

[View this email in your browser](#)

Defending Rights of Journalists &  
Freedom of Expression in South Asia



February 2023

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



SLWJA members commemorate dead and disappeared journalists at a Black January Protest on January 27, 2023.

Credit: SLWJA

## In Focus

**Killed and Disappeared journalists remembered through Black January:** Across Sri Lanka, journalists, press freedom advocates and human rights organisations held Black January commemorations, remembering killed, assaulted, and disappeared journalists across the country. Through annual demonstrations, protestors call on Sri Lankan authorities to combat impunity by launching investigations into crimes against journalists. The Sri Lanka Working Journalist Association (SLWJA) organised a protest in Colombo's Viharamahadevi Park, calling on the government to investigate crimes against journalists and stressing the important role independent media plays in democracy. The Free Media Movement held a candlelight vigil in Borella, with speakers and participation from journalists, civil rights activists, and press freedom organisations. Other demonstrations occurred throughout the country. 'Black January' has long been observed, as Sri Lankan officials fail to properly investigate and charge perpetrators of violence against journalists.

The holiday has been marked due to the high frequency of crimes against journalists occurring in January, especially through Sri Lanka's civil war. In early January 2009, the Sirasa studio suffered a series of attacks, facing petrol bombs, stalking, and the destruction of equipment following an invasion of the media outlet. On January 8, *Sunday Leader* newspaper editor and senior journalist Lasantha Wickrematunge was killed. Despite international and domestic pressure to investigate his case, inaction

language newspaper *Rivira*, and Lal Hemantha Mawalage, a news producer at state-run television station *Rupavahini*, were attacked on January 30, 2011, and January 23, 2008, respectively.

#### In this bulletin:

- Misinformation prevalent in South Asia
- Bangladesh government orders closure of 191 websites
- Probe launched into death of Indian journalist Shashikant Waishe
- Sri Lankan state minister modelling future media policy on China, Singapore
- IFJ runs regional fact-checking forum
- IFJ-NED Project Extended to 2025

## The Region

**Misinformation and efforts against it:** In recent years, the unintentional or purposeful spreading of misleading or false information has become increasingly prevalent across South Asia. According to researchers from Nepal, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, commissioned under an EU-funded IFJ project, misinformation and disinformation are increasingly seen in coverage of politics, health, conflict, religion and disasters. In Nepal, doctored images, fake screenshots, and out-of-context 'shallow-fake' videos were significant sources of misinformation and disinformation during Nepal's recent local and parliament and provincial elections. In 2019, fake news on Facebook led to several communal clashes in Bangladesh. During the 2022 Sri Lanka protests, demonstrators were inaccurately portrayed as 'naïve' and 'unserious', obscuring the legitimate concerns and complaints directed at the then Rajapaksa government. An ongoing economic crisis and political instability further served to spread disinformation and misinformation in Sri Lanka, weakening the spread of accurate and unbiased news throughout the island. Numerous initiatives have been founded to combat misleading or inaccurate social media posts, political statements, and news articles. In India, FactChecker, the nation's first fact-checking organisation was launched in February 2014 ahead of the parliamentary elections. Currently, 27 fact-checking organisations are active in India, with over 17 associated with the International Fact-Checking Network (ICFN). In Nepal, organisations like South Asia Check, Nepal Fact Check, and popular blogs like My Sansar and Nepal Check all serve a valuable role in the country's information environment. In Sri Lanka, FactCheck.lk was launched in 2018, while other fact-checking initiatives like Watchdog, Citizen Fact Check, Fact Seeker, Fact Crescendo Sri Lanka and AFP Sri Lanka help fight disinformation.



