



FreeExpression

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A NEWSLETTER OF FREEDOM FORUM

Escalating Suppression

Media, Academia, Intellectuals, Poets, Artists, Singers at Receiving End

The public officials holding power from the local levels to province and federal governments have become increasingly antagonistic towards media persons and journalism. Even the works-practice of freedom of expression by the academia, intellectuals, poets, artists and singers are getting targeted. The officials are anxious with the belief that 'mission journalism' was begun against them of late. Irrespective of the irregularities, malfeasance and corruption rife in the country, thereby spoiling atmosphere for good governance and deferring development, the FoE practitioners including journalists and critical writers are publicly decried and issued threat of physical assault. It has been a new normal at present in Nepal. In the present system, journalists are taught- dictated indeed- how to do journalism!

For the practice of FoE, press freedom and bringing into light the information of public importance, the intimidation on journalists with arrest, death threat, assault and other violations continued unabated in the recent time. The efforts are on to control media with lure, misinformation, misuse, threat/fear and harsh legal provisions.

Arrest, Charge of Cybercrime

Journalist Arjun Giri associated with www.tandavnews.com (an online news portal) was arrested for cybercrime from Pokhara city of Kaski district. Kaski district lies in Gandaki Province of Nepal. The incident occurred on April 15.

According to the information sent by FF's representative for Gandaki Province, Rajan Upadhyay, Arjun Giri was arrested by security officials at Kaski and brought to Kathmandu as per the order by Central Investigation Bureau of Nepal Police.



Journalists in Pokhara stage sit-in protest demanding release of journalist Arjun Giri

Talking to FF's Monitoring desk, Kaski District Deputy Superintendent of Police Rabindra Man Gurung informed that the journalist was arrested and sent to Kathmandu after CIB received an application from Bipendra Raj 'Batas'. Earlier on April 12, journalist Giri had written news about the fraud involving businessman Batas concerning the land ownership issue.

Giri had written a detailed story along with the proof claiming that businessman Batas deceived the other two people in Pokhara. Later, Batas filed the case at CIB under cybercrime offense asserting that the news had tarnished his image in the society.

Security officials, without any investigation, charged journalist of cybercrime even though he had published news backed up with the fact and proof. Harassing journalist for writing

news is against the fundamental notion of press freedom and freedom of expression guaranteed by the constitution. FF had urged the concerned authority to look after the issue seriously and release journalist Giri as soon as possible.

Moreover, Freedom Forum continuously followed the case- meeting journalist Giri in detention and visiting court and effort to observe the hearing. On April 17, journalist Giri was produced before Kathmandu District Court, only one court in the country, to see the cyber-related cases. The Court is scheduled to hear the case today (April 18) and FF gave close watch on it with the mobilization of Legal Officer.

Moreover, over the arrest and case against Giri, entire media fraternity and rights defenders

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Message from Executive Chief

Govt's Jaundiced Eye on FoE

The atmosphere for healthy practice of freedom of expression and information in Nepal has neared the depths of despair in Nepal. At a time when the government has practically mounted adversity to the freedom of expression and press freedom by escalating censorship, capturing State-run media and luring reporters with money and advisory posts to hide irregularities from across the country, its policy level adventures are also unimaginably damaging to the democratic achievements Nepal has made so far. Blatant lies from the responsible persons including the minister, snobbery and gross disrespect to media's role while seeking utmost veneration to political leaders from the media persons at the same time not only shows gross contradiction but also exposes how Nepali media is to suffer worst at the hand of a single party (ruling party) authority. The diktat to write, or not to write any issue of public concern has become new normal.



Irrespective RTI activists, the unrelenting concern showed by the FoE practitioners, rights defenders, media persons, technical activists towards the Information Technology (IT) Bill, the government minister and the political leaders are making efforts and threatening publicly of passing the IT Bill as it is. It is laudable that the Bill has been brought to develop the IT sector. It is need of the hour indeed. The atmosphere for the technical innovation and information spread is much sought for boosting country's economy. However, some provisions that undermine the value of openness, transparency, security in the use of internet and technology resulting in sheer curtailment and violation of citizen's right to FoE can not be compromised at all. The IT Bill, which is currently at the Development and Technology Committee of the House of Representatives, is to replace various laws including the Electronic Transaction Act (ETA). Many lawmakers showed reservation. But the government is adamant to pass the bill as it is, showing some incidents- misuse of photos on Facebook. The government is sticking to the negative side of social media, being blind to its other positive sides where FoE is promoted, privacy is protected and technical innovation thrives. Instead of making a robust mechanism to make aware the populace about the broader regime of internet and technology via formal and informal educational programs across the country, the way the government is imposing harsh law is sure to increase the case of unjust arrests, detentions and cyber cases. It has been reported much that Article 47 of the Electronic Transaction Act (ETA) 2006 was/is often mis/used to torture common citizens and journalists. But the provisions even harsher than that of ETA in the IT Bill warrant attention and analyses.

It is true that Nepal needs numerous laws to fit the changed political and governance system- the paradigm shift. The State functionaries can not work effectively for lack of policies and laws that meet the aspiration of people and spirit of the constitution. The issues ranging from FoE to innovation and business fall under the IT regime. The growing penetration of internet- nearly 60 percent- coupled with the expansion of IT infrastructures is significant prerequisite to foster internet governance and e-governance. However, the jaundiced eye of the government at present with harassing and harsh provision as - giving internet service providers sole authority to regulate internet contents, compulsory registration of social networking sites as Facebook and Twitter, Apps like websites, re-registration of the websites running previously and keeping the violation of these rules to be dealt under criminal law rather than the tort law are signaling that FoE on internet and digital platform would be more guided and controlled in the days to come. Similarly, providing authority to IT Controller to access citizen's data/information on digital platforms shows that citizen's privacy would be breached at any time the IT Controller wants. Due procedure, serious need and Court's permission must be considered before tracking anyone's data.

Abhorring that the Communications Minister pressed the parliamentary committee to immediately finalize the discussion and forward the Bill to the parliament for its passage, some days back. It is an egregious interference with the parliament's right. Parliament is the supreme and ultimate place to make and amend laws, but such pressure is unwarranted and shameful indeed. The vague words used in the IT Bill in the name of nationalism guided by single party pomp and activities inciting hatred and disharmony, harsh punitive measures would undoubtedly damage entire internet ecosystem in Nepal. Time has come for the multi-stakeholders ranging from civil society organizations as FF, media persons, researchers and innovators to come together to foil the ill efforts that has direct impact on country's system. Nepal believes in openness and liberalism, not authoritarianism. 🌱

- Tara Nath Dahal

FF shares Nepal's FoE situation in IPI World Congress

The 68th World Congress of the International Press Institute (IPI), the global network of freedom of expression practitioners as media executives, editors and eminent journalists from across the globe was held in Geneva, Switzerland, from 4 to 6 June. The IPI is the organization committed to protecting freedom of opinion and expression, promoting free flow of news and information and improving media practices. Freedom Forum's Executive Chief Mr Taranath Dahal had active participation in the event, which discussed myriad of issues around the FoE, shared experiences. Even the General Assembly of the IPI was held during the Congress in partnership with the European Broadcasting Union (EBU).

The World Congress, as the IPI states, is IPI's flagship event and a top international forum for issues related to media freedom and quality journalism, gathering more than 300 leading media professionals each year. The event was addressed by top editors and journalists, prominent past speakers at IPI Congresses including Nobel Prize laureates and numerous heads of state and government. During Congress, various burning issues posing challenge to the free media and freedom of expression were discussed under the broad themes as 'stopping hacks, data abuse and disinformation in Europe: what works - and who's responsible', 'joining forces: when large and small media work to break stories together', 'a reality check - connecting with audiences', 'populism reawakened: what does it mean for quality journalism?', 'trust in public service media in shifting times - ways to make it better', 'critical journalism in central and Eastern Europe in critical condition', 'surviving against the odds - journalism in repressive media environments.'

Executive Chief Mr Dahal shared with the top FoE practitioners and editors that Nepal's media situation was worsening with escalating hostility posed by the government in the recent days. The policy and laws relating to FoE and press were drafted in blatant violation of constitution and international practices, he reminded. As shared during the session relating to trust in media, the trust on internet and Facebook in Europe was declining. More the 60% countries in Europe trust on public service media. There was increasing fragmentation and independence of newsroom.

On the occasion, Pakistani journalist Cyril Almeida was conferred on the 2019 IPI World Press Freedom Hero award amidst a ceremony during the 2019 IPI World Congress on June 5. Similarly, the 2019 Free Media Pioneer award was handed to Egyptian news site Mada Masr. Both awards were provided by IPI in partnership with International Media Support (IMS), said the IPI newsroom. As the IPI stated, a columnist and assistant editor with the English-language daily Dawn, Almeida is widely respected for his critical coverage of Pakistan's powerful military and its direct or indirect involvement in political affairs. That scrutiny has made both him and Dawn a target of intense harassment.

Moreover, Mada Masr, the 2019 IPI-IMS Free Media Pioneer, has courageously defied Egypt's media crackdown to deliver independent, investigative news to a public otherwise starved of it. In 2017, the site was one of nearly two dozen critical outlets blocked by the Egyptian government for "spreading lies" and "supporting terrorism" - accusations the authorities routinely level against critical voices. The site was unique in launching a legal case against the 2017 website blockings. The case has since been referred for technical review to a panel of experts within the Justice Ministry.

Speaking to IPI prior to the ceremony, Lina Attalah, co-founder of Mada Masr, which publishes news in Arabic and English, said that on behalf of the entire team of Mada Masr she was "grateful for such international recognition". The IPI's World Congress 2018 was held in Abuja, Nigeria, under the theme "Why Good Journalism Matters" and opened by Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari. 🌱

Press Freedom Violations

PROVINCE 1

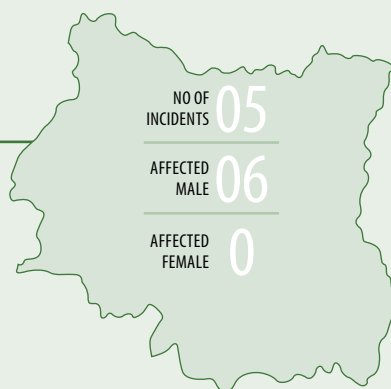
MAYOR CHAUDHARY THREATENS JOURNALIST REPEATEDLY

Yet again, Itahari Sub-Metropolitan City's Mayor Dwariklal Chaudhary issued threat of attack on Sunsari based journalist Birat Gautam on June 4. Itahari lies in the southern plains of Province 1.

