

# ANNUAL REPORT

2022-23



**Freedom Forum Nepal,**

**Aadarsh Marg, Thapathali, Kathmandu**

**Phone: +977-1-4102022/4102030**

**Email: [freedomforum2005@gmail.com](mailto:freedomforum2005@gmail.com)/ [info@freedomforum.org.np](mailto:info@freedomforum.org.np)**

**Website: [www.freedomforum.org.np](http://www.freedomforum.org.np)/ [www.nepalpressfreedom.org](http://www.nepalpressfreedom.org)**

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## Message from Chairperson

I am pleased to present the annual report of Freedom Forum for this past fiscal year, 2022/23. The report encloses overall activities and accomplishments of FF along with extensive advocacies made towards protection and promotion of freedom of expression and access to information in Nepal.

FF is always committed to achieve its goals in line with its mission and vision. This past year too, FF stood firm in its fight for freedom and human rights. This year, Nepal successfully conducted federal and province elections on November 20. Local election was held on May 13. FF closely observed the activities of Election Commission and the election campaign during this period. FF also reminded the EC and asked it to be aware of citizen's right to free expression while planning to monitor contents on social media.

Similarly, Nepali social media witnessed slews of misinformation and disinformation pre, during and post elections. As Nepal also has significant number of social media users, their access to mis/disinformation has brought host of challenges and communal disturbances lately. In this context, we advocated for utmost need for digital literacy programs and educating people on digital safety.

Moreover, it has been years of advocacy to revise old acts and laws related to media as per time so as to regulate the new issues of mass communications in the ICT, but in vain. The bill session of first session of the parliament expired without any work in new legislation. Let's hope new leadership after the election will be able to deliver the promises they had made to the public during their election campaign and retain public trust on party and politics.

Needless to say, access to information has always been one of the major agendas of FF. This year too, FF prodded the National Information Commission to assess the status of RTI implementation and way forward for its effective implementation. Even after more than 15 years of its implementation, dearth of consolidated data on number of RTI requests and responses is worrying. On this, FF is also planning to build collaboration with NIC in the coming year.

Lastly, I would like to congratulate newly elected committee under my chairmanship. I am also delighted to share that FF has entered eighteen years of its operation this year. We at FF are truly thankful to all the national and international donors and activists for their immense support in accomplishment of the organization's goal throughout the journey.

Hari Binod Adhikari  
Chairperson

## **About the Report**

This is an annual report containing major activities and achievements accomplished by Freedom Forum (FF) during a fiscal year, spanning from July 17, 2022 to July 16, 2023. The primary objective of the report is to disclose overall activities, learning, and outcomes of the organizational initiatives and demonstrate its track record and competence to execute ideas aligning the key themes of the organization. It is expected to serve as a solid documentation of key efforts of the organization to attain its objectives, projects executed and a consolidated contribution FF made to the country's national development.

Information contained in this report have been widely extracted from the newsletters, project documents, project reports, press releases, website updates, meetings and discussion notes, media coverage and social media updates.

## **Who We Are:**

Freedom Forum is an independent, non-government, not-for-profit and non-partisan social organization established on September 1, 2005. It is registered at the District Administration Office of Kathmandu (Regd.127/062/063) and the Social Welfare Council (Affiliation No.18518) of Nepal. Its head office is in Kathmandu, Nepal. It has different representatives in province and district sites to coordinate programs at local level.

The organization has a 13-member Board of Directors, and five staffs. Its General Assembly is held every year. Board meetings are held twice a year. Freedom Forum has seven representatives/ stringers at seven provinces of Nepal.

Freedom Forum, has been established as an acclaimed institution in Nepal working in the sector of freedom of expression, right to information, policy and legislative reform, journalists' rights safety, public financial management and open budget, internet freedoms and open data, electoral reform and democracy, governance and accountability etc. In its 18 years of experience, it is enriched with knowledge resources on freedom of expression, press freedom, right to information, open government, open budget and open data.

FF has also experience of lobby and advocacy among parliamentarians to promote open government and open parliament and is also involved in reviewing bills, acts and policies in line with the national legislation and international norms of human rights and providing recommendations to the lawmakers. Moreover, its websites [www.freedomforum.org.np](http://www.freedomforum.org.np), [www.nepalpressfreedom.org](http://www.nepalpressfreedom.org) and RTI Nepal application have been knowledge hub for researchers and activists.

