

[View this email in your browser](#)



Defending Rights of Journalists &
Freedom of Expression in South Asia

NEWS BULLETIN

July 2024

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



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi (2L) with Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders celebrate the party's win in the country's general election, in New Delhi on June 4, 2024. Credit: Money Sharma / AFP

In Focus

Modi and the Media – Ten Years on: The incumbent Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have claimed victory in the world's largest democracy, but not without pushback. Despite earlier projections claiming the BJP could achieve an outright majority, the party fell significantly short of the 272-seat parliamentary threshold required. With another five years ahead, the election calls into question Modi's continuing impact on press freedom in India. In the weeks since the election process was finalised in June, journalists and media workers have continued to face legal and physical threats. The replacement of the colonial-era Indian Penal Code in December was met with criticism from activists and lawyers, who raised concerns at the new law's challenges to legal proceedings and propensity for rights abuses. Less than two weeks after the law came into effect on July 1, police in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh launched investigations into journalists Zakir Ali Tyagi and Wasim Akram Tyagi under the 'promoting enmity' and 'disruptive statement' sections of the new code, after Zakir claimed in a social media post that a Muslim man had died in a mob violence incident. In the ten years since Modi came to power in 2014, over 50 journalists have been killed in India. As detailed in the IFJ's annual South Asia Press Freedom Report 23-24, 22 journalists were detained between May 2023 and April 2024, with Kashmiri journalists Sajad Gul, Irfan Mehraj, Majid Hyderi, and Aasif Sultan languishing in jails for years under the draconian Unlawful Activities Prevention Act. The highly politicised October 2023 arrest of NewsClick founder Prabir Purkayastha was declared 'invalid' by India's Supreme Court in May. Other legal threats, government pressure, and internet blockages have been deployed in increasing frequency while working conditions across the industry and job security have seen a dramatic decline. Foreign journalists have been placed under increasing scrutiny in recent months, with journalists expelled and working documents lost in an opaque bureaucratic process. The next five years of the Modi government have no guarantee of improvement, but what will remain important is how journalists, media workers, and other unionists and human rights defenders continue to fight collectively for better outcomes.



In this bulletin:

- IFJ ExCom meeting sees wins for South Asia
- New journalist accreditation policy in Maldives
- IFJ trains trainers in Islamabad
- Shireen Abu Akleh Prize launched
- JAB appoints new Executive Director



Members of the IFJ's Executive Committee meet in London on June 20-21. Credit: NPU / IFJ

The Region

IFJ Executive Committee Meeting Sees Wins for South Asia: The IFJ's recent Executive Committee meeting from June 20-21 heralded significant developments for journalists in South Asia. Hosted by the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) of the United Kingdom and Ireland at the headquarters of the International Transport Federation in London, the meeting brought together union leaders and journalists from around the world, including IFJ Vice President Sabina Inderjit, and [Nepal Press Union President Shiva Lamsal](#). The meeting saw the launch of the IFJ World Group for Young Media Workers, a historic organisation designed to serve as a voice for young media professionals within the Federation. Five of the 27 young journalists are from IFJ affiliates in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, and India, with the group to meet regularly until the IFJ's next World Congress in May 2026. IFJ also admitted the Bangladesh Manobadhikar Sangbadik Forum (BMSF), a member of the South Asia Media Solidarity Network since 2002, as one of two new affiliates. Delegates also reaffirmed the IFJ's solidarity initiatives in the wake of attacks on the media in Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan, and beyond, with further funding and support programs assessed and planned.

Gaza Media Update - July 2024

disabled. On July 6, the media [reported](#) that at least five Palestinian journalists had been killed in Gaza in [just 24 hours](#). The Lancet, a British journal, reports the death toll of the Gaza war could be [over 186,000, which is 7.9%](#) of the total population in the Gaza Strip “using the 2022 Gaza Strip population estimate of 2 375 259”. The IFJ and the PJS [published](#) a safety advisory in English and Arabic for journalists and have [opened](#) Media Solidarity Centres across Gaza, 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](#).



Palestinian journalists cover the arrival of injured and killed Palestinians at the al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah, in the central Gaza Strip, following the Israeli bombardment of a residential apartment in Deir al-Balah and an area of al-Maghazi, on June 8, 2024. Credit: Bashar Taleb / AFP

National Issues

Afghanistan: On the order of the Taliban’s intelligence agency, the General Directorate of Intelligence, crackdowns against independent media outlets have continued in Afghanistan. On June 13, members of the Taliban shuttered private radio station [Kawoon Ghag](#), an outlet based in Laghman province operating for two decades, claiming that it was [launched with international funding](#). In a raid, the Taliban interrupted outlet broadcasting and sealed the offices, expelling the staff and confiscating equipment.

Bhutan: Thimphu Press Club [hosted](#) a dialogue with Canadian Ambassador Cameron MacKay on June 26, focusing on the evolving bilateral relationship between Canada and Bhutan. The session was [attended](#) by journalists and media workers from Bhutanese media outlets, with attendees claiming the event represented both

Bangladesh: This month, two journalists were subject to physical abuse in Bangladesh. In the western city of Pabna, Daily Kaler Kantho correspondent Prabir Kumar Saha was attacked by a local politician at his offices on July 1. On June 30, Somoy Television correspondent Lotus Rahman Sohag was [allegedly assaulted](#) by the executive engineer of the West Zone Power Distribution Company in Jhenaidah while gathering news on supposed irregularities in work conduct, with the engineer grabbing and damaging his camera.