Birat Gautam is the news chief of local Koshipatra daily and also associated with the on online news portal www.nepalsamaya.com run from the federal capital, Kathmandu. On Facebook post of journalist Gautam, Mayor Chaudhary commented that journalists were chatukar patrukaar (lackey substandard being).

Moreover, he roared that he had allocated 'Rs. 10 million to break his nose.' He even threatened that he had mobilized a local leader from the ruling Nepal Communist Party to attack the journalist.

Earlier, Mayor Chaudhary had ill-treated with Sunsari based journalists duo Krishna Bahab Bhattarai and Bikal Regmi who were reporting about a staff the Mayor manhandled at his office. It had drawn huge criticism, resulting in his statement of apology and respect to press freedom. Freedom Forum Province 1 stringer, Bikram Niraula, shared that the family of journalist Gautam was panicked over the threat and



even suggested him to quit the journalism. Later, to an interview with a television, Mayor Chaudhary reiterated that he was dead against journalists and would assault them at any time. Referring to the names of various communist and Maoist leaders as Mao, Stalin and their dictatorship, Mayor Chaudhary even warned of suppression of entire media. Meanwhile, some leaders of his party, Nepal Communist Party- expressed serious concern over Mayor Chaudhary's public threat to journalists and urged him with seek apology.

FF vehemently condemned the incident as it was sheer violation of press freedom. It foiled the atmosphere for free reporting and instilled fear among journalists, resulting in self censorship. Being the people's representative, Mayor is a public and responsible person, but such response to journalist is deplorable.

Although the Mayor made apology for second time, he did not stop issuing threat to the journalists. 🌱



Source: Social media

ATTACK

At a time when the panic over media fraternity was still fresh with the public threat of attack on journalists by Itahari Sub-Metropolis Mayor in Province 1, journalist Rambabu Yadav was attacked by a civilian, Raj Narayan Mahato, for writing news in Mahottari, Province 2, on June 5. Journalist Rambabu Yadav is associated with the Public Today daily published from Mahottari.

FF's representative from Province 2, Rajan Singh, reported that Yadav had published news about domestic violence- the violence against women-involving Mahato. As per the news, Mahato had been physically and emotionally torturing his spouse. Violence against women is a crime. As journalist Yadav met Mahato to know more about the incident, he was beaten badly by Mahato. Claiming that the news had tarnished his image, Mahato attacked journalist Yadav. Mahato who had two wives had been torturing the second wife after first wife gave birth to a child.

ATTACKER APOLOGIZES

Journalist Bhojraj Basnet, affiliated to a news portal- www.nirantarkhabar.com- and Radio etana 97.1 MHz was attacked by a local political leader at Belbari, Morang, on May 19. Morang district lies in Province 1 of Nepal. According to the information provided by Freedom Forum's representative, Bikram Niraula, Vice-president of the ward committee affiliated to Nepali Congress Bikram Rai attacked journalist Basnet while he was about to leave his office at 7:00 pm. However, journalist Basnet escaped major injuries- his shirt was torn during the attack.

Journalist Basnet was attacked for publishing news on the concerned party's decision to suspend the Vice-President Rai including others on May 18 in www.nirantarkhabar.com, reported representative Niraula. Following the incident, Area Police Office Belbari had taken Rai under control. Later, he was released next day (May 20) after apologizing in front of journalist Basnet and police officers, informed representative Niraula quoting Police Inspector Man Bahadur Shrestha.

BRIEF CONTROL

Reporter with the Morang based Nigrani daily, Kishor Shrestha, was arrested for posting a status on social media page in Urlabari, Morang, on May 12. Morang lies in Province 1 of Nepal. Reporter Shrestha was briefly detained for posting a on Facebook status about a suspicious object found at Kankai bridge of Jhapa. He was released after an hour convincing police that he had shared the information on Facebook for quick circulation and to help the police. 🌱

PROVINCE 2

Brief control

Journalists from different media were arrested during their peaceful protest in Dhanusha district on June 12. The district lies in Province 2.

According to FF's representative for Province 2, Rajan Singh, police arrested nine journalists while they were staging a peaceful protest at District Post Office, Dhanusha, demanding the refund of the amount deducted from public welfare advertisement. Among the nine arrested one was a female journalist working at local daily. The arrested ones were R N Biswas (Kantipur TV), Shyam Sundar Yadav (Nepal TV), Baidhyanath Yadav (Avenues TV), Nabin Kumar Gupta (ABC TV), Bhusan Kumar Singh (Radio CPM) and Bindu Yadav (Local Purwa Prabhat Daily), Dharmapal Raut (Rajbiraj Today), Gopal Gupta (Biruwa weekly) and Paris Karna (Green Madhesh daily). Later, they were released after an hour of detention.

Manhandle

A. Security official intimidated reporter Sumit Mishra while reporting in Dhanusha on June 21. Dhanusha lies in Province 2 of Nepal. According to the information provided by FF's representative for Province 2, Rajan Singh, police officer manhandled the reporter while reporting an argument between driver and the police.

Dhanusha-based ABC Television's reporter Mishra was taking photos and videos of the incident, meanwhile the police officer snatched his mobile and manhandled him. Mishra sustained injury on his chest.

B. Reporter with the Kantipur Television, Amar Kant Thakur, was misbehaved by a government officer in Mahottari on May 16. Mahottari district lies in province 2 of Nepal.

According to the information provided by FF's representative, Rajan Singh, Office Chief at Nepal Electricity Authority, Mahottari Maghabendra Yadav manhandled correspondent Thakur for reporting about NEA. "While reporter Thakur reached the Office, Chief Yadav raged against him blaming journalists for torturing him mentally by publishing and broadcasting news about NEA. He also warned journalists to face consequences for writing news against him", informed representative Singh quoting reporter Yadav.

Threat

Journalist Rakesh Kumar Yadav was issued threat of attack for writing news about Deputy Mayor Kiran Thakur in Rautahat on May 13. Rautahat lies in Province 2. Journalist Yadav is associated with Janakpur Today newspaper.

As per information sent by FF representative from Province 2, Rajan Singh, Gaur Municipality Deputy Mayor's driver Ramsharad Thakur threatened journalist Yadav of physical attack if he continued writing news about the activities the Deputy Mayor had involved. He also asked reporter Yadav to immediately stop writing such news. Prior to the incident, Yadav had published news about Deputy Mayor's attempt to build a house violating the criteria mentioned in the building code.

Threat for writing news on misuse of budget

Senior journalist Ananta Prasad Mehta 'Anurag' was issued threat of attack for publishing news about the Province 2 Minister in Kathmandu on April 21. As per the information received from Province 2 representative for Freedom Forum Rajan Singh, editor at www.todaykhabar.com- a news portal, Ananta Prasad Mehta (Anurag) was issued threat through a press statement.

The statement was released by Madhesh-based political party's student wing Rastriya Bidhyarthi Sangh that threatened journalist for publishing news about the misuse of allocated development budget by Province 2 Minister for Physical Infrastructure Development, Jitendra Sonal. The statement was issued following the publication of news on the online portal. It argued the news defamed Province 2 government, minister and student association hence, immediate action was sought against the journalist. Otherwise, the government itself has to be responsible for any mishaps occurred in future.

Furthermore, talking to FF's media monitoring desk senior journalist Anurag shared that one can resort to lawful way for any reservation on news contents but publishing abusive and threatening statement and using his photographs without consent on social media was condemnable.

Obstruction

Raj Kumar Raut, a journalist from Kantipur Television, was barred from reporting news about Secondary Education Examination (SEE) in Sarlahi district on April 5. Sarlahi district lies in Province 2.

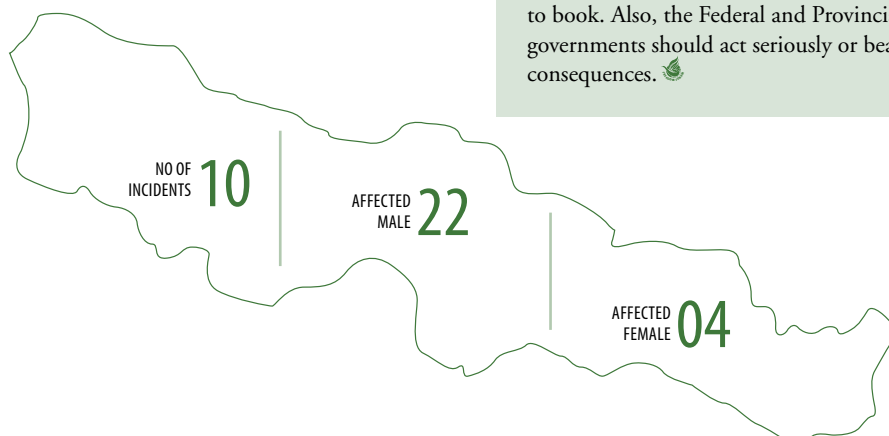
Security persons who were deployed at exam center not only barred journalist Raut from reporting but also snatched his camera and threatened not to capture the photos and video of the ongoing exam. Questioning why they

PUBLIC THREAT

Sonama Rural Municipality's office in Mahottari district issued threat to journalists through a press release for reporting on May 5. Mahottari district lies in Province 2.

According to FF's representative for Province 2, Rajan Singh, the Rural Municipality circulated a press release in response to the news published on different media on May 4. The news reported municipal representatives' brutal attack upon locals Shankar Sah and Sudhir Sah for a social issue in the municipality office.

The press statement reads- The news has been published with the aim to tarnish the image of the Municipality as well as its representatives. Thus, the reporters Dhanbir Mahato (Radio Rupantaran), Dharbendra Kumar Yadav (www.mahottariipost.com) and Shailendra Mahato (www.todayapati.com) must be brought to book. Also, the Federal and Provincial governments should act seriously or bear consequences. 🌱



restricted journalist' reporting they said they were ordered by Chief District Officer, Rudra Prasad Pandit, not to allow journalists for exam reporting. Freedom Forum's representative for Province 2, Rajan Singh, confirmed that in all exam centers, Chief District Officer Pandit had issued a circular to not allow journalists for reporting the SEE exam.

CDO's message to bar journalists came in the wake of the last week's news on question paper leak which had raised a question on irregularities in exam in Province 2.

Science question paper was leaked a day before the exam in Saptari resulting in the postponement of the exam throughout Province 2. The same exam was re-conducted on April 5. Likewise, Social Studies question paper was also leaked in the same Province.

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RTI WATCH

People's rep attacks RTI campaigner for seeking information

It was hardly a week since an anti-corruption campaigner Gyanendra Shahi was released by the court order, another right to information (RTI) campaigner has been brutally attacked for seeking information at an office of a local government.

RTI and anti-corruption campaigner Biraj Yadav was thrashed for requesting information on expenses incurred for road construction in his area in Birgunj on June 11. Birgunj lies in Parsa district of Province 2, Nepal.

