

# FACTORS ABOUND AGAINST PRESS FREEDOM: A REPORT\*

## **BACKGROUND**

*With the successful conduct of the first round of elections to the House of Representatives and provincial parliament in 32 Himalayan and upper hilly districts combined on November 26, the preparations were in full swing to hold the election in the second phase in the remaining 45 districts on December 7. Therefore, the activities of political parties and government were obviously concentrated in these districts. The electioneering as rallies, gatherings, door-to-door campaigns were rife. These were the area most reported in media. In view of this atmosphere, Freedom Forum conducted a media mission, third and last for this year, focusing the southern plains in the eastern part of the country. With the electioneering ongoing by different political parties, it was difficult to get time from the people from politics and government agencies due to their hectic schedule. However, the views and observation of journalists, who are not only reporters of the voice of the voiceless but also the frontline human rights defenders, were taken reaching their working area- Morang and Sunsari districts. Equal interest was shown whether the general people and election candidates and supporters were enjoying freedom of expression without any restriction/obstruction.*

## **FINDINGS/ VIEWS OF THE JOURNALISTS**

### **Mr Santosh Yadav, reporter to Nepal Television**

- We've safe atmosphere to work.
- But sometime, we're unsafe from our colleagues!
- In some cases, journalists themselves lose professional integrity, which kills/is detrimental to investigative journalism
- Harmony within journalists is essential to boost professionalism.
- Election has become biggest festival as Dashain- misuse of money with feasts

### **Mr Rajan KD, Editor, Purbi Hotline daily**

- Various people misuse journalists, so media is divided. It has badly hampered freedom of expression.

### **Ms Ranjana Poudel, operator, [www.newpati.com](http://www.newpati.com)**

- Some media are inclined to political parties, which has ruined fair reporting.
- Journalism here is women friendly.

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*\*The report is prepared by Freedom Forum with field visit on the eve of Dec 7, 2017 election of House and Representatives and Provincial parliament.*

**Mr Ganesh Niraula, Tarahara FM**

- In the recent time, political parties and leaders have been prodding media to write on their favour, which has put fair report at the receiving end.

**Mr Shaligram Pande, editor, Shree Janamat weekly**

- Politics has been so pervasive that you don't feel secure if you don't belong to any political party.
- Fair reporting always faces challenges. Courage is essential.
- Journalists are yet to write the voices of the voiceless
- People have become a hostage of political parties. Political parties have brainwashed people. So, media needs to expose the wrongs of political parties.

**Mr Subid Guragain, freelance journalist**

- With the growing development of ICT, traditional media have seen challenge
- Although exercise of FoE has grown alarmingly, the FoE is not fair, not independent. Real expression of people is not published in media.
- When media edits people's views, how can citizens' rights to FoE protected and promoted? So, FoE is in crisis.
- Journalists are suffering self censorship.
- The journalism limited in city and accessible areas has failed to bring the voices of the far flung people.
- In the name of election code of conduct, the Election Commission has violated people's right to FoE. But I wonder why media are not speaking against it.
- Time has come to promote blog writing.

**Mr Jaykrishna Yadav, reporter, Gorkhapatra daily**

- Very few people have access to media outlet. So, we've failed to bring their voices to fore.
- As the media is controlled by big ones, the media content are guided by corporate interests.
- It is quite biting fact that 'people don't vote but made to vote for any party'.
- Although there are 250 people having FNJ membership, hardly 100 are working as active journalists.

**Mr Uddhav Ghimire, reporter, Himalayan Times daily, and local Darshan Times daily**

- There is no restriction at all for writing news.
- Some media have served imbalanced news to people.

- Writing news on irregularities and wrongdoing in border as custom evasion, smuggling is very difficult. The vicious nexus among brokers, security persons, and employees makes it more difficult for journalists to expose irregularities in the border area.
- Central media does not provide us anything to ensure our safety.
- Local media would be sustainable if the advertisements at local level are given to local media.



**Mr Kumud Adhikari, reporter to Radio Nepal**

- Journalists have got freedom to write but have not got proper remuneration.
- Of course, the corruption is rife, but the sources do not provide ample information to expose it.
- We're comparatively safe than the past.

**Mr Nawaraj Kattel, reporter to Gorkhapatra daily, editor at local [www.pahilokitab.com](http://www.pahilokitab.com)**

- Journalists have wrong assumption that they regard themselves superior than general public.
- The local media do not have effective role to bring change, and check irregularities.
- The atmosphere is FoE-friendly.
- It is comparatively difficult to write news stories on border issues as irregularities and crimes.
- Local media are not financially secure which is reflected on less investigative and professional journalism.

**Ms Indira Bhattarai, journalist and women rights defender**

- Presence of women in media is very meager. There are no more than 7 women journalists working actively
- Comparatively speaking, the news media women find comfortable to work is FM radio.
- We've not got threats in terms of FoE exercise relating to election.
- Writing corruption related news is difficult for lack of proper source.
- There are very few news stories written about border crimes and aberrations.

**Mr Dik Ghimire, district representatives of Human Rights and Peace Society**

- General people are becoming aware about media slowly. But it is not sufficient.
- People's access to media needs to be improved.
- Media have yet to deliver to the extent it is expected to. Media need to make people aware about the activities and role of the local governments.
- Election campaigning are largely peaceful.

**Mr Bikram Niraula, reporter to BBC**

- Most of the media persons are reporter to the central level (Kathmandu-based) media.
- The provision of minimum salary to journalists is not implemented. As journalists don't get good salary, they don't want to take risk while searching for news.
- Some political parties have misused media.

**Mr Bandhu Pokhrel, District Chair, Federation of Nepali Journalists**

- Media persons need to be more aware because citizen journalism is shadowing their role due to technological advancement.
- For betterment of reporting, the central media have not invested at all.
- We're safe because of 'unsafe psychology.'
- Media also need to be decentralized.
- Local media have given priority to local issues.
- The concept of centre-controlled media must be disrupted.
- Despite emergence of new media (social media), role of traditional media would not fizzle out soon.
- Effectiveness of any media can be determined by the busyness of the reporters too.
- There are 17 FM radios and seven dailies, while 50 out of 183 journalists affiliated to Federation of Nepali Journalists, working actively.

In addition to this, a female voter in Morang said she was not afraid, as it was secure atmosphere for voting. However, the explosion of Improvised Explosive Device in Sunsari district panicked supporters, party leaders and voters in general. No casualty was reported.

Similarly, despite some untoward incidents intended to create fear among voters and candidates, they were not discouraged but enjoying the election fervor and waiting for exercising democratic rights.

## CONCLUSION

*Going through the views and observation of the journalists, there are no physical threats to journalists. However, political parties' influence, division and groupism within journalists, lack of technical skills, non-implementation of minimum pay scale to journalists, border crime are severe hindrances to the professionalism in journalism. These factors have not only hampered in producing investigative reporting but also resulted in weaker professional solidarity. So, empowerment of journalists by catering technical knowhow, strengthening of local bureau, frequent interface within journalists and among others as civil society and political representatives, government bodies, for better press freedom situation is imperative.*

