



International
Federation
of Journalists

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To IFJ Asia-Pacific affiliates and friends

Welcome to IFJ Asia-Pacific's monthly e-bulletin. The next bulletin will be sent on **Tuesday April 1**, and contributions from affiliates are most welcome. To contribute, email ifj@ifj-asia.org

Please distribute this bulletin widely among colleagues in the media.

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1. IFJ Launches Press Freedom Campaign for China

As the international press freedom spotlight focuses on China in the lead-up to the Beijing Olympic Games in August, the IFJ has launched a new campaign, Open and Free – Towards a Democratic Media Culture in China. Several jailed journalists were released in February, but freelance writer and democracy activist Lu Gengsong was jailed for four years, accused of "inciting subversion of state power". The IFJ welcomed the release on February 8 of Yu Huafeng, 39, who served four years of an eight-year sentence on charges of corruption. Along with two colleagues, Li Mingying and Cheng Yizhong, who were also arrested but have since been freed, Yu worked for the Guangdong-based *Southern Metropolis Daily*, known for reporting controversial news. Yu's new-found freedom followed the release of Ching Cheong, a Hong Kong-based correspondent for Singapore's *The Straits Times*, and Li Changqing, the former editor of *Fuzhou Daily*, earlier in the month.

For more information visit the China campaign page on www.ifj.org or email ifj@ifj-asia.org.

2. Extensive Media Coverage of Pakistan Election Thanks to PFUJ Campaign

Coverage of the national elections in Pakistan on February 18 included broadcasts from all major private television and radio stations and the press, thanks largely to the efforts of the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) and its campaign and petition on Free Media for Fair Polls. More than 2200 journalists in Pakistan, as well as international press freedom and human rights organisations, signed the petition after it was launched on January 12. The petition was the culmination of the PFUJ's three-month campaign against two anti-media ordinances imposed by President Pervez Musharraf, the closure of 45 television channels, and gags on the media enforced by the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA). Under the leadership of the PFUJ, journalists and media owners defied a last-minute attempt by PEMRA to stifle coverage of the elections. The IFJ commends the tireless efforts of the PFUJ and supports its request to the new government of Pakistan to guarantee freedom of the media by abolishing the PEMRA "code of



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conduct”, revoking the anti-media ordinances, and implementing the Seventh Wage Award. The IFJ will lead its third international press freedom mission to Pakistan from March 13-17.

For more information, visit www.pfuj.info

3. Sri Lankan Police Continue to Abuse, Threaten and Harass Journalists

The IFJ is alarmed at the lack of respect for journalists shown at all levels of the Sri Lankan police force after another month of attacks, abuse and harassment. On February 12, Gemnu Amarasinghe, a photojournalist working for Associated Press (AP), was arrested by Civil Defence Committee members while covering the opening of a college in Colombo. He was held at Narahenpita police station for several hours and was released only after intervention by media organisations. On the same day, eight journalists were held in custody in Galle for two hours for covering an unruly incident in a Southern Provincial Council meeting while two Muslim journalists were refused entry to the Government Secretariat in Batticaloa. Allegations by Deputy Inspector General H.W. Prathapasinghe to a newspaper on February 17, claiming that journalist Sampath Lakmal de Silva was a paid military informant at the time of his murder in 2006 have been sharply criticised by the Free Media Movement (FMM) and the IFJ for provoking fear and distrust among the media community. The FMM also reports that a senior police officer, Inspector Mahesh Perera, abused and assaulted Sugath Dharmapriya, a news producer of Derana TV, who was reporting on a bomb blast in Colombo on February 23. The FMM and the IFJ have sent letters of protest to the Inspector General of Police, Victor Perera. All affiliates are invited to send similar letters.

To view the IFJ letter, [click here](#).

For more information, visit www.ifj-asia.org or www.freemediasrilanka.org

4. Nepal Journalists Under Siege

Indefinite “bands”, or strikes, in the Terai region and a sharp increase in reports of attacks on journalists are forcing journalists into a siege-like state, according to local affiliates the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) and the National Union of Journalists, Nepal (NUJN). In the latest incidents, a Janaki FM correspondent, Ganesh Sah, suffered head injuries in an attack by Armed Police Force personnel while reporting a clash between cadres of the a separatist group and police in Golbazar, in the Terai district of Siraha, on February 13. The editor of the weekly *Birat Darpan*, Bujaya Kumar Pathak, was reportedly attacked by Madheshi People’s Rights Forum (MPRF) cadres at protests in the Terai district of Morang on February 16. A Kantipur Publications vehicle was torched by cadres of the Federal Limbuwan State Council (FLSC) in the eastern region of Nepal. Subodh Singh Tharu, of Nepal Television, was reportedly attacked as he prepared to film protests by the United Democratic Madheshi Front (UDMF) in Banke. Jhapa-based journalists and editors closed six dailies and 12 weeklies on February 22 due to a supplies shortage. The NUJN reports that all newspapers in the Jhapa district have now closed for an indefinite period.