According to the information sent by FF's representative for Province 2 Rajan Singh, campaigner Yadav reached Ward No. 3 Office of Birgunj Sub-Metropolitan to file RTI application, demanding certified copy of cost estimation form for road construction in the ward. After the ward office refused to register the application, Yadav decided to register it through postal address.

Knowing Yadav's effort to seek information via with the application sending via post office, Ward Chair Baijulal Swarnakar-led a team including Jabahar Miya Thakuraya, Jiyabul Hak, Shahim Miya Thakuraya and others reportedly attacked campaigner Yadav in the public place

“Every citizen shall have the right to demand and receive information on any matter of his or her interest or of public interest.”

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dragging him out of his residence. Also, the video of attack went gone viral on social media.

Yadav sustained injuries his face and his mobile phone was also damaged. Yet again, campaigner Yadav has been receiving threats, reported representative Singh.

Thereafter, District Police Office arrested one of the attackers Samim Ali Ansari and has been searching for others involved in the attack, informed representative Singh.

Freedom Forum vehemently condemns the attack upon citizen for practicing RTI. RTI is the fundamental rights in Nepal. Article 27 of the Constitution of Nepal mentions, 'Every citizen shall have the right to demand and receive information on any matter of his or her interest or of public interest.' Therefore, the incident is sheer violation of fundamental right.

The incident further indicate that the governments from the federal to provincial and local levels are developing non-transparent culture, showing severe hostility to anti-corruption campaigner and journalists. If the governments aim to build good governance, such acts must come to an end. The people's representatives must build trust among citizens, rather than treating as 'intruder'. Citizen's campaign for good governance and transparency must not be trampled.

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Province Govt denies information sharing

Journalists were denied information by the Provincial-2 government on the expenses made during the visit of the Prime Minister from neighbouring country in the Province. After

this, journalist Sailendra Mahato filed a complaint at the National Information Commission, seeking information about the provincial government's financial activities. In response, the NIC directed the provincial government to provide information within seven days. But, journalist Mahato was not provided the demanded information.

According to FF representative for Province 2, Rajan Singh, journalists, Ajay Anuragi and Manika Jha had also registered application, seeking information on the expenses of the provincial government during visit of the neighbouring PM in the Province. They too were not provided the information.

Journalist Sailendra Mahato is associated with Ujyaalo Network 90 and Todaypati.com. Similarly, Ajay Anuragi is affiliated to Radio Janakpur and Lokaantar.com, and Manika Jha with the Annapurna post daily. 🌱

Brief Detention

Journalist Shailendra Mahato Kranti, who made news about Secondary Education Examination (SEE) question paper leak, was tortured by security officials on March 29 in Janakpur. Janakpur lies in the southern plains of Province 2.

Journalist Kranti who is associated with Ujjyalo Network and todaypati.com news portal had covered news regarding the leak of Science and Social Studies SEE question papers before the examination. Following it, journalist Kranti was called by security officials for interrogation at Dhanusa District Police Office and he was kept forcefully in police custody for five hours.

While talking to Rajan Singh, Freedom Forum representative from Province 2, Kranti said, "I was grilled over the coverage of SEE leaked question paper and I was told not to publish such news which tarnishes government's image." He added, "Now onward, I am no longer able to write news the way I used to. I am discouraged and self-censored." Science question paper was leaked a day before examination in Saptari and following that, examination of Science was canceled throughout Province 2. Again, another day, Social Studies question paper was leaked and gone viral on social networking sites in Janakpur. 🌱



PROVINCE 3

Death Threat

Kathmandu based Journalist Binod Dhakal was issued death threat for publishing article about Dhurmush- Suntali Foundation's construction of international cricket stadium in Bharatpur Metropolitan City.

Journalist Dhakal is the Editor-in-Chief of Janaprahar weekly, who is also associated with Lahuri TV and dainiknepal.com news portal.

Dhurmush-Suntali Foundation a few days back received threats from some local groups and had to suspend the construction of cricket stadium.

Following that, journalist Dhakal had published an article analyzing various perspective of Dhurmush-Suntali Foundation's work in his news portal. The article was published on 31 May.

In a telephonic conversation with FF, journalist Dhakal said, "I have been receiving a series of threat messages through social media from different parts of the country to not speak about Dhurmush-Suntali Foundation's work."

Manhandle

Correspondent with Janata Television, Salikram Pudasaini, was manhandled while reporting at Kalimati of central capital Kathmandu on May 26.

Talking to Freedom Forum's monitoring desk, correspondent Pudasaini shared, "While reporting about Nepal Police action after arresting public for drunk drive, one of the police persons on-duty shoved me speaking abusive words."

"After I fell on the ground, he angrily said, 'As a journalist, you must behave as journalist with integrity, otherwise, I'll kick you', added Pudasaini, quoting the police person.

Correspondent Pudasaini and his cameraperson had reached the place to report the verification for drunk driving of the arrested ones through fake tests at the hospital. 🌱

Political leader threatens TV correspondent

Correspondent with the Avenues Television, Sushil Pande, was issued threat of attack by a political leader in Kathmandu on May 14. Kathmandu lies in Province 3 of Nepal.

Talking to the monitoring desk, correspondent Pande shared, "Samajbadi Party's central member Bishnu Jung Basnet asked for a meet to talk about the recently aired interview of Deputy Prime Minister and Co-chair of his party. I suggested him to go to Press Council for any reservation on the media contents."

He then raged, shouting, 'who are you to suggest about Press Council to me, I better know how to treat you', Pande further informed.

Earlier, the Deputy Prime Minister, all of a sudden, had quit the interview being taken by correspondent Pande. The DPM was raged after critical question to him.

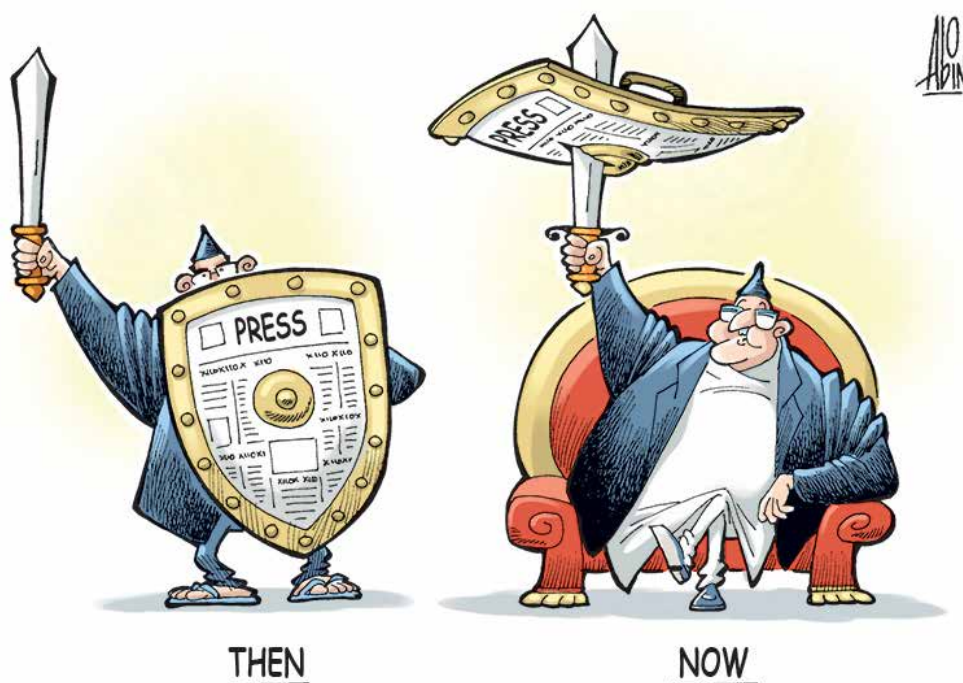
The political party had issued a press release calling the Press Council to take action against the journalist or face consequences.

Moreover, a group of masked people vandalized Birgunj-based Avenues Television's bureau office on May 13. Birgunj lies in Province 2 of Nepal.

According to FF's representative Rajan Singh, the group led by Birgunj Metropolitan City ward no 13, Chair Tufan Singh entered the office at noon and damaged office camera, broke glasses and torn office banner, resulting in the the loss of Rs 200 thousand.

The cadres stated themselves being affiliated to Samajbadi Party.

Representative Singh further reported that the cadres vandalized television's regional office after the interview went viral in social media. 🌱



Ruling party cadres burn magazine

No space for criticism

Nepal government has been earning disrepute because of its blatant attempts one after another to stifle freedom of expression and press, panicking journalists for nearly a year.

Whether it was the gross effort to transform Press Council Nepal to a fully judicial body to whip journalists with huge punishment or the move to control citizen's space on internet and their arrest for news and any social media post, the government was fully prepared to gag FoE and press freedom in a coordinated manner.

Kantipur publication's Nepal magazine was burnt in Hetauda on May 26. Hetauda city lies in Province 3. According to FF representative from Province 3, Rammani Dahal, Nepal Communist Party (NCP) cadres burnt Nepal magazine, showing concern over the cover image of Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, depicting him as comrade 'bahubali' in the magazine. 'Bahubali' means man with muscles, wielding power and pressure on others.

In a telephonic conversation with FF, Nepal magazine editor Basanta Basnet said, "Burning magazine is against freedom of expression and press freedom guaranteed by the constitution of Nepal. Use of satirical image while presenting news is the common practice and is internationally accepted trend in journalism."

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"Burning magazine is against freedom of expression and press freedom guaranteed by the constitution of Nepal. Use of satirical image while presenting news is the common practice and is internationally accepted trend in journalism."

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International Instrument on FoE and Information

1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.
2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.
3. The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:
 - (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others;
 - (b) For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.

-ICCPR

This edition of the magazine with the satirical image of PM Oli on cover page had a special focus on how Nepal's Prime Minister Oli had insatiable greed for power. The magazine (Nepali language) explained 21 incidents that had empowered Prime Minister to wield additional power and undue pressure to the subordinate bodies and even the ministers. With this overture, various institutions were under Prime Minister's grip to act as per his desire. Autonomy of institutions was dying in the Oli regime, the news analyses concluded. Even the agencies set up for vigilance for good governance are rendered toothless with Prime Minister's attempt to bring those under his office.

For some times, the magazine has been exposing how the Oli-led government in Nepal has been practicing sheer non-transparency and single-handedness in law and policy making, thereby avoiding the participatory approach. Many laws are drafted via detour- avoiding the regular process- so that the Prime Minister's office can foist anything it likes.

