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



November 2022

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



Mourners gather around the coffin of veteran journalist Arshad Sharif in Islamabad on October 27, who was shot dead by police in Kenya. Credit: Ghulam Rasool / AFP

In Focus

Unchecked impunity for crimes against media workers in South Asia: Despite promises of reform, protection and justice, journalists and media workers in South Asia face increasing violence, harassment, legal threats and killings. The majority of cases do not reach South Asia's legal systems, and even cases with a strong political will can languish behind systemic inadequacy, scapegoating or a failure to materialise rhetoric. In 2022, the IFJ documented the killings of eleven South Asian journalists for their work. Not a single case has been resolved. In a recent attack, former ARY News anchorperson and veteran Pakistani journalist, Arshad Sharif, was fatally wounded after suffering shots to his head and chest by General Service Unit in Nairobi, Kenya on October 24. Sharif, a supporter of former Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Prime Minister Imran Khan, fled Pakistan after he and other ARY News journalists were charged with broadcasting anti-national sentiments in May. While police officials said the incident was the result of mistaken identity and is being investigated, reports indicate Kenyan police operate with a remarkably high rate of impunity in their operations. As the second Pakistani commission into the journalist's killing is announced this week, time will tell if this high-profile case can see justice amid these challenges. Impunity is also present in cases of other crimes against journalists and

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suffer arbitrary arrests, ill-treatment and threats, often by Taliban militants. Journalists and media workers in Sri Lanka have suffered forced disappearances and killings, with cases going back decades. Given this culture of impunity in South Asia, the IFJ and its affiliates called on governments to adopt the UN Convention on the safety and independence of journalists and other media professionals ahead of International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists on November 2. Alongside a statement and campaign from the South Asia Media Solidarity Network (SAMSAN), IFJ affiliates in South Asia, including the National Union of Journalists-India (NUJ-I), the Maldives Journalists Association (MJA), and the Sri Lankan Working Journalists Association (SLWJA), launched advocacy efforts against impunity and urging governments to support the convention.

In this bulletin:

- IFJ and FES host digital organising bootcamp
- Afghan journalists face challenges living in Pakistan
- Bangladesh's High Court in favour of non-disclosure of sources
- MJA recommends six measures to curb impunity for crime against journalists
- FNJ conducts digital journalism training



FUTURE POWER 2022

Digital Organising for Stronger Unions





Kath Cortez
Kathryn Xenix Cortez has been a member of the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) Board of Directors since 2013. Kath was re-elected in 2021, now serving as the NUJP's Vice Chairperson and documenting attacks on journalists through her role as Chief Safety Officer. Kath started her career in radio and is currently a senior writer for online news outlet *DavaoToday.com*.



Asantha Bandara
Asantha Bandara has been an executive committee member of the Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association (SLWJA) since 2020. Asantha has worked in media since 2004, currently as Head of Web at online news outlet *Lak FM News*. He has been recognized for his work in digital media and journalism.



Aishath Nuzuha
Aishath Nuzuha began her career as a journalist in 2020 and is currently working for *Adhathu News*, having worked for several prominent Maldivian news outlets over the past two years. Nuzuha is a member of the Executive Committee of the Maldives Journalists Association (MJA) with skills in investigative reporting and digital media.



Reena Moktan
Reena Moktan has been a member of the Federation of Nepal Journalists (FNJ) for the past six years and has been actively involved in union activities and programs. Reena currently works at the Nepalese media outlet *Ekanipour.com* and works to ensure the professional and physical safety of journalists. She is also a passionate advocate for digital journalism.



Ramesh Khatiwada
Ramesh Khatiwada is a central committee member of the Federation of Nepal Journalists (FNJ) and Head of the Digital Media Department, with over over 10 years of journalism. He is currently a Chief Editor of prominent regional online news portal, *batkhal.com*, and a Correspondent of *Nagarik National Daily*.



Paul Soriano
Paul Soriano joined the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) in 2013 and has been active in many of the organization's programs and activities, working as a researcher for the *Ethical Guide for Filipino Journalists*. He now serves as the Secretary-General of the NUJP's Metro Manila chapter and as the NUJP's project manager for media safety, ethical journalism, and legal safety for journalists and media workers, alongside his work as a journalist and producer.