For more information, visit www.ifj-asia.org

5. Cambodian Journalist Run Down After Report on Gambling Venue

Just weeks after the Cambodian Association for the Protection of Journalists (CAPJ) presented its review of the state of press freedom in Cambodia to Information Minister Khieu Kanharith, *Sakal* editor Khuon Phlay Vy was targeted for attack. According to CAPJ, Vy, who uses the pen name Sar Keo Virak, was hospitalised with serious injuries after a white Toyota Camry rammed his motorbike in Phnom Penh. Vy told CAPJ that he had previously received a verbal threat from an unidentified man over the phone, warning him not to publish a report about an illegal gambling place in Phnom Penh’s Boeng Keng Kang II commune. The IFJ supports CAPJ in its reiteration to



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journalists in Cambodia that exposing corruption and illegal activities is one of the core ways that journalists contribute to promoting open and free democratic societies.

For more information, visit www.ifj-asia.org

6. IFJ Praises Judicial Intervention in Murder Investigation in the Philippines

A crucial decision by a Regional Trial Court judge in the Philippines may lead to the arrest of two suspects in the murder of journalist Marlene Esperat in 2005. Judge Simeon Dumdum dismissed jurisdiction challenges by two officials from the Department of Agriculture, Osmena Montaner and Estrella Sabay, concerning warrants issued for their arrest on February 4. Esperat, a journalist for the weekly *Midland Review*, was gunned down inside her house in Tacurong City, Sultan Kudarat, on March 24, 2005. According to the IFJ-NUJP Safety Office, established by the IFJ and the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP), Esperat was targeted because she exposed misappropriation of funds within the Department of Agriculture. The new development in Esperat's case is a positive step for journalists in the Philippines, where more than 90 journalists and media workers have been murdered over 20 years. The only convictions recorded for the murder of a journalist are those of Estanislao Bismanos, Gerry Cabayag, Randy Fernandez-Grecia and Rowie Barua, sentenced to life imprisonment in 2006 in relation to Esperat's murder. Only eight other investigations remain active.

For more information, visit www.ifj-asia.org or www.nujp.org

7. East Timor Security Police Apologise for Assault on Journalist Nightworker

A senior layout editor for the *Timor Post*, Austinho Ta Pasea, suffered cuts and bruises to his face after being beaten and arrested by military police in Dili, East Timor, on February 23. The IFJ received reports detailing the event which occurred in the early hours of the morning as Ta Pasea took a computer file of the *Timor Post* weekend edition to the printers. He was held and assaulted at a police station for breaking Dili's 10-pm-6am curfew. *Timor Post* editor Mouzinho De Araujo said a formal complaint had been lodged with police and the Government of Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao. East Timor's Secretariat of State Security issued a formal apology on behalf of the Government for use of "unjustified force" and said the security forces would ensure incidents of this kind are not repeated. The IFJ urges journalists to defend press freedom during such a difficult and unstable period for East Timor.

For more information, visit, www.ifj-asia.org

8. Sierra Leonean Journalists Win Refuge in Australia

Three Sierra Leonean journalists and their families have been given refuge in Australia thanks to the efforts of the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance and the IFJ. The journalists spent about 10 years in exile in Guinea after fleeing Sierra Leone's civil war. In 1999, Sierra Leone was reported as one of the most dangerous countries for journalists, who faced risks of detention, torture and execution. The Alliance and the IFJ ran a letter-writing campaign, including some of Australia's best known and respected journalists, to ask the Australian Department of Immigration to grant refugee status for the journalists. With the support of the New South Wales Journalists' Benevolent Fund and the Northern Beaches Refugee Sanctuary, three of 11 journalists who applied for refugee status in 2006 were granted entry and arrived in Australia on February 20. Concerns remain, however, for the other eight journalists and their families who are yet to be accepted into a refugee program. The IFJ thanks affiliates, colleagues and friends who assisted in this campaign.

For more information, contact ifj@ifj-asia.org



9. Trade Unions Appeal on Behalf of Afghan Journalist

The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance have called on Australia's Government to make a high-level representation to Afghanistan's Government and President Harmid Karzai to repeal the death sentence imposed on journalist Sayed Parvez Kambakhsh. As part of a global campaign by the IFJ, press freedom organisations and the trade union movement in support of Kambakhsh, a delegation of the ACTU and the Alliance asked Australia's Minister for Foreign Affairs, Stephen Smith, to seek President Karzai's intervention in the case. IFJ affiliates around the world are asking their home governments to take similar action in calling on Afghanistan's leaders to show a commitment to a free and open Afghanistan by intervening to overturn the sentence and withdraw blasphemy charges against Kambakhsh, and to take steps to institute reform of the legal system to ensure such judgments cannot be applied in the future. Kambakhsh is awaiting the commencement of an appeal process.

