



FreeExpression

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A NEWSLETTER OF FREEDOM FORUM

Rasuwa Bhotekoshi flood Devastate local media and journalists

On 26 August 2026, devastating flood entered Nepal through the Bhote Koshi River in Rasuwa. The flood originated in the northern Himalayan region due to glacier melting caused massive destruction along the Bhote Koshi and Trishuli river corridors. Local communities and critical infrastructure in Rasuwa, Nuwakot, Dhading, Gorkha, Chitwan districts and surrounding areas were severely affected.

The flood inundated riverside settlements destroying homes, roads, bridges, hydropower facilities and other essential infrastructure. Nepal government has reported significant loss of life, displacement and extensive damage to physical infrastructures. The disaster also damaged electricity and communication infrastructure. Electricity supply, mobile networks and internet services were interrupted across large parts of the affected areas immediately after the flood. According to Nepal Telecom office, mobile and internet services were restored by the first week of September in most of the affected areas of Rasuwa, Nuwakot and Dhading districts. Nepal Electricity Authority also restored electricity supply across all areas except for few households in Rasuwa districts.

National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority has reported total 1451 deaths and 5745 still missing till September 21, 2026. Of the total missing, 11% are reported to be foreign nationals. Rescue operations are ongoing.

Freedom Forum assessed the flood's damage to media and journalists. Majority media and journalists in Rasuwa and Nuwakot districts are highly affected with few affected in Dhading district. Journalists have lost their family



FF team during field visit to flood affected site

members, their house/ lands and vehicles have been damaged or covered with flood debris and some media operation were temporarily disrupted.

According to Freedom Forum's assessment, total four journalists are missing, around 14 family members of journalists are missing, two journalists lost their vehicles and six community radio stations were affected due to irregular electricity and internet supplies. FF also conducted need-based assessment among affected journalists. Affected journalists were asked to fill up an assessment form providing their current status (living and working) and urgent need for support.

FF categorizes flood impact upon media persons into four categories:-

1. Missing journalists- Total four journalists have been reported missing,

- a. Tekraj Thami (Naya Patrika National daily): He had travelled to Kerung, a border town in Tibet, to attend an event.
- b. Raj Kumar Nepali (National Dalit Journalists Association): He has been missing from his office in Betrawati, Nuwakot.
- c. Shekhar Dhungana (Freelance): He was on a family trip to Kailash Mansarovar with his wife, mother-in-law and father-in-law.
- d. Suresh Simkhada (Shilapatra online): Journalist Simkhada was on a family trip to Kailash Mansarovar, a religious place in Tibet region of China, with his mother and sister.

2. Missing family members of journalists- Total 14 family members of journalists have been missing since the flood.

- a. Father, mother, uncle, aunt and sister of

To be continued on page 9

Message from Executive Chief

Rethinking media safety & resilience during disasters

The Bhotekoshi flood has sparked an important debate about the safety of Nepal's media sector and its role in times of disaster. In addition to massive destruction and human casualties, the disaster has raised serious questions about how journalists and media organizations can remain safe, resilient and effective in serving communities when they need reliable information.



Taranath Dahal

We have realized that no sector is immune to natural disasters. The recent flood swept away communities along Trishuli River. Several journalists lost their homes, belongings and essential reporting equipment. These incidents have exposed the vulnerability of media sector to natural disasters. Now, organizations like Freedom Forum (FF) must think about disaster preparedness, safety of journalists and media institutions. We need to reflect on how to better prepare media houses and journalists for future emergencies, ensuring their safety and protection of essential equipment. Moreover, the disaster also calls for a serious assessment of media capacity-building priorities. Climate change and its consequences have increasingly become central concern for Nepali journalists. Bhotekoshi flood has further underscored the urgency of these issues. It has further indicated that climate crisis is among Nepal's most pressing challenges. At FF, disaster has also prompted us to reflect on our own responsibilities and adjust our work accordingly. Although many sectors and communities were affected by the Bhotekoshi flood, journalists and media organizations suffered significant losses as well. In this difficult situation, FF stood alongside affected journalists and media outlets, extending relief and support to help them cope with their losses and begin their profession. In this disaster, four journalists lost their lives, some while carrying out their professional duties and others while travelling. Their death is a profound loss for their families and Nepali media community. Other journalists have lost their homes or been displaced from their hometowns. With support from our international partners, we were able to provide assistance to some of the affected journalists and their families. While this support could not undo their losses, we hope it would offer some relief and reassurance that they are not alone at this situation.