Minister of Communications and Information Technology Rekha Sharma in a photo with FNJ representatives on February 6, 2023. Credit: FNJ

Subscribe	Past Issues	Translate ▼	RSS
<p><b>Afghanistan:</b> Foreign journalist Mortaza Behboudi, who was <u>arrested</u> on 7 January in Kabul, has been charged with “espionage”. The French-Afghani photojournalist was arrested by the Taliban while trying to obtain a media work permit. Behboudi has been <u>awarded</u> two Bayeux Prizes and a Varenne award for the national daily press and has been recognized for his coverage of Afghanistan before and after the Taliban’s ascension in August 2021.</p>		<p><b>Bhutan:</b> The Prime Minister of Bhutan has <u>said</u> that the mandatory insertion of a one-page Dzongkha-language section in every private English newspaper has failed to effectively promote and develop the Dzongkha language in the country. In the wake of this news, the Prime Minister has announced that the government would support the only private Dzongkha-language newspaper, Kuensel, to support quality local journalism.</p>	
<p><b>Bangladesh:</b> The Bangladesh government has <u>ordered</u> the closure of 191 websites accused of publishing “anti-state news”. Information Minister Muhammad Hasan Mahmud has accused the websites of ‘spreading confusion among the public’. The Bangladeshi government has <u>blocked</u> websites using powers granted under the draconian Digital Security Act before, notably ahead of the country’s 2018 national elections. The move has been <u>criticised</u> by human rights organisations and freedom of information advocates.</p>		<p><b>India:</b> The Maharashtra state government <u>announced</u> the formation of a Special Investigative Team (SIT) on February 11 to probe the death of journalist Shashikant Warishe, who was killed on February 7. The investigation is being pushed by Devendra Fadnavis, an opposition politician who holds the home department portfolio. The <i>Mahanagari Times</i> journalist, <u>died</u> a day after being deliberately struck by a vehicle, allegedly driven by local land broker Pandharinath Amberkar, against whom the journalists had criticised as conducting criminal activity.</p>	
<p><b>Maldives:</b> The Maldives Journalists Association (MJA) <u>organised</u> and held its first training session program entitled ‘Think Like a Journalist’ on February 8. The session was delivered by senior journalist Alan Geere and was participated by university students and working journalists. During the session, Geere covered several ethical and practical considerations of journalism.</p>		<p><b>Nepal:</b> Media stakeholders, including the Freedom Forum, the National Federation of Right To Information, the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), and the Nepal Press Union have expressed their concerns over a decision by Chief Secretary Shanker Das Bairagi’s decision to classify 87 categories of policy-level information. In an official statement released on January 29, FNJ General Secretary Roshan Puri has <u>argued</u> that the government’s new classification system is against the spirit of the Right To Information.</p>	
<p><b>Sri Lanka:</b> Sri Lankan State Minister of Mass Media, Shantha Bandara <u>expressed</u> his intention to pursue a domestic media policy in line with Chinese and Singaporean models. Citing concerns over ‘social disturbances’, the minister announced his government’s intention to establish greater regulations on social media users and platforms. President Ranil Wickremesinghe has previously</p>		<p><b>Pakistan:</b> Pakistan <u>unblocked</u> Wikipedia on February 7, two days after officials suspended the services of the online encyclopedia for hosting ‘blasphemous sentiments’. The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA)</p>	

<a href="#">Subscribe</a>	<a href="#">Past Issues</a>	<a href="#">Translate ▼</a>	<a href="#">RSS</a>
---------------------------	-----------------------------	-----------------------------	---------------------

legislation; both moves have been denounced by media rights organisations and press freedom advocates.

remove offensive, ye content. The unblock order was issued by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif following consultation with a three-member ministerial committee.

## Featured Action

**Nepal:** Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) met with the newly appointed Minister of Communications and Information Technology, Rekha Sharma on February 6 to discuss current issues in the Nepali media. During the discussion, FNJ president Bipul Pokharel, and other FNJ representatives urged Sharma to fulfil obligations under existing media-related legislation and to include greater stakeholder input.

**Bhutan:** On February 1, the Journalists Association of Bhutan launched a new program promoting solutions journalism. The training program has been established with support from the UNDP Bhutan, Bhutan's Department of Tourism Bhutan, and the Solutions Journalism Network (SJN). As part of the program, Bhutanese journalists will aim to engage in the evidence-based mode of reporting focusing on social issues as advocated for by the SJN.

**India:** The Indian Journalists Union launched its first meeting with the Gender Council of the Tripura Journalists Union (TJU) on February 11 to discuss the low percentage of women working in journalism and provide support to change the current situation. TJU President Sajjad Ali noted that there is a need to understand existing reasons behind sexism and gendered violence to challenge gender inequality and empower women in journalism. As part of the meeting goals, TJU encourages holding workshops to support young female journalists.