### **Executive Board Members:**

Chairperson	Hari Binod Adhikari
Vice- Chairperson	Rajesh Ghimire
General Secretary	Sanjeeb Ghimire
Secretary	Bin Kumar Bishwakarma
Treasurer	Shiva Maya Dahal
Members	Bishnu Sharma
	Ram Maya Lamichhane
	Kedar Dahal
	Ramesh Paudel
	Rajendra Dhital
	Ram Bikash Chaudhary
	Deek Ghimire

## **Objectives**

The key objectives of the organization are:

- Protection and promotion of freedom expression and information
- Promotion and development of professional journalism
- Defending journalists' rights, Right to Information activists and freedom of expression practitioners
- Promotion, protection and practice of the right to information
- Promotion of human rights and democratic norms and values
- Research and study, civic monitoring, oversight and education and advocacy for the guarantee of free and fair elections
- Promotion of the use of media, RTI, Open Data and Public Financial Management (PFM) tools to support the movement and campaign for social justice and mainstreaming of marginalized people
- Contribution to the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through exchange of ideas, experience and learning at national and international level being focused on attaining the targets of Goal 16
- Affiliation to and participation in regional and global networks related to transparency, right to information, freedom of expression, free and professional press, civic engagement and Open Government Partnership
- Undertaking action research and study to draw evidences for advocacy in its core areas of works.

## **Our Mission**

To safeguard the fundamental freedoms of citizens in full adherence to modern democratic norms and values.

## **Our Vision**

Establishment of peace and 'inclusive' democracy in Nepal by focusing on press freedom, human rights and civil liberty.

### **Ongoing projects**

Overview of the partnership projects being executed this fiscal year:

<b>SN</b>	<b>Name of project</b>	<b>Funding agency</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Project Site</b>	<b>Financial grant</b>
1.	Mainstreaming Human Rights in Cyber security and Cybercrime policy (MHRC)	Global Partners' Digital	January 2020 to September 30 2022	Kathmandu	\$49,500
2.	Open Budget Survey	International Budget Partnership	December 2020 to November 2022	Kathmandu	\$28,150
3.	Country-level Research and Engagement on Budget Credibility and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	IBP	September 2021 to February 2023	Kathmandu	\$3000
4.	Open Budget Survey	IBP	January 2023 to December 2024	Kathmandu	\$11,000

## **Programs under Projects**

### **1. Mainstreaming Human Rights in Cyber security and Cybercrime policy (MHRC)**

#### **a. Orientation to journalists and province lawmakers on human rights and cyberspace:**

Freedom Forum conducted brief orientation programs for journalists and province lawmakers in six provinces of Nepal. During the orientation, journalists were made aware on the importance of digital safety and use of safety tools along with protection and promotion of free speech on cyber space.



They were shared that legislative efforts surrounding information technology and cyber could have the provisions that breach free speech on cyber and digital space. References of the Information Technology Bill brought by the federal government were also given on the occasion. The lawmakers were also made aware and informed about international practices on human rights on online space and Freedom Forum's policy analysis paper. The policy brief prepared by FF on the IT Bill was distributed among the participants and civil society members as part of the knowledge building on the above mentioned issues.

For details: <https://freedomforum.org.np/human-rights-and-cyberspace/>

### **2. Open Budget Survey (OBS):**

Freedom Forum continued the survey for this fiscal year as well on budget transparency and credibility. The survey is conducted with support from International Budget Partnership (IBP). It assesses the degree to which the government provides opportunities for the public to engage in budget process. The survey examines mainly three aspects of how governments are managing public finances. It is the world's only independent, comparable measures of budget transparency, participation and oversight. It also examines the extent to which legislature and Supreme Audit Institutions (SAI) are able to provide effective oversight of the budget.



a. Access to Fiscal Information and Dissemination of Open Budget Survey-2021 Findings:

On September 27, Freedom Forum in collaboration with the International Budget Partnership (IBP) organized the national-level gathering with a wider spectrum of participation. The gathering was held to publish [OBS 2021 Nepal report](#).