In this effort, the solidarity and support of Free Press Unlimited (FPU), a press freedom organization based in the Netherlands, have been remarkable. I extend my sincere thanks to FPU for standing with Nepal's media community at such a difficult time. Our thanks also go to Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) and International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX). Both the networks shared solidarity messages seeking support for victim journalists and media. We are equally grateful to Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) for collaborating with FF to develop a safety guide for Nepali journalists covering disasters. The scale of destruction caused by the Bhotekoshi flood is devastating. This has seriously affected national economy. The affected area is a main economic corridor for Nepal-China cross-border trade and business. Likewise, majority of Nepal's economic pillars- water resources and hydroelectricity production sector were situated in Rasuwa and Nuwakot districts. This extensive damage at the districts north of the capital city, Kathmandu make recovery and reconstruction process challenging for Nepal.

In this context, role of journalists and local media is more important than ever. Active involvement of journalists and media in ground reporting is the need of hour. While developing programs related to media development, Rasuwa-Bhotekoshi disaster experience should always be taken into account. This flood is a valuable learning not only for Nepal, but for the entire Himalayan regions. It is evident that climate-related risks in the Himalayan regions have become an inescapable reality that neither Nepali nor global media can ignore. Hence, FF welcomes collaboration and cooperation with the global media community to foster a safe, secure and resilient press. Most importantly, our responsibilities do not end with emergency relief. Post-disaster rescue, rehabilitation, recovery and reconstruction activities must be accompanied by transparency and accountability. Existing corruption in the management and allocation of post-disaster aid remains a major challenge for Nepal. FF is aware that our longstanding efforts to good governance, transparency and accountability must also mainstream disaster response and recovery. We must continue to ask whether assistance reaches those in need, whether public resources are used responsibly and whether recovery plans reflect the priorities of affected communities. For this, the journalists must have uninterrupted access to information and they should be equipped with necessary tools and safety gears for their safety. Most importantly, they need motivation and support for ground-level investigative reporting. A safe journalist builds a vibrant press. A vibrant press brings voices from the ground and makes an accountable government.

FF is always committed to standing in solidarity with local media and helping rebuild a vibrant, resilient press that can continue to amplify local voices and bring community concerns to public attention.

FF contribution to Nepal's first-ever Citizen Budget

Ministry of Finance (MoF) is preparing Nepal's first-ever Citizen Budget to make budget information easier for the public. As part of the preparation process, the ministry held a consultation with experts and stakeholders in Kathmandu on August 13, 2026 to finalize the Citizen Budget template. It later organized a validation workshop on September 22, 2026 to review and improve the draft document.

FF actively participated in both workshops and provided suggestions to improve the template and draft Citizen Budget. International Budget Partnership (IBP)'s Senior Program Officer Andres Ponce Morales also shared examples of successful Citizen Budgets from other countries and highlighted the importance of making simplified budget documents publicly available alongside the government's regular budget publications.

FF Executive Chief Taranath Dahal stressed the need to publish accessible budget documents online without delay. He also highlighted key features of a Citizen Budget including use of simple language, clear visuals, an easy-to-read format and all essential budget information.

Following the initial workshop, FF reviewed draft Citizen Budget template in detail and submitted 16-point recommendations to improve the document. The suggestions included using clear, sector-wise visuals, such as a 'where each Rs. 100 in tax goes' infographic; simplifying complex planning cycles into interactive 12-month civic roadmap and replacing complex ministry tables with output focused sectoral impact cards.

During the validation workshop, Dahal provided further feedback on the document's language, visual presentation and overall structure. He recommended using official government branding on the cover page and presenting key budget figures at the beginning, before explaining the budget process.

To make the document more useful and easier for the public to understand, he also suggested clearly showing how the budget directly benefits different groups such as students and farmers. He further recommended keeping the final document within 40 pages to make it concise, accessible and engaging for the public.

Freedom of Expression Violations

Koshi Province

Manhandle

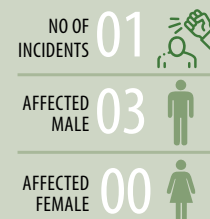
Journalists were verbally abused and manhandled while covering an event in Morang on September 25.

