



International
Federation
of Journalists

AIDAN WHITE
General Secretary
JACQUELINE PARK
IFJ Asia-Pacific Director

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To SAMSN members and friends,

Welcome to the monthly e-bulletin of the South Asia Media Solidarity Network (SAMSN). The next bulletin will be sent on March 17, 2008 and inputs are most welcome. We encourage contributions to let others know what you are doing; to seek solidarity and support from other SAMSN members; and to find out what others are doing in the region.

To contribute, email ifj@ifj-asia.org

SAMSN is a group of journalists' trade unions, press freedom organisations and journalists in South Asia that have agreed to work together to support freedom of expression and association in the region. SAMSN was formed at a meeting of these groups in Kathmandu, Nepal, in September 2002. The group agreed to stand in solidarity and work together for media reform, for an independent pluralist media and to build public respect for the work of journalists in the region.

For further information on SAMSN, visit www.ifj-asia.org/page/samsn.html

Please distribute this bulletin widely among colleagues in the media.

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1. Journalists in Line of Fire as Pakistan Elections Approach

As the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) continues to lead journalists and media workers in their fight for press freedom, tensions begin to mount in the lead-up to the national elections set for February 18. On February 12 a bomb was detonated outside the offices of independent electoral candidate Aslam Bizenjo in the Khuzdar district of Balochistan, seriously injuring nine people including five journalists. The PFUJ has confirmed the journalists as Ayub Baluch, of GEO-TV; Munir Noor, of Rang TV; Abdullah, of KTN; and stringers Latif Baluch and Munir Shakir. Despite tireless efforts by the PFUJ in its "Fair Media for Fair Polls" campaign, the safety of journalists in Pakistan took a blow after a targeted fatal attack on senior journalist Chishti Mujahid in Quetta on February 9. According to the PFUJ, Mujahid, a senior journalist with the weekly *Akbar-e-Jehan*, was shot twice by a gunman as he left his house in the morning. For the first time in Pakistan, a militant group called the Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA), has claimed responsibility for the murder. These incidents signify an alarming escalation of violence and serious direct threats to the personal safety of journalists in Pakistan. The IFJ has supported the PFUJ in its call on media owners to provide their journalists, particularly those reporting on election coverage, to take all necessary safety measures to protect them.

2. Afghanistan President promises to investigate Parvez case

IFJ partners the Afghan Independent Journalists Association (AIJA) and the Committee to Protect Afghan Journalists (CPAJ) met with the President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, to discuss the death sentence issued to 23 year old journalism student, Sayed Parvez Kambakhsh by the primary



court of the Balkh province on January 22. Kambakhsh was accused of distributing articles and books that contained anti-Islamic sentiment. The court's decision was made in a closed session despite the appeals and protests from the provincial court of Balkh province, the AIJA and a number of international media freedom bodies. The AIJA reported that Parvez was denied a lawyer, and journalists and civil society and human rights organisations were not permitted entry to the court. President Karzai indicated to the AIJA and CPAJ in the course of discussions on February 6 that he would investigate the possibility of revoking the sentence in response to concerns voiced by the AIJA, the CPAJ and press freedom organisation across the world in an extensive letterwriting campaign.

At a regional meeting of IFJ Asia-Pacific in Kuala Lumpur at the beginning of February, 21 unions and associations representing journalists across the Asia-Pacific region issued a joint statement to the President and Government of Afghanistan demanding immediate action to overturn the sentence and institute prompt reform of the legal system to ensure such judgments cannot be applied in the future.

3. Violence against journalists simmering in Nepal

Reports from IFJ affiliate the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) indicate that in the series of attacks on the media since the beginning of January, over 15 fifteen journalists and media workers have fallen victim to threats and acts of violence, including the killing of Pushkar Shrestha on January 12. Shrestha, the editor of weekly newspapers *New Highway* and *New Season*, was gunned down by a member of the armed militant group Janatrantrik Terai Mutki Morcha (JTMM-J) in the Birgunj region. In the same region, an unidentified group hurled a bomb at the Indreni FM 97.6 radio station bomb about 8 pm on January 30. Earlier attacks, reportedly committed by civilians, highlight a worrying trend where journalists are being targeted by individual or groups reacting to news reports. Freelance journalists Manoj Sah almost lost his hand in a brutal stabbing by an armed group of 12 people in the Chamar region of Janakpur on January 17 which the FNJ believes was related to an article by Shah about a controversy regarding the Janaki Temple.

In a separate incident, the FNJ reported that Rajendra Gautam, a sub-editor with the Purbanchal Daily, was assaulted by chicken farmers on January 25. The farmers were reportedly upset about an article in which Gautam reported there was bird flu in Indian state of West Bengal, in areas bordering Nepal. Gautam was dragged out of his office, beaten and suffered chest pains following the attack.

