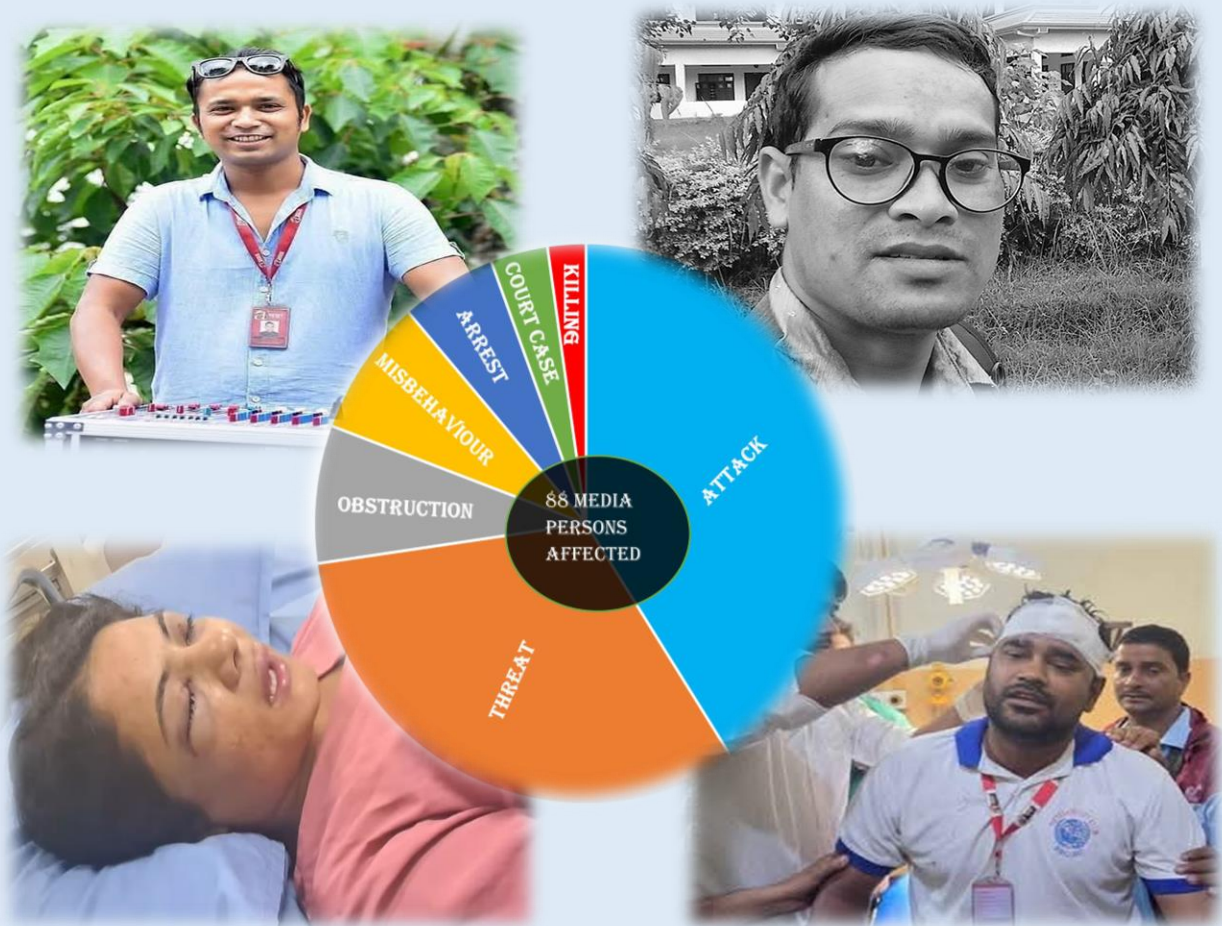


## WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY 2025

### Year of Journalists' Killings: Press Freedom in Peril



## ANNUAL PRESS FREEDOM REPORT

May 3, 2025

NEPAL



**FREEDOM FORUM**

"A Nepali CSO (civil society organization) dedicated to democracy, human rights and governance"

