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



November 2023

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



FNJ members, journalists, and supporters protest the illegal termination of 82 Kantipur Media Group employees outside their Kathmandu offices on October 18. Credit: Facebook

## In Focus

**FNJ labour rights fight continues:** The Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) has continued its campaign against labour rights violations at the Kantipur Media Group (KMG), calling on outlet management to abide by labour rights legislation and reinstate 82 journalists who were illegally terminated on the eve of Nepal's national festival, Dashain, from October 15. The dismissed journalists, who rejected the management's agreement, filed complaints about the irregular payment of salaries, lack of dismissal entitlements, and improper contract termination procedures. Employees received 'retirement letters' via email without a valid cause for dismissal, violating Nepal's Working Journalist Act and other labour laws. Nepal's Minimum Wages Fixation Committee (MWFC) expressed concern over labour rights violations, urging the media group to comply with the Working Journalist Act.

On October 16, the FNJ released its plans to protest outside the offices of Kantipur Media Group (KMG) for one hour every day, announcing the start of a daily one-hour protest action outside the KMG's offices the following day. The protest schedule was modified on November 6, to include daily two-hour sit-ins at the KMG premises, a 'search for an editor' event, digital campaigns, discussions with unions, correspondence with national and international bodies, and meetings with parliamentary committees to address labour issues. On November 9, a KMG staff member assaulted a protestor, with the FNJ calling on police to immediately investigate the incident. The second phase of the protest, initially scheduled for November 17, has been postponed for three days due to an earthquake in Jajarkot in Western Nepal.



#### In this bulletin:

- IFJ trains union leaders in Pakistan
- Apple warns Indian journalists over hacking risk
- FNJ continues to fight for exploited Kantipur staff
- IFJ launch survey of youth for Decent Work day
- Israel continues media suppression

## The Region

To mark the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists on November 2, the IFJ called for the enforcement of clear legislation to safeguard journalists and emphasized the need for a binding United Nations (UN) Convention to guarantee the safety and independence of media professionals. The IFJ urged global governments to condemn, investigate, and apprehend those responsible for the unpunished murders of journalists, including the murder of Pakistani journalist Arshad Sharif on October 23, 2022. In a video released on November 2, the IFJ and its global affiliates united to call on governments to end impunity. Despite the UN declaring an international day to end impunity a decade ago, a new report reveals that nearly 80 per cent of journalist killings worldwide between September 2013 and August 2023 remain unsolved. In September 2023, The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights reported that the lack of accountability remains a significant human rights issue in Sri Lanka. Despite numerous cases of violence, arrests, and harassment of journalists, there have been minimal convictions, and only a few cases have reached the prosecution stage.



People walk through buildings destroyed by Israeli bombing in Rafah in the southern Gaza strip on November 11, 2023. Credit: Said Khatib / AFP

## Gaza Media Update - November 2023

Since October 7, at least 39 journalists and media workers have been killed in Gaza, Israel, and Lebanon, with many more injured, missing or displaced following Israeli bombardments of the Gaza strip and Southern Lebanon. This month, Israeli authorities introduced new legislation to block or restrict news channels seen to damage 'national security', with Lebanese outlet Al-Mayadeen blocked on November 13. Palestinian and

The IFJ has been working closely with its affiliate, the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate (PJS), to provide material assistance to journalists in Gaza. The IFJ and the PJS [published](#) a safety advisory in English and Arabic for journalists, while the IFJ's Safety Fund has paid for medical kits, equipment battery packs, and direct financial assistance. Over 80 IFJ affiliates, including 13 affiliates from the Asia Pacific region, signed a joint letter calling for the Israeli Defence Forces to observe international law and safeguard the lives of journalists. Donate to the IFJ safety fund [here](#).

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## National Issues

**Afghanistan:** On November 2, the Afghanistan Journalists Center (AFJC) [called](#) on the Taliban to take decisive action in the prevention of impunity for crimes against journalists and media workers. Through its monitoring, the AFJC has recorded the deaths of 128 journalists since 2001, with those responsible being held accountable in less than ten per cent of cases. Members of the Taliban were responsible for at least 60 killings, more than any other party or organisation.

**Bhutan:** The Thimphu Press Club (TPC) [hosted](#) the inaugural Bhutan Monthly Dialogue on November 15. Led by Professor Divyansh Juneja from Chitkara University in India, the dialogue focused on the theme "AI in media and governance: opportunity and threats". The dialogue explored the transformative impact of artificial intelligence on news reporting, sharing, and consumption, as well as its influence on government decision-making.

**Maldives:** The Maldives recently [concluded](#) its fourth multi-party presidential election, marking a milestone in its democratic journey. The elected president, Mohamed Muizzu, affiliated with the People's National Congress (PNC) and the Progressive Party of Maldives (PPM), has ties to former President Yameen Abdul Gayoom, known for his three-decade-long authoritarian reign. While Muizzu's victory reflects public dissatisfaction with the incumbent administration, questions linger about his commitment to democratic norms, including press freedom.

**Bangladesh:** On October 28, approximately 30 journalists were [assaulted](#) while covering clashes between the police, supporters of the opposition Bangladeshi Nationalist Party (BNP), and supporters of the ruling Awami League Party-led coalition. Journalists faced [violence](#) from protestors and police, with their equipment damaged and even stolen. The [clashes](#) involved over 125,000 BNP supporters, [demanding](#) the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to allow for a free and fair election under an impartial government.

**India:** Several journalists and opposition political leaders were [notified](#) by Apple of potential state-sponsored attacks on their iPhones in late October. The alert, received by at least five journalists simultaneously, warns of an increased risk of remote compromise and unauthorised access to sensitive data, communications, and device components. The alert raises concerns given previous instances of spyware attacks on journalists, politicians, and activists in India. The government has requested Apple's cooperation in investigating the alleged state-sponsored attacks.

**Nepal:** In the 17 years since the end of Nepal's Civil War, impunity has [reigned](#) in the killings and disappearances of journalists. Out of 23 documented murder cases between 1996 and 2006, over 13 have yet to be investigated. The whereabouts of three disappeared journalists, with transitional justice mechanisms designed to address human rights violations during the conflict failing to conduct investigations for years at a time. Since 2012, Nepal has failed to

exposed military business affairs, was detained and questioned by Sri Lanka's Counter-Terrorism and Investigation Division for over four hours on November 1. The interrogation centred around a story published in 2020 concerning the birthday of Velupilai Prabhakaran, the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and the publication of a letter inviting an LTTE celebration on November 27. Jaffna Police have filed a case against him related to the incident.

**Pakistan:** Beginning on November 1, Pakistani authorities have deported at least 200,000 Afghan refugees, with a minimum of 200 Afghan journalists and media workers currently refugees in Pakistan at risk. Afghan journalist Nasima Rawnaq, who fled to Pakistan following the Taliban takeover of Kabul, has had her visa extension rejected for the second time without explanation. Rawnaq fears being considered "illegal" and risks arrest and deportation.



Participants and trainers from the IFJ's leadership training program in Islamabad, Multan, and Quetta. Credit: IFJ

## IFJ At Work

**IFJ bootcamp a regional success:** The IFJ, in partnership with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), held a successful intensive regional bootcamp in Karachi, Pakistan from October 21-23. Participants from Sri Lanka, Pakistan, the Maldives, and across the region participated in a three-day training program designed to enhance regional solidarity and build participant leadership, organising and negotiation capacities.

**Leadership trainings held across Pakistan:** Through November, the IFJ and the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) hosted a dynamic leadership training program for journalists in Islamabad, Multan, and Quetta. Each session was attended by at least 20 young journalists, with the sessions designed to develop young leaders within journalist unions. The participants learned how to build collaborative efforts, prioritise issues, and develop creative strategies and action plans to promote labour rights. The participants also worked together to design effective campaigns.

**WMFP discuss daycare centres & media:** The Women's Media Forum Pakistan (WMFP), an advocacy and discussion group for women in Pakistan's media sector, held a discussion on November 3, emphasising the need for childcare facilities in press clubs and media institutions. Participants, WMFP coordinators, and care expert Sofia Rahman discussed their experiences of parenthood, gender, and rights in the workplace in a session attended by over 90 participants.



Participants and trainers attend the IFJ-FES FUTURE POWER 2023 regional bootcamp in Karachi, Pakistan, from October 21-23. Credit: IFJ

## IFJ Blog

With a rise in the attacks, jailings, and killings of the global media community, more must be done to ensure that those responsible are held accountable. Sheema Siddique turns a spotlight on the entrenched impunity for crimes against journalists the world over and explains why it must matter to each one of us. Read the full blog [here](#).

## Featured Actions

**SLWJA draft Inclusivity Charter for Media in Sri Lanka:** Following research, outreach and consultation, the Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association (SLWJA) are finalising a series of guidelines and commitments to ensure that media coverage of marginalised communities is conducted fairly, independently and responsibly. The Charter is designed to assist a human rights-focused approach to journalism, enhancing its quality and fulfilling ethical considerations.

**PFUJ join protests for Palestine:** Journalists in Karachi [protested](#) the record killings of journalists and media workers outside the Karachi Press Club (KPC) on November 8, with members and leadership of the PFUJ [involved](#). At least one hundred protesters marched from the KPC to the Sindh Governor House, showing solidarity with journalists who have been killed in Gaza since October 7. Pakistani journalists called on journalists worldwide to counter disinformation on conflict reporting, urging the UN and other global journalists' unions to investigate the killings of journalists.

## From the media

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How Journalists Offered Voice to Bangladeshi Factory Workers - [VOA](#)

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Seizure of journalist's devices very serious, come up with better guidelines: SC to Govt - [The Indian Express](#)

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Whispers Amidst The Mountains: why AJK has so few women journalists - [T Magazine](#)

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Threats to democracy in the world on the rise with elections and rights in greater danger - [EL PAIS](#)

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Dialogue needed to mitigate attacks on journalists by law enforcement in elections - [Rappler](#)

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Israel: Government shuts down first critical foreign media over "security concerns" - [IFJ](#)

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## TAKE ACTION!

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Register for the [Media Topoo-2024 Industry Forum](#)

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Enrol in the ['Investigative Journalism: Safety and Security for Asian Journalists' program](#)

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Attend a [Reuters Institute Seminar Series](#)

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Register for the online [ITCILO Labour Inspection and Compliance Course](#)

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Apply for the [Kim Wall Memorial Fund](#)

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IFJ Asia-Pacific**

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