It is noteworthy to mention that in recent days, the new laws and policies this government have made have drawn huge criticism for failing to address inclusive and democratic values. IT Bill

and Media Council Bill are the latest to these ill efforts. Some months back, because of tremendous pressure from the ruling party, a singer was forced to lift his video song from YouTube.

Journalist, poet held briefly

Journalist Sangeet Shrota and poet Thakur Prasad Timilsena aka Rasuwali Kabi were held briefly by the police persons on June 26. The incident occurred in Kathmandu District.

As per the information received by FF, they were arrested from a program organized at Nepal Law Campus and taken to Metropolitan Police Office Singhadurbar. Security Officials said that journalist arrest was the case of mistaken identity while poet Timelsena was arrested for his alleged involvement in Biplab-led Maoist Party. Both of them were released after a while. Earlier as well poet Timelsena was arrested and detained for 25 days for his political affiliation.

FF denounced the shameful and cowardice act of arresting journalists and poets- Sangeet Shrota and Rasuwali Kabi. This incident has tampered the civil liberty of a free individual. Freedom of expression can't be compromised. 🌱

Gandaki Province

Brief Control

A. Journalist Raj Kumar Ghimire was taken under control briefly by security officials for unknown reason from Pokhara on June 19. Pokhara lies in Gandaki Province. Later on the same day, he was released.

Journalist Ghimire is associated with an online news portal- www.sancharkendra.com

According to FF's representative from Gandaki Province, Rajan Upadhyaya, journalist Ghimire was taken control for allegedly supporting Biplab-led Nepal Communist Party, which is banned by the government.

After the release, Ghimire shared his status on Facebook, "Police arrested me unethically for doing journalism. But I am released now with the support of my well-wishers."

In conversation with FF's representative Upadhyaya, Kaski Police Head Dan Bahadur Karki however claimed that police had not arrested journalist Ghimire. Karki further said without any reason it is not necessary for police to arrest journalist.

B. Journalist Rajendra Adhikari was arrested for writing news from Pokhara of Kaski district on April 1. Kaski district lies in Province 4 of Nepal.



According to Freedom Forum representative for Province 4, Rajan Upadhyay, the journalist was arrested by security official early in the morning from Prihivi Narayan Campus. He was arrested for covering news about a program organized by Biplab Maoist group, a banned political group in Nepal. Other two students along with the journalist were also arrested by the officials. Journalist Adhikari was released after 3 hours' control.

Journalist Adhikari is publisher and editor of edonnews.com -an online news portal operated from Kaski district.

Apology for misbehavior

Reporter Pratap Rana associated with Kantipur daily was misbehaved while reporting. The incident occurred on April 29, 2019, at Tanahu district of Gandaki Province.

Ward Secretary of Bhimad Municipality, Ramesh Prakash Baral, misbehaved with the journalist Rana while he visited the municipali-

ty office for reporting about the misuse of natural resources in the Municipality. During the interview with ward secretary about this issue, he furiously denied giving information to the journalist and offended the journalist Rana.

Later, on May 1, the ward chair apologized for misbehaving with the journalist and committed to cooperate with media for easy access to information on the Municipality's activity among citizens.

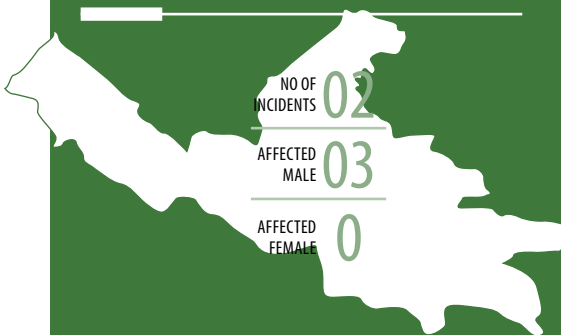
Misbehaviour

Security officials misbehaved with reporter Ashwin Dani in Pokhara on April 20. Reporter Dani is affiliated to an online news portal www.gandak-news.com. Pokhara lies in Gandaki Province of Nepal.

FF's representative Rajan Pokharel reported that an on-duty army officer misbehaved with reporter Dani while taking a video of disposal of a suspicious object like bomb found behind the Trade Mall in the city.

Representative Pokharel further informed that even after displaying his identity card mentioning as a reporter, the officer shouted at the reporter, 'why he took video'. He even damaged his mobile phone. 📱

PROVINCE 5



Threat

Nawalparasi based reporter with the Butwal Today, Bechu Gaud, was issued threat for writing news about the use of low quality products for road construction at Palhinandan Rural Municipality-1, Shankarpur. The incident occurred on Nawalparasi of Province 5. Journalist Bechu had published the news on this issue also on www.koliyakhabar.com where he works as the news manager. He was threatened by the road construction contractors.

According to the news received by FF, on April 26, more than a dozen people reached journalist's residence and threatened him to remove news from the online news portal or bear consequences. After the incident, journalist Gaud informed the security officials regarding the threat issued against him. However, he was reported receiving such threat time and again.

Attack

Freedom Forum is concerned over the assault and attack on journalist Rajesh Kumar Aryal and Bijay Kumar Baidel on April 2, 2019. The incident occurred at Palpa of Province 5 of Nepal. According to Freedom Forum's representative for Province 5 Sudeep Gautam, journalists were assaulted while covering story about the locals protesting the road extension at Palpa Tansen road.

On the same day 3 people associated with the attack of journalists namely Sailendra Bhattarai, Laxman Regmi and Baburam Bista have been arrested and booked under Public Offence by security officials. As per the Superintendent of Police Bishwomani Pokharel, the offenders have been arrested and booked under public offence crime as per provisions set by Criminal Code of Nepal. 📱

Karnali Province

Death Threat

Kalikot based reporter Ramesh Rawal was issued death threat on May 20. Kalikot is a far-western district in Karnali Province of Nepal. Journalist Rawal is associated with Hamro Karnali Khabar daily and Thahakhabar Network. According to FF's representative for the Province, Laxmi Bhandari, one Bishal Bista, son of Naraharinath Rural Municipality's Chairperson called on reporter's mobile at 3:00 pm on the day and threatened to 'break his hands and kill him.' Bista issued the death threat to the reporter for publishing news on Chairperson's misuse of the municipality's vehicle. Following the news reporting, Bista, however, admitted that he issued the threat and further argued that he threatened the reporter for writing 'false news.' FF representative further said after receiving death threat, journalist

Rawal demanded security, registering the application at District Administrative Office.

Attack

Reporter with the Lokmanch daily, Punam BC, was attacked for writing news relating to corruption on May 14. The incident took place in Surkhet, a district in Karnali Province of Nepal. FF's representative Laxmi Bhandari reported that reporter BC was attacked by the locals Nar Bahadur Gurung and Janak Raji at around 10:00 pm. "They attacked him for unknown reason while reporter BC was on his way to home after work", informed Bhandari quoting BC. Reporter BC has sustained injuries on his head and hands. Following the incident, he filed First Information Report at District Police Office Surkhet on May 15.



Police then arrested both the attackers and filed a complaint against those for the attack at public place, said representative Bhandari quoting Deputy Superintendent of Police Pradeep Chhetri. Reporter BC also confirmed that he used to receive threats for reporting news on social irregularities and corruption.

Obstruction to peaceful gathering

Acting Chief District Officer of Surkhet district, Ms. Binita Bhattarai, threatened journalists while staging a peaceful protest at District Administrative Office Surkhet. The incident occurred on April 19. Surkhet district lies in Karnali Province of Nepal.

According to information shared by FF's representative for the province, Laxmi Bhandari, journalists were barred from staging a peaceful protest in the office premises. The journalists had gathered to press the government and concerned authority to withdraw the case against journalist Arjun Giri who was charged under the Electronic Transaction Act 2006. CDO Bhattarai released a circular stating 'no entry' for journalists into the office and also called security officials to obstruct the protest.



Source: Basu Kshitiz, Annapurna Express

Far West Province

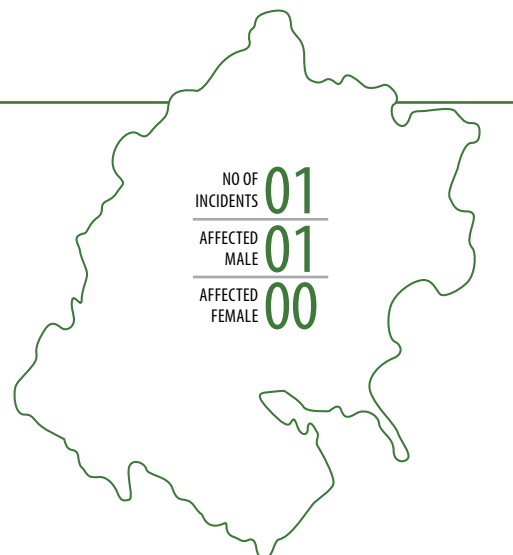
Attack

Sub-editor at Dinesh FM 98.3 MHz, Janak Bista, was attacked by a local businessman Tejendra Thapa while reporting in Dhangadhi on May 5. Dhangadi lies in Far-West Province of Nepal.

FF's representative for the Province, Min Bam, reported that businessman Thapa attacked journalist Bista while reporting on the rented shutters space provided by the local school Trinagar Secondary School to the businessman.

"Following the complaint on the rented shutters, journalist Bista had reached Principal's office to talk about the issue. Thapa then suddenly entered the room and attacked him speaking using abusive words", informed representative Bam, quoting the journalist Bista. Businessman Thapa was one of the tenants to rent the shutter.

After the attack journalist Bista sustained a minor injury in his face and hence received treatment at a local health facility.



Nepal: end attacks on free expression

Escalating crackdown on journalists, social media

(New York) – The authorities in Nepal should stop prosecuting journalists and social media users for peaceful reporting and online expression, Human Rights Watch said today. The government of Prime Minister Khadga Prasad Sharma Oli should review and reform the Electronic Transactions Act, 2006, which has been repeatedly used to unlawfully muzzle speech, and ensure that any new or revised legislation upholds freedom of expression.

On April 15, 2019, the authorities detained Arjun Giri, editor of the online weekly Tandav News, and initiated a police investigation after he reported on alleged fraudulent business practices in the provincial city of Pokhara. The Kathmandu District Court ordered his release on April 18. Since the Oli government took office in February 2018, at least six journalists including Giri have been detained under the Electronic Transactions Act. At least 19 people are believed to have been arrested over six months up through January for their activities on “social networks.” “Nepalis have fought hard for their democratic rights so it’s especially troubling that a government elected on a promise to uphold constitutional freedoms is intimidating and restricting Nepal’s vibrant public discourse,” said Meenakshi Ganguly, South Asia director. “The government should drop their investigation of Giri and stop harassing people for expressing their peaceful views.”

