid also indicated that the ministry will assess changes to the nation's existing mass-media law to prevent the future publication of culturally or religiously 'offensive' material. Journalists and

Bangladesh: The Editors' Council of Bangladesh has called on the nation's press council to publicly release a new draft amendment to the Press Council Act. In a statement released on August 20, the editors' council criticised the Bangladesh Press Council for failing to consult with relevant stakeholders, including the editors' council itself and journalists' unions, before finalising the amendment. Reiterating these concerns, transparency International Bangladesh emphasised the importance of considering the views of

further deterioration of press freedom in Afghanistan.

Bhutan: Women journalists and LGBTQI producers participated in a three-day online workshop run by the Journalists Association of Bhutan designed to encourage greater coverage of stories on marginalised communities in rural Bhutan. The workshop provided participants with resources to assist reporting on the specific issues affecting these communities, aiming to create a platform for marginalised voices and foster a more inclusive media environment in Bhutan.

Maldives: The Maldives Journalists Association unanimously passed a motion to launch a bid to become a member of the Maldives Trade Union Congress (MTUC) on August 24. The MTUC is an association representing numerous trade unions and workers' organisations, and addresses concerns relating to labour rights in the Maldives. The IFJ met with leaders from the Maldivian Trade Union Congress earlier this month and welcomes the MJA's decision to apply to become a member of the Congress.

Pakistan: The Islamabad High Court Chief Justice Athar Minallah ordered the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority to restore the broadcast of ARY News on September 1. The station's transmission was blocked on August 8 after it aired controversial remarks regarding the leader of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) political party, Shahbaz Gill. The channel's senior vice president, Ammad Yousaf, was also arrested in connection with the case.

India: Siddique Kappan, a senior journalist who was arrested in Uttar Pradesh in 2020, has been granted bail by the Indian Supreme Court. Kappan has remained in custody, as India's Enforcement Directorate continue to investigate him for allegedly conspiring to incite riots. Kappan was originally accused of inciting communal violence and charged under Sections 153A, 295 A and 124A of the Indian Penal Code, which criminalise the promotion of enmity between groups, deliberate and malicious acts and sedition.

Nepal: Nepal's controversial 2019 Bill to Amend and Integrate the Media Council Act has been sent to the House of Representatives for deliberation. Under the proposed changes, journalists and media practitioners can be fined up to NPR 1 million (approx. USD 8,850) for publishing material that violates the nation's media code of ethics. The Nepal Press Union has strongly criticised the bill and warned that, if passed, it will pose a significant threat to press freedom in Nepal.

Sri Lanka: The Chinese Communist Party exercised considerable influence over Sri Lankan media between 2019 and 2021, according to a recent report by Freedom House. The report revealed that a range of Sri Lankan state-run media outlets, including Daily News and Daily FT, served as platforms through which Chinese state content and narratives were disseminated. Sri Lankan journalists and media outlets that had published material critical of the Chinese government were also found to have been pressured by the Chinese embassy in Sri Lanka to remove content.

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Nepal: The Federation of Nepal Journalists (FNJ) staged a sit-in protest outside the offices of Image Television on September 4, demanding the station implement a minimum wage for employees and to pay salaries owed to journalists dismissed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The FNJ indicated that its members would continue to protest until their demands were met.

Maldives: The Maldives Journalists Association's (MJA) congress, held on September 4, comprising 80 MJA members, elected a new executive committee including Ali Rifshaan as president and Mohamed Yameen as vice president. Ahmed Naif and Nazim Hassan were elected as general secretary and budget secretary respectively. The new committee members will retain their positions until September 2024.

Sri Lanka: 80 journalists participated in a webinar on unionism run by the Federation of Media Employees Trade Unions (FMETU) on August 27, under the IFJ and Union To Union's Global Union Strengthening Project. During the session, participants learned about the importance of unions as well as the key challenges currently facing unions in Sri Lanka. The FMETU expects the number of youth members in the FMETU executive committee to grow by 30 per cent due to programs of this kind.

Bhutan: Following the resignation of incumbent President Tashi Dema, the Journalists Association of Bhutan held a by-election for the post of president on August 30. Rinzin Wangchuk was elected as president for his third term.

Afghanistan: According to the decision of the Congress of the Association of Independent Journalists of Afghanistan, held on May 8, 2022, the Association of Independent Journalists of Afghanistan (AIJA) changed its name to the Union of Independent Journalists of Afghanistan (AIJU) and was registered as a trade union. According to the president of AIJU, by registering as a 'union', the AIJU can now work in all 34 provinces in Afghanistan. The AIJU was established in 2002 with a mandate to protect and promote the rights of journalists in Afghanistan. [Read more about the change here.](#)

IFJ Blog

After one year of Taliban rule, journalists in Afghanistan are leaving in unprecedented numbers. Stories of escape, survival and solidarity are more important than ever, as we look to support journalists fleeing repression and violence, [writes Lubna Jerar Naqvi.](#)



The Maldives Journalist Association's new leadership stand together following their election at the September 4 congress. Credit: Twitter

IFJ At Work:

IFJ conducts one-week mission in the Maldives: The IFJ visited the Maldives to meet with journalists, media workers and union stakeholders and discuss the challenges confronting the media across the island nation. Key issues identified by the IFJ included the ongoing influence of political appointments to the Maldives Broadcasting Commission and Public Service Media; an industry-wide practice of docking journalist salaries, a practice that violates labour rights; and women journalists leaving the industry due to cultural and industry pressures. The IFJ recommended the establishment of an industrial legislative framework for media and other workers, and a media rights mechanism for the country to raise awareness about journalist rights and media violations.

IFJ to hold Digital Organising Bootcamp: With support from Fredrich Ebert Stiftung, the IFJ will hold a 'Regional Digital Organising Bootcamp' in Kathmandu, Nepal on November 1-4. The boot camp will bring together young union leaders working on digital organising and union renewal from Nepal, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Indonesia and the Maldives. The boot camp represents part of a post-Covid-19 effort to boost union membership, organisation, and capacity in digital media.

From the media

US 'concerned' over Pakistan media curbs, attacks on journalists - [Al Jazeera](#)

Govt must take stakeholders on board in press council law change - [NewAge](#)

Pakistani reporter goes neck deep in water to cover floods - [The Times of India](#)

Oppression in IIOJ&K - [Business Recorder](#)

Freedom of speech - [Pakistan Today](#)

Manik Miah: A Legendary Journalist - [The Daily Star](#)

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Ensuring press freedom for democracy - [NewAge](#)

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IFJ Asia-Pacific**

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