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...
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 (SAMSIN), 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

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 the region.
Asia to strengthen media unions and hone digital organising strategies for the new age. Under the guidance of facilitator Kevin Brokt, Senior Campaign Lead with IFJ affiliate The 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
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.
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 (AJI) 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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Apply for The Nieman Visiting Fellowship

Submit your entry for #CrisesofInequality Media Contest organized by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD)

Apply for ENGAGE-Asia programme 2023 for trade unionists and labour activists

Apply for Media Workshop on Covering India's Net Zero Transition
Apply for TRACE Prize for Investigative Reporting: Uncovering Commercial Bribery
Read Gender Disparity in Pakistan Media report-2022

Apply for The J. Anthony Lukas Prize Project Awards

Apply for John S. Knight Journalism Fellowships

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IFJ Asia-Pacific

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