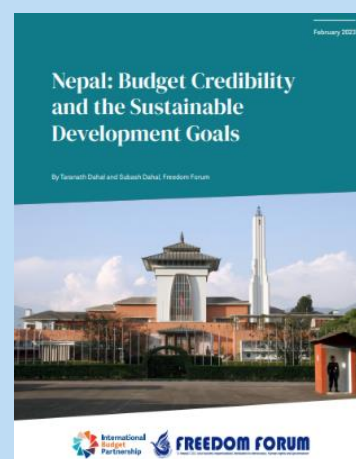


Representatives from the concerned government agencies, parliament committees, Supreme Audit Institution, civil society organizations, media, individual champions and International Budget Partnership (IBP) had actively participated in the collaborative event.

For details: <https://freedomforum.org.np/iduai-2022/>

3. Budget credibility and SDGs:

This activity in partnership with IBP was carried out to conduct research and writing of two briefs about budget credibility which trends at a sector-level in comparison with the progress on SDGs in Nepal. The research findings will also investigate the drivers and consequences of budget credibility challenges. The brief to be prepared from the program is also aimed to spur dialogue within international communities on promotion of better budgeting and spending practices and acceleration of progress toward achieving SDG targets.



The first SDG brief was published on February 2023 presenting analysis of Nepal's federal spending in six key sectors that relate to nine SDGs, examining budget credibility trends in 2018, 2019 and 2020.

The brief is available at <https://freedomforum.org.np/download/connecting-budget-credibility-to-the-sustainable-development-goals/>

## **Programs under Core Activities**

### **1. Media Monitoring:**

Monitoring of media contents and developments in media rights and journalism is the core activity of FF. Under this, FF is watchful on the government and civil society's movement on issues of press freedom, media rights, freedom of expression and access to information.

FF records incidents of violation of press freedom and freedom of expression through media monitoring and updates those on its dedicated website- [www.nepalpressfreedom.org](http://www.nepalpressfreedom.org).

### **2. Right to Information Campaign:**

FF continues its campaign to promote use of RTI thus, making citizens informed and aware of the public issues through its RTI Nepal application.

a. **RTI Nepal Mobile App**: News, articles and important information related to RTI are regularly updated on the App available on both Android and IOS systems. The application can be downloaded from Playstore of android devices and Appstore of IOS devices.



b. **Legal support**: Additionally, FF has RTI support desk which also provides counselling and legal support to the journalists and activist who require legal support for seeking information using RTI. FF has been providing legal support to activist Kailash Majhi.

c. **Statements**: FF continuously advocates against unconstitutional move of the government that curtails citizen's access to information and classify information.



On January 29 2023, the Government

Committee classified information about 87 different policy areas into five categories namely- national sovereignty and national security, social harmony, trade secrets and property rights, individual privacy and crime investigation. These information were classified as 'confidential' demanding secrecy, which however violated constitutionally guaranteed rights of citizen, and the rights provided by the Right to Information Act, 2064.

However, following criticism from FF and other civil societies the government withdrew the decision after two days and decided to classify the information after thorough discussions among concerned stakeholders.

For details: <https://freedomforum.org.np/nepal-govt-classifies-information/>



d. Sri Lankan information commissioners meeting with FF: Right to Information Commission, Sri Lanka's commissioners and officials from UNDP (United Nations Development Program) visited Freedom Forum on May 26. This was a sharing meeting where FF informed the visiting team about legal provisions and implementation of RTI in Nepal. The international commissioners were keen to learn about how the RTI regime and how it could be improved in their nation as well.

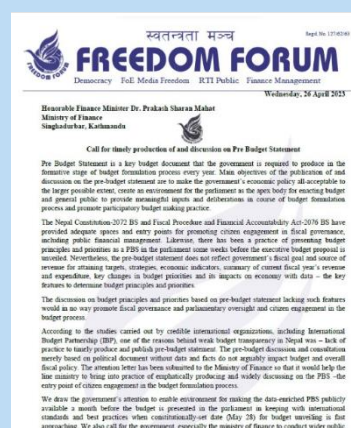
For details: <https://freedomforum.org.np/information-commissioners-from-srilanka-visit-to-freedom-forum/>

### 3. Budget Transparency:

Apart from the survey on open budgets, FF actively advocates for budget transparency and accountability. FF has been continuously drawing attention of the government towards importance of citizen participation in the process of formulating budget.

a. On April 26, 2023 FF wrote a memorandum letter to Finance Minister Dr. Prakashsharan Mahat, calling for timely production of Pre-Budget statement and discussion on it. In the letter, FF wrote: Pre-Budget Statement should be made public at least one month in advance by adopting the international best practice to create an environment for wider level public discussion on data-enriched Pre-Budget Statement.