Ezra Sihite
Ezra Sihite is a member of *Alansi Journalis Independen (AJI)* and is a member of *AJI Indonesia's Labor Division*. She has contributed to AJI programs designed to increase union membership and capacity and worked as an editor for a joint *AJI-International Labor Organization* publication. Ezra has worked as a journalist in Indonesia for over 10 years and is currently an editor at *Viva.co.id*, a national online news outlet.



Samim Sultana Ahmed
The news editor of *Dainik Agradoot*, Samim Sultana Ahmed is the first woman president of the *Journalists Union of Assam (JUA)* and a member of the *Indian Journalists Union's (IJU) Gender Council*. Samim has previously attended IFJ conferences and events and was elected as a Steering Committee member of IFJ's Gender Council for a second term.



Nakul Aryal
Nakul Aryal is the Vice President of the *Nepal Press Union (NPU)* and a working journalist. He currently works as a News Coordinator for *NepalPress.com*. Nakul is an advocate for democracy, press freedom and freedom of expression. He has also worked as a central member of the *Federation of Nepal Journalists (FNJ)* in the past.



Bimo Fundrika
An executive committee member since 2017, Bimo Fundrika is currently the Coordinator for the Media and Creative Industry Workers Union for Democracy (SINDIKAS)'s Advocacy Division. Bimo has been involved with the *Freedom Expression Division of Southeast Asia Freedom of Expression Network (SafeNet)* and has utilized digital organizing to advocate for the interests of workers in the policy and industrial relations spheres. Bimo currently works as a journalist and editor for *Siam.com*.



Sabookh Syed
Sabookh Syed is the Chairman of the *Digital Media Alliance of Pakistan (DGMAP)*, a formal association of independent online news outlets and journalism platforms in Pakistan. Sabookh is a published academic and has been involved with international research projects and social media training works across Pakistan. Sabookh has also worked for several nationally distributed news outlets.

The Region

Digital organising is the future for unions, using technology to create meaningful and authentic outreach to empower workers. From November 1-3, the IFJ and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) ran an intensive digital bootcamp, *FUTURE POWER 2022: Digital Organising for Stronger Unions*, in Nepal, bringing together young leaders from across

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News Guild – Communications Workers of America (TNG-CWA), participants from Indonesia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Maldives, India, Nepal and the Philippines learnt to effectively use both digital and offline skills, platforms and tools to expand union membership, organise freelancers and create personal relationships through virtual outreach and conversation. Using the knowledge gained across the three-day program, the young union leaders developed digital organising action plans to put into practice within their unions. The IFJ thanks TNG-CWA and Kevin for his constant professionalism, passion, and union camaraderie throughout the training, as well as Hovig Melkonian, Pratima Bhatta and Pooja Kapahi from UNI Global Union for sharing their expertise in digital organising. The program would not have been possible without the continued collaboration and support of the FES team in Nepal, as well as Norsk Journalistlag, Union to Union and the National Endowment for Democracy.

National Issues

Afghanistan: Afghan journalists temporarily residing in Pakistan have been faced with a lack of job opportunities and an uncertain future. Many journalists who fled Taliban rule must live on temporary or family visas and face poor job prospects. Although Pakistan's Ministry of Interior declared a visa amnesty until December 31 2022, any stay into the new year could leave Afghan journalists at risk of facing legal consequences.

Bhutan: On November 4, the Journalists' Association of Bhutan held its "Occasional Panel", centred around the theme 'She Leads Here, She Leads Now'. The panel featured speakers from a collection of feminist, LGBTQIA+ and social advocacy groups, including Global Shapers Thimphu Hub, QUEER Voices of Bhutan and the Bhutan Network for Empowering Women. The workshop was organised with support from Canada in Bhutan.

Maldives: The Maldives Journalists Association (MJA) has called on the Maldivian government, media and other stakeholders to adopt six measures to address impunity in crimes against journalists and media workers. On November 2, The MJA asked the government to condemn violence and

Bangladesh: In response to a petition filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) against a National Daily journalist, the High Court ruled on October 23 that journalists should not be pressured to betray the confidentiality of their sources. The High Court stated that journalists are free to collect information from anywhere and recommended that issues with reportage should first be settled through the Press Council.

