



May 25, 2007

To SAMSN members and friends

Welcome to the South Asia Media Solidarity Network's (SAMSN) monthly e-bulletin. The next bulletin will be sent on Monday June 11, 2007 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 grouping of journalists' trade unions, press freedom organisations and journalists in South Asia that have agreed to work together to support the freedom of expression and association in the region. SAMSN was formed at a meeting of these groups in Kathmandu 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. Launch of IFJ South Asia Press Freedom Report

The IFJ's fifth annual South Asia Press Freedom Report: *The fight goes on: Press Freedom in South Asia 2006-2007* was released on World Press Freedom Day, May 3, 2007 in Male, Maldives and via the Internet. The report, which contains sections on Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka over the last year, was produced with contributions from IFJ SAMSN affiliates and other press freedom partners in South Asia. It is supported by UNESCO and documents the major challenges to media freedom in South Asia between May 2006 and April 2007. The report is now available here: www.ifj-asia.org/files/South_Asia_Report_2006_07.pdf.

2. World Press Freedom Day, May 3

Around South Asia, journalists marked World Press Freedom Day on May 3. Events commemorating the day included the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) hosting a mass rally in Kathmandu before launching their annual report, *Press Freedom - One Year of Loktantra*, and a book documenting journalists killed during the civil war there, *Bandukko Maarmaa Kalam*;



the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) released their press freedom report *Increasingly dangerous trends of violence threatened Pakistani journalists in 2006*; and the Free Media Movement (FMM) published a scathing review of their country's press situation, *The Death of Media Freedom in Sri Lanka*. Visit www.ifj-asia.org for the full round up.

3. Two Sri Lankan journalists killed in separate incidents

The murders of two Tamil journalists in April have accelerated grave fears for the welfare and safety of Tamil media personnel in Sri Lanka. Subash Chandrabose, editor of the magazine *Nilam*, was reportedly shot dead on April 16 at his Thirunavatkulam home. In a separate incident on April 29 Selvarajah Rajivarnam, reporter for the newspaper *Uthayan*, was shot dead by an unidentified assailant while cycling to his office in Jaffna. Rajivarnam had only been working for the newspaper for four months. Since 2001, every media personnel that has been killed in Sri Lanka has been a Tamil, apart from one Sinhala journalist. Go to www.ifj-asia.org for further details.

4. Growing pressure against the independence of Sri Lankan journalism

Ongoing harassment by government officials and associates has highlighted concerns at the current status of independent journalism in Sri Lanka, particularly in provincial areas. Ranjith Rajapakshe, a correspondent in Hatton is currently being held in prison due to a complaint and arrest issued against him by a group of prison officers on May 16. He has in the past been subject to intimidation and threats for his corruption reporting. On the same day as Rajapakshe's arrest, Jaffna-based journalist Navarathnam Parameshwaran was threatened by a political group affiliated with the government following an article he submitted to a newspaper. A day earlier, Sonali Samarasinghe, editor of *The Morning Leader*, was questioned by the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) for four hours after receiving a complaint from the Central Bank regarding articles she published in the *Sunday Leader* and the *Irudina* last year. Two female journalists, Munusamy Parameshawary and Champika Liyanarachchi, were also subject to derogatory comments made by the Agricultural Minister Hemakumara Nanayakkara, which were aired on the pro-government television station Independent Television Network (ITN) on May 9. Visit www.ifj-asia.org for more.

5. Three newspaper employees killed in protest attack against article in India

Three employees of Tamil daily *Dinakaran* were killed as a result of violent protests and petrol bombs being hurled at the newspaper's office in Madurai on May 9. Computer engineers M Vinod Kumar and G Gopinath, and security guard K Muthuramalingam, died in a fire that destroyed the office building which was also shared by newspaper *Tamil Murasu* and the television station Sun TV. The attack was allegedly committed by supporters of a faction of the political party Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), who were angry at a political poll conducted by *Dinakaran* concerning the next political leader in the region. The National Union of Journalists (NUJI), have condemned the horrific attack and demanded action be taken against those found guilty. For more, see www.ifj-asia.org.

6. Aaj TV station siege in Karachi

The Karachi offices of Pakistan cable television channel Aaj TV was under siege for four hours on May 12, as armed groups reportedly set the station car park ablaze, while production schedules were thrown into chaos as staff sheltered from periodic showers of bullets. Photographer Anwar Abbas received head injuries, two camera persons were injured and had their cameras stolen at gunpoint, and a reporter and another camera person were taken hostage. Three media workers suffered minor bullet wounds. The attack was considered to be in retribution to Aaj TV's live coverage of the violence occurring in Karachi sparked by a planned public address by suspended Pakistan chief justice, Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry. For more information visit www.ifj-asia.org.

7. PFUJ host "black day" protest against Aaj TV attack

The Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) held a "Black Day" on May 14, protesting the Aaj TV attack in Karachi, and vowed to defend freedom of the press. Protest demonstrations were held



in towns across the country, including Islamabad, Lahore, and Karachi, to demand greater protections and safety measures for journalists. The PFUJ have been vocal about the dire circumstances impacting Pakistani journalists, and their ability to work autonomously and safely. In February, the PFUJ along with the IFJ conducted an International Mission for Press Freedom and Journalist Safety in Pakistan. Recently, the PFUJ has been calling for a review of the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), arguing that it is misusing its power and suppressing freedom of expression in Pakistan by pressuring private channel broadcasters. Go to www.pfuj.info for further details. To read the IFJ and PFUJ report, visit www.ifj-asia.org.

8. Four journalists injured in suicide bomb aimed at Pakistan interior minister

Four journalists were injured in a suicide bomb attack aimed at Aftab Khan Sherpao, the Pakistani interior minister, in the north-western district of Charsadda on April 28. According to local reports, 28 people were killed in the suicide attack and many more were injured including the four journalists: TV cameraman Arif Yousafzai, *Subah* newspaper reporter Siddiquallah, Ayaz Muhammad of the Associated Press of Pakistan, and Press Information Department photographer Arshad Ali. Interior Minister Sherpao received only minor injuries in the attack. For further information contact ifj@ifj-asia.org.

9. IFJ Handbook on improving relations between India and Pakistan

To promote good journalism practices in South Asia, particularly reporting on peace and conflict between India and Pakistan, the IFJ has released *Bridging the Divides: Improving Relations between India and Pakistan*. The handbook aims to encourage the important role the media could play in reducing conflict, thereby assisting the road to peace. The handbook was launched at the IFJ hosted India-Pakistan Media Summit on February 27 in New Delhi. To request a copy, please contact ifj@ifj-asia.org.

10. Himal magazine censored in Bangladesh

Himal Southasian, a monthly political magazine, was prevented from distribution until it removed an editorial piece and an article, which both discussed the growing power of the military and the future of democracy in Bangladesh. *Himal Southasian* has since announced that the cover story in their June issue will discuss the ongoing political experimentation in the country. Visit www.ifj-asia.org for more details.

11. Strike ends for Nepal 1 Television

The IFJ has welcomed news of an agreement between Nepal 1 Television employees and management on May 7, ending a three-week workers' strike where staff padlocked the offices shut since April 19. The agreement has settled many of the demands in the employees' original 20 point letter, including post-dated contracts, health insurance and a provident fund. The IFJ has lobbied on the employees' behalf, including President Christopher Warren writing a letter to management, urging them to address the staff's calls for better working conditions. Contact ifj@ifj-asia.org for more.

12. Growing harassment against Nepalese journalists for their critical reporting

Nepalese journalists have faced continuing and escalating intimidation and harassment for their critical reporting. In the most recent incident, Santosh Neupane, editor and publisher of *Narayani Express National Daily*, received death threats from Maoist supporters on April 22. The threats came after Neupane published critical reports on clashes with Maoists. A few days earlier on April 19, *Kantipur* daily correspondent, Krishna Thapa received death threats from the chairperson of the Rasuwa Hospital Development Committee who stated: "I will kill these types of journalists". On the same day Rameshwor Bohara, a correspondent for *Himal*, and Damodar Bhandari, from the *Annapurna daily* in Rolpa, were reportedly ambushed by a Maoist group. For more, visit www.ifj-asia.org.



13. IFJ co-host Human Rights summit and training workshops in Nepal

The Human Rights and Conflict Summit, co-hosted by the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ) and the IFJ, was held in Kathmandu on May 7 and 8. The summit, supported by the European Commission (EC), addressed the issue of journalists and media reporting on human rights. Asia-Pacific Director Jacqueline Park, representing the IFJ, told the meeting it was important that journalists put human rights at the centre of their work. In her address, Park commented that “To defend the rights of others, journalists must be able to defend their own rights”. In supporting this aim, the IFJ led a number of Danida-funded training workshops to Nepalese journalists a few days earlier, teaching skills in Union Leadership Management. According to Park, “Journalists do not have to choose between defending their own rights and those of the public. By doing one they strengthen their ability to do the other”. Contact ifj@ifj-asia.org for further information.

14. IFJ Congress in Moscow next week

The 26th IFJ Congress will commence next week in Moscow running from May 28 to June 2. The IFJ, which represents more than 500,000 journalists in over 115 countries, holds its Congress every three years bringing journalists’ leaders together from around the world. This year’s theme is *Making News for Democracy: Building Trust in Quality Journalism*, in which three key issues will be the main focus: impunity and the killing of journalists; building quality media and confronting intolerance; and the future of journalism. “Our Congress will focus on how we can build on positive developments,” says IFJ General Secretary Aidan White. “How we can rekindle the mission of journalism and how we can build a fresh solidarity that will protect journalists’ rights at national and global levels”. For more information regarding the Congress visit www.ifj.org.

15. Media monitoring and corruption reporting workshops in Sri Lanka

Throughout June, the IFJ and the Free Media Movement (FMM) will again host a series of training exercises for Sri Lankan journalists as part of their USAID and ARD funded program: *Enhancing Media Capacity for monitoring and reporting corruption (with especial relevance to tsunami rehabilitation and reconstruction)*. Aimed at creating a corps of investigative journalists who are able to investigate, assess and report on the implementation of the tsunami reconstruction effort and use of international aid money, this month’s program will commence with two field reporting exercises led by an experienced investigative journalist. This will be followed by a second round of investigative journalism training workshops and a round table meeting of editors to consider the program’s work and the media’s role in monitoring tsunami-related aid and tackling corruption. For more details about the project, contact ifj@ifj-asia.org.

16. IFJ staff changes

The IFJ Asia-Pacific Project office is pleased to welcome Sukumar Muraliharan as IFJ Asia Project Manager. Prior to working with the IFJ, Sukumar had an illustrious career as a journalist, trainer and consultant, and was formerly the Deputy Editor and Delhi Bureau Chief for the Indian current affairs magazine, *Frontline*, which is part of the Hindu group. For more information, contact ifj@ifj-asia.org.

17. Latest South Asia protests

[Cambodia: Journalist flees in fear after being targeted for abuse by Cambodian PM - 21/5/2007](#)

[Bangladesh: IFJ blasts Bangladesh authorities’ censorship of Himal Southasian - 16/5/2007](#)

[Pakistan: IFJ outraged by Aaj TV station siege in Karachi - 15/5/2007](#)

[India: Three killed in “shocking” petrol bomb attacks on media offices - 11/5/2007](#)

[Nepal: Journalists attacked for critical reporting - 9/5/2007](#)

[Nepal: IFJ hails end to Nepal 1 Television strike as “win for employees” - 9/5/2007](#)

[Hong Kong: IFJ joins global campaign for an independent Radio Television Hong Kong \(RTHK\) - 9/5/2007](#)

[Cambodia: IFJ condemns General’s “kidding” death threat to journalist - 7/5/2007](#)

[Philippines: IFJ calls for libel law reform in Philippines - 4/5/2007](#)

[World Press Freedom Day: IFJ launches Fifth Annual South Asia Press Freedom Report: The fight](#)



**International
Federation
of Journalists**

CHRISTOPHER WARREN
President
AIDAN WHITE
General Secretary

[goes on: Press freedom in South Asia 2006-2007- 3/5/2007](#)

[Maldives: Statement by International Press Freedom Mission to the Maldives - 3/5/2007](#)

[Pakistan: Freelance photographer killed in attempted assassination on Pakistan Interior Minister - 2/5/2007](#)

[Sri Lanka: Second Sri Lankan journalist murder has "grave implications for journalist safety" - 1/5/2007](#)

If SAMSUN members 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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SAMSUN 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