Makalu Television reporter Dilip Agrawal told Freedom Forum that he and two colleagues were covering a municipal assembly. While taking a

statement from municipal chief Bikash Siwakoti, he pushed Agrawal and verbally abused him. "He also threatened me of showing what he could do my journalism profession", the reporter added.

Municipal Chief Siwakoti also manhandled Chandan Paswan, a reporter for Koshi Awaj online. Paswan's hand sprained in the incident.

Reporter Agrawal further shared that Siwakoti verbally abused Paras Mandal, a reporter for Our Pradesh online during the event.



Madhesh Province

Attack

Reporter at Radio Dhanushadham 107.3, Gobinda Yadav was severely attacked while covering news in Dhanusha on June 25.

Reporter Yadav told Freedom Forum that he was reporting on the construction of a road in Karjanha Municipality-7, Dhanusha, following complaints from local residents that substandard materials had been used in the construction. While he tried to take byte of the ward chairperson Ramsevak Yadav about locals' complaint and ongoing construction, Chairperson Yadav ordered him to stop filming. Then, Chairperson's son kicked the reporter and struck Yadav on the head with a metal object (fighter). As Yadav began bleeding, both the ward chairperson and his son fled the scene.

Thereafter, local residents informed the nearby police station. Reporter Yadav was taken to a local hospital where he received three stitches for head injury.

Talking to Freedom Forum on July 1, Yadav said, "On June 26, I had gone to the Area

Police Office, Mirchaiya to file a complaint against both the father and son, but police officers refused to register it. On June 30, police officials told me that they will notify me as soon as the complaint was registered. I have not received any information yet."

Deputy Superintendent of Police Purushottam Pandey told Freedom Forum that the complaint was registered today (July 1) and that the delay occurred due to some technical issues. The attacker is still absconding and police investigation is ongoing.



Obstruction

Siraha-based reporter Dilip Sahani of News 24 Television was obstructed from reporting on June 27.

Speaking to Freedom Forum, Sahani said he was threatened while reporting at the Area Police Office, Golbazaar. He had gone there to report on the alleged sale of duplicate bore-hole pipes by a metal store after receiving a tip-off. While he was reporting, the store's administrative chief allegedly threatened him not to publish the news without his permission or bear consequences.

"Soon after, a police person in civilian clothes approached me and asked whether I had asked for permission from the office to report on

the premises. He pushed me and told me to bring written permission from the office. Then the police office's spokesperson said that I should maintain decorum and obtain written permission to report on the police office premises", Sahani said. "He then sent me out of the premise."

Threat

Saptari-based reporter Bidhyanand Ram of Kantipur national daily was abused and

threatened of legal action following his reporting on June 21.

Speaking to Freedom Forum, reporter Ram said that Kantipur published an online news report on June 21 concerning the stalled construction of the Ramrajan Prasad Singh Institute of Health Sciences and alleged lack of initiative by its Chairperson to move the project forward. Following publication of the report, institute's Chairperson Dr. Pashupati

Chaudhary posted abusive remarks targeting the reporter on his social media page.

According to screenshot of the post shared by Ram, Chaudhary reposted the journalist's social media post containing the news report and described journalists as 'brokers' and 'mafias' alleging that they spread misinformation. Chaudhary also warned the reporter of legal action. 🌿

Journalist acquitted after 2 years court case

Reporter Jiyalal Sah has finally secured justice after facing multiple lawsuits for more than two years over his investigative reporting.

On July 6, 2026, Parsa District Court acquitted Sah in all four cases. The court decision stated that the prosecution had failed to substantiate the charges with sufficient evidence. The court cleared him of all allegations, including criminal defamation, offenses under the Electronic Transactions Act Section 47, offenses relating to personal reputation and defamation and contempt of court.

Reporter with Sidhakura.com and Birgunjcity.com, Sah had been facing legal action since January 2024 for publishing investigative reports about Birgunj Metropolitan City

Mayor Rajesh Man Singh's involvement in an alleged fake citizenship case. According to Sah's reporting, the mayor had facilitated the issuance of a citizenship certificate by descent to a girl from another family by identifying himself as her father. Sah subsequently published follow-up reports and other stories critical of the mayor on both news portals.

Following that, Mayor Singh filed a complaint against Sah under the Electronic Transactions Act. Then, arrest warrant was issued against Sah on cybercrime-related charges on November 24, 2024. Sah appeared before the court on November 26, 2024 and was released on bail of NPR 5,000. Since then, he faced a total of four cases filed by Mayor Singh and his son. Freedom Forum provided legal assistance to Sah. 🌿



Bagmati Province

Court Case

Kathmandu District Court sentenced Saroj Mishra (former editor at Rajdhani Daily) to four months imprisonment and imposed a fine of Rs. 1,000 in a criminal defamation case.

