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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 (SAMSN)



On November 25, the IFJ marked 16 days of action against gender violence. Credit: IFJ

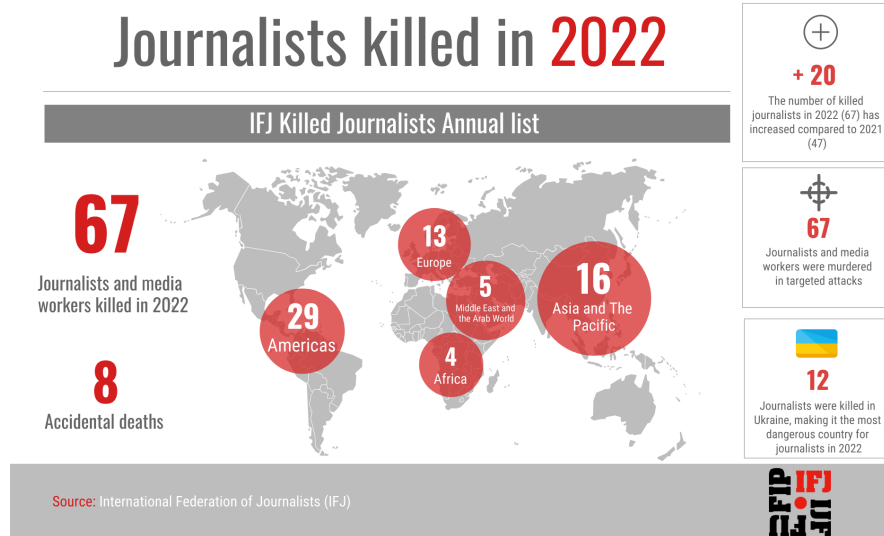
In Focus

IFJ marks 15 days of action against gendered violence: Across South Asia, women journalists face online trolling, harassment and abuse, which can escalate into threats of sexual and physical assault. According to the IFJ's [South Asia Press Freedom Report 2021-2022](#), women journalists in India and Sri Lanka belonging to marginalised communities face particular abuse while reporting in the field. In Pakistan, women journalists are similarly [vulnerable](#) to online harassment and abuse including trolling, cyber-bullying, intimidation and doxing, with a new [report](#) from IFJ and Individualland finding over 40 per cent of surveyed respondents had suffered sexual harassment throughout their careers. A new report by the Maldives Journalists Association (MJA) [reveals](#) a similar story, reporting that 24 per cent of women journalists had faced sexual harassment in their line of work and 19 per cent had experienced gender-based discrimination.

Solidarity Network (SAMSN) joined the United Nations' annual campaign against gendered violence. Across the region, SAMSN members organised meetings, regional advocacy, and social media campaigns to unsettle sexist threats and abuse. In Nepal, the Federation of Nepali Journalists and the Nepal Press Union organised discussions to raise awareness of gendered violence online and in newsrooms and to address discrimination faced by women in the workplace. On December 2, the MJA launched #Baaruveri, an advocacy campaign sharing the lived experiences of women journalists, featuring the inauguration of a gender council and a forum on empowering women journalists. In Sri Lanka, the Federation of Media Employees Trade Unions participated in a discussion with several media organisations on gender and media issues across the country.

In this bulletin:

- **IFJ releases killed and jailed list 2022**
- **Bangladesh Press Council to create journalists' online database**
- **Indian journalist Khalid Gul released**
- **Maldives journalists launch gender campaign**
- **IFJ sends a letter to the Maldivian Minister of Economic Development**



The Region

IFJ launches 2022 killed and jailed list: The IFJ has published its annual list of journalists killed and jailed worldwide. Of the sixty-seven journalists killed globally, eleven were from South Asia, with six from Pakistan, two from India and three from Bangladesh. In Pakistan, journalists Muhammad Younis, Zia-Ur-Rehman Farooqi, Hasnain Shah, and Iftikhar Ahmed were all victims of gun violence, while Channel 5 journalist Sadaf Naeem was crushed beneath a container while covering a political rally in Lahore on November 1. In an ongoing case, a Pakistani investigation into the killing of senior journalist Arshad Sharif by Kenyan General Service Unit (GSU) officers found his death was planned, and may have involved 'transnational characters'. Afghanistan saw a dramatic reduction in killings of journalists and media workers; in 2021 the nation recorded nine deaths while recording zero in 2022. In Bangladesh, the killers of journalists Hasibur Rahman Rubel, Abdul Bari and Mohiuddin Sarkar Nayem have escaped with total impunity, as law enforcement and legal systems fail to hold the perpetrators of their murders to account. In India, Odisha journalist Rohit Biswal was killed in an explosion, allegedly

National Issues

Afghanistan: On December 9, Balkh Information and Cultural Affairs Department executive Mohammad Younis Rashid announced further restrictions for Afghanistan's media. Speaking at a gathering of media and Taliban representatives in Balkh, Rashid announced the intention of the Taliban to prepare a plan dictating an 'appropriate' direction for media outlets. Journalists and the media community have lamented the lack of action supporting Afghanistan's collapsing media industry.

Bhutan: A delegation of Bhutanese journalists, including Journalists Association of Bhutan (JAB) president Rinzin Wangchuk, met with the president of the Indian Chapter of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) journalists forum, Anirudha Sudhansu, on November 23. In their discussion, JAB and SAARC journalists forum leadership discussed issues facing media communities across South Asia, future conferences, and meeting opportunities.