## IFJ Blog

The increased use of artificial intelligence (AI) in journalism poses an unprecedented challenge for journalists in Pakistan. The potential of ChatGPT to spread misinformation and disinformation has raised concerns over the truth and reliability of AI-generated articles, and the role they may play in Pakistan's media, writes Lubna Jerar Naqvi.





A screenshot from the IFJ fact checking workshop on February 11. The forum featured speakers from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and Sri Lanka, and had 52 participants. Credit: Supplied.

## IFJ At Work:

**IFJ runs regional Fact-Checking workshop:** The Maldives Journalists Association and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), with support from the European Commission, conducted an 'Asia-Pacific Fact Checking Forum' on February 11. The forum was hosted by Ujjwal Acharya and featured speakers from Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka. It aimed to foster international solidarity and collaboration in fact-checking efforts, sharing best-practices and encouraging international solidarity and collaboration. The forum had 52 participants from 17 South-East and South Asian Unions.

**IFJ launches final killed and detained list for 2022:** The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) published its print Killed and Jailed report, detailing all journalists and media staff killed and detained in 2022. The IFJ's 32nd report details 68 killings of media professionals, including targeted and accidental deaths. The report mentioned that a total of 10 journalists were killed in 2022 in South Asia including 3 journalists from Bangladesh, 2 from India and 5 from Pakistan.

**IFJ-NED Project Extended to 2025:** From February 1, 2023, the IFJ will launch a new project with the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) titled 'Promoting Labor Rights, Gender Equality and Freedom of Association in Pakistan's Media'. The project will continue the IFJ's work in Pakistan since 2019 and will aim to strengthen the capacity of journalists to advocate for labour and professional rights and empower women in media through increased involvement in unions and press clubs and an increased focus on gender issues. The project will run from 2023 to 2025.

## From the media

Why Maharashtra journalist's murder reflects poorly on status of press freedom in India - from [news laundry](#)

A must-read on digital journalism - from [The Financial Express](#)

Tavleen Singh writes: Modi's futile battle with the media - from [The Indian Express](#)

[Subscribe](#)[Past Issues](#)[Translate ▼](#)[RSS](#)

---

**Post**

---

Rabi Lamichhane and pandora's box of Nepali media - from [Nepal Live Today](#)

---

Afghan Radio Squeezed by Economic, Political Pressures - from [Voice of America](#)

---

Social media is no saviour of journalism - from [The Daily Star](#)

---

Violence against journalists must stop - from [New Age](#)

---

## TAKE ACTION!

---

**Submit your entry** for [SEJ's 22nd annual Awards for Reporting on the Environment](#)

---

**Apply** for [Fellowships for reporting on conflict, violence](#)

---

**Apply** for the [Knight Media Forum](#)

---

**Submit a proposal** on [Reports on India's Progress Towards Net Zero Through a Just Energy Transition](#)

---

**Register for the** [International Symposium on Online Journalism](#)

---

**Apply** to join [Poynter's virtual classroom](#)

---

**Apply** for the [Knight-Bagehot Fellowship in Economics and Business Journalism in Columbia University](#)

---

**Download the** [Gender Diversity Research Report](#) by IL and IFJ

---

**Apply** for the [2023 Global Investigative Journalism Conference](#)

---

**Donate** to the [IFJ Safety Fund](#)

---

**Browse** [Journalists and the China Story - IFJ's China Portal](#)

---

**In Solidarity,  
IFJ Asia-Pacific**

[Stay updated with IFJ - Subscribe](#)

---

International Federation of Journalists  
Asia-Pacific Regional Office (APRO)  
245 Chalmers Street  
Redfern, NSW, 2016  
Australia

Contact IFJ Asia-Pacific:  
[www.ifj.org/regions/asia-pacific](http://www.ifj.org/regions/asia-pacific)

[Subscribe](#)[Past Issues](#)[Translate ▼](#)[RSS](#)

This email was sent to [ifj.coordinator@ifj-asia.org](mailto:ifj.coordinator@ifj-asia.org)

[why did I get this?](#) [unsubscribe from this list](#) [update subscription preferences](#)

International Federation of Journalists · Rue de la Loi 155, City of Brussels, Belgium · City of Brussels 1040 · Belgium