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More press freedom violations in Bangladesh although panel created to monitor harassment of journalists

Just days after establishing a special procedure for examining cases of harassment of journalists, Bangladesh's information ministry has revoked the press accreditation of 59 journalists regarded as supporters of the previous prime minister. Reporters Without Borders (RSF) urges the interim government not to use the withdrawal of press cards as a punitive measure, to end the ongoing political reprisals against journalists, and to prioritise structural reforms to promote press freedom.

Update of 12/11/2024: On 10 November, the Direction de l'information cancelled the accreditation cards of a further 118 journalists. The total number of cards cancelled since 29 October is 167.

On 5 November, the information and broadcasting ministry's Press Information Department (PID) [cancelled](#) the press cards of another 29 journalists regarded as supporters of the government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina that was ousted in August. These cards provide access to all official press conferences and government offices. The day before, the PID had cancelled the cards of 30 journalists for the same reason.

The decision to strip these journalists of their all-important press cards came just one week after the same ministry established a procedure for examining reports of harassment of journalists - a welcome measure after many complaints falsely implicating journalists in the deaths of protesters.

"The decision to rescind the accreditation cards of journalists considered close to the previous government is politically-motivated and punitive, and has the effect of intimidating the press. It encourages self-censorship and threatens the very existence of opposition media. This decision by the information and broadcasting ministry is incomprehensible, coming just a week after it took a positive step by establishing a mechanism for reporting cases of harassment against journalists. We urge the ministry to return to this more constructive path by establishing a regulated procedure for issuing and rescinding press cards, by ensuring that cases of harassment are examined impartially, and by putting a final stop to political reprisals against media professionals.

Celia Mercier

Head of South Asia Office

Nearly 140 journalists accused

In reaction to the bloody crackdown on anti-government protests that preceded Hasina's removal and flight into exile on 5 August, journalists seen as affiliated to her government have been the targets of reprisals ever since. Extremely grave but baseless accusations of killing protesters have been brought against nearly 140 journalists. [Twenty-five have been charged with "crimes against humanity."](#) Many of them have gone into hiding because they fear being arrested and jailed.

The creation of a Committee for Monitoring Harassment Cases against Journalists in Mass Media could eventually result in these charges being dropped. But the committee is dominated by senior government officials and some lawyers have doubts about its efficacy and impartiality.

Furthermore, journalists seeking the committee's intervention must include "admissible evidence" in their application, which amounts to being required to prove their innocence. The committee is supposed to transfer cases to the justice ministry, which will decide whether the charges should be dropped. The security of applicants' personal data, especially information about their current location, is also a matter of concern.

Another reporter was added to the list of unjustly accused journalists on 30 September. It was **Mohammad Nesar Uddin**, a correspondent for the national newspaper *Daily Jugantor* and editor of the local newspaper *Daily Sagarkool* in the southern coastal region of Barguna. He is arbitrarily accused of shooting and wounding a protester. RSF has learned that his name was added to a list of 79 suspects in a police report. Compounding the absurdity of the accusation, the complainant said he did not know Uddin and had never even heard his name, other local journalists told RSF.

RSF reiterates its recommendations to the interim government. Detentions of journalists and arbitrary legal proceedings against them must stop at once. Before the new government took over, [Bangladesh](#) was ranked 165th out of 180 countries in RSF's 2024 [World Press Freedom Index](#).