Maldives: The Maldives Journalists Association (MJA) launched a research report on December 10 titled 'Gender Equality in Maldives Media', highlighting gender disparity in the media industry and exposing widespread mistreatment and sexual harassment faced by women journalists in media houses. Speaking at the launch event, State Minister Zifleena Hassan acknowledged the efforts and initiatives of the MJA and emphasised the importance of establishing gender parity in the media.

Sri Lanka: In contrast to international

Bangladesh: The Bangladesh Press Council is preparing to institute an online database of journalists to combat the spread of misinformation and 'fake news'. Journalists willing to be registered will require an undergraduate degree or must have been in the profession for a minimum of five years. Once registered, journalists will be issued an identity card, allowing their participation in council-run workshops, training sessions and events.

India: Journalist Khalid Gul has been granted bail by a court in the Anantnag district of Jammu and Kashmir following his December 6 arrest. Local media reported that police released the Greater Kashmir journalist from custody hours after the court's order on December 7. In November, Gul's residence was raided by police as part of a police investigation into online threats to journalists.

Nepal: A survey conducted by the Media Advocacy Group (MAG) revealed that 89 per cent of women journalists have faced online violence in their careers. The survey involved 281 women in journalism, with 53% of women reporting trolling and harassment relating to their careers, and 21.4% of women reporting an escalation of online abuse into threats and physical attacks. The majority of respondents reported facing online violence through Facebook messenger, with Twitter, WhatsApp and Viber all significant risks following in probability.

Pakistan: BOL news, facing intense pressure from Pakistan's government, issued a press release on November 22 reiterating its commitment to

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the island, Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) MP Kapila Athukorala called for greater social media censorship on November 25. Addressing Sri Lanka's Parliament, Athukorala alleged that social media accounts are being used as a tool to promote dissent and discredit individuals. Social media platforms in Sri Lanka have faced restrictions through 2022, often coinciding with civil unrest.

BOL news "still upholds true journalistic norms in Pakistan". On September 5, the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) blocked the transmission of BOL News and BOL Entertainment, revoking the broadcasting license of BOL's parent company. According to the network, BOL News journalists and staff have experienced intimidation in personal and professional settings since.



FMETU General Secretary Dharmasiri Lankapeli (centre) and Deputy General Secretary Indira Nawagamuwa (left) meet with Sri Lanka's Minister of Labour and Foreign Employment (right) on November 22, 2022. Credit: FMETU

Featured Action

Sri Lanka: A new study by the Federation of Media Employees Trade Unions (FMETU) has revealed deplorable conditions for journalists across Sri Lanka. The study, produced under the IFJ and Union to Union global project 'Union Renewal for Stronger Media' found that 77 per cent of Sri Lankan journalists suffer from job insecurity, while 16.4 per cent had suffered gendered violence. The survey also revealed that most journalists working in print, electronic and digital media institutions were not entitled to salary increments, social security, or other benefits enjoyed by workers across Sri Lanka. The survey's results were presented at a December 1 press conference and presented to Sri Lanka's Minister of Labour and Foreign Employment on November 22.

India: IFJ's Indian affiliates, the National Union of Journalists - India (NUJ-I) and the Indian Journalists Union (IJU) observed National Press Day on November 16, organising various programs to fight for a high-quality, independent press. Ras Bihari, President of NUJ-I, demanded the formation of a media council, a National Media Commission, and the creation of

IFJ Blog

Abuse in the workplace continues for journalists and media workers in India, with women journalists facing sexism and harassment. Senior journalist Indrani Sarkar describes her experiences navigating India's media industry, and the struggles she has had to endure to exist as a critical and independent journalist [here](#).

IFJ At Work:

IFJ sends letter to Maldivian Minister: On December 1, the IFJ sent a letter to Maldives Minister of Economic Development, Fayyaz Ismail, regarding the working draft of a proposed Industrial Relations Bill. In the letter, the IFJ raised concerns over the lack of consultation with workers or workers' associations throughout the drafting of the bill and the disregard for previously proposed legislation supported by the International Labour Organisation.

Release of Pakistan Media Labour Rights Bulletin: The IFJ [launched](#) its third quarterly bulletin on media labour rights developments and campaigns for decent work in Pakistan on November 30. The bulletin documents industry developments, progress on labour rights reform action in Sindh, the deaths of journalists Arshad Sharif and Sadaf Naeem, and an analysis of the launch and findings of the joint IFJ-Individualland '[Gender Disparity in Pakistan Media Survey Report 2022](#)'. The bulletin is one of several initiatives launched with the support of the National Endowment for Democracy.

IFJ conducts Gender Equality and Safety Training: The IFJ conducted a two-day Gender Equality & Safety Workshop in partnership with the Peshawar Press Club on November 18-19, 2022. The workshop focused on harassment in the workplace and gave advice and strategies to women journalists. The training was facilitated and conducted by co-trainer Farzana Ali and Lubna Jerar Naqvi, IFJ's Pakistan Gender Coordinator.

From the media

The fallacy of freedom of thought? - from [Minute Mirror](#)

Freedom of Expression: Dimensions - from [Daily Times](#)

Dealing With Disinformation - from [The Rising Nepal](#)

Indian media stoke religious tension over brutal murder instead of focusing on femicide - from [France24](#)

Choking the lifeblood of democracy -from [The Daily Star](#)

In India, warnings that independent news media are teetering on a precipice - from [AOL](#)

DSA and rise of ex-pat media - from [New Age](#)

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