For more: <https://freedomforum.org.np/call-for-timely-production-of-and-discussion-on-pre-budget-statement/>





b. On May 29, Nepal government announced that the Pre Budget Statement will be prepared and presented by the end of Falgun (March 14-15) of the year in the parliament from the upcoming fiscal year. FF welcomed this move as an important development for improving Nepal's budget formulation practice and overall public finance management of the country.

For details: <https://freedomforum.org.np/pbs-press-release/>

#### 4. Participation in Nepal Peoples' Forum 2022 on SDGs:



Freedom Forum conducted one of the important sessions of Nepal Peoples Forum 2022 on SDG 16+ – ‘Access to Information and Fundamental Freedoms’ on August 5, 2022 in Kathmandu. It was a hybrid event- both in-person and virtual with zoom platform.

Total 44 participants including National Information Commissioner, representatives from nationwide networks of Right to Information, civil society, media and SDG network participated in the session and shared their views on current status of the implementation of RTI.

For details: [https://freedomforum.org.np/rti-implementation\\_sdg16/](https://freedomforum.org.np/rti-implementation_sdg16/)

#### 5. Fulbright Specialist Program 2022:



Freedom Forum successfully completed a two two-day training workshops on ‘How to combat false information online? – Be a verification Ninja’ in Kathmandu and Hetauda on 5-6 September and 8-9 September 2022 respectively. The workshops hosted by Freedom Forum

and led by Fulbright specialist Linda Austin were conducted in collaboration with the Fulbright Commission Nepal. Both the workshops were conducted in five sessions.

For details: <https://freedomforum.org.np/be-a-verification-ninja/>

## 6. Day Celebrations:

### a. Celebration of World Press Freedom Day 2023:

Freedom Forum marked the 30<sup>th</sup> World Press Freedom Day by organizing a dialogue on May 2, 2023 in Kathmandu. The dialogue entitled- 'Press Freedom in Nepal: Status and challenges' was conducted among journalists and freedom of expression practitioners.



Freedom Forum Executive Chief Taranath Dahal started the program by launching FF's annual press freedom report. He highlighted the significance of the day to remember freedom fighters, respect journalists' contribution to the society and nation. Other speakers pointed out the need for improving FoE-friendly atmosphere in Nepal.

For details: <https://freedomforum.org.np/stakeholders-call-for-constant-vigilance-against-tendency-to-muzzle-free-press/>

### b. Access to Information Day 2022:

FF marked the International Day for Universal Access to Information 2022 with several initiatives. On September 27, FF unveiled its report on 'Open Budget Survey 2021' amid a national-level discussion program on 'Access to Fiscal Information'.

On September 28, the Right to Information Support Center was established at FF to encourage the activists to request as many RTI applications as they can to hold public bodies accountable and make public service



delivery effective.

Similarly, a discussion paper written by Executive Chief Taranath Dahal on 'Right to Information in Nepal: Status, Challenges and Way Forward' was also published in both English



and Nepali languages. The paper was widely disseminated through FF's website, social media pages and emails.

A podcast based on the discussion paper was also released on the

same day.

Similarly, FF's policy advisor Krishna Sapkota took part in a street-based information dissemination program hosted by RTI Federation on September 28 at New Baneshwor, Kathmandu. During the program, activists displayed placards and banners with informative messages on Access to Information.

Executive Chief Dahal also presented a paper on 'Access to information, E-Governance and AI' in the national seminar organized by the National Information Commission on the same



day. At the program, Dahal shared the evolution and expansion of freedom of information and RTI worldwide as well as the essence of international instruments on universal access to information.

For details: <https://freedomforum.org.np/iduai-2022/>

### c. End Impunity Day 2022:

FF marked this day through social media campaign. Several posts related to impunity for crimes against journalists were posted on official Facebook and Twitter pages of FF. The posts were helpful to draw attention of the concerned bodies on long pending cases of impunity relating to crimes against journalists as well as current status of press freedom in the country. FF publication 'Unabated Impunity' was also shared on the occasion to make them aware on the cases of conflict period.