# Year of Journalists' Killings: Press Freedom in Peril

*The trends of increased violation of press freedom with growing physical attacks, widening economic pressure in media with retrenchment on rise, little progress in lawmaking and media reform, information disorder, horrible incident after a decade- killing of an on-duty journalist turning federal capital itself into the most hostile place for free press and journalist, impunity left ignored, underreporting of public concern for lack of effective media presence, and rising intolerance towards media with discredit checkered Nepal's media landscape in the past one year from May 1, 2024 to April 30, 2025. It underscores urgency of vibrant media along with respect to press freedom and thriving media profession equipped with favorable law and tolerant public spheres.*

Freedom Forum (FF) recorded 68 incidents of press freedom violation in the last year- May 1, 2024 to April 30, 2025. In 68 anti-press incidents, a total of 88 media persons- 77 male and 11 female journalists- including eight media houses were directly affected. This last year saw increase in violation, as the previous year from May 2023 to April 2024, had only 60 incidents of violations which had affected 88 media persons including 11 female and three media houses.

Freedom Forum tracks incidents of press freedom violations in all seven provinces of Nepal through its media monitoring desk. These incidents are then analyzed and data maintained in a dedicated website- [www.nepalpressfreedom.org](http://www.nepalpressfreedom.org).

## 1. Violation Type

### *Killing: A Horrible Trend After Decades*

It was unfortunate that two incidents of journalist killings were reported in the last year. Suresh Bhul<sup>1</sup>, an aspiring journalist from Sudurpaschim Province, and Suresh Rajak<sup>2</sup>, a journalist from Bagmati Province, lost their lives in the monitoring period.

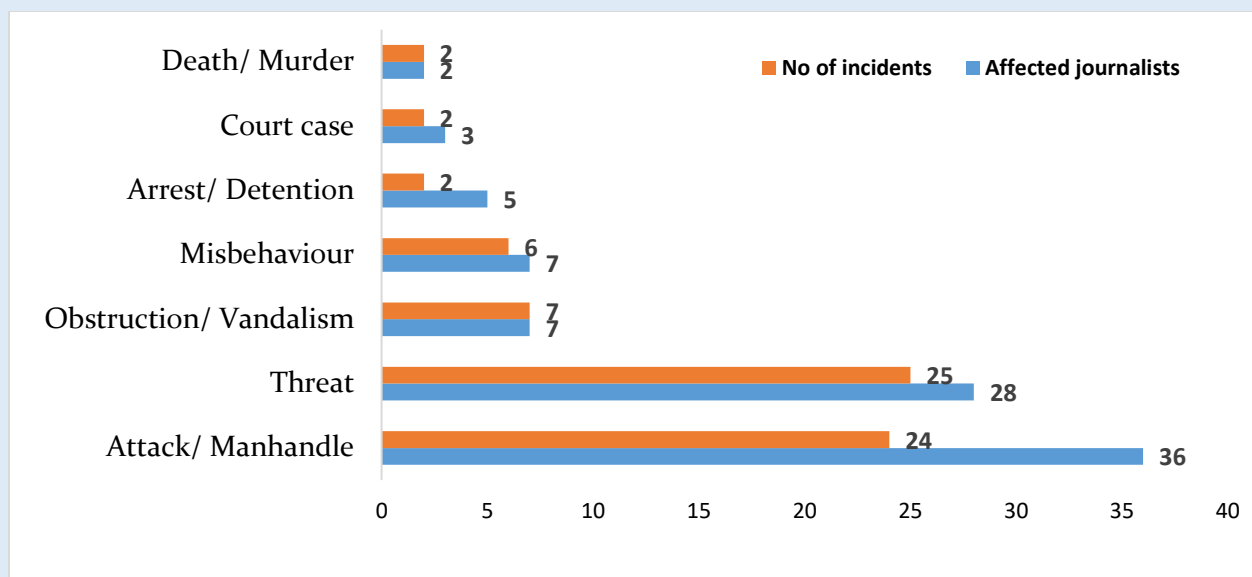
*Photojournalist at Avenues Television Suresh Rajak died in a fire set at a building by the protestors on March 28, 2025. Rajak was reporting the pro-monarchy group's protest at Tinkune area of Kathmandu Valley from the building. As the mob set the building on fire, Rajak could not escape, but succumbed to death.*

*Right to Information activist and Sudurpati online's reporter Suresh Bhul was beaten to death on November 9 in Kailali. The case is still under investigation.*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://nepalpressfreedom.org/main/issue-single/1479>

<sup>2</sup> <https://nepalpressfreedom.org/main/issue-single/1502>



FF categorized violation incidents into seven types: 2 cases of killing of journalist, 2 court cases against journalists, 2 arrest/ detainments, 6 misbehaviors, 7 obstructions/ vandalism, 24 attack/ manhandles and 25 threats/ death threats.

*Kantipur Media Group's chairperson Kailash Sirohiya was arrested on May 21 from the media office in Kathmandu. He was arrested on the basis of an arrest warrant issued from District Court, Dhanusha following a complaint filed accusing him of holding multiple citizenships. The arrest warrant was issued following a series of investigative news stories covered by the Kantipur daily about then Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane's involvement in the misappropriation of several cooperative funds. He was released on May 29, 2024.<sup>3</sup>*

Similarly, four media houses were vandalized, three received threats for publishing news and one has been facing court case.

Looking into the number of affected journalists, the highest (36) were attacked for their news reporting followed by 28 being threatened. Moreover, 7 journalists were misbehaved and 7 barred from reporting, 5 arrested, 3 have been facing court cases and 2 killed as mentioned above in section 1.

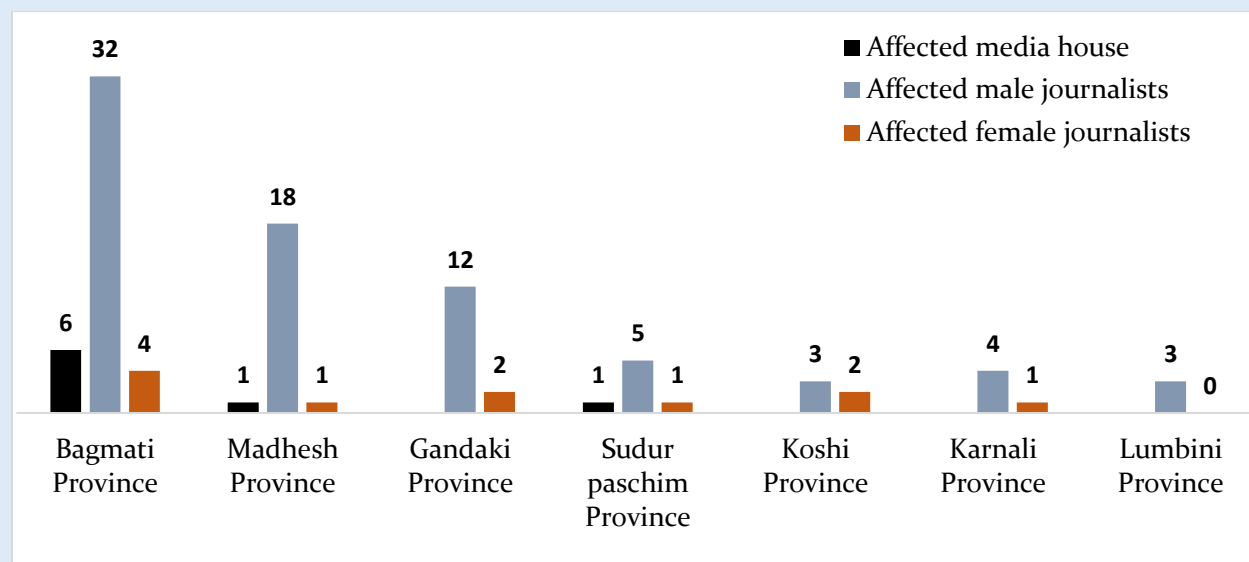
## 2. Violations in Provinces

This year again, the highest number of press freedom violation (28) were recorded in Bagmati Province with majority (20) in federal capital, Kathmandu. In these incidents, 32 male and 4 female media persons and six media houses were affected.

<sup>3</sup> <https://nepalpressfreedom.org/main/issue-single/1445>

Lately, Kathmandu has turned the most hostile place to on-duty journalists, spreading alarm over safety and press freedom. FF recorded devastating incidents where a journalist was killed other were seriously injured, media houses faced vandalism and arson attempt.

*Reporter with the Prime Times Television Sabina Karki was severely injured in her eyes while covering a protest in Kathmandu in April. She was injured by the water cannon thrown by the police targeting the mob as they tried to enter the restricted area. She has been undergoing treatment.<sup>4</sup>*



During the pro-monarchy protest in Kathmandu on March 28, journalists were targeted by the mob based on the media outlets they represented. Thus, they were forced to prioritize their safety over reporting. This signifies that majority journalists affected in this incidents could not be documented accurately.

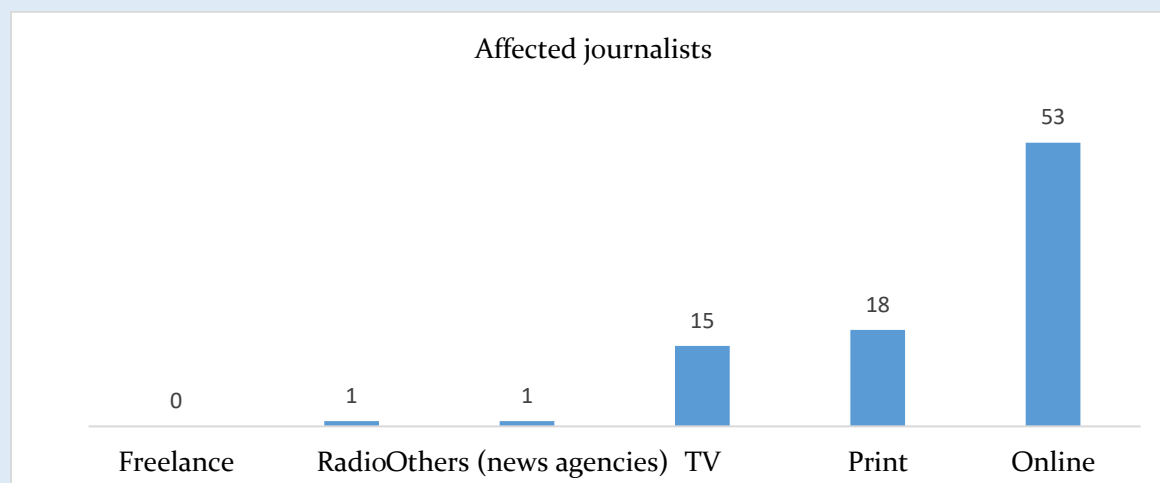
Following this, 15 incidents took place in Madhesh Province affecting 19 media persons (one female) and 1 media house. Similarly, 7 incidents occurred in Sudurpaschim Province affecting 6 media persons including a female and a media house; followed by 6 incidents in Gandaki Province where 12 male and 2 female journalists were affected. In 5 incidents recorded from Karnali Province, 4 male and 1 female journalists were affected. This was followed by 4 incidents in Koshi Province affecting 3 male and 2 female journalists; and 3 incidents in Lumbini Province affecting 3 male journalists.

### 3. Affected journalists and media affiliation

According to data, total 60% journalist working in different online media outlets faced attacks for doing their job in the past year.

<sup>4</sup> <https://nepalpressfreedom.org/main/issue-single/1513>

Among total affected journalists, 53 were affiliated to online media followed by 18 working in print media, 15 in television, one in radio and one in a news agency- noted under 'Others' category.



*Radheshyam Bishwakarma, a reporter with AP1 TV faced harassment while covering an event in Rupandehi district on April 21. While he was reporting on an official visit of a minister, he noticed the presence of some miscreants at the venue and began recording their activities. Meanwhile, the leader of group seized his camera, press identity card, and motorbike key. They returned Bishwakarma's belongings back after deleting photos and video footages.<sup>5</sup>*

Notably, with the growing number of online television channels broadcasting on social media platforms like YouTube, a significant number of journalists in these media have also been targeted while covering news.

#### 4. Elements hostile to journalists

In a majority of the incidents, journalists (29) faced threat and/ or attacks from political leaders and their cadres followed by public employees affecting 15 journalists.

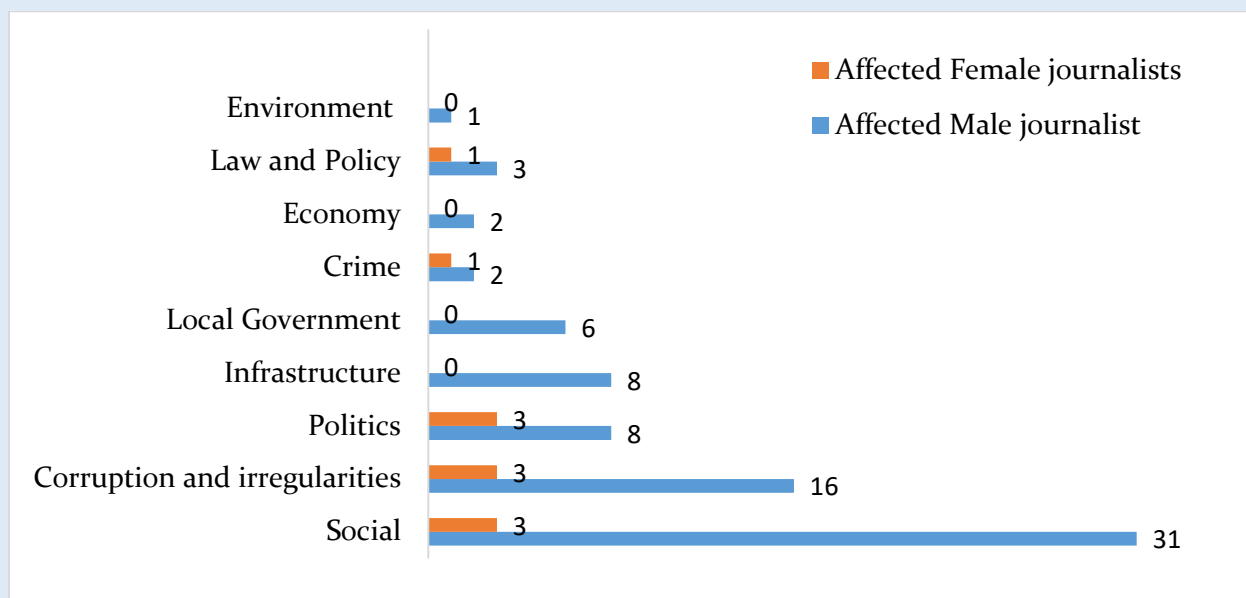
*Dilmaya Shahi, from Mahilajagaran.com was attacked for her reporting in Jumla on March 11. She was attacked for her stories about the rape of a young girl that led to the imprisonment of around 50 perpetrators. She was attacked just after the court's decision.*

Additionally, 29 media persons were targeted by elements such as businesspersons, locals, contractors, etc. It is worrying that both state and non-state actors on frontline to intimidate journalists.

<sup>5</sup> <https://nepalpressfreedom.org/main/issue-single/1511>

## 5. Topics of the news reported

Out of total 88 affected journalists, majority (31 male and 3 female) faced intimidation for covering news related to social issues (protest, education, health, events, etc). Among those, 21 journalists including 3 females were attacked while covering protests.



This data suggests that journalists are at high-risk of attack while covering protests. Thus, their physical safety should still be a priority. Seconding it, journalists reporting on corruption and irregularities are targeted the most.

*Gopal Dahal from Dharan city wrote a story for the Centre for Investigative Journalism, but faced severe threat from the Mayor, resulting into reporter Dahal's displacement for the some months. For the investigative reporting, Dahal faced series of threats.<sup>6</sup>*

Total 19 journalists including 3 females were targeted for their reporting on corruption and irregularities, especially at the local levels in the past year. Similarly, 11 journalists including 3 female covering political issues, 8 reporting on infrastructure, 6 on local government, 33 on crime, 2 about economy, 4 laws and policies and 1 journalist reported on environmental issues.

<sup>6</sup> <https://nepalpressfreedom.org/main/issue-single/1475>



## TREND ANALYSES

- After a decade, Nepal's media faced the most horrible moment, exposing utter lack of safety. A journalist on job lost his life while covering a protest in the federal capital itself on March 28, 2025. Suresh Rajak, photojournalist associated with Avenues Television broadcast from Kathmandu, was burnt to death in the fire set in a building from which he was visualizing the protest held at Tinkune, Kathmandu.
- Another serious incident- killing of a journalist Suresh Bhul in Dhangadhi city drew equal concern this year. Importantly, whether Bhul was journalist or not remained debated initially, diminishing chance of proper advocacy for his rights and justice to the family. Was he killed for his reporting or for other reason is still debated. But, his activities like seeking information at public offices and threats he received from various sides over his campaign of transparency and his affiliation to a local media clearly indicated he was a journalist. The attention this case deserved was meagre, thereby giving impetus to the rogue elements and increasing hostility to journalists and media houses.
- At a time when impunity relating to crimes against journalists during the conflict-era are still awaiting address, the torching alive the on-duty journalist and lackadaisical investigation into the incident exposes journalists are at high risk.
- In the March 28 incident, another journalist Dinesh Gautam affiliated to the onlinekhabar.com and Rajesh Gurung from The Himalayan Times were brutally attacked by the protestors. The media houses- Kantipur, Annapurna Post and a vehicle of Himalaya Television were attacked on the same day.
- These incidents make it clear that once there are political protests be it in the federal capital or outside, the journalists are at the receiving end. The more the political protests, the more risk to media.
- The death of on-duty journalist in the protest raises questions on multiple fronts- government agencies' safety arrangement, media house's plan of protest coverage and mobilization of reporter, media associations' training to build capacity for reporting at risk, and personal risk assessment level.
- In a democratic society where press freedoms and journalists' safety must be a multi-stakeholders' concern, the inadequate advocacy for these shows a reflection of shrinking civic space in Nepal.

- As was the case in the past, the investigative journalists who expose political and financial corruption and irregularities and contribute to good governance are however the butt of attack. Both the state and non-state actors on prowl to assail the journalists who question officials and their cabals linked to irregularities.
- Irrespective of the political parties being one of the significant pillars of democratic system, another pillar of system, free press, is consistently victimized by the political cadres at district and local level, which paints double standard of the political parties- verbal and even written commitment to protection and promotion of free press but hostility in action. It warrants change in political perspective towards role of media and free press for a functional democracy.
- The capacity building of Nepali media houses and journalists to navigate disruptive changes is in a sorry state, thereby putting journalists and media houses at receiving end of the flood of disinformation, misinformation and mal-information. It has ruined the healthy information ecosystem, creating information disorder, and depriving people of their right to right information. It has further shadowed the role of free press and traditional media.
- Another worrying trend that witnessed continuity in the past one year was- discrediting media and journalists. Public officials and social networking sites influencers giving views against media houses and journalists not only disheartened journalists but also discredited media profession. It has a role to incite the elements that want news in their favour or warn of consequences.
- Media co-opting is a disastrous trend, eating up the value of free press. Co-option is gaining a pace, controlling and manipulating media houses and journalists in a certain favor. It is a serious threat to press freedom.
- In the wake of no chance of recovery in media finance that saw record low in the Covid-19 time, the shift towards digital media is continuous. As the financial health of media houses have not improved, chances of violating media professionalism have upped.
- The violations of press freedom are largely related to online media, which is indication that traditional media are fast losing the workforces to digital spheres.
- The retrenchment at media houses is on rise, prompting media persons to job hopping. A comprehensive study and research on how press freedom can be promoted and journalists retained is the need of hour.



- Artificial intelligence (AI) is another frontier bringing hope and stress together in Nepal's press as well. But, sustainable use of AI for better press freedom is not witnessed except some facilitation at work like translation, editing, content generation. Nepali journalists and media houses still lack proper literacy of AI along with the skills to minimize its harm to the media profession caused by spread of mis- and disinformation.
- The financial crisis in media has resulted into non-reporting and under-reporting of significant issues of public concern. The underreporting has not only triggered atmosphere of non-transparency at multi-layer governments but also the retrenchment in local and national media. The layoff of media staffs and closure of media houses have deprived many journalists of their right to continue press freedom. It has also hindered the people's right to information.
- The number of online media is in continuous rise- around 5,000 media portals have been registered at Press Council Nepal as journalistic platform but their sustainability is not clear. Need of capable human resources, affordable internet facility, and favorable business environment are required to foster online media and promote press freedom online in Nepal.

## **LAW AND POLICY: LITTLE PROGRESS**

The bill session of the federal parliament- House of Representatives (HoR), was largely expected to bring the laws waited for long to bring media reform in Nepal, but it saw little progress this time. There were limited number of parliamentary proceeding and deliberation.

- Government failed to bring an integrated mass communications regulation law including the Mass Communication Bill as planned in early 2024.
- The Media Council Bill, which was approved by the National Assembly on February 10, was registered in the House of Representatives on February 11. It entered theoretical discussion among parliamentarians on February 25, leading to a decision allowing lawmakers to submit amendment proposals. As many as 19 amendment proposals were submitted in the House. Freedom Forum also submitted 24-point suggestions on the bill. The points for the amendment were relating to the structure of the Press Council, recommendation committee, code/ethics and self-regulations, journalists' accreditation, independence and accountability. It is still in parliament.

- The Social Media Bill drafted to regulate social media platforms and users was tabled in the Upper House as the 'Social Network Bill, 2081' on January 28. It was later presented by Minister for Communications and Information Technology in the Assembly on February 9. The Assembly decided to continue theoretical discussions on the bill. The bill aims at regulating the platforms through mandatory registration, strict penalties, and content.
- A positive development is that the President of Nepal approved the Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) Bill on October 8, 2024. It includes a provision to merge two state-owned media: the Radio Nepal and the Nepal Television, to function as a public service broadcaster. The Board instituted along with its Chair and members is currently in operation. However, fully functional PSB and its independence and autonomy, as envisioned by the law, are yet to be awaited. PSB should not be limited in name but in action.
- As in the past, for lack of new laws and policies, the old law as Electronic Transaction Act (ETA) has continued inflicting journalists.

*Jiyalal Prasad Sah from birgunjcity.com has been facing charges against cybercrime under the Electronic Transaction Act for his news reporting on embezzlement of funds in Parsa district. His case is sub-judice at District Court Parsa.<sup>7</sup>*

## ON IMPUNITY

- As in the previous update, few cases of impunity relating to crimes against journalists from the conflict period are still pending and the journalists' families are desperately waiting for justice, while prosecution is yet to start in few cases. Ten cases of slain journalists are in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission while, six cases are awaiting investigation, prosecution and adjudication<sup>8</sup>.

## SAFETY MECHANISM AT NHRC: A POSITIVE STEP

The FoE and journalists' safety mechanism anchored by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) under its Directive on Formation of a Safety Mechanism and Work Procedure for Protection of FoE, 2019 has been expanded to seven provinces along with orientation to its members. It is positive development in deed that the mechanism formed for the protection and promotion of FoE and journalists' safety would be instrumental in adopting multi-stakeholder approach

<sup>7</sup> <https://nepalpressfreedom.org/main/issue-single/1471>

<sup>8</sup> <https://freedomforum.org.np/download/annual-media-report-2023/?wpdmcl=5523&refresh=662a11f595f291714033141>

to create safe atmosphere for the journalists across the country. The meetings in the province level have sensitized the stakeholders to stand together on the pressing issues of press freedom and journalists, to which FF notes positively. However, for the effectiveness and broader visibility of the mechanisms in the centre and provinces require utmost support and cooperation from its members. Equipping it with data and information on FoE and press freedom violations regularly is equally significant.

## DISCUSSION AND WAY FORWARD

- With deepening financial crisis in Nepali media, further decline of media profession, impacting press freedom atmosphere can not be denied in Nepal.
- Digital surge in information landscape requires positive interventions with favorable law and policy. Sheer lack of policy and laws in the past year backgrounds the prediction of further disorder in press freedom surrounding digital spheres.
- The attempts of guided political stability would jeopardize the safety of media persons and press freedoms because it will invite political protests and demonstrations of various kinds.
- Rising intolerance in multiple fronts will keep press freedom at further risk. So, it is essential for all sides to build consensus and abide by rule of law where press freedom and journalists will be respected. Intolerance towards media and press freedom must end.
- Capacity building of journalists must be continued throughout the year. The media houses, media educators, journalists' unions, government agencies and CSOs require collaborative initiatives to train journalists for their physical and psychological safety considering the hostile atmosphere they face during reporting. The role of trained and professional journalists and media experts will grow further to keep constant watch on anti-press elements and attitudes. Skilling, re-skilling and upskilling of journalists should therefore be continued as a campaign in the face of growing challenges posed by volatile politics, digital disruption and unexpected disaster. Empowerment of journalists will help foster press freedom.
- Government and state agencies' and public officials' perspectives towards media and free press must improve to foster democratic practices and values. For press

freedom to function as one of the pillars of functional democracy, other pillars' cooperation is required at present.

- Strict adherence to code and professional values will help media persons minimize threats and discredit to journalism. Erosion of trust in media requires immediate check. Journalists and media houses' role counts much to check such erosion so that it helps create atmosphere favorable to press freedom.
- Progressive approach in media, IT and digital/cyber related laws and policies is essential to ensure press freedom and journalists' safety.
- Nepali press and media persons are likely to face continuity of populist politics. So, informed approach of news along with better digital/IT awareness and skills will be essential to ensure rights and save free press.
- The prolonged impunity relating to crime against journalists has further victimized the families of victim journalists. So, the government's seriousness is utmost need to this regard.

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