Section 47 of the Electronic Transactions Act prohibits electronic publication or display of material deemed illegal under existing laws, including vaguely defined material “which may be contrary to the public morality or decent behavior or any types of materials which may spread hate or jealousy against anyone or which may

jeopardize the harmonious relations subsisting among the peoples of various castes, tribes and communities.” It authorizes a sentence of up to five years in prison and a 100,000 Nepali rupee (US\$900) fine. Freedom Forum, a Nepali rights group, recorded 98 violations of freedom of expression in 2018, compared with 66 in 2017, including threats and attacks by interest groups, and arbitrary arrests. Freedom Forum reported increased constraints on the media under the Oli government, including pressure to self-censor material critical of the government.

In addition, the Committee to Protect Journalists has warned that several provisions in Nepal’s new criminal code, which came into effect on August 17, 2018, threaten media freedom. These include section 294, which prohibits disclosing private information without permission, including private information about public figures; section 295, which prohibits photographing a person outside of a public space without their consent; and section 306, which criminalizes satire that disrespects an individual. Internet access is rapidly expanding in Nepal, reaching 60 percent of the population and adding 250 new users every hour. Social media reach is increasing, and an estimated 9.3 million Nepalis use Facebook. While the government has recognized the importance of digital technology for social and economic development, it is also cracking down on peaceful dissent and criticism. On February 3, 2019, the news website newssewa.com was reportedly blocked by the authorities after it carried an item that was critical of a senior police officer. Two weeks later, a satirical song criticizing government corruption, “Lutnasake lut kanchha!” (Loot if you can my friend!), was removed from YouTube after protests by youth

Nepal’s political leaders should reject any efforts that undermine the rights of Nepalis to peacefully express their views.

Meenakshi Ganguly
South Asia Director

supporters of the ruling party. In August 2018, Homnath Sigdel, a local government official, was arrested for sharing a satirical image of the prime minister on Facebook.

In January 2019, the government proposed a new law imposing sweeping restrictions on what government employees can post online, making virtually any criticism of government policies unlawful. This followed an order from the Education Ministry in October 2018 prohibiting almost 500,000 staff nationwide, including teachers, from criticizing the government or political parties on social media. The government has placed before parliament an Information Technology bill, which would impose penalties of up to five years in prison for “improper” posts on social networking sites if they are deemed to discredit individuals or to harm national security. The Nepali government should review and revise as necessary all proposed legislation that affects free expression.

Nepal, as a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, is obligated to respect the right to freedom of expression, including the freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, in any medium. Any interference with the rights to privacy and free expression should be based on clear law, for a legitimate reason, and be proportionate – that is, the minimal interference necessary. The United Nations Human Rights Committee, in its general comment on the right to freedom of expression, stated that the “mere fact that forms of expression are considered to be insulting to a public figure is not sufficient to justify the imposition of penalties.” Thus, “all public figures, including those exercising the highest political authority such as heads of state and government, are legitimately subject to criticism and political opposition.” “Attacks on free expression have increased in Nepal over the past year, and proposed laws and policies provide further grounds for alarm,” Ganguly said. “Nepal’s political leaders should reject any efforts that undermine the rights of Nepalis to peacefully express their views.” 🌱



Journalists stage a protest against new laws that threaten to curb media freedoms, Kathmandu, Nepal, September 19, 2018. © 2018 AP Photo

‘Who killed my husband?’

- Dhital's spouse

Devi Prasad, a noted entrepreneur and Chairperson of Radio Tulsipur in Dang district was killed on July 22, 2010. With his involvement in other business in addition to media, Dhital was killed by an unknown gang. The unknown gang took Dhital's life in a coordinated and well-planned manner. Although the family filed a complaint, the Area Police Office, Tulsipur, despite saying that it was working to this, have not accelerated the investigation as no culprit has been identified till date. The file on Dhital is now under Central Bureau of Investigation (CIB) jurisdiction. According to the Area Police Office, Tulsipur, the District Police Office, Regional Police Office and the Central Bureau of Nepal Police at Nepalgunj returned the file on his murder without doing further investigation. The victim family is desperately waiting for justice.

The family visited Freedom Forum to discuss the case and share their story in April 2019. The story below is the summary of the interview FF Legal Officer Ms Ashmita Pokharel took with Devi Prasad Dhital's wife, daughter, and nephew. Manju Dhital, wife of late Devi Prasad Dhital, shared that she wandered at a lot from one places to another with the file of complaints seeking justice and making the

offices aware of the way her husband was killed. She visited CIB office several times to follow up the case. She has left no stones unturned to make the offices clear about the killing and how her family was still waiting for justice. "My husband was killed in a broad daylight on a highway, yet police have not found who the culprit is", Dhital shared with teary eyes. Dhital family has also established a trust in the name of her husband that organizes a program every year in his memory. "We invite guests from the security agencies to press them on the issue, yet all our efforts are in vain. No police officer or no police authority has found out any truth about the case that took place eight years back. All we want to know is who killed my husband and the reason behind it"

Who killed my father and why?

- Dhital's daughter

Similarly, eldest daughter, Manisha Dhital, said police officer had informed them that they had identified the culprit on the 13th day of my father's murder. The days turned into a week and the week into years. But, till now, they have not disclosed the identity- who killed the father. "They have been playing with our emotions", she accused. She is sure that police have already found

out who the culprit was, but are denying and delaying to disclose his/her identity because of the political and monetary advantages. Under such circumstance, she feels as if everyone she goes by is the murderer. "For us everyone is my father's murderer as we cannot point on one particular person. We have even doubted our own family member which we know is wrong, yet we cannot do anything on that. We want peace in our life which can only be achieved once the police show us the face of the culprit. We want to know who killed my father and why" wondered Dhital's daughter Manisha Dhital during the talk.

Moreover, Dhital's nephew, Ashish Bhattari, argued that officials have failed to perform their duty. He believes that justice is aborted due to the weak investigation and suppressed attitude from the side of security officials. "Due to the depressing investigation, the case has not reached to the court yet. The process for justice has not even begun because of the weak investigation." he stressed. The only concern from the Dhital family was- they want to know the identity of the culprit and the reason behind his killing. They suggested that the police must form a special taskforce and carry out a thorough investigation and look into the issue seriously. They were univocal- they want justice at any cost. 🌱

Legal news on main pages

This three-month too, Freedom Forum has monitored contents of same nine major nine national broadsheets and six mainstream online news portals.

The first report of 2019 still presents low but a bit improving statistics on presence of women in the contents of monitored media outlets. Unlike past, the legal news have been given priority in the first page of the major national dailies. Some of the major findings are as below:

Print media

- Among total 873 news stories scanned from the main news pages of broadsheets, 73% showed named byline with 13% names of female and remaining 87% names of male journalists.
- While scanning the same news stories for sources quoted, 13% were found to be women with 87% men.
- Total 195 op-ed articles were also scanned for their authors from the same nine broadsheets which revealed 22% female against 78% male authors.

- This quarter's monitoring recorded majority of news on social and legal issues (30%) on the main pages of selected broadsheets followed by news on politics and government (28%).
- Irrespective of the above result, the highest number of female in news and op-ed byline (41%) and as news sources (34%) are found in news on social and legal issues.
- Among the broadsheets monitored, Gorkhapatra (State-owned) daily published the highest number of news with female byline (19%) and Kantipur contained the highest number of female-authored op-ed articles (28%).
- The Kathmandu Post on the other hand, is found quoting the highest number of female as news sources (22%) as compared to other broadsheets.
- As compared to previous quarter (Jan-Mar), this quarter witnesses increase in the number of female in news byline by 3% and op-ed by 1% with equal percentage of those as news sources.

Online media

- Total 360 news stories published on the home page of six online portals were also scanned for bylines and sources quoted. Scanning resulted in 17% female bylines and 83% male among 143 stories with named byline.
- Again those news stories scanned for three months- quoted only 10% women as news sources against 90% men.
- While majority of the news are related to politics and governmental affairs (30%), maximum female bylines are found in the social news (33%) whereas their presence as sources is found maximum in news about science and health (26%).
- Comparison among the online portals showed the highest contribution of Setopati (54%) to female in news bylines and that of On-linekhabar to those as news sources (26%).
- However, this quarter witnesses decrease in the number of female in news bylines by 3% and as news sources by 1% as compared to the last quarter (Jan-Mar). 🌱

Continued from page 1...

were agitated. Huge criticism of government and security official was reported.

After four days, a single bench of Kathmandu District Court Judge Ambarraj Poudel ordered for Giri's release.

Arrest and re-arrest

The security officials arrested again journalist Jitendra Maharjan despite the Supreme Court order for his release on April 21 against the habeas corpus writ filed to release him from the detention. Journalist Maharjan was arrested and charged under Crime against State and organized crime provisioned under the new Criminal Code of Nepal. Earlier on April 9, he was arrested by the security officials and was in detention for 13 days.

In response to habeas corpus petition filed on behalf of Maharjan, the Supreme Court termed his detention illegal and ordered the government to release him from custody. A division bench of justices Anil Kumar Sinha and Dambar Bahadur Shahi ordered the government to release Maharjan from detention. However, on the same day, security officials arrested him again, resorting to new arrest warrant where Kathmandu District Court permitted for the offense against the State and organized crime.

In the habeas corpus order issued by Supreme Court, it was clearly mentioned that security officials could further investigate upon the involvement of journalist, if any, in such offense outside the detention.

To this, Freedom Forum maintained- not only journalists were facing a series of attack under Electronic Transaction Act, but they were targeted also for their political affiliation. Government's increasing intolerance towards the journalists and free speech directly threatened the journalists and tampered freedom of expression. With this, FF demanded immediate release of the journalist.

Meanwhile, some journalists in Butwal city of Province-5, which is regarded as the second most active place for journalism after the federal capital, Kathmandu, are learnt to have been tortured with the cybercrime cases. Although the government has initiated new bill on information technology which would replace the existing Electronic Transaction Act, 2006, the Act is being misused again and again to harass and torture FoE practitioners including journalists and common public. Since the introduction of this Act and its negative impact on FoE and press freedom, advocacy against this was begun. However, the governments are paying no heed to this regard, but misusing continuously. 🌱



Photo: <https://www.nepal24hours.com/nepalese-journalist-jitendra-maharjan-released-from-police-custody/>

Youtuber held for critical review of movie

'Meme Nepal' presenter Pranesh Gautam was arrested for making a review of recently released movie Bir Bikram 2 on YouTube on June 7. He was arrested in the federal capital Kathmandu. In conversation with FF's representative, Ashok Dahal, Chief of Metropolitan Police Crime Division, Sahakul Thapa, said, "Gautam has not only defamed the movie artists on the YouTube video posted from Meme Nepal but also used foul words to mock at the movie." The police official said the Crime Division had planned to present Gautam at Kathmandu district court and file case under ETA.