India: On June 17, the National Media Section Committee of the IFJ’s Australian affiliate, the Media, Entertainment, and Arts Alliance (MEAA), wrote to the Indian High Commissioner in Australia regarding the treatment of Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) reporter Avani Dias. The union [passed a resolution](#) condemning the

Maldives: The Maldives Broadcasting Commission has unveiled a new policy of journalist accreditation. The commission claims the policy will encourage a higher quality of media work, while also requiring the creation of a broadcast reporter registrar. Journalists with a relevant certificate or over three years of experience will be qualified to apply for a new press card which also requires the completion of an additional training program.

Pakistan: The Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication issued a notification on July 9 that the Federal Government had authorised its intelligence agency to intercept and trace calls and messages in the “interest of national security”. Contesting the government’s authorisation to allow the intelligence agency to monitor phone communications, a petition has been filed in the Lahore High Court against the government’s decision.

her coverage of India’s crackdown on Sikh separatist activists.

Nepal: On July 4, Purbeline news journalist Sanjita Dhamala was assaulted at the Dharan Sub-Metropolitan civic offices in eastern Nepal, two days after questioning the city’s mayor over a public complaint of bribery in a citizenship certificate scheme. Dhamala was invited to the office, where she was interrogated and assaulted by police. Speaking with Freedom Forum, Dhamala reportedly indicated a desire to pursue a lawsuit for the attack and comments made against her.

Sri Lanka: Asia Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) has been ordered to pay LKR 13,500,000 (approx. USD 44,000) in compensation to an unlawfully terminated Hiru News Editor, Nirosh Maithri, with the court citing a lack of credible evidence in the channel’s case. Maithri was accused of violating COVID-19 protocols when he allegedly handed a non-station employee a video recording in a period with restrictions. An appeal is permitted until August 2.

IFJ At Work

IFJ’s training of trainers in Islamabad: IFJ hosted a four-day ‘Union Organising & Leadership Training of Trainers’ from June 26-29 in Islamabad, Pakistan, forming part of its institutional and union-strengthening strategy in the country. 14 young and mid-career journalists and media workers were selected from the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), the Women’s Media Forum Pakistan (WMFP), and other regional media unions and collectives, with all trainees now expected to deliver three-month action plans developed during the training.

IFJ-WMFP Women Taskforce Meeting in Karachi: On July 1, 25 participants, attended a joint IFJ and Women’s Media Forum Pakistan (WMFP) Women’s Taskforce Meeting at Karachi Press Club. The meeting was the first of five to be held across Pakistan and served to build alliances and relationships between key media, civil society, and trade union stakeholders in fighting for gender equity and collective bargaining.

Shireen Abu Akleh Prize launched: IFJ and the International Francophone Press Union (UPF) opened nominations for a competition celebrating the contributions of women journalists globally on July 2, named after killed Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh. Interested parties must submit their nominations by October 15, with winning candidates evaluated on a matrix of journalistic impact and contributions. The winner will be presented with a EUR 5,000 (approx. USD 5,400) cash prize in Paris on December 10.



Members of the Maldives Journalists Association (MJA) meet with the country's police commissioner on July 1 to discuss press freedom concerns in the Maldives. Credit: MJA

Featured Actions

JAB appoints new Executive Director: The Journalists' Association of Bhutan (JAB) has welcomed Rinzin Wangchuk as its new Executive Director. JAB announced the result of the [selected candidate](#) for the position on June 25. Wangchuk was the longest-serving president of JAB until 2022, with an extensive background in media and journalism, and a frequent contributor to the IFJ's South Asia Press Freedom Report.

MJA meet with state stakeholders: The Maldives Journalists Association (MJA) [met](#) with the commissioner of the Maldives Police Service, Ali Shujau, on July 1 to discuss challenges facing the country's media community and future opportunities for collaboration. The meeting comes days after [discussions](#) were held between the MJA and the Minister of Youth Empowerment Ibrahim Waheed to discuss government initiatives surrounding press freedom and media support.

From the media

Journalism in crisis across Southasia – [Himal Southasian](#)

How Israeli journalists cover their own country – [Columbia Journalism Review](#)

How much do people pay for online news? – [Reuters Institute](#)

Transnational repression of journalists threatens democracy: Special Rapporteur - [UNHCR](#)

Seven Journalists of Courage and Impact Honored at EWC Media Conference in Manila – [East West Center](#)

Foes CPN-UML and the Nepali Congress Turn Friends to Form New Nepali Government – [The Diplomat](#)

Record number of journalists killed in Pakistan already this year – [The Guardian](#)

No music, no Western-style haircuts: UN report details life in Afghanistan under Taliban's moral enforcers - [CNN](#)

Why freedom matters – [Deccan Herald](#)

TAKE ACTION

Learn how [Employers Can Help End Domestic Violence](#)

Apply for the ITCILO's [Course on AI, Disinformation and Diversity](#)

Apply for the [Daphne Caruana Galizia Prize](#)

Apply for the The Fund for Investigative Journalism

Register for the Earth Journalism Network's [workshop on renewable energy](#)

Donate to the [IFJ Safety Fund](#)

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

**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

Copyright © 2024 International Federation of Journalists, All rights reserved.