



International
Federation
of Journalists

AIDAN WHITE
General Secretary
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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 January 14, 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 ifi@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 2004. 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. PFUJ stands firm against attack on media

Journalists in Pakistan marked International Human Rights Day on December 10 by continuing their five-week campaign against the Government's continuing efforts to obstruct press freedom. In support of the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), an IFJ affiliate, SAMSN and the IFJ sent an emergency mission to Pakistan in mid-November. This was followed by the country's four bodies representative of the media industry - the PFUJ, the All Pakistan Newspapers Society (APNS), the Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors (CPNE) and the Pakistan Broadcasters Association (PBA) - issuing a joint statement to condemn the anti-media actions of President Pervez Musharraf. However, almost one month after the state of emergency was declared, a first information report (FIR) was filed against the PFUJ and its subsidiary union, the Rawalpindi Islamabad Union of Journalists (RIUJ), to initiate an investigation into reported displays of anti-state sentiment at earlier protests. The IFJ fully supports the PFUJ's condemnation of the charge and stands by all journalists in Pakistan who are fighting for their professional rights and media freedom.

For more information, visit www.pfuj.info

2. Live election coverage banned in Pakistan

The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) sent a letter to all private television networks to warn that live television reports about Pakistan's national elections are banned.



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Journalists who do not comply face three years in jail and fines of up to 10 million Rupees (about US \$165,000) as well as cancellation of the broadcaster's licence. However, no broadcaster was named in the letter. The PFUJ reports that television programs, including live talk shows, were warned not to broadcast live reports such as phone-ins and interviews about the election, set for January. The PFUJ is concerned that the caretaker Government is using PEMRA to try to impose a complete ban on all non-state media before the election.

For more information, visit www.pfuj.info

3. Pakistan courts keep GEO TV off air

More than 1,200 journalists may be out of work in Pakistan after the Sindh High Court rejected two petitions by GEO television to be permitted to broadcast. The court upheld the Government's ban on four of GEO TV's news, sports and entertainment channels that have been off air since emergency decrees were issued on November 3. According to the PFUJ, journalists and media workers risk losing their jobs because the inability to broadcast has severely dented GEO's advertising revenue. GEO initially circumvented the bans by transmitting from its Dubai offices. However, under pressure from Pakistan, the Dubai authorities shut the external transmission in mid-November. GEO has refused to sign a government-mandated code of conduct promoted by the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulation Authority (PEMRA). The PFUJ and IFJ encourage all members of SAMSUN to support GEO in its defiance of the code, which contains stipulations contrary to the principles of independent and free media.

For more information, visit www.pfuj.info or www.geo.tv

4. Sri Lanka air strike kills journalists

As many as five journalists and media workers were killed in a targeted attack on the Voice of Tigers radio station, operated by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), in Sri Lanka on November 27. According to the Free Media Movement (FMM), an IFJ affiliate, four other civilians were also killed in the attack and 10 were taken to hospital with serious injuries. The Sri Lanka Air Force claimed responsibility, confirming on the state-run Media Centre for National Security (MCNS) website that it had successfully destroyed its target. A similar attack occurred in October 2006 when the Air Force launched a rocket at the VoT radio tower, although no one was killed on that occasion. The IFJ backs the FMM's demand for Sri Lanka's Government to act in accordance with its obligations under Article 79 of the Additional Protocol to the Geneva Convention to respect the safety of journalists as non-combatant civilians.

For more information, visit www.freemediasrilanka.org

5. Journalists continue to face violence in Afghanistan

Freedom of expression and personal safety remain a major issue for journalists in Afghanistan, with two separate incidents of violence against the media since December 1. The Afghanistan Independent Journalists Association (AIJA), an associate of the IFJ, said gunmen chased and fired shots at Afghanistan Radio Television (ART) producer Ali Asghar Akbarzada on December 3. Akbarzada reportedly said he believed he was targeted due to his program, which discusses issues such as corrupt officials and criminals. On December 4, a radio journalist for Salam Watandar, Omar Mohammadi, was attacked by a police officer who reportedly grabbed his recording device and tried to kick and punch him as he was reporting on a suicide attack in Kabul. On a positive note, the AIJA and the Committee to Protect Afghan Journalists (CPAJ) secured the release of ART journalist Ehsanullah Shahidzai from Laghman province. Shahidzai was detained for a week after claims he expressed anti-government sentiments and was linked to the Taliban.



6. Two reports of police attacks on journalists in Nepal

The Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), an affiliate of the IFJ, reported two attacks on journalists by police in the Sunsari region. On December 6, a correspondent for *Rajdhani Daily* and Sagarmatha Television, Birendra K.M., was reportedly beaten and forced to hand over his film after being forcibly taken inside a police van by members of the Armed Police Force. Birendra was covering clashes between local businessmen and police over fertiliser smuggling in Inaruwa, the district capital, when the attack occurred. On November 24, FNH Sunsari chapter president Govinda Ghimire was abducted, beaten and threatened with death by a police official in the same area. The motivation for the abduction is reportedly related to Govinda's news reports about a senior police official. Govinda was released after two hours. Journalists in the district organised strike at the FNJ's Sunsari headquarters and rallied at the District Administration Office to demand action against those responsible.

For more information, visit www.fnjnepal.org

7. Sri Lanka journalists work on children's rights

A five-day workshop on children's rights and the media was led by an IFJ trainer at the Sri Lankan College of Journalism (SLCJ) in early December. A group of 20 journalists working in Sinhala Tamil and English participated in the course, which was developed by IFJ trainers in New Delhi and Sydney. The course covered issues such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and its practical dimensions in terms of survival and development rights, protection rights and participatory rights. Other sessions dealt with interviewing children while the participants also conducted field assignments on children's rights in their communities. The workshop was supported by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and involved guest speakers from the donor agency and Sri Lanka's National Child Protection Authority.

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

Latest IFJ Asia-Pacific protests

[Pakistan: PEMRA Threatens Ban on Live Election Coverage in Pakistan - 12/12/2007](#)
[Afghanistan: Journalists Continue to Face Culture of Impunity in Afghanistan - 11/12/2007](#)
[Nepal: Police Attack Journalist In Nepal - 11/12/2007](#)
[Pakistan: Pakistan Journalists Demand Respect for Human Rights - 10/12/2007](#)
[Pakistan: Pakistan High Court keeps GEO-TV off air - 05/12/2007](#)
[Pakistan: IFJ condemns attempt to silence Pakistan unions - 03/12/2007](#)
[Philippines: Police condemned for arresting journalists in the Philippines - 03/12/2007](#)
[Pakistan: PFUJ steps up battle for media freedom - 27/11/2007](#)
[Nepal: Nepali journalist abducted, beaten and threatened - 27/11/2007](#)
[Sri Lanka: Media terror in Sri Lanka's Jaffna - 23/11/2007](#)

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.

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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)

Media Watch, Bangladesh