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

NEWS BULLETIN

March 2024

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



Taliban security personnel stand behind an Afghan woman wearing a burka in Badakshan province on February 26, 2024. Credit: Wakil Kohsar / AFP

In Focus

Taliban launches latest attacks on women in media: Amid [economic crisis](#), journalist [detentions](#), and a mass [exodus](#) facing Afghanistan's media, Taliban officials have announced new repressive legislation targeting women in media. On February 28, the Taliban's acting Minister for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, Mohammad Khaled Hanafi, [warned](#) media representatives at that any broadcast which fails to adhere to its skewed media code may lead to a prohibition of women working in the media. At the meeting, Taliban representatives 'recommended' that media representatives adhere to a modest dress code and show solely images of women in black attire with veils, leaving only their eyes visible. These threats have been echoed across Afghanistan. In Khost, Taliban police [banned](#) women from participating in phone calls to radio and television broadcasters, with a leaked letter released on February 24 from Khost Taliban police chief Abdul Rasheed Omari [calling](#) the airing of women's voicing a 'violation' of Islamic values, and threatening shutdowns and raids for any offending outlet. Since its ascent to power in August 2021, the Taliban has [enforced](#) a series of media directives limiting access to information, introducing gender segregation, and cracking down on dissent. Among them include the prohibition of all women from working national radio and television, a ban on women appearing in television dramas or films, and a February 18 [ban](#) on any photography or filming of meetings attended by local officials in Kandahar. As of March 2024, 19 out of 33 provinces have [zero women in media](#).



In this bulletin:

- Journalists mark International Women's Day across the region
- IFJ meets with NPC's first female secretary
- Annual affiliate snapshot survey to be launched
- FMM hold speaking tour in Sri Lanka
- International Day for Palestinian Journalists held globally

The Region

This month, IFJ's affiliates commemorated International Women's Day on March 8, celebrating the vast contributions of women in media across South Asia and devising union strategies to address gender inequality in South Asia and beyond. In Kabul, over 16 senior media figures and women journalists from the Afghanistan Independent Journalists Union (AIJU)'s women caucus attended a celebration of women in Afghanistan's embattled media sector. In India' the Gender Council of the Indian Journalists Union (IJU) affiliate, the Tripura Journalists Union, organised a conference attended by senior media figures and journalists for a discussion focusing on online harassment, while the All Manipur Working Journalists' Union held a talk at the Manipur Press Club centring on addressing barriers to the rights of women in media. On March 5, the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) and the Minimum Wage Determination Committee held a discussion to commemorate the day, attended by 85 participants and featuring speeches from leading women journalists, unionists, and FNJ President Bipul Pokharel. The IFJ commemorated IWD with a message of solidarity with Palestinian women in media, commemorating the thirteen women journalists who have lost their lives since October 7, demanding concrete measures to ensure their safety, and an end to war atrocities. Special attention is given to the memory of Al-Jazeera correspondent Shireen Abu Akleh, killed by the Israeli army in 2022.



Gaza Media Update - March 2024

Since February 15, at least three journalists and media workers have been killed by Israeli airstrikes, bombardments, and snipers, bringing the total number of slain journalists to 98 since October 7. On February 26, the IFJ-organised International Day for Palestinian Journalists was commemorated internationally, with demonstrations held globally and messages of solidarity sent from senior union figures. On March 1, the IFJ nominated its Palestinian affiliates, the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate (PJS) for the UNESCO / Guillermo World Press Freedom Prize for 2024 in memory of slain and injured colleagues since October 7. The IFJ and the PJS published a safety

National Issues

Afghanistan: The Taliban has allowed private broadcaster Nasim Radio to resume broadcasting in the central Daikundi province, following the establishment of a Taliban-appointed oversight committee and five months after the station was raided and three journalists arrested. Former chief editor Sultan Ali Jawadi remains imprisoned, sentenced to a year in detention in December on “espionage” and anti-Taliban “propaganda” charges. He was denied legal representation.

Bhutan: The Bhutan Media Foundation held a Climate Change Reporting Training on February 25, targeting senior and emerging journalists to enhance the quality and scope of environmental reporting in Bhutan’s media. The session, supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Royal Government of Bhutan, was attended by 21 editors, freelancers, and reporters from seven media houses.

Maldives: Historic Maldivian news outlet Haveeru will be allowed to resume publication following the conclusion of a decade-long legal battle over joint ownership claims. The newspaper was shuttered following a 2019 High Court ruling, which found three former management figures to be owed an ownership stake in the publication, with the most recent March 3 decision overturning the judgement following a 2021 appeal.

Pakistan: A controversial bill to ban all social media platforms was withdrawn by Pakistan People’s Party senator Bahramand Khan Tangi on March 3. Widely opposed by journalists and digital rights activists, Tangi claimed the bill would redress the platforms’ ‘adverse affects’ on young people and stop the spread of ‘negative and malicious propaganda’. Access to the popular social media platform ‘X’, formerly known as Twitter, has been restricted since February 17 following protests related to the nation’s general election on February 8.