For more information, contact ifh@ifj-asia.org

To read the letter to Australian Foreign Minister Stephen Smith, [click here](#)

10. International Women's Day on March 8

The IFJ has launched a letter-writing campaign protesting the closure of *Zanan* one of Iran's leading women's and pro-reform magazines, to coincide with International Women's Day on March 8. Despite being an important voice reporting on gender-related issues and achievements of women in Iran, *Zanan* was ordered to close on January 28 by Iran's Press Supervisory Board. *Zanan* has been promoting women's rights since its founding in 1991 and one of its journalists, Shahla Sherkat, was a recipient of a *Courage in Journalism Award* in 2005. The IFJ will join other international press freedom groups such as the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) in sending letters to the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, protesting the magazine's closure. The letter also protests the arrests of 33 women including some journalists who have been working on the 'One Million Signatures Campaign' which began in August 2006 protesting the discriminatory laws against women in Iran.

To participate in this action, contact ifj@ifj-asia.org
Or go to <http://www.ifj.org/default.asp?Index=5886&Language=EN>

Please inform the IFJ by March 5 of any actions and activities that you are planning to mark International Women's Day.

11. Journalists in Afghanistan Remain Targeted by All Political Groups

Increasing disrespect and violence by local authorities and militant groups toward journalists is the main concern of the Afghan Independent Journalists Association (AIJA) after several reports of police intimidation, death threats and abduction during February. Five journalists were reportedly threatened with guns by security officials outside Balkh prison as the Deputy Minister for Commerce and Industries, Zia-u-din Zia, visited the site on February 18. All five presented their press cards and were travelling in a clearly marked press vehicle. Meanwhile, the *Kabul Shahan* weekly was forced to relocate its offices after the newspaper's owner, Sidiqullah Sahil, received a letter stamped and signed by the Taliban Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan on December 15, 2007. The letter accused Sahil of being a spy for international and anti-Taliban authorities, naming him an enemy of Islam and threatening him with death. Grave concerns are also held for Javid Ahmad, a journalist working for Canadian Television (CTV) who is being held at Bagram Air Base. He was detained by US military forces in October 2007 without charge. Ahmad was arrested at Kandahar airport for reportedly having contacts with local Taliban leaders and possessing a video containing Taliban materials.



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The AIJA and the IFJ plan two workshops on election and political reporting in Jalalabad and Charikar during March. The workshops will train participants in ethical political reporting and will emphasise journalists' safety.

For more information, visit www.ifj.org

Latest IFJ Asia Pacific protests

[India: IFJ Worried Over the Harassment of Journalists in India's North-East - 27/02/2008](#)
[East Timor: Government Regrets Attack on Journalist in East Timor - 27/02/2008](#)
[Fiji: IFJ Denounces Fiji's Deportation of Newspaper Publisher - 27/02/2008](#)
[Nepal: Concerns as Newspapers Close in Nepal's Troubled Terai Region - 26/02/2008](#)
[Afghanistan: Call to Australian Government to Seek Release of Afghan Journalist 26/02/2008](#)
[Sri Lanka: IFJ Condemns Police Inspector for Attack on Journalists in Sri Lanka - 25/02/2008](#)
[Pakistan: Pakistan Coalition Pledges to Restore Media Freedoms - 22/02/2008](#)
[Afghanistan: Journalists Under Constant Threat in Afghanistan - 22/02/2008](#)
[Nepal: Newspaper Vehicle Torched as Anti-Media Violence continues in Nepal 22/02/2008](#)
[Sri Lanka: IFJ Condemns Unsubstantiated Accusation Against Murdered Journalist - 21/22/08](#)
[Philippines: IFJ Welcomes Judicial Intervention in Murder of Journalist - 21/02/08](#)
[Pakistan: PFUJ Campaign Crucial To Media Coverage to Pakistan Elections-20/02/08](#)
[Sri Lanka: IFJ Calls on Sri Lanka Police to End Harassment of Journalists - 20/02/08](#)
[Cambodia: Journalist Victim of Hit and Run for Investigating Gambling Venue 19/02/2008](#)
[Nepal: Fear Grows for Journalists Under Siege in Nepal - 18/02/2008](#)
[Sri Lanka: Suspicious Watch On TV News Director in Sri Lanka - 18/02/2008](#)
[Pakistan: Pakistan Media Urged to Stand Strong and Unified For Elections - 15/02/2008](#)
[Pakistan: Bomb Blast Injures Five Journalists As Tensions Rise In Pakistan - 13/02/2008](#)
[China: Jailing of Journalists Is Not the Olympic Spirit - 12/02/2008](#)
[Pakistan: Targeted Killing Highlights Rising Trend of Violence Against Pakistan Journalists - 12/02/2008](#)
[India: IFJ Calls for Investigation Into Attack on TV Chanel Chief in India's Guwahati - 12/02/2008](#)

If affiliates have any information on a press freedom violation, please make sure you immediately contact staff at IFJ Asia so action can be taken.

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