

Province No 2 Awaits Proper Attention from Central Level Media

Nepal has successfully held two rounds of the much awaited local level elections- first on 14 May and second on 28 June 2017. The country is now eagerly waiting the third round of the local election scheduled on 18 September in Province No 2 which houses eight districts in the southern plains in the east of the Capital City, Kathmandu. The province is populated with 20.4% of the total population (5,404,145). The election in this province bears significance for it has suffered numerous political demonstrations and agitations causing the death of 60 persons. Though the political protests were for citizens' rights; press freedom remained at the receiving end of the protest. The main cities Birgunj, Janakpur, Rajbiraj and Lahan were prone to several incidents of attack and oppression of journalists and media persons. Earlier, the central of Terai-Janakpur-had witnessed murders of working journalist Uma Singh, Rohan Chaudhary, Birendra Saha and media entrepreneur Arun Singhaniya.

The incidents of press freedom violation as threats, attacks, newspaper burning, obstruction was caused by the agitation. Even the movement of journalists was limited. Incidents provoking communal conflict and hatred among Madheshi people (majority in the Terai) and hilly people (minority in the Terai) were also witnessed in Province No 2.

With this in the background, agitating Madheshi leaders and groups after being ensured of constitution amendment by the Parliament agreed to hold the election in Province 2. It is due on 18 September.

With the upcoming local level election, Freedom Forum conducted a media mission in Province No. 2. The mission met the stakeholders including journalists in four major districts as Saptari, Siraha, Dhanusha and Mahottari to monitor the overall status of press freedom, freedom of expression and journalist' safety. The team held discussions with journalists, media entrepreneurs, civil society personnel, local administration and political officials of the four districts from September 6 to 8. The discussions were held in the main cities of those districts as

Bardibas (Mahottari), Janakpur (Dhanusha), Lahan and Golbazaar (Siraha), and Rajbiraj (Saptari).

Table 1.1 Media Mission Team

S.No	Name	Position
1	Taranath Dahal	Executive Chief, Freedom Forum
2	Sailendra Jha	Senior journalist from Janakpur city
3	Ajay Shah	Stringer, Freedom Forum

Discussion with the Journalists/ CSO representatives of Saptari, Rajbiraj



Table 1.2 Travel date and location

Date	Location
September 6 th 2017	Lahan, Siraha, Bardibash & Mahottari
September 7 th 2017	Rajbiraj & Saptari
September 8 th 2017	Golbazar, Siraha, Janakpur, & Dhanusha
September 9 th 2017	Jaleswor, & Mahottari

The discussions were intensively focused upon

- Professional challenges and security of the reporters and editors from local print and broadcast media as well as national level media, and
- Civil societies, political parties and local administration's role and concern on journalist' safety and security.

Observations made during the mission are as follows:

1. Series of attacks on media have considerably decreased. Against the backdrop of agitations in Province No 2 on the ground of local level election journalist and media persons' security challenges have also decreased significantly.
2. During the election period, political parties were found aware and sensitive towards building good relation with media persons. Terai-based- agitating political parties who had hostile cadres towards journalists pressing on publishing and broadcasting news in their favor in the past; have changed significantly in present context, according to the journalists.
3. However, as one of the political parties and some minor underground groups have announced boycott from election and hence, the fear of their forcing the media to publish and broadcast news contents encouraging anti-election activities still exists.
4. Prevailing communal divide among journalists from different geographical areas has also caused lack of fair and close rapport among them. They are doubtful and skeptic among one another..
5. Nowadays, especially in Janakpur, journalists are engaged in accusing each other on social media (Facebook). It has created antagonism resulting in writing against each other. Due to this, their professional integrity as well as social image is negatively affected.
6. The local journalists complained the Kathmandu-based journalists and editors' insensitivity towards Madhesh issue. As per their view, Kathmandu-based journalists have not taken the Terai (Madhesh) issues seriously and have never prioritized the subject matter. As there is less

understanding about the inclusion issue in news desk, news sent by them were edited unnecessarily or ignored, they argued.

7. The satirical entertainment programs broadcasted on Nepali television channel make fun of Madhesi language and their speaking tone. Journalist and CSO's have serious concern regarding negative image of Madhesh shown on television making it the subject matter of fun and ridicule. They suggest that if this issue is addressed it would create the social solidarity and accord in the society.

Discussion with the Journalists/ CSO representatives of Lahan, Siraha



8. In all four districts, local media were found lacking adequate advertisement, qualified human power to continue radio station for long. Even the equipments were not standard. However, there were few qualified journalists working with professional integrity. These issues were not mentioned in the Working Journalist Act. Similarly, investment in media was not prioritized. Many journalists stated there was a prime need for the increment in advertisement, increment in training opportunity institutional development of media sector in that area.
9. State still has not given compensation to the media houses which were severely affected during the Madhesh agitation - their media equipments were damaged. They complained about the fact that even a committee was formed to investigate Madhesh agitation; but the committee ignored the media issue and has shown no concern on the damage in the media houses.

10. They suggested that journalists from southern plains (Tarai/Madhes) need to travel to northern hilly (Pahad) areas and vice versa to build knowledge of the socio-economic and cultural status of different places.
11. There is a need for an immediate discussion and discourse on the issues of freedom of expression and information, media rights, press Freedom and others in relation to media and the political parties, local administration, CSO, and journalists. Everybody suggested that if this kind of discourse was held regularly, it would build harmonious situation between the journalists and other social constructs; it would also help keep intact social and cultural harmony.
12. However, civil society complained lack of investigative reporting, professionalism among journalists and media's inadequate role to maintain good governance. To this, journalists also admitted the lack of skills on investigative reporting. Security risks and lack of investment in media were main reasons behind it, they argued.
13. According to civil society, due to the imbalanced distribution of media in the urban (more) and rural areas (less), appropriate watchdog role is lacking.
14. Senior journalists however argued of no security threat to media persons if they practiced balanced and professional journalism. But recently in those areas, due to increase in the number of newcomers who lack training and are from diverse community and, cultural beliefs; variety of conflict inducing matters can be observed in the media.
15. Journalists' politicizing, lack of sustainability and understanding on social tolerance were the main challenges of media, according to local administration and civil society persons.
16. Media entrepreneurs said media was endangered both financially and commercially because even local advertisements were forwarded to capital based media rather than to the local media.
17. There are total 159 print media and 50 radio stations in Province No. 2.