Bangladesh: On February 20, Bangladeshi authorities approved funding of BDT 20,300,000 (approx. USD 183,000) for distribution to the nation’s media community through the Bangladesh Journalist Welfare Trust. Announced at a meeting of the fund’s trustees, the fund will be implemented through the second phase of the 2023-24 financial period, and aim to be distributed to over 250 journalists, an increase from previous allocations

India: Several journalists and media workers were allegedly attacked by supporters of the Mahagathbandhan, a broad political alliance in Bihar, at an opposition political rally in the historic Gandhi Maidan in Patna on March 3. According to several media personnel, supporters stormed the rally’s press gallery, with the assailants taking recording equipment, phones, and wallets. First Information Reports have been registered in relation to the incident.

Nepal: Journalists in Kathmandu have conducted a hunger strike on March 3 outside the offices of Metropolitan Chief of Police Balen Shah. The protest comes weeks after the assault Pramanch.com editor-in-chief Padam Prasad Pokharel during a police operation in Sundhara, Kathmandu on February 27. The assault was condemned by the Federation of Nepali Journalists.

Sri Lanka: On March 7, Former Sri Lankan president and current Member of Parliament Maithripala Sirisena announced to the Island’s parliament his intention to pursue action under the recently passed but yet-unimplemented Online Safety Act against the media for alleged “character assassination” related to coverage of his current residence. The legislation was passed in January, with the claim to be referred to five-person President-appointed council for judgement.



The IFJ and WMFP meet with Nayer Ali (C), the first female secretary of the National Press Club in Islamabad on March 11. Credit: IFJ

IFJ At Work

IFJ to launch annual affiliate snapshot: The IFJ Asia-Pacific will launch its affiliate snapshot survey for 2024 later this month, with support from Union To Union. The survey, conducted annually, informs IFJ planning, campaigning and decision making. In line with IFJ's work in the region, this year's survey will focus on growing union power in the world of work and supporting a decent work agenda for media workers in the Asia-Pacific.

WMFP campaign for IWD: On March 10, the Women's Media Forum Pakistan (WMFP) held a zoom discussion to commemorate International Women's Day on March 8. Discussions focused on barriers to women in media, with particular focus on involvement with journalist representative bodies and senior management positions. The move came following a WMFP campaign featuring senior journalists, WMFP coordinators, and civil society organisation representatives celebrating the day, and reinforcing the importance of addressing gender inequality.

IFJ mission to coordinate MJA activities: During a recent IFJ mission to the Maldives from February 23-26, the IFJ and Maldives Journalists' Association (MJA) leaders convened several meetings to coordinate the final stages of a joint IFJ, Internews and European Commission project. Through the last months of the project, the MJA and IFJ will focus on a union strengthening, journalist training and gender equality initiatives. This activity was conducted with support from the European Commission.

IFJ Press Club campaign shows results: On March 11, WMFP Islamabad Coordinator Rashida Shoab and IFJ Pakistan Coordinator Ghulam Mustafa met with the Pakistani National Press Club (NPC)'s first female Secretary, Nayer Ali. During the meeting, the newly elected Secretary, Nayer Ali, was presented with a commemorative souvenir, symbolizing not only her personal accomplishment but also the collective progress towards gender inclusivity within NPC. The election comes following the WMFP's 'Pakistan's Media Needs Women' campaign in January, which set out to increase women's representation in unions, press clubs, and outlet management.

IFJ Blog

On a rainy day in the Parisian square that commemorates murdered journalists, IFJ President Dominique Pradalié mounted a make-shift stage with a megaphone in her hand. "The killing of journalists in Gaza must stop", she demanded. "Journalists all over the world demand that Israel abides by international law and instead of targeting reporters, starts to safeguard them". Read the full blog [here](#).



Journalists and MJA members attend a journalism ethics course in Male in March, 2024. Credit: X

Featured Actions

IJU hold executive meeting: From March 2-3, the Indian Journalists Union (IJU) and the Journalists Association of Assam held the union's first annual National Executive Committee meeting for 2024 at Burha Mayong in the eastern Indian state of Assam. The session was attended by 21 IJU leaders and will determine future IJU strategies and approaches into 2024.

MJA rollout ethics course: The Maldives Journalists Association (MJA) held the first-ever Maldivian journalism ethics course in Male, with a pilot-training held in Male on March 2 attended by eight journalists and media workers. The short course, supported by Alinea and the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, will inform ethical journalism practise and techniques.

FMM hold freedom speeches: In the wake of the widely-condemned Online Safety Bill, the Free Media Movement (FMM) convened a series of meetings with journalists, civil society activists, and unionists across the Island to discuss its impact on freedom of expression. On February 24, the FMM held a meeting Manarama Municipal Council Cultural Hall, with a follow-up meeting convened in Trincomallee on March 9.

From the media

Billionaire press barons are squeezing media freedom in India - [Bloomberg](#)

Satish Nandgaonkar remained a journalist to the end, despite the toxicity of the industry around him - [NewsLaundry](#)

What happened with journo Rana at UNO office in Sherpur? - [Dhaka Tribune](#)

Journalists Believe Mass Layoffs Are Jeopardizing The Future Of Journalism – [The Hilltop](#)

A lone journalist's struggle to bring his attackers to justice – [The Business Standard](#)

Afghan Journalist Makes Long, Perilous Journey to Safety - [VOA](#)

The Taliban once smashed TVs. Now it fosters YouTubers to promote its image - [The Washington Post](#)

Press in crisis in Nepal as media revenue dips – [DW](#)

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