On April 8, 2026, the court also ordered the journalist and the media house to pay Rs.

500,000 as compensation amount to the plaintiff. The order was authenticated on June 9, 2026.

The court delivered its verdict on a criminal defamation case filed under Section 306 of the National Penal Code against the editor and media, over news reports published in the daily. The court states that the reports lacked sufficient factual basis and had defamed the plaintiff.

According to the daily, Advocate Shova Karki filed the case at Kathmandu District Court on July 31, 2023, alleging that the reports



contained baseless claims and had damaged her reputation. A complaint was also lodged at Press Council Nepal following the news publication on the daily. On the council's letter seeking clarification over content, the media office had submitted its clarification on August 4, 2023.

However, district court stated that the clarification and evidence presented were insufficient to substantiate the allegations contained in the reports and delivered verdict.

Obstruction

Journalists were barred from reporting on the plights of displaced people at government holding centers in Kathmandu, Bagmati Province.

On July 11, journalists faced restrictions while reporting from the Holding Center in Kirtipur, where people displaced following the demolition of riverside settlements for alleged encroachment on government land had been temporarily relocated. Several journalists shared incidents of intimidation and obstruction during their reporting.

A reporter from Kantipur National Daily, Samarpan Shree wrote in his social media post titled- Reporter's Diary that police stopped him at the gate despite showing his press identity card and informed him that they had 'orders from above' not to allow journalists inside. However, he contacted a representative from the Prime Minister's Office who was inside the center and he was allowed to enter. Even then, police asked whether he was carrying a camera and warned that taking photographs or videos inside the premises was prohibited. The

reporter further stated that he chose not to confront the police, fearing that doing so could prevent him from reporting at the site in the future.

Similarly, in a video report Himalkhabar.com reporters Archana Darji and Menuka Chhantyal stated that the government representative and security persons forced them to leave the holding center while reporting and had to continue reporting from outside the gate.

Restrictions on media continued on July 12. According to Onlinekhabar journalist Kaushal Kaphle, media persons were denied entry to another holding center in Kharipati, Bhaktapur where displaced families had been relocated from Kirtipur Holding Center after flooding.

Journalists were reportedly asked to obtain official permission from the Ministry of Home Affairs or the Chief District Officer before they could enter the facility.

Arrest

Nepal Police arrested journalist Kishor Shrestha from his residence in Jhamsikhel, Lalitpur on August 12. Shrestha is the editor-in-chief of Janastha Weekly, a tabloid newspaper known for sensational journalism.

According to District Police Range Kathmandu Spokesperson SP Dan Bahadur Thapa, journalist Shrestha was arrested for investigation into allegations of violating individual privacy rights. Police have initiated an investigation against him on charges of infringing individuals' right to privacy and committing cybercrime.

Spokesperson Thapa told Freedom Forum that a victim had filed a complaint against Shrestha at the District Police Range, alleging publication of news violating her privacy rights. Shrestha was first presented before Kathmandu District Court on August 13 to seek an extension of remand for investigation purposes. The court remanded journalist Shrestha three days of police custody. Moreover, Shrestha's wife Saraswati Shrestha filed a habeas corpus writ at the Supreme Court against the arrest. During the hearing on August 13, the court ordered the authorities to present him before the court on August 17 along with all the confiscated reporting equipment of Shrestha and the media.

In the early morning on August 13, police had raided the media outlet's office and seized computers, mobile phones, equipment and related documents.

On August 17, District Court ordered authorities to keep Shrestha in custody for four more days to continue investigation. However, on the same day, the Supreme Court ordered the police to release journalist Shrestha and return all computers, mobile phones and other equipment confiscated following his arrest. The court concluded that a journalist cannot be arrested or detained merely for publishing news report. It further stated that the police may continue their investigation without keeping him in custody.

Following the court's order, journalist Shrestha was released on August 17.

Death threat

Comedia Amarendra Yadav received death threats over his performance in a comedy show. On August 18, Yadav shared that he faced multiple threats for the past 3 days following the comedy show in which he roasted political leaders through a Facebook post.