According to the Meme Nepal, director of the movie, Milan Chams, accused the reviewer Pranesh Gautam for making review under the influence of 'drugs'. Adarsha Mishra, who is associated with the page, informed that earlier, they had received several threats for legal actions from the movie team if the critical review was not pulled out from Youtube Channel.



Photo: MONIKA DEUPALA, www.nepalitimes.com

As a result, they pulled out the movie review from MemeNepal page. After nine days, the Kathmandu District Court issued order

for Gautam's release. In this case as well, the government was lambasted for misusing the Electronic Transaction Act 2006. 🌱

Dissemination of Media Council Bill

Freedom Forum has submitted the proposed amendments and policy briefs regarding Media Council Bill to influential lawmakers from the ruling and opposition political parties in both the upper and lower houses of the federal parliament, senior level officials at the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology and other concerned stakeholders on 23 May. The documents were put to parliamentarians' pigeonhole and also circulated via emails, social media updates.

The bill, registered on 10 May, was matter of concern for various media institutions, editors, media-related CSO and other stakeholders as the provisions were against the rights guaranteed by the Constitution of Nepal. In this regards, FF reviewed the bill and prepared policy brief and provided recommendations which need to be incorporated in the bill.

The proposed bill consisted of unclear and vague provisions. The definition of the specific word in the bill should be specific and clear. The self-regulation provision which is the major departure of National Mass Communications Policy is not incorporated at all in the draft bill. Furthermore, the structure and the representative of the Council is simply an appendage of the Communication Ministry, which is quite objectionable and in against the rationale of the self-regulatory body. The odd procedures and responsibility prescribed in the

bill is in contradiction with constitutional and international standard of FoE.

Furthermore, FF has suggested amendments to 20 provisions in 15 sections of the bill. The main recommendations are as follows:

- Appoint a retired justice of the Supreme Court as head of the proposed Media Council, having the members -two lawmakers from lower house and one from upper house recommended by the Speaker of house and representatives and Chairperson of the National Assembly (NA), the President of FNJ, a Professor or Associate Professor of journalism department at a university, one senior journalist from each Province, three journalists elected by FNJ and three noted personalities with experience in human right, gender and social inclusion, language, communication management or research and one senior journalist nominated by the Ministry and chief of the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication of TU.
- Journalist involved in violation of the media code will be asked to make a public apology or face black listing or publishing of his/her name instead.
- Exclude 'publisher' from editorial responsibility.
- Revoke the provisions related to government directions to the Council.
- Incorporate and incite self-regulation provisions in the bill. 🌱

Listen to podcast

In these three months, 20 episodes of podcast are produced and updated on FF website. The podcasts are on various pressing issues, such as press freedom, freedom of expression, impunity, RTI and policy/law making faults and suggestion, climate change, internet rights and internet governance, women presence in Nepali media, politics and democratic values and environment.

The podcasts are prepared, holding discussions with the area experts, researchers, practitioners, rights defenders, and officials from the right institutions, among others. These podcasts have clearly shed light on the growing intolerance of the government towards the atmosphere of FoE and press freedom- both in policy and practice; how non-transparent the law making process is, how the political and civic space is shrinking in the country; how rights defenders evaluate the civil and political situation is; how the family members of the victim journalists are waiting desperately for justice; in what points the government can mull for amendment and reform to ensure press freedom; how the political and economic situation is unfolding in Nepal; how the information seekers are facing problems; the way Nepali media have presented the women etc. 🌱



Listen to Freedom Forum Podcast Freedom Chautari Here.

<http://freedomforum.org.np/content/podcast/>



CONTEXT: MAY 3 DAY

Nepali press faces mounting hostility

Freedom Forum marked World Press Freedom Day 2019 organizing a program in Kathmandu on May 2. The program organized with an objective to create a favorable atmosphere for press freedom as well as to make collective commitment to end the impunity and hostility to media witnessed participation of approximately 100 participants from diverse sectors. Participants were the representatives of political parties, human rights defenders, human rights institutes, lawmakers, senior media persons, freedom of expression advocates and activists, government officials, researchers and media.

Initiating the formal program, a podcast based on a year-long monitoring report prepared by FF was released amid the participants. According to the report, as many as 104 anti-press incidents occurred in the country during the period from May 2018 to May 2019 where over 158 journalists were directly affected.

Similarly, the report highlighted that this year's figure is the highest in six years which obviously paints bleak scenario. The report further predicts 'Rule by law' is likely to replace the 'rule of law' - which would be the biggest source of fear and threat to free and independent journalism, thereby resulting in mounting self-censorship in reporters and minimum investigative reporting. Moreover, efforts to curtail journalists' rights both in practice and policy are likely to spoil the importance of free press in democracy.

Shedding light upon the significance of World Press Freedom Day, Chief Executive Taranath Dahal stressed the collaborative action among the concerned stakeholders and freedom of expression advocates to ensure rights of freedom of press and expression in practice. Asserting that impunity has been the biggest challenge for press freedom to thrive, Federation of Nepali Journalists Nepal's President Govinda Acharya claimed that those attacking journalists were still walking free. He further expressed FNJ's commitment to cooperate with the stakeholders to work for press freedom and journalists' rights. He also informed that FNJ had been reminding political parties about their commitment to press freedom.

Leader of Bibeksheel Nepali, a political party in Nepal, Ujjwal Thapa, showed concern over growing self-censorship in the country. Referring to the recently published song of Pashupati Sharma 'Lootna sake loot' which was subject to self-censorship, he argued that culture of silencing media is getting stronger so time has come to defend press freedom and freedom of expression. Hence, a broader network comprising political parties, media, civil society and academia is essential, he opined.

Similarly, Member of Parliament from Rashtriya Janata Party Nepal, Brikhesh Chandra Lal, argued that press freedom protects freedom of expression. Hence, its protection is the need of hour. Stating stability must not be against de-



mocracy, he further questioned the government whether stability meant suppression of media. He also committed to work in favor of press freedom on behalf of his party. Chief Guest at the program, Anup Raj Sharma, Chairperson of National Human Rights Commission, stated only 'Full Press Freedom' in the preamble was not enough, but 'Proviso' in fundamental right depicted risk in Nepal. "Not only journalists but also other stakeholders should advocate on issues of press, NHRC is ready to cooperate on it", he committed.

Lastly, FF's Chair Hari Binod Adhikari arguing suppressing press is no way acceptable in democracy called upon the concerned authorities to speak up for journalists' rights and protect democracy. All the noted speakers voiced solidarity on the protection of journalists' rights, right to free press and expression. They also committed to cooperate FF in this campaign. 🌱

Government finally puts the Bill on hold

Freedom Forum has engaged in different laws and policies in Federal as well as Provincial level. In Federal level, Media Council bill was one of them. Before registration in the parliament (National Assembly), FF drew attention of stakeholders mainly the media including others. Through social media platforms and press release, FF continuously sought the development/progress of the bill. Media community prioritized this policy issues equally which helped to bring the concern of stakeholders in forefront. After the registration of the bill in the parliament, FF prepared policy brief including the points, which needs to be amended. At the same time, it was widely disseminat-

ed to different media, concerned stakeholders and the parliamentarians as well. On the other hand, media stakeholders like FNJ and others declared a protest movement for withdrawal of the bill. Regular media coverage, follow-up news and collaborative efforts to reform the bill then became a vital public interest issue. Owing to the mounting pressure and protest by CSO's and media fraternity the government put on hold the Media Council Bill.

Similarly, in the provincial level as well, the government did not show courage to forward the bill with controversial provisions. Such as, Integrated Mass Communication Bill in Province

2 is on hold in which FF showed its concern via its representatives during stakeholder discussion. Likewise, Press and Publication Bill of Province 5 was planned to be tabled along with other pending bills. Soon then, Ministry official held a discussion over the bill where various reservations surfaced on the proposed bill that were extracted from the quick preliminary review provided by FF. The review made the stakeholders able to figure out the flaws in the bill. Furthermore, now the Ministry is not being able to move the bill to another level. Thus, the bill is in limbo. Hence, the increased pressure over policy issues with collaborative manner will certainly be a worthy exertion in enabling policy reform initiatives. 🌱

Province editors welcome FF study

Making media women friendly

“Now onwards, I read Freedom Forum’s report thoroughly, hold editorial and staff meetings on how women presence could be increased. I believe my paper will also encourage reporters to present women in positive way in the news. I’m inspired by this discussion.”

It was the observation made by Krishna Malla, Editor of the Butwal daily published from Butwal city of Nepal, while speaking after the FF presentation on women’s presence in provincial media at a programme on May 27.

Similarly, Radha Phulara, reporter of the Hill Times daily published from remote Dadeldhura district of the far west province, shared, “We have very good atmosphere for women. Women reporters compete with each other for writing news. This program has further encouraged us to produce more women bylines and women news source to make the media inclusive.”

FF organized the interaction among editors and journalists representing the major three dailies from each province- Gandaki Province, Province 5, Karnali Province and Far West Province in Dang city and shared the information about the objective of the program and project and garnered their views on it.

They were made aware that the project was implemented to monitor the presence of women in province dailies- in news byline, news source and the presentation of stories on women. They were told that it had aimed at making the media inclusive and gender balanced. Even the result and impact of the FF monitoring report in the national level media were shared before the editors.

Gender Monitoring Officer Nanu Maiya Khadka made PowerPoint presentation on the representation of women on the three dailies

from each four provinces. According to the report, news contents monitored from total 21 dailies of all seven provinces for a year 2018 showed 11% women in news byline and 14% as news sources. Among the dailies, Hill Times from Far-west Province was found containing the highest number of women in news byline.

The report further stated that province dailies were found to have maximum social news stories on their front pages in contrast to maximum political stories from national dailies. Maximum number of news stories with female byline and sources were related to social and legal issues according to the report. Moreover, Administration and Finance Officer, Aruna Adhikari, shared at the program that FF had launched RTI Nepal App, which the media persons could use for making the stories more investigative, exposing corruption and irregularities entrenched in the public agencies and society.

She also informed about legal support FF was going to provide to the victim journalists and their families as per the need after verification from the authorized bodies about their profession. Editor of Hill Times daily, Chhatra Saud, shared that there was increasing self-censorship in media for five to six years, resulting in low number of female bylines. Reporters could not be mentioned in byline on sensitive news, he added.

Bhawana Joshi, Publisher and Editor from Sundaranchal daily, published from Achham district said it was really difficult for women to carry on journalism in mofussil. Lack of physical facilities was another discouraging factor as she said. Few number of women experts accounts to few number of female bylines, she argued.

Seconding to Saud’s statement, Surkhet based Hamro Akhabar daily’s reporter Dipak Jung Shahi said safety was still a major challenge for female journalists to work and continue this profession. Similarly, editor of the Malika Post daily published from Kalikot district of Karnali Province, Khagendra Bhattarai, reasoned journalists’ affiliation to multiple work places for not giving byline to their news.

Reporter of Dhamaka daily published from Dailekh district of Karnali Province informed that geographic difficulty was the major reason of making reporting costly. It obviously deters women from reporting, he stressed. Managing Editor at Naya Youghodh published from Province 5, Laxmi Acharya, claimed that while men are quoted as expert, women are most often quoted as victim in the news.

“The fact is that female participation is low in media, and media owners should also be gender friendly to increase their participation”, argued Basundhara Gautam, Editor of Radio Swargadwari FM Dang, adding, “BBC media has however mandated to quote at least one female source in their news.”

Moreover, Publisher of Goraksha daily from Dang Sulochana Gautam argued that low financial support and remuneration to women was another cause of minimal presence of women in media. Admitting the absence of female journalists in Adarsha Samaj daily published from Gandaki Province, Editor Krishna Prasad Bastola committed to providing byline and op-ed space for journalists from anywhere now onwards. He also confirmed that providing bylines to the journalists make them more responsible about their contents.

Editor Prakash Chandra Bhattarai from Tanahun-based Lokwani daily accepted the study report stating that giving byline to the news is important as it is also related to standardization of newspapers. But it is difficult to retain women in media due to socio-cultural problems, he added.

Concluding the program, Secretary at Freedom Forum, Ram Maya Lamichhane, stressed the empowerment of women and mainstreaming those in media for ensuring inclusive media. Stating that such interface was fruitful to address existing disparity in media, she also called upon journalists to break socio-economic barriers, change their attitude towards women and utilize opportunity to bring women in forefront and make newsroom gender friendly. The program witnessed participation of total 22 participants with 10 females. 🌱

Review of RTI Bill of Province 3

Freedom Forum submitted a review document on “Right to Information (RTI) Bill- Province 3” to the Province Assembly Members and other stakeholders on April 4 with the objective of facilitating the Province Ministry to ensure citizen’s better access to information, and openness in the public agencies in line with the national legislation and international practices.

On the basis of the reviewed bill, FF organized a policy stakeholder discussion on RTI Bill- Province 3” on 24 April in order to show the gaps in various provisions of the bill. The reviewed document and recommendations have also been shared with respective Province Assembly members and government officials.

The main objective of the bill is defined as follows:

- To assure accountable, transparent and responsible governance in province level.

- To promote easy access to information for citizenry.
- To protect sensitive information of citizen and execute the citizen constitutional rights.

FF’s major concern/ recommendations on draft bill:

- Section 2 (d) of the bill proposed Appellate Committee instead of provincial information commission. Such kind of Committee formulated by executive can not ensure the protection and promotion of RTI.
- Section 2 (i) of the bill excludes the political party from the public body list which is against Federal RTI law and constitutional provisions and would be void ipso facto.
- Section 5 provisioned proactive disclosure in voluntary basis not compulsory one. The respective provision is against the basic principle of RTI as well as federal RTI law.
- The committee secretariat office is proposed under the Ministry of Internal

Affairs and Law and the secretary of the committee is also from the personnel’s of same Ministry. Similarly, the budget and the expenses of the committee will be managed from ministerial budget. Those provisions are opposed to the autonomy and implementation of RTI mechanism.

- The recommendation committee with dominant government representative should be replaced with inclusive body and headed by speaker of Provincial Assembly. The minister of communication and leaders of opposition party should be the member of the committee.
- The punishment right of the proposed Appellate Committee is curtailed. Only the provision of compensation is included. New act should comprise both of these provisions.
- Right to appeal for unsatisfied party on Appellate Committee verdict should be remained open. 🌱

Policy stakeholder dialogue on RTI Bill of Province-3

Freedom Forum organized a policy stakeholder discussion on ‘Right to Information (RTI) Bill- Province 3’ in Kathmandu on 24 April. Various Province Assembly Members from Province-3, lawyers, policy stakeholders, RTI activists and campaigners, media fraternity and other concerned stakeholders participated in the policy dialogue event on the proposed bill which is under consideration in State Affairs Committee of Province Assembly.

Highlighting the objective and background of respective bill, Freedom Forum’s Project Manager, Sanjeeb Ghimire, presented a brief paper about the bill, its positive and negative aspects/ impacts and what needs to be done or amended to make it well acquainted with the international and constitutional standards and best practices of rights relating to FoE and Information. Meanwhile, various speakers expressed their opinions regarding the questionability and validity of provision containing RTI Bill and amendment proposals held by the Province Assembly Members. In the meantime, Former Secretary of the National Information Commission (NIC), Shree Ram Panta, stated the reason and purpose must not be compulsory while filing RTI request. Chief Executive of Freedom Forum, Taranath Dahal, argued that proactive disclosure is the crux of RTI law so it must be a compelling provision for all public bodies, not the voluntary one. Similarly he

said, “This bill must include a political party in the list of public bodies along with the provision of punishment when not fulfilling the RTI compliance,” he underscored.

Showing strong concerns on the respective bill, Legal and Policy Advisor of FHI360, Tanka Aryal, viewed that the record of information requests and supply must be kept updated in the public body’s repository system. And technology friendly medium and procedure of information request via postal, email, fax, scan, etc; should be contained in the law.

Adding to the concern of Aryal, Member of Province Assembly, Ramesh Paudyal, said the proposed bill only provisioned the assurance of information request not guaranteeing of receiving the requested information. Another Member, Rajendraman Shrestha, said, “If we ratify the proposed RTI Bill as it is, it could be disastrous for democratic milieu so we asked the government for withdrawal of this bill. There’s need of more progressive law not regressive one.” Similarly, Province Assembly Member, Radha Ghale, emphasized that RTI law must assure the pro-democratic and transparent governance not bad governance. Sita Lama pointed out the need for categorical points to amend the content of the bill in order to ensure the bill more progressive.



Focusing on the clarity in the respective bill, another Member of the Province Assembly, Bijaya KC Shrestha, stated the bill must be clear about the private vs. public information regarding public officials. All the matters relating to the public officials must be the matters of public concern except little personal and private matter, she added. Accepting the flaws in the respective bill, Jeevan Dangol, said the bill needs massive discourse further to make it more progressive states. The proposed RTI Bill must be withdrawn by the Province 3 government because if it is passed as it is, it creates hurdles in the implementation of the very fundamental rights of Nepali individual, added Tsering D. Lama, Province Assembly member. Concluding the program, Chairperson Hari Binod Adhikari showed his concern towards the flaws in the RTI Bill. The program was held as part of the program under Civil Society Mutual Accountability Project (CS: MAP) supported by FHI360. It was attended by 37 participants. Out of 37 participants, there were 10 females. 🌱

Stakeholders meeting on IT Bill

Freedom Forum organized stakeholder discussion on IT Bill's in Kathmandu on 30 June. The program was conducted in the presence of the members of Development and Technology Committee of the House of Representatives (HoR), Legislation Management Committee of the National Assembly (NA), lawyers and concerned stakeholders in order to develop common understanding on the conflicting issues and define the strategy and way forward on the IT Bill.

FF previously reviewed and suggested amendment provisions to the lawmakers and other stakeholders to amend the problematic provisions in the bill. As per FF's recommendation, IT Bill enshrines the provisions that curtail freedom of expression online by introducing harsh punishments by criminalizing the expression via posting 'improper contents' on social media and any other online media.

Considering different stakeholder concerns and suggestions, the lawmakers put number of amendment proposal on the IT Bill. During the discussion over contradictory issues of the bill, the sub-committee however could not accommodate the major amendments in the

Baburam Aryal emphasized the chronological development of drafting phase of the bill. He further remarked that at least four bills had to come in this sector but all sectors were incorporated into one.



report. So, in this context, FF organized this event to push the stakeholder and concerned committee for accommodating the amendment while finalizing the report. FF Chief Executive Taranath Dahal introduced the objective and major strategic concern over the bill to the policy makers and other stakeholders and delivered concerns related to the freedom of expression in the bill.

Legal and Policy Advisor of FHI360, Tanka Aryal, shared his concern to the lawmakers over the process on how the bill was drafted and what were the further procedure to be adopted before finalization from parliament. Answering to the queries of Aryal, HoR Member Pushpa Bhusal stated how the bill was drafted and how it goes through various committees or sub-committee and lastly gets approved from the houses. Updating the status, Ram B Bista further shared the ongoing progress of the bill at Technology and Development Committee.

Other lawmakers as Minakshi Jha and Rangamati Shahiput put their concern over the bill. Similarly, National Assembly Member, Surendra Pandey, Brikhes Chandra Lal, Anita Devkota, Badri Pandey and Prakash Panth also participated in the discussion and shared the probable reform in the bill from the NA.

Addressing the concern of MPs, advocate Santosh Sigdel said the major focus of the bill was to regulate the IT sector but not to provide the platform to facilitate and flourish it. Most of the provisions of the bill left the space for executive to play in his/her convenience. Moreover, advocate Baburam Aryal emphasized the chronological development of drafting phase of the bill. He further remarked that at least four bills had to come in this sector but all sectors were incorporated into one. He explained that the IT court should only be allowed for civil nature of case not criminal. Adding the points on cybercrime, he said ISP shouldn't be made responsible for sharing internet content. IT Policy Analyst Saroj Pathak pointed out that the bill did not provide opportunity for startups and innovation and also highlighted the provision against FoE.

Concluding the program, the IT stakeholders CAN, FNCCI and Internet Society Nepal Chapter showed their commitment to put joint pressure from their sides on government and parliament for correcting the provisions in the bill. The program, held as part of the program "Civil Society Mutual Accountability Project (CS: MAP)", supported by FHI360, was attended by 27 participants. Out of them, there were 8 female. 🌱



Findings of ODI and KAP Survey disseminated



Freedom Forum organized a half day event to share key findings and recommendations of two separate studies entitled 'Mapping and Analysis of Existing Open Data Initiatives (ODI) at the Federal and Local Government level in Nepal' and 'Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice (KAP) Survey of Citizen-State Engagement at Local Level using Technological Interfaces' in the capital on June 30.

The studies were undertaken by FF as part of the 'Sustainable Use of Technology for Public Sector Accountability in Nepal (SUSASAN)' – a project implemented in 12 local governments of Nepal with funding from Global affairs Canada (GAC). Centre for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI) is implementing the project in partnership with Freedom

Forum, Young Innovation, and Centre for Law and Democracy as well as six district-based civil society organizations.

The sharing event had brought together total 42 people, including CSOs, researchers, public policy-makers and shapers, experts, media professionals, participants from project districts, representatives from SUSASAN project partners, journalists, thematic experts and international development partners. The sharing event was divided in three sessions – two presentation sessions followed by a question answer session.

Taranath Dahal, Executive Chief at FF, emphasized the importance of both the studies to create evidences to engage local governments

and citizens for improved public service delivery. Prakash Poudel, who was in a study team of conducting KAP survey, presented the major findings and recommendations of the KAP survey in the event. He stressed that the KAP survey identified the areas for citizens, including women and marginalized groups to participate in the decision-making process at local level which is spectacular for future planning and programming.

Governance Officer Pramod Bhattarai presented the major findings of the ODI mapping and analysis laying emphasis on the need of enhanced awareness among local government, CSOs and citizens for increasing use and re-use of data in demanding governance. In the sharing program, local governance expert, Krishna Prasad Sapkota, appreciated the practice of disclosing information through digital platforms in many local governments. Country Director of CECI Nepal, Sitaram Bhatta, concluded the event, highlighting the importance of the both studies in the work for promoting accountability at local level. Major feedbacks from the participations are following:

- Both the studies are important to bridge the gaps between the needs and existing practices at local levels
- Interventions should be carried out to deepen digital literacy so that local people irrespective of education, caste, strengths and class can access to public information and services
- There is pertinent need of developing disaggregated data to identify real problems and need for people on data literacy and other literacy
- The samples of the studies should include respondents from all provinces being not limited to province 3 and 7
- The KAP survey and ODI study report should be updated to reflect the changes in context as the studies were undertaken in 2017. It is necessary to carry out next rounds of studies taking the existing reports as the baselines
- The studies should increase more inclusiveness in several aspects

The four-year SUSASAN project is being implemented in Municipal and Rural Municipal government level of six districts: Sindhupalchok, Lalitpur, Kailali, Dadeldhura, Achham and Bajhang of two provinces (3 and Far West) along with federal and provincial government.



Self disclosure update

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|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Type and Nature of Organization | NGO working for Democracy, Right to Information, Freedom of Expression, Fiscal Transparency and Open Data, Media Policy and Law, Internet Freedom | | |
| Legal Status | Registered at District Administration Office Kathmandu. DAO Registration Number: 127/062/63, SWC Affiliation Number: 18518 | | |
| Location | Adarsa Marga, Prasuti Griha Road, Thapathali, Kathmandu | | |
| Staffs and Roles | Taranath Dahal: Executive Chief, coordinates overall organizational and administrative affairs | | |
| | Aruna Adhikari: Finance and Administration Officer, looks after accounting and administrative affairs and performs responsibilities as the Information Officer. | | |
| | Nanu Maiya Khadka: Gender Monitoring Officer, responsible for monitoring media content on gender perspectives | | |
| | Manju Ojha: Front Desk Assistant, Kamal Poudel: Driver, Ganga Kumari Gurung: Office Assistant | | |
| Projects | Krishna Sapkota- SUSASAN (CONSULTANT), Narayan Ghimire- CACFRIM (CONSULTANT), Pramod Bhattarai- SUSASAN, Sanjeeb Ghimire- EEMIR Bhawana Poddar- EEMIR, Bobbish Dhakal- EEMIR, Sulav Timilsina- EEMIR, Ashmita Pokharel- CACFRIM Deepa Adhikari- CACFRIM, Shanti Chaulagain- CACFRIM | | |
| Ongoing Project Information | Project Name | Supporting Agency | Date of Signing the Contract |
| | Amendment of the Right to Information Act | The Asia Foundation TAF) | 26th September 2018 |
| | Enable Environment for Media Law Reforms and Improved RTI Practice (EEMIR) (CS-MAP) | FHI 360 | 30th Dec 2016 |
| | Contributing to the Atmosphere Conducive to FoE, Reduced Impunity and Inclusive Media (CACFRIM) in Nepal | Free Press Unlimited (FPU) | 5th March 2019 |
| | Sustainable use of Technology for Public Sector Accountability in Nepal (SUSASAN) | CECI | 17th April 2017 |
| | Freedom of Expression Training for Lawyers and Legal Defense Fund | FPU | 13th May 2019 |
| | Open Budget Survey 2019 | International Budget Partnership (IBP) | 18th January 2019 |
| Services Offered/ Activities Carried Out | Research, capacity development and policy advocacy including media monitoring, trainings on RTI and journalism, meetings, workshops, seminars and other campaigns to promote issues of democracy, RTI, FoE, fiscal transparency, human rights, local governance. It also provides legal aid to journalists, media and information seekers. | | |
| Responsible Authority | Chairperson: Hari Binod Adhikari, Executive Chief: Tara Nath Dahal | | |
| Decision Making Process | General Assembly: Making policies, rules and regulations of organization Executive committee: Formulation of action plans as per constitution of organization, rules and regulation Management team: Running projects and daily operational affairs and reporting timely to the Executive Committee. | | |
| Past and Current Activities | Please follow the link: http://freedomforum.org.np/content/category/activities/ | | |
| Information Officer | Aruna Adhikari | | |
| Financial Information | Freedom Forum received grants amounting Rs. 6161668.06 (April to June 2019) | | |
| Official Website | www.freedomforum.org.np | | |
| Publications of Freedom Forum | Freedom Forum has over 50 Publications (printed) Please Follow the Link: http://freedomforum.org.np/content/publications/ | | |
| Annual Report | http://freedomforum.org.np/content/publications/reports/annual-reports/ | | |
| Mechanism for Information Dissemination | Websites- http://www.freedomforum.org.np/ ; www.nepalpressfreedom.org , and Newsletter-Free Expression | | |

FF in the international forum

Executive Chief Mr. Taranath Dahal participated in three various events which were organized in different part of the world. Dahal participated in IBP Learning Network Partners Meeting (PM) which was held in Dakar, Senegal from 2nd to 4th April. The objective of the meeting was to enable an active and collaborative community where CSO

can incorporate equity and inclusion in public finance, integrate revenue, combat corporate power and corruption and strengthen governance infrastructure for accountability. Similarly, Executive Chief Dahal participated in the opening of 2019 IPI World Congress at the UNOG in Geneva, Switzerland on June 4th and 5th. Mr Dahal also participated in IFEX strategic conference and general meeting held in Berlin on 10th

and 11th April. The objective of the conference was to have a broader dialogue on the topic of freedom of expression and information within IFEX members.

FF Policy Advisor Krishna Sapkota participated in the 6th Open Government Partnership Summit held in Ottawa, capital of Canada on May 28th to 31st. 🌱

“An unlawful death”: Dr. Agnès Callamard’s report on the killing of Jamal Khashoggi

Annie Game, 26 June 2019

A modest title, for what is a truly groundbreaking piece of work. Submitted to the United Nations by Dr. Agnès Callamard, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions on 19 June, it makes for disturbing, compelling reading.

In it, Khashoggi’s brutal murder is described as premeditated. Overseen. Planned. Endorsed. Financed. Coordinated. The report aims high – well-above those who wielded the weapons in the Saudi Consulate in Istanbul where the journalist was killed in October 2018, and all the way up to the author of the crime. In the rigour of its research, the breadth of its investigation, the unambiguity of its conclusions, and the directness of its accusations of State accountability at the highest level, it is an uncompromising demand for justice.

It makes no fewer than 41 recommendations, directed at UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, UN institutions and agencies, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United States, UN member states, corporations, and civil society. These recommendations need to be listened to, and acted upon. Will they be?

As I wrote last November to mark the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, Khashoggi’s murder and the ensuing cover-up were planned and carried out by people who believed that they were untouchable. Who still believe that they are untouchable.



Why wouldn’t they? Those guilty of such crimes are still rarely held to account.

We need to prove them wrong. And by we, I mean all of us. As Dr. Callamard told a room full of passionate free expression advocates and press freedom defenders from the global IFEX network, along with partners and allies, in April: Your voice matters.

“Don’t let anyone silence you. I suspect that if we had more international voices maybe a year ago when Saudi Arabia started doing what it did, maybe Mr. Khashoggi would still be alive. I have no proof of it, but I just want to leave us with this thought. Your voice matters, standing up matters, and we cannot let people silence us in the face of such injustice.”

If ever there was a time to remind ourselves of the power we hold within ourselves, that time is now. Threats to press freedom are multiplying across the world. This year alone, 24 journalists have been killed according to UNESCO. And there are all too many cases where justice remains elusive: the murders of Maltese journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia,

Cambodian activist and broadcaster Kem Ley, Bahraini photojournalist Ahmed Ismail Hassan, Pakistani reporter Shan Dahar, and many others. Civil society groups campaign tirelessly on these and so many other cases. Their efforts keep hope alive, support the victim’s families, and in some cases – even when the odds are stacked high against them – they bring those responsible to account.

Which brings us back to Jamal Khashoggi. Despite the odds, despite the power of those accused, the denials of Saudi Arabia, the lukewarm reactions from some other powerful states, and President Trump’s stated willingness to tolerate such gross violations of human rights in exchange for trade deals, we are compelled to do the same here.

The report presented by Dr. Callamard is already, in a very real sense, a victory for justice. In her comprehensive set of recommendations, she lays out a roadmap not just to deliver justice in this specific case, but to tackle the problem of impunity as a whole. It’s now up to all of us to stand up and pressure our elected representatives, governments, and international institutions to act on this roadmap.

The successes we have seen in cases of impunity for crimes against journalists have something in common. The knowledge that, yes, it is a long game, and not for the faint-hearted. The belief that, yes, working together, we can help deliver justice, as hard and as daunting a challenge as that may be, and, yes, it is worth it. And, finally, and perhaps most essentially, the firm belief that yes, our voices do matter. 🌱

Source: <https://ifex.org/noimpunity>



Freedom Forum is an independent, non-governmental and not-for-profit civil society organization working for the cause of social accountability, democracy and human rights focused on press freedom, freedom of expression and right to information in Nepal. Incepted in 2005, Freedom Forum has emerged as a prominent national organization in promoting access to information and freedom of expression through dialogue, research, training, public advocacy and campaign and programme implementation. Currently, the organization is working on the issues of public finance management, budget transparency, open data and aid governance, political and parliamentary accountability, freedom of expression online and open government partnership (OGP) based on its on-hand experience and learning.

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Freedom Forum

P.O. Box: 24292

Block No. 22, Adarsha Marg
Thapathali, Kathmandu, Nepal

Telephone: 977-1-4102022, 4102030

Fax: 977-1-4226099

Email: info@freedomforum.org.np
monitoring@freedomforum.org.np

Web: www.freedomforum.org.np
www.nepalpressfreedom.org