On January 23, at least 11 journalists were reportedly assaulted during public protests in Kathmandu against increased fuel and oil prices. The FNJ reported that journalists including Maina Dhital from The Kantipur Daily and Anjali Subedi from *The Kathmandu Post* were harassed and beaten while driving through the protest. Ananta Raj Luintel and Dewan Rai of *The Himalayan Times*, Rajan Raj Joshi, of *Annapurna Post*, Madhav Nirdoshi, chairman of Hatemalo Media Services, and Lomus Joshi, from *Independent Business News*, also reported being harassed by demonstrators.

4. Sri Lanka remains a violence hotspot in South Asia

The safety crisis for journalists in Sri Lanka has deepened over the last few months, with a significant rise in verbal and physical violence against journalists and media workers, including by spokesmen of the Sri Lankan Government, who have public ridiculed principles of the right to free speech. In recent public statements, Sri Lanka's Army Commander and Defence Secretary, have called for media censorship, the judicial enforcement of criminal defamation and the prosecution of leading media institutions for "critical reportage". This latest series of reported violent incidents include a knife attack on Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation (SLRC) news producer Lal Hemantha



Mawalage on January 25. Mawalage was reportedly attacked by two unidentified men on his way home in Athurigiriya, a suburb of Colombo. The Free Media Movement (FMM), an IFJ affiliate, reports that Mawalage has received continuous death threats since speaking on behalf of SLRC employees regarding an aggressive intrusion into SLRC's offices by Labour Minister Mervyn Silva on December 27, 2007. Mawalage's vehicle was intentionally hit by another car on January 23.. On January 28, Suhaib M. Kasim, another journalist working for state-controlled media, was stabbed at his home in Colombo. The FMM reported that five intruders entered Kasim's home, dragged him outside, and stabbed him, inflicting serious abdominal injuries.. On January 26, the chairman of Associated Newspapers of Ceylon had "removed" Kasim from his position as associate editor of the state-controlled Tamil daily *Thinakaran*.

On February 5, IFJ and affiliate organisations of the Asia-pacific region, appealed to President Mahinda Rajapaksa and the Government of Sri Lanka to protect the safety of journalists in Sri Lanka and uphold the rights of the media to report freely.

5. Media rights workshop held in Guwahati, India

The IFJ, in association with affiliate the Indian Journalists' Union (IJU), conducted a two-day workshop on media rights monitoring and advocacy in Guwahati, capital of the Indian state of Assam, on February 8 and 9. The workshop involved 20 journalists from five of the eight north-eastern states of India. Journalists in India's north-east face an unsettled security situation and a multiplicity of insurgent movements that operate in the region. Extraordinary security laws in force in the region often enable a virtual suspension of the right of free speech and summary imprisonment of media workers. In addition, rivalries between different insurgent groups, which express themselves in directives backed up by the threat of violence, on the editorial policy of particular media groups, have often meant that the media has frequently been unable to function. Journalists also confront an inhospitable work-place, with wage agreements often dishonoured and employers being unmindful of their professional safety and security. Participants at the IFJ-IJU workshop deliberated at length on these issues and determined that they would constitute themselves into an action committee to fight for improvements.

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[**Afghanistan: Joint Statement to President and Government of Afghanistan- 02/02/2008**](#)

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[**Afghanistan: IFJ Calls on Afghanistan's President to Overturn Death Sentence - 23/01/2008**](#)



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[Sri Lanka: Attacks Continue On Journalists In Sri Lanka](#)

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[Nepal: IFJ Joins Call To Ensure Safety Of Journalists And Media Workers In Nepal - 18/01/2008](#)

[Pakistan: PFUJ Launches Petition For Fair Polls In Pakistan - 17/01/2008](#)

SAMSN members who have information on a violation of press freedom are encouraged to contact staff at IFJ Asia-Pacific immediately so that action can be taken.

Jacqueline Park
Sam Grunhard
Melissa Davey
Anna Noonan
Deborah Muir
Sukumar Muralidharan

IFJ Asia-Pacific
www.ifj-asia.org
ifj@ifj-asia.org

SAMSN Members

Afghan Independent Journalists' Union, Afghanistan
Bangladesh Journalists' Rights Forum (BJRF), Bangladesh
Dhaka Reporters' Unity, Bangladesh
All India Newspapers Employees' Federation (AINEF), India
Indian Journalists' Union (IJU), India
National Union of Journalists India (NUJI), India
Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ), Nepal
National Union of Journalists Nepal (NUJN), Nepal
Nepal Press Union (NPU), Nepal
Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), Pakistan
Pakistan Press Foundation, Pakistan
Sri Lanka Working Journalists Association (SLWJA), Sri Lanka
Federation of Media Employees' Trade Unions (FMETU), Sri Lanka
Free Media Movement (FMM), Sri Lanka
Bangladesh Manobadhikar Sangbadik Forum (BMSF: Human Rights Journalists Forum of Bangladesh)
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