Sharing a social media post, Yadav wrote- For the past 3 days, ever since the video was made public, I have been continuously facing death threats. I am not sure who they are but I am being personally abused and harassed. Now, I am afraid to leave my room. How long

am I supposed to stay inside my room? He has also requested to take the roasting as an entertainment and comedy as it is his profession and in no way related to politics.

Responding to Yadav's post, political leader Surya Thapa who was also present in the show wrote on his Facebook post on August 19 that he had the courage to listen to and face critical questions. "I was fully aware that I might be roasted by the comedians and I was prepared to accept it", Thapa wrote. 🌱

Obstruction

Reporters Radheshyam Khatiwada and Santa Kumar Chaudhary were obstructed while reporting in Chitwan on August 29.

Khatiwada is associated with Rajdhani daily and Ujjyalo Radio Network and Chaudhary is associated with Seto Nepal online news portal.

Freedom Forum talked to Federation of Nepali Journalists Bagmati Province president Basanta Raj Parajuli about the incident. According to Parajuli, reporters Khatiwada and Chaudhary had gone to report on the police management of flood victims' bodies in Chitwan.

Police persons initially told the journalists that they were not allowed to take photographs or record

videos at the site. While the journalists were filming premises, Nepal Army officials approached them, seized reporter Khatiwada's camera and deleted all photographs and videos recorded that day, including footages from August 26.

Following the incident, the journalists reported the matter to the District Administration Office and concerned Army officials. The Army officials subsequently apologized for the incident and assured the journalists that they would not obstruct journalists from carrying out their reporting.

Misbehavior

Reporter Dinesh Dulal of Sindhujwala online was publicly misbehaved in Sindhupalchowk on September 29.

Speaking to Freedom Forum, reporter Dulal said the incident was linked to a news report published in the weekly newspaper two years ago. The report covered a protest by locals against Ward Chairperson Ramesh Raut over extension of a transmission line.

On the day of incident, Dulal was reporting on an ongoing election of a political party in Barhabise, Sindhupalchowk. When he approached the Chairperson, Raut verbally abused the journalist and said, "Who do you think you are to shake hands with me?" 🌿

Gen Z activists intimidated during protest

Gen Z activists were arrested and detained for protesting in Kathmandu on July 11

Nepal Police allegedly assaulted activists Sarishma Thapa, Majid Ansari and Nelson Ghatani while they were protesting outside the Kirtipur Holding Center. The center had been flooded following heavy rainfall on the night of July 10.

According to activist Thapa, they had gone to the holding center to observe situation of displaced people and assist them in managing their belongings at around 3 pm. When security persons refused to allow them to enter the center, they began questioning the reason for the restriction. During the protest, security persons allegedly assaulted the activists and forcefully took them into police custody.

In a video posted by the Gen Z Movement Alliance on July 11, activist Ansari is seen asking police to give him an arrest warrant. Instead, police persons forcefully put him into a van, telling him that as a student, he should focus on his studies rather than get involved in politics.

According to media reports, Ansari sustained injuries to his eyes and face during the incident. Ansari was admitted at Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital for treatment and was discharged from hospital on July

15 when doctors advised at least 2-3 days of bedrest, he said. He has shared on his social media post that he was threatened to sign the bail papers in hospital or face lawsuit under indecent behaviour charges. However, he was released from the police custody on the same day in presence of National Human Rights Commission.

Thapa and Ghatani were released after around four hours in police custody.

In a separate incident, 26 youths protesting outside the police station in Biratnagar, Koshi

Province were arrested late at night on July 11. They were protesting against the arrest of activist Ansari. The youths were released on July 12. Police handed them over to their parents after obtaining a written consent that they would not participate in such activities again in future.

These incidents indicate a serious violation of the rights to freedom of peaceful protest and fundamental human rights. Freedom Forum urges the concerned authorities to conduct fair investigation into the alleged assault of activists and respect and protect citizens' right to peaceful protest. 🌿



Activist Majid Ansari forced into police van

Gandaki Province

Misbehaviour

Reporter at Nepallead.com Suman Dhungana received abusive messages following the publication of a news report on July 23.

Dhungana told Freedom Forum that he had reported on the alleged illegal encroachment of public land to operate a resort in Pokhara Metropolitan City. The news portal published both video report and a written story on the issue.

Following the publication, a person named Dinesh Acharya messaged Dhungana asking to meet him and sent abusive messages as he refused. Dhungana filed a complