

## FOREWORD

By Jacqueline Park, director, IFJ Asia-Pacific.



IFJ Asia-Pacific director, Jacqueline Park addresses a protest demonstration of journalists in Kathmandu on March 22, 2006.

Dangerous and difficult – two words that sum up much of the daily reality for journalists and media workers in South Asia.

Journalists often face daily attacks, while those who threaten journalists seem to enjoy impunity from prosecution. This culture of impunity reinforces a media environment that can often be profoundly undemocratic and hostile.

In many instances journalists are forced to do their jobs in a climate of fear and intimidation.

In the name of tackling terrorism, governments around the region have continued the crack down on democratic rights and press freedom. This is nowhere better illustrated than in the continuing tragedy that is Nepal.

Corrupt officials, insurgents, fundamentalists of all religions and gangsters with their own violent methods of silencing truth tellers, continue to strike out at journalists.

In this report you will get the full story of press freedom, democratic rights and journalists' safety in South Asia. Sadly, it details the deaths of too many of our colleagues and records the unspeakable treatment of many others. It documents the declining media freedoms so important for media independence and vital to democracy.

At the same time, journalists, media workers and friends of media freedom are fighting back.

Here you will find stories of amazing courage and professionalism by our colleagues across the region: journalists in Nepal at the forefront of the opposition to the royal coup, and its clampdown on press freedom and democratic rights; courageous Bangladeshi journalists exposing the corruption that pervades the country despite continuing horrific violence; Indian journalists in conflict prone-Kashmir and the north east facing the ire of both militants and security forces; media persons in Pakistan and Afghanistan resisting religious fundamentalism in the shape of blasphemy laws; in Sri Lanka media workers supporting holistic media reform initiatives in a country ravaged by conflict and more recently, the tsunami.

The report is testament to the professional solidarity among journalists in South Asia.

The increasing assault on journalists' rights and press freedom saw the emergence of the South Asia Media Solidarity Network (SAMSAN) in Nepal in September 2004. This unprecedented coalition of journalists' unions and press freedom organisations in South Asia, representing more than 25,000 journalists, is dedicated to building solidarity among journalists' organisations

and other groups in the region. It aims to promote a safer working environment and greater respect for the work of journalists and media workers.

This solidarity is based on a shared understanding of the importance of the craft, a commitment to high professional standards, and, at the most basic level, an understanding that journalists need to support each other to do their job in safety.

As with the previous years, this report looks at the major challenges to media freedom in the past year and briefly explains trends and specific incidents – both positive and negative. A comprehensive list of cases of media freedom violations and attacks on journalists from May 2005 to April 2006 has also been compiled.

This year, we also carry reports from Bhutan and the Maldives – where democratic forces in these tiny nations are struggling for press freedom and challenging autocratic rule.

Spotlighting the cases of violence against journalists and press freedom violations plays a valuable role in not only raising awareness of these issues but also in applying pressure to ensure that the perpetrators of these assaults are brought to justice. Governments must respect democratic rights, investigate and follow up every attack and be held accountable when there is official indifference, negligence or, as in some cases, official complicity in attacks on media.

It is the duty of the state to provide an environment in which journalists are able to carry out their professional duties without fear of attack and intimidation from state and private parties. Violence and threats foster a climate of fear and insecurity that inhibits independent journalism and can promote self-censorship.

Through protest and solidarity actions and the publication of this report, the South Asia Media Solidarity Network stands as a challenge to those that violate press freedom and independent journalism in South Asia.

This report has been produced by the International Federation of Journalists on behalf of the SAMSAN with the support of IFJ affiliates, journalists and press freedom organisations across South Asia, including:

### **Afghanistan**

Committee to Protect Afghan Journalists, Kabul

### **Bangladesh**

Bangladesh Freedom Watch

Bangladesh Journalists' Rights Forum

Bangladesh Manobadhikar Sangbadik Forum (BMSF: Human Rights Journalists Forum of Bangladesh)

Media Watch, Bangladesh

### **Bhutan**

Association of Press Freedom Activists, Bhutan

### **India**

All India Newspaper Employees' Federation

Indian Journalists' Union

National Union of Journalists, India

### **Nepal**

Center for Human Rights and Democratic Studies (CEHURDES)

Federation of Nepalese Journalists

National Union of Journalists, Nepal

Nepal Press Union

### **Pakistan**

Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists

### **Sri Lanka**

Federation of Media Employees' Trade Unions

Free Media Movement

Sri Lanka Working Journalists' Association