



International
Federation
of Journalists

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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 June 16, 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 and ifjsouthasia@hotmail.com.

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 <http://asiapacific.ifj.org>

Please distribute this bulletin widely among colleagues in the media.

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1. **Sixth South Asia Press Freedom Report attracts wide coverage**

SAMSN and IFJ Asia-Pacific released the sixth annual South Asia Press Freedom Report on April 30, just ahead of World Press Freedom Day on May 3. The report, which serves as a campaign tool for media freedom work in the region, attracted widespread media coverage. *In the Balance: Press Freedom in South Asia 2007-2008* analyses the conditions of journalists and media organisations in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. It discusses the impact of political changes on press freedom and the working conditions of journalists. The report also carries an extensive listing of media rights violations over the year 2007-08, including of media workers killed or harmed.

See: <http://asiapacific.ifj.org/en/pages/in-the-balance-press-freedom-in-south-asia-2007-2008-2>

2. **Photojournalist killed in Jammu and Kashmir clash**



Photojournalist Ashok Sodhi, 45, a veteran of the newspaper industry with 25 years of service, died after sustaining bullet injuries while covering an armed encounter in India's Jammu region on May 11. He was employed by the *Daily Excelsior*, a leading newspaper in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. He had reached the location of the gunfight between security forces and militants holed up inside a house in Samba district, 45 kilometres south of Jammu, early that morning. SAMSUN and the IFJ mourn his death and call upon media organisations to increase safety awareness among professional staff and provide basic protective gear for all personnel deployed to cover situations involving lethal weaponry.

See: <http://asiapacific.ifj.org/en/articles/ifj-mourns-death-of-photojournalist-in-india>.

3. Grenade attack on home of Afghan journalist

A grenade was thrown into the home of journalist Khadija Ahadi, in Herat, western Afghanistan, on April 11, according to the Afghan Independent Journalists' Association (AIJA). Khadija is the deputy editor-in-chief of Radio Faryad and producer of a talk show addressing political and social issues. She had received anonymous calls for more than two months before the attack, warning her to leave her job. Part of her home was destroyed in a similar attack on April 6. Radio Faryad, an independent radio station established a year ago by journalism graduates from Herat University, is known for its critical commentary.

Meanwhile, an Australian journalist, Paul Rafael, working on assignment with the *Smithsonian* magazine, was among 50 people injured in a suicide bomb blast in Khogyani district, Nangarhar province, that claimed 18 lives on April 29. The Taliban reportedly claimed responsibility for the attack, which occurred amid preparations for a drug-eradication operation.

See: <http://asiapacific.ifj.org/en/articles/grenade-attack-on-home-of-female-radio-journalist-in-afghanistan> and <http://asiapacific.ifj.org/en/articles/dangers-rising-for-journalists-in-afghanistan>

4. Press freedom crisis in Sri Lanka; three still held without charge

May 7 marked two months since J.S. Tissainayagam, editor of www.outreachsl.lk, was detained without charge by Sri Lanka's Terrorist Investigation Division. Tissainayagam was detained on March 7 following the arrest of N. Jesiheran, the owner of E-Kwality Printers and a writer for outreach, and his partner, Valarmathi, on March 6. Serious concerns are held for the health and welfare of all three. The detentions without due cause given are just one indicator of the press freedom crisis in Sri Lanka. During the past month, the Defence Secretary called for restrictions on the reporting of independent media and alleged that critical media reports amounted to treason, while journalists and photographers were denied access to information about war casualties and provincial elections, and the treasurer of the Free Media Movement was threatened with abduction. Journalists held a candlelight vigil in Colombo to highlight the media crisis as part of the Stop the War on Journalists in Sri Lanka campaign and to mark World Press Freedom Day.

For more information, visit: <http://freemediasrilanka.wordpress.com>

5. Suspect arrested for murder of Pakistan journalist

Pakistani authorities took into custody Altaf Unar, a former provincial government minister from Sindh province, on April 16 for alleged involvement in the murder of Munir Sangi, a cameraman with KTN channel. Sangi was shot dead on May 29, 2006, while reporting on a gunfight between feuding members of the Unar and Abro tribes in the town of Larkana, in Sindh province. Sangi's family suspected the involvement of the Unar family in Sangi's death. The Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) welcomed the arrest but also called for a fair trial and for protection for Sangi's widow, who continues to face threats and intimidation.



See: <http://asiapacific.ifj.org/en/articles/ifj-welcomes-arrest-of-suspect-in-murder-of-pakistani-journalist>

6. Call for protection and insurance in Pakistan

The PFUJ observed World Press Freedom Day on May 3 by calling for legal protection, safety training and insurance cover for all journalists. The Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Baluchistan province and Karachi city, it observed, had become the most hazardous locales for journalists. The PFUJ also demanded that the authorities properly investigate and bring to account those responsible for the deaths of nine journalists in Pakistan during 2007 and two killed so far in 2008. The PFUJ said promises made by the new civilian governments at the federal and provincial levels were a “sign of hope”. But it called on the Government to address seriously issues of core concern for journalists, such as implementation of the award of the Seventh Wage Board and enactment of a “right to information” act.

See: <http://asiapacific.ifj.org/en/articles/journalists-in-pakistan-must-be-protected-and-insured>.

7. Pakistan Supreme Court seeks to curb media coverage

There are renewed concerns for media freedom in Pakistan after the Supreme Court issued an order on May 12 restricting reporting of anything that may be deemed “derogatory” of judges. The order followed a hearing involving a GEO News TV bureau chief and a reporter of the *Daily Jang* for alleged contempt of court in relation to reports on May 8 of a supposed meeting between the Federal Secretary of the Interior and three court judges. One of the judges named in the reports ordered the journalists to reveal their sources and the media not to publish any reports involving a judge without the court’s clearance. These orders were diluted at the May 12 hearing, but GEO and *Daily Jang* were told to produce transcripts of all news items published or broadcast since November 3, 2007, the day President Pervez Musharraf declared a state of emergency. The court asked the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) to ensure compliance. The PFUJ vowed to fight the curbs and to ensure that PEMRA is not used as an instrument of coercion.

See: <http://asiapacific.ifj.org/en/articles/ifj-concerned-by-pakistan-court-order-restraining-media-coverage>.

8. TV off air in Jammu and Kashmir

Television broadcasts in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir went off the air on April 25 when cable operators retaliated against an Indian Government order that they stop transmitting four popular Pakistani channels. The state’s political leadership, both from the side of the ruling coalition and the opposition, criticised the supposed ban. The Ministry for Information and Broadcasting in the Indian Union Government, in turn, disavowed any intent to impose a ban and said that the objective was to ensure the channels complied with a regulation requiring registration with appropriate authorities in India. The Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) criticised the directive and the National Union of Journalists of India (NUJ-I) joined SAMSUN and IFJ Asia-Pacific in calling for clarity. Cable operators resumed transmissions after two days of protest action. However, procedures for registering TV channels in India still fail the test of transparency.

See: <http://asiapacific.ifj.org/en/articles/ifj-urges-india-to-clarify-restrictions-on-pakistani-tv>.

9. International media freedom mission to Nepal

The Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) hosted an International Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression Mission before and after the country’s Constituent Assembly elections on April 10. The



mission concluded that media scrutiny and sustained coverage of the electoral process contributed to a peaceful election day and an orderly vote count. The FNJ was commended for providing leadership in creating a climate conducive for media work throughout the process. The mission, however, emphasised a need for continued vigilance on issues of media freedom. According to its investigations, which were supported by the FNJ's media monitoring network, the period before the elections was marked by 61 instances of violations of media rights, including restricted access to information and attacks on journalists and media workers.

See: http://www.fnjnepal.org/mission5/election_monitoring.php.

10. Radio journalist attacked in mid-western Nepal

FNJ sources reported that Tila Bhandari, a radio journalist, was harassed and threatened with death by members of the Nepali Congress in the town of Harre, in Nepal's mid-west, on May 10. Bhandari, of Nepal FM 91.8, was in Harre to cover a *bandh* (general strike) called by the Nepali Congress in Surkhet district. The FNJ reported the group, which pressured Bhandari not to report on their activities, also confiscated the memory card from her camera.

See: <http://asiapacific.ifj.org/en/articles/journalist-in-nepal-attacked-for-reporting-on-strike>

11. New leadership team at FNJ

The FNJ conducted its organisational elections in April and the following new leadership team has taken office: Dharmendra Jha, President; Govinda Acharya, Vice-President; Poshan KC, General Secretary; Ramjee Dahal, Secretary; and Ramesh Bista, Treasurer. The following have been elected to the FNJ's executive committee: Kishor Kumar Karki, Sambhu Jha, Ujir Magar, Jagat Nepal, Pratap Bista, Seetal Shah, Punya Paudel, Rabindra Bastola, Janak Nepal, Prem KC, Chattrra Saud, Manmohan Suwar, Yesodha Timsina, Rajkumar Dikpal, Mahesh Das, Diwakar Bagchand, Ajaya Phunyal, Bharat Sakya and, Saradraj Gautam. The new executive committee met for the first time at the FNJ headquarters in Kathmandu's media village on May 6.

See: http://www.fnjnepal.org/images/morephotos/big/newcentral_comitee.jpg

12. Media rights monitoring and advocacy workshop in Dhaka

SAMSN and IFJ Asia-Pacific, in association with Massline Media Centre, Dhaka (MMC), conducted a workshop on Media Rights Monitoring and Advocacy in the Bangladeshi capital on May 3 and 4. The workshop was supported by UNESCO's International Program for the Development of Communication (IPDC) and attended by 22 journalists from various parts of Bangladesh, all regular contributors to MMC's media rights monitoring network. The workshop discussed issues confronting journalists in Bangladesh in the context of the severe political polarisation witnessed in recent years and the declaration of a state of emergency in January 2007. Strategies for professional unity were also discussed. Journalists were encouraged to participate in a broader networking process involving global advocacy groups and to engage in solidarity actions to create a climate of respect for media rights in Bangladesh.

For details, contact: ifjsouthasia@hotmail.com

13. Media rights monitoring and advocacy workshop in Raipur

A similar workshop under the UNESCO/IPDC program for South Asia was held in Raipur, the capital of Chattisgarh state, India, on April 19 and 20. Twenty-five journalists from Chattisgarh and the neighbouring states of Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Jharkhand participated. All the participants had, in some degree, experienced the pressures of working in an area that has



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long been in the grip of a Maoist insurgency. Several security laws to deal with the situation have had the effect of increasing the potential for journalists to be harassed, intimidated and summarily detained. Participants resolved to strengthen their professional unity in the context of the problems they faced and also to seek solidarity actions at the national, regional and global levels.

For details, contact: ifjsouthasia@hotmail.com.

14. Sri Lanka Action Plan on Gender Equity

Five journalists' organisations in Sri Lanka adopted a two-year Action Plan on Gender at the Talking Gender summit in Colombo on May 3 and 4. The plan, supported by SAMSN and IFJ Asia-Pacific, identifies unequal participation of women in media unions and organisations and limited training for women as priority issues to be addressed. Aiming to increase the number of women journalists, including senior journalists, represented in media unions and organisations, the plan aims to ensure women receive leadership training and capacity building support. The plan is based on the 2006 Charter of Gender Equity for Media and Journalism in Sri Lanka. A working group was set up to implement the plan, supported by the Federation of Media Employees Trade Unions, the Sri Lanka Working Journalists' Association, the Free Media Movement, the Sri Lanka Tamil Media Alliance and the Sri Lanka Muslim Media Forum. The summit was held with the support of the European Union.

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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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 Nepali 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