India: On November 3, Pune state police arrested five people accused of involvement in the assault and attempted shooting of journalist Ritvik Jeevan Mulik. Following a disagreement, the alleged perpetrators attacked Mulik and two others, Ganesh Jadhav and Atul Bholashankar, and have been charged with 13 offences, including attempted murder, robbery and extortion, among others.

Nepal: On November 5, The Election Commission of Nepal (ECN) directed online news outlet Setopati to delete an article regarding former Attorney General Agni Prasad Kharel's son. The November 4 article alleged Kharel's son still held Nepalese citizenship despite active service in the US army. The ECN revoked its decision following

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investigations into attacks. The MJA also asked the government to advocate for the safety and rights of journalists, and provide support for victims of violence and harassment.

Pakistan: Mariam Shaikh, press counsellor for the Pakistani mission to the United Nations, asked the United Nations General Assembly's Fourth Committee for international cooperation to counter disinformation. Shaikh said the trend of hate speech, discrimination and violence against Muslims in several parts of the world is increasing and urged the United Nations Department of Global Communication to initiate necessary measures to counter Islamophobia in media.

Sri Lanka: Amid increasing media rights violations, The Free Media Movement (FMM), the Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association (SLWJA) and The Federation of Media Employees Trade unions (FMETU) organised awareness campaigns to commemorate the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists on November 2. The FMM conducted a leaflet campaign across Sri Lanka, while the FMETU and SLWJA held online advocacy workshops.

Featured Action

Nepal: On October 31, the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) conducted a digital journalism training session in partnership with the IFJ and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) Nepal. The sessions aimed to impart digital journalism skills and knowledge to young and women journalists, with the 25 participants learning tools for cybersecurity and discerning fake news.

Maldives: The Maldives Journalists Association (MJA) is conducting a survey to gather information on its membership, identify relevant issues, collect information on gender and working conditions, and identify areas for improvement. The MJA plans to complete the survey by December 2, 2022. This month, the MJA has also expanded its internal operations, with a new development committee, program and organising committee, and communications committee.

India: From October 29, National Union of Journalists-India (NUJ-I) President Mr Ras Bihari, Vice President Shiva Kumar and IFJ National Coordinator Indrani Sarka campaigned for press freedom, journalist rights, safety and security in Hyderabad and Vijaywada. During a three-day campaign, NUJ-I leadership advocated for a UN Convention for the protection and independence of journalists and other media professionals.

Pakistan: The Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) organised nationwide demonstrations demanding an international investigation into the death of ARY News anchor and senior journalist Arshad Sharif, who was killed by police in Kenya on October 23. PFUJ President GM Jamali and Secretary General Rana Azeem said they held grave concerns over Sharif's killing and demanded the authorities conduct a transparent and comprehensive investigation.

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Sri Lanka has an unfortunate history of impunity for crimes against journalists and media workers. Media and press freedom organisations in Sri Lanka should take advantage of international action and social momentum to challenge impunity, [writes](#) Ruki Fernando.

IFJ At Work:

IFJ hosts Media Rights Monitoring training: The IFJ hosted an online Media Rights Monitoring training session on October 18, to promote strong monitoring, verification and advocacy from its affiliates across the Asia-Pacific. The session featured speakers from Pakistan's Freedom Network and the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AIJ) Indonesia, who shared best practice examples to empower affiliates and bolster media rights monitoring practices.

Individualland and IFJ launch report on 'Gender Disparity in Pakistan Media: In Islamabad on November 9, Individualland and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) [launched](#) a new report titled 'Gender Disparity in Pakistan Media Survey Report -2022'. The report maps gender disparities within Pakistan's media sector and explores the status of women journalists, their working conditions and other considerations. The research report [revealed](#) that many women working in Pakistan's media face poor working conditions and unequal opportunities. The report found union membership and knowledge are lacking, and women occupy an inadequate number of leadership positions.

From the media

Is India's Free Press In Its Final Throes? - from [Outlook](#)

Justice for slain journalist couple still remains a far cry - from [NewAge](#)

Most of world's female journalists faced online violence: Study- from [The Daily Star](#)

Press freedom shrinks: Dutch ambassador- from [NewAge](#)

Trolling, Abuse, Harassment: What Press Freedom Looks Like For Women Journalists In India - from [Outlook](#)

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