

## **[Statement] India: Restore The Kashmir Walla's Website and Social Media Accounts**

(Bangkok/Kathmandu, 22 August 2023) - The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) condemns the Indian Government's recent arbitrary blocking of the independent news outlet, [The Kashmir Walla \(TKW\)](#).

On 19 August 2023, TKW's website became inaccessible in India as it was [blocked](#) by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology under the Information Technology Act of 2000.

In addition, TKW's Facebook page has been removed while its Twitter account has been withheld in India. TKW's office in Srinagar has also been served an [eviction notice](#). TKW was given no prior notice and reason before such actions were taken.

This is the latest instance of a continuing infringement on press freedom, freedom of expression, and people's right to access information in Indian-Administered Kashmir.

### **Alarming patterns of reprisal**

Founded in 2011 by Fahad Shah—a prominent Kashmiri journalist and recipient of the Human Rights Press Award—TKW has stood as one of the last remaining bastions of independent media in the region.

Since 2019, TKW has been enduring a systemic crackdown against independent media, following India's revocation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status. This crackdown involved the introduction of [Media Policy 2020](#) and the closure of the [Kashmir Press Club](#). Since 2019, at least [49 Kashmiri journalists](#)—including TKW staffers—have faced police summons, interrogations, threats, and physical assaults. At worst, some have been charged under criminal cases for their journalistic work.

In 2019, [a TKW staffer](#) was physically assaulted and unlawfully detained at the Fateh Kadal police station. In 2021, [TKW journalist Yashraj Sharma](#) faced legal action for publishing reports on the army's alleged coercion to hold Republic Day celebrations at a school in the Shopian district. In January 2022, [Sajad Gul](#)—a student and TKW trainee reporter—was arrested under the Public Safety Act (PSA). Gul is currently languishing in prison.

In 2020, journalist Fahad Shah and another TKW staffer were [detained at gunpoint](#) as they were returning from a reporting assignment. In a separate incident in January 2022, Shah was summoned by the police for his news coverage of a gunfight, which aired the victim's family's grievances. The following month, Shah was arrested for allegedly uploading 'anti-national content' on social media. The content in question

was related to Shah's earlier gunfight coverage, wherein the victim's family maintained their son's innocence as opposed to the police labeling him a '[hybrid-militant](#).'

Shah's case is a textbook example of [revolving door arrests](#) under repressive laws, such as the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) and the PSA, which allow for prolonged detention without trial. Shah was initially granted bail, only to be rearrested for another reporting and eventually charged under the PSA in March 2022. Although the court quashed Shah's detention under the PSA, he remains incarcerated under the UAPA case—alongside Kashmiri scholar Aala Fazili—for his allegedly '[seditious](#)' article published on the TKW way back in 2011.

Over the past 18 months, TKW staff have been experiencing a series of harassment as the State Investigation Agency (SIA) has [conducted multiple raids](#) on the TKW office and even Shah's residence. The SIA also confiscated their documents and electronic devices. TKW's interim editor, Yashraj Sharma, has also been repeatedly [summoned](#) by the authorities.

### **Call to Action**

'The blocking of [TKW's website](#) by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology under the Information Technology Act is an arbitrary measure intended to curtail access to information regarding the human rights situation in Indian-Administered Kashmir. This constitutes a severe setback not only for TKW but also for the state of press freedom in the entire region,' said Mary Aileen Diez-Bacalso, Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA.

FORUM-ASIA urges the Government of India to restore The Kashmir Walla's website and social media accounts. We call on the government to immediately cease all acts of harassment and intimidation against TKW staffers.

In the interest of upholding freedom of expression in the region, we urge the authorities to swiftly drop all charges against Fahad Shah, Sajad Gul, and other Kashmiri journalists.

## **About FORUM-ASIA:**

**The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)** is a network of 85 member organisations across 23 countries, mainly in Asia. Founded in 1991, FORUM-ASIA works to strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development through research, advocacy, capacity development and solidarity actions in Asia and beyond. It has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. The FORUM-ASIA Secretariat is based in Bangkok, with offices in Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. [www.forum-asia.org](http://www.forum-asia.org)

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