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Defending Rights of Journalists &
Freedom of Expression in South Asia

ASIA BULLETIN

September 2023

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



Imprisoned journalist Aasif Sultan is brought into custody outside a Srinagar court for reporting on slain Kashmiri militant Burhan Wani in 2018. Credit: X (Twitter)

In Focus

BBC report draws official ire in J&K: On September 1, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) published an article decrying attacks on press freedom in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) since 2019, including travel bans, threats, intimidation, and prolonged detentions of journalists Aasif Sultan, Fahad Shah, Sajad Gul, and Irfan Mehraj. Barely a day after the article's publication, J&K police threatened legal action against the BBC, claiming the article had unfairly criticised state law enforcement and disrespected anti-terrorism efforts. The BBC report, titled 'Any story could be your last' - India's crackdown on Kashmir press', was produced following a year of research, in which over 20 Kashmiri journalists were interviewed or engaged. In February, Indian authorities blocked the airing of a BBC documentary critical of Prime Minister and former Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi's role in the 2002 Gujarat riots, in which at least one thousand people lost their lives in communal violence. Weeks after the government order, the Indian tax authorities instituted an official inquiry in the BBC's Indian offices.



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 - **JAB holds Annual Journalism awards in Bhutan**
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The Region

Across South Asia, journalists continue to face spurious charges, arrests, and detentions from both state authorities and private actors. In Pakistan's northern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region, journalist Fayaz Zafar was held in custody overnight on August 31 for allegedly 'exploiting freedom of speech', while fellow Swat Valley journalist Amjad Ali Sahaab had charges registered against him on September 2 after publishing content critical of the government on social media. In India, Kashmiri journalist Asif Sultan completed five years in jail on August 27, imprisoned alongside three other media workers in Kashmir alone. Two Bangladeshi reporters, Sharifuzzaman Pintu and Arifuzzaman Tuhin, were ordered to appear in court by August 27 in relation to a defamation case registered in a Cox's Bazar court. In Afghanistan, the IFJ could verify the arrest and release of nine members of the media by the Taliban in August and September, with journalists arbitrarily held from one night to several weeks. French-national Mortaza Behboudi, arrested on January 7, remains in custody.

National Issues

Afghanistan: Since the Taliban's takeover in August 2021, at least seven media outlets in Afghanistan's eastern Paktia province have closed, primarily due to financial strain. Both local and international media outlets have faced increasing scrutiny over the past two years, with hundreds of outlets shuttering amidst a withdrawal of international backers, and difficulties navigating Taliban restrictions. In August, the IFJ documented the arrest and release of nine journalists, with a majority of arrests suspected to be in relation to their perceived affiliation to banned international publications.

Bhutan: The Journalists' Association of Bhutan held its seventh Annual Journalism Awards on August 28, celebrating excellence in Bhutan's media sector. The event, sponsored by a range of NGOs and for-profit enterprises, presented selected nominees with awards across a variety of categories, including investigative journalism, photojournalism, sports journalism, documentary, and others.

Maldives: In a joint statement, the Maldives Journalists' Association (MJA) and the IFJ called on the Maldivian media community to maintain professional standards ahead of historic elections beginning on September 9. Media workers were urged to ensure that information is

Bangladesh: Members of notorious religious group Rajarbah Darbar Sharif have threatened, harassed, and intimidated at least two journalists reporting on the group's alleged criminal conduct. Journalist Fara Hossain has faced online attacks, intimidation, and harassment after preparing and publishing a series of articles between August 23-24 detailing the group's reported criminal activity. On August 30, the IFJ and 18 other press freedom organisations sent a letter in solidarity with fellow Rajarbah Darbar Sharif victim Adhora Yeasmean, who has faced an ongoing case in relation to her reporting on the group under the country's Digital Security Act.

India: Amid ongoing unrest in India's eastern state of Manipur, police filed a First Information Report (FIR) against four journalists associated with the Editors Guild of India (EGI) on September 4, following the publication of a report analysing ongoing unrest in the region. Chief Minister N. Biren Singh alleged that the report would 'provoke clashes' and continued to label the report 'highly condemnable'. The IFJ has joined the EGI in calling for the withdrawal of the intimidatory charges.

Nepal: Asian journalists attending the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) Media Leaders Academy visited Nepal in early

MJA further called on journalists to ensure that their coverage did not interfere with democratic processes, including anonymity in ballot casting.

Pakistan: Former Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) lawmaker Shazia Atta Marri has pursued legal action against Public News reporter Harmeet Singh, accusing the journalist of defamation after he allegedly spread false information related to an alleged government raid on Marri's property. Despite issuing a public apology, Singh has since been fired, and has reported having his YouTube channel blocked.

Journalism Network, and visiting the offices of Nepal Republic Media. The KAS, based in Singapore, states that its objective is to strengthen investigative journalism in the region.

Sri Lanka: Ven. Galagoda Aththe Gnasaara Thera, General Secretary of the far-right Buddhist-Nationalist party Bodu Bala Sena, has pled guilty in a case accusing him and several others of trespassing and obstructing a press conference held at Colombo's Nippon Hotel in April 2014. Thera and seven other accused were ordered to pay fines of LKR 300,000 (approx. USD 925) and were warned to not repeat any similar offences.



Members of the IFJ's Sri Lankan affiliates FMETU, FMM, and SLWJA take part in capacity audit workshops with the IFJ in Colombo on September 13-14. Credit: IFJ

IFJ At Work

Sri Lankan unions build capacity under UTU program: IFJ met with members of its three Sri Lankan affiliates in Colombo on September 13 and 14 for a series of union capacity audit workshops under the first stage of IFJ's global Union to Union program. The Federation of Media Employees Trade Unions (FMETU), Free Media Movement (FMM), and Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association (SLWJA), all brought important ideas to reform and strengthen each union across a range of areas, from membership to the situation of press freedom in Sri Lanka, in a participatory process that will allow the development of national action plans for the coming years.

IFJ trains future leaders across Pakistan: The IFJ has conducted two successful trainings in Pakistan under its project 'Promoting Labor Rights, Gender Equality and Freedom of Association in Pakistan's Media', supported by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). On September 6-7, senior, mid-career, and young journalists from Lahore, Islamabad, Karachi, Hyderabad, and Quetta, came together for a leadership training in Karachi, led by IFJ Asia-

and Gender Equality and Safety Training in Islamabad from September 8-11, with twelve journalists in attendance, including the five coordinators of the Women's Media Forum Pakistan (WMFP). Through a highly interactive workshop, participants were given the tools and confidence to conduct their own trainings in their regions for women journalists in the future.

IFJ Blog

Do journalists deserve legal protection beyond that granted to the general population? For many of us, the instinctive answer is “no”. It is a matter of professional pride and identification with our audience that we do our work by graft and guile, not privileges withheld from others. There are aspects of reporting, however, that make it wholly unlike other occupations. Plenty of jobs involve exposure to accidental injury – in many cases, unacceptably so. Journalism, however, is the only civilian occupation where significant numbers lose their lives as a result of systematic and deliberate acts, [writes](#) IFJ Deputy General Secretary Tim Dawson.



IFJ staff, trainers and participants from across Pakistan take part in leadership, gender equity and safety, and training of trainers workshops in Karachi and Islamabad in September. Credit: IFJ

Featured Actions

ANJU holds media student training: Journalists across Afghanistan have completed an Afghanistan National Journalists Union (ANJU)-led series of training sessions, designed to address safety measures, peace reporting, and digital media for graduating journalism and communications students. Capacity-building workshops for journalists have been under intense scrutiny in recent months, with the Nangarhar-based Radio Hamisha Bahar forced to [shutter](#) after holding a mixed-gender journalism course in August.

JAB appoints new chair: The Journalists' Association of Bhutan (JAB) [appointed](#) a new chair, Ashok Tirwa, on September 5. The veteran journalist, currently working as chief editor of the Bhutan Broadcasting Service, will serve on the association's board of directors, to which JAB's secretariat is answerable.

Monitoring violations during Maldivian elections: Amid the first round of the Maldivian presidential elections on September 9, covered by hundreds of journalists and media monitors across the archipelago, the Maldives Journalists Association (MJA) continued to support journalists encountering harassment, restrictions, or other media violations through its media rights monitoring program. Journalists were encouraged to report any incidents to the team via a hotline or email to receive

From the media

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Kashmir should get its press freedom back – [NIKKEI ASIA](#)

G20 shows India's global power and press freedom concerns – [NBC News](#)

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

Contact IFJ Asia-Pacific:
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