#### d. International Women's Day 2023:

FF celebrates this day by advocating for gender friendly newsrooms and inclusive and media contents. FF's media monitoring reports on gender in media are shared through the social media posts on this day. FF also joins Free Press Unlimited to mark this day.

#### 7. Podcasts:

FF has been producing various podcasts based on its concerned themes as right to information, freedom of expression and democratic rights in both Nepali and English languages. In this fiscal year, FF produced 9 episodes of Freedom Chautary podcasts which were also published on FF's website and social media handles.



All the episodes can be accessed here: <https://freedomforum.org.np/podcast/>

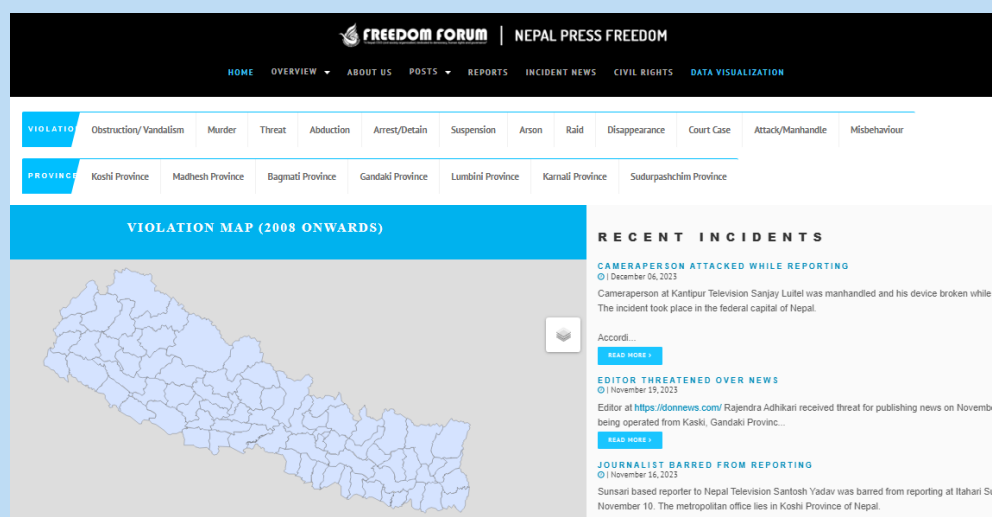
#### 8. Social Media Updates:

FF has its official Facebook and Twitter accounts through which it disseminates and publishes its publications, advocacy campaigns and important information.

Facebook id: Freedom Forum Nepal

Twitter id: @forumfreedom

#### 9. Regular Updates and Operation of Nepal Press Freedom website:



FF has its own website dedicated to Freedom of Expression. On this website, incidents of violations of press freedom, freedom of expression and right to information are updated along with data presentation and visualization. The website is a one-stop site with data on current

press freedom and freedom of expression status in Nepal. It also covers incidents of violations faced by the civilians for exercising right to information and free expression rights in Nepal. Total 43 incidents of violations and 5 press statements have been updated on the website in this fiscal year.

The website's link is <https://nepalpressfreedom.org/main/>.

## 10. Press Statements:

FF issues attention letters and press statements on the issues around media rights, open budget, freedom of expression, journalists' safety and other contemporary issues. In this fiscal year, total 20 statements were issued, and submitted to the concerned authority and also published on FF's official website.

## 11. National Election Watch:

FF also keeps an eye on Election Commission's activities by taking into account whether the activities breach citizen's right to freedom of expression. With the federal parliament and provincial assembly approaching nearer, FF noted news reports stating the Commission was planning to form a monitoring mechanism involving Nepal Police Cyber Bureau, Nepal Army, Advertisement Board, Press Council Nepal, Nepal Telecommunications Authority, and computer operators. The team will be named as 'Press Office' and will be responsible to monitor the Nepali media and social media contents as directed by the Election code of conduct.

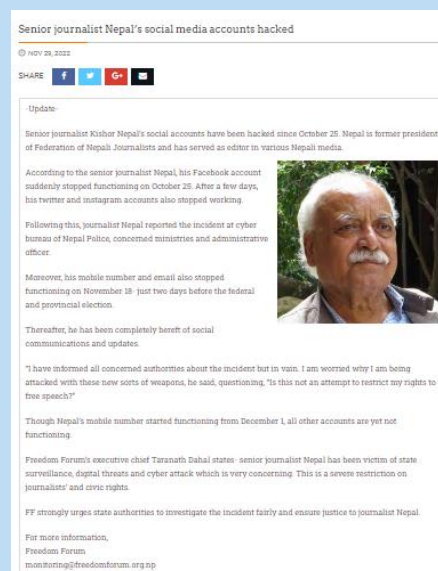


For details: <https://freedomforum.org.np/election-commission-not-to-trample-free-speech/>

Again, the EC issued a press release stating- Facebook groups and pages with the names, 'No, Not again, No. Not Again and NO NOT AGAIN' should be immediately removed or those

people involved in those campaigns through social media will have to bear 'fine up to 100 thousand or imprisonment up to five years or both' according to the Electronic Transactions Act. FF issued statement against this notice arguing that it was aimed at stifling citizen's right to free expression and speech.

For details: <https://freedomforum.org.np/ff-concerned-over-ecs-order-to-remove-social->





[media-page/](#)

Similarly, incidents of FoE violations during election period are also documented in the official websites and social media pages of FF.

## 12. Collaborative Movements:

FF is a collaborative partner of Office of Auditor General (OAG) and National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in Nepal. FF has involved in performance audit, advocacy of citizen participation in audit and workshops on CPA developing trained citizen auditors across the country as a collaborative partner of OAG. FF also has representation in steering committee of Performance Audit Unit at the OAG.

NHRC also agreed to work in collaboration with FF in the follow-up activities of Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and other human rights related issues. In a letter dated July 9, NHRC agreed to collaborate with FF for monitoring of press freedom and FoE, important day celebrations and follow-up discussions on UPR.

FF also joined Amnesty International Nepal to mark Amnesty Day on May 28 in a discussion program on 'Data Protection in Nepal: Regulation, Challenges and Way Forward' with an aim to explore the issues of digital rights in Nepal, particularly in the context of data privacy and protection. The event was organised in partnership with Freedom Forum, Digital Rights Nepal, and Federation of Nepali Journalists.

## 13. Membership and Networks:

FF is also a member at IFEX (International Freedom of Expression Exchange), Freedom of Information Advocates Network, CIVICUS, and Open Data in Developing Countries. In addition, FF also works in coordination with Committee to Protect Journalists, Federation of Nepali Journalists, Amnesty International Nepal, and Digital Rights Nepal.

## 14. Publications:

All the publications of FF can be accessed and downloaded at:

<https://freedomforum.org.np/publications/>

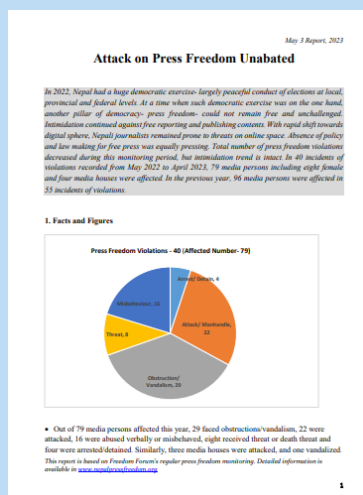
### a. Newsletters:

As its core activity, the newsletter- Free Expression- is published every three months. The newsletter covers updates on the thematic issues FF has



been working on. Total four issues of newsletter were published this year. All the issues are published on the official website of Freedom Forum and can be accessed at: <https://freedomforum.org.np/publications/newsletters/>

b. Annual reports 2022/23:



FF published four annual reports in this fiscal year.

Two are annual media monitoring reports which present status of press freedom and freedom of expression in the country and also observe the trend of media freedom, impunity and access to information during the reporting period.

Detailed Annual Media report 2022 can be read at <https://freedomforum.org.np/download/annual-media-report-2022/?wpdmdl=5262&refresh=6571725d1b1601701933661>

Similarly, the May 3 report was released on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day amid a discussion program. The report specifically described about the press freedom and journalists' safety on the basis of documents recorded at Freedom Forum from May 2022 to April 2023. The full report can be downloaded from <https://freedomforum.org.np/download/may-3-report-2022/?wpdmdl=5017&refresh=657172d6665591701933782>

Moreover, annual report and audit report for the fiscal year 2021/22 were also published in this fiscal year, covering overall program and administrative details of Freedom Forum.

