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

**ASIA BULLETIN**

December 2023

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



Family members of detainees and supporters of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) gather on International Human Rights Day on December 10 to demand the release of BNP activists in police custody.

Credit: Rehman Asad / AFP

## In Focus

**Press under attack as Bangladeshi elections approach:** Political tensions in Bangladesh are escalating ahead of the country's general elections scheduled for January 7, 2024, with journalists and media workers facing assault, intimidation and harassment amid a wave of government restrictions and electoral violence. Clashes between supporters of the opposition Bangladesh National Party (BNP) and police in the eastern Habiganj District on December 10 resulted in the injury of at least 50 people, with correspondents from My TV, Niranjana Goswami, and Desh TV, Amir Hamza, shot while covering the clash and transferred to Dhaka for medical care. On November 20, journalist Md Nahid Assan was assaulted in Dhaka by at least 20 activists from the ruling Awami League's youth and student wings after sharing his location while gathering information on a political clash. Chittagong Bureau of Independent Television Journalist Rakib Uddin was verbally and physically abused by a former Awami League politician and his supporters on November 30 while covering an election registration. His equipment was reportedly damaged and confiscated. Through October and early November, the IFJ monitored attacks on at least 30 journalists during a BNP protest, as well as threats and assaults of campus correspondents in universities across the country. With the BNP rejecting the elections as undemocratic, the impact of Bangladesh's political polarization will be seen through the coming month.



### In this bulletin:

- **IFJ Killed List: 94 journalists killed in 2023**
- **WMFP launch campaign for gender equality in Pakistan's media**
- **Fahad Shah released in landmark legal ruling**
- **Violence continues against Palestinian media workers**
- **Nepal reconsiders TikTok ban**



## The Region

**IFJ launches 2023 killed and jailed list:** On December 8, the IFJ released its annual list of killed and jailed journalists worldwide, recording the deaths of 94 journalists and media workers. Of the seven currently confirmed cases from the Asia-Pacific region, four were from South Asia in India (1), Afghanistan (2) and Bangladesh (1). In India, a Special Investigation Team concluded in May that real estate broker Pandharinath Amberkar had murdered Maharashtra journalist Shashikant Warishe, after injuries the journalist sustained proved fatal after Amberkar deliberately struck him with his vehicle on February 7. Amberkar targeted Warishe after an article accused the land broker of engaging in criminal activity and highlighted the links between him and leading politicians. In Afghanistan, journalist Sayed Hosein Naderi and media student Akmal Nazari were killed after a parcel bomb detonated at the Tabyan Cultural Centre in Afghanistan's northern Balkh province during a celebration of Afghanistan's media workers on March 11. 16 journalists and media workers were also injured in an attack claimed by the Islamic State. In Bangladesh, Golam Rabbani Nadim, correspondent for Ekattor TV, Daily Manabjamin, and Banglanews24.com died after being attacked by a group of assailants on June 14 in Jamalpur, with politician Mahmudul Alam Babu arrested alongside 16 other suspects. Nadim's murder came months after the journalist published a series of articles about Babu. Additionally, the IFJ highlights the alarming increase in imprisoned journalists, with 393 currently behind bars, of which 19 are from South Asia.



Smoke billows over the northern Gaza Strip during Israeli bombardment from southern Israel on December 14.  
Credit: Ack Guez / AFP

## Gaza Media Update - December 2023

Since November 15, 23 Palestinian and two Lebanese journalists have been [killed](#) by Israeli airstrikes, bombardments, and snipers, bringing the total number of slain journalists to 71 since October 7. This month, the IFJ and its affiliate, the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate (PJS) have [lobbied](#) the International Criminal Court (ICC) to take action against the killings of journalists in Gaza. This month, IFJ General Secretary Anthony Bellanger undertook a [mission](#) to Ramallah in the West Bank in support of the IFJ's affiliate, the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate (PJS), with representatives from the PJS calling on the International Criminal Court in December to denounce the mass killings of journalists and media workers 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. Donate to the IFJ safety fund [here](#).

## National Issues

**Afghanistan:** The Afghanistan Journalists Center (AFJC) [published](#) a report on November 18 detailing 75 media freedom incidents between March 21 and November 17, comprised of 33 arrests and 42 incidents of threats or harassment. Through this period, the majority of media rights violations have been made by representatives from the Taliban's intelligence directorate and other agencies. The AFJC further pointed to the impact of the Taliban's 13 directives as [highly detrimental](#) to press freedom and freedom of information.

**Bhutan:** From 2021 to 2023, the total amount of journalists in Bhutan has [decreased](#) by 37 per cent, according to a new survey by news outlet Kuensel, with only four out of 15 vacancies filled in the past two years. 66 per cent of those who

**Bangladesh:** On November 30, human rights organisation VOICE [conducted](#) a consultation meeting in Dhaka to enhance collaboration and share understandings of online safety and privacy for journalists, women, and human rights defenders online. The importance of a strong legal framework for personal data and privacy in Bangladesh was stressed, with a focus on public awareness, moral values, and digital rights education. The session was organised as a part of a broader journalist safety and professional capacity program.

**India:** In a landmark legal decision, Kashmir Walla editor Fahad Shah was [granted](#) bail on November 23 after over 600 days in custody, with the Jammu and Kashmir High Court citing a lack of evidence under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act. On December 12, the

low salaries and a lack of professional development opportunities as the two leading reasons for their departure. Insecure work and a lack of professional freedom were also identified by over half of the respondents.

**Maldives:** In a letter made public on November 17, Human Rights Watch urged the newly elected Maldivian leader Mohamed Muizzu to prioritise the protection and promotion of human rights through his presidency. The organisation outlined an agenda with recommendations in seven key areas, including enforcing environmental laws, amending laws related to peaceful assembly and evidence, repealing criminalization of same-sex conduct, strengthening judicial independence, and ensuring accountability for past crimes.

**Pakistan:** The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), has directed all satellite television channels to adhere to its code of conduct and desist from the broadcast of 'speculative' or 'false' information ahead of national elections in 2024. PEMRA said that false information or media content about the general elections may be met with strict action against channels violating these guidelines.

failure of law enforcement to produce a detention order made the detention illegal.

**Nepal:** Nepal's Prime Minister, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, has expressed openness to reconsidering the nation's newly instated ban on social media platform TikTok, stating that the decision is not final. The ban, implemented on November 13, was prompted by pressure from coalition partners. Acknowledging public reactions to the ban, Prime Minister Dahal suggested the possibility of regulating TikTok, similar to existing measures in other social media platforms.

**Sri Lanka:** During a parliamentary debate on December 8, National People's Power lawmaker Anura Kumara Dissanayake called for journalists to be paid a salary in line with the cost of living. He highlighted financial difficulties faced by many journalists in the country and emphasised that current allowances provided by media institutions are insufficient. MP Dissanayake warned of a potential information blackout if media institutions, crucial for disseminating information, are forced to shut down due to financial constraints.



The WMFP has launched a new campaign calling first on press clubs, unions, and media news outlets to genuinely commit to change for gender equality.

## IFJ At Work

**WMFP launches campaign for gender equality in Pakistan's media:** On the eve of Pakistan's press club elections starting this month, a growing network of women journalists is pushing for much needed reforms within the media industry to represent them more equitably. A [new campaign](#) launched today by the Women's Media Forum Pakistan (WMFP) is calling first on press clubs, unions, and media news outlets to genuinely commit to a 'change agenda' at all levels. Have you say [here](#) and subscribe to the WMFP [mailing list](#).

**IFJ guides Afghan journalist advocacy:** On November 22, the IFJ [attended](#) a coordination meeting held by UNESCO in Brussels, collaborating and guiding the future of Afghan media support and safety initiatives alongside a panel of media and journalists' NGOs. Joint priorities emerging from the initiative include enhanced cooperation, advocacy efforts, and support to women journalists, diaspora media, and those still in Afghanistan. The role of the media in highlighting on-the-ground issues in Afghanistan and in pressuring the Taliban to end its repression of women's and human rights was also highlighted.

**Pakistan coordinators hold gender trainings:** Following the IFJ's Training of Trainers (TOT) in Islamabad in September, participants and Women's Media Forum Pakistan (WMFP) coordinators have planned and conducted a series of regional gender trainings in Karachi, Islamabad, Lahore, and Peshawar through late November and early December. The trainings were held in press clubs and attended by over 60 participants, focusing on a central theme of gender equality and safety.



Participants and trainers attend the regional gender trainings in Karachi, Pakistan, on November 29. 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

**MJA call for end to impunity in joint statement:** On November 28, the Maldives Journalists Association, alongside the IFJ and four other press freedom and human rights organisations, [launched](#) a joint statement calling on Maldivian authorities to end impunity for crimes against journalists to expedite investigations, and where possible, pursue prosecutions. The letter comes after charges were [dropped](#) on November 22 against the accused in the murders of journalist Ahmed Rilwan and blogger Yameen Rasheed on November 22.

**FNJ settles KMG dispute after 60 days of action:** On December 1, the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) [announced](#) the termination of protest action following the successful

wages, and the creation of avenues for voluntary retirement have been made. The success of the agreement will be identified by internal FNJ labour welfare monitoring bodies.

**JAB attend election training program:** Members of the Journalists' Association of Bhutan attended a training program on November 18, addressing election-reporting skills ahead of National Elections in November and January. The event, organised by the Bodhi Media & Communications Institute, was supported by UNESCO, and designed to impart relevant knowledge and skills to Bhutanese journalists in covering elections in a free and fair manner.

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## From the media

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Google sheds light on how it's fighting deep fakes and AI-generated misinformation in India - [The Indian Express](#)

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VR offers new tools to war journalists hoping to reach audiences - [Ahram Online](#)

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A massive data breach, a TikTok ban, a mass crackdown, and 'overpolicing free speech' - [IFEX](#)

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How India tamed Twitter and set a global standard for online censorship - [The Washington Post](#)

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'Day of the Imprisoned Writer' remembers persecuted authors - [DW](#)

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DCO issues white paper to combat online misinformation - [ARAB NEWS](#)

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Global journalist group says Israel-Hamas conflict is a war beyond compare for media deaths - [AP News](#)

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Reporters Without Orders Ep 300: The challenges of being a reporter in India - [NewsLaundry](#)

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## TAKE ACTION!

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Register for a [Virtual Newsroom Visit](#)

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Register events on [AI for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion](#) and [Gender Equality](#).

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Enrol in the [Logan Science Journalism Program](#)

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Submit your nominations for the [Human Rights Press Awards 2024](#)

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Attend a [World Press Photo's digital storytelling contest](#)

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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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Subscribe to the IFJ and its weekly [newsletter](#)

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Donate to the [IFJ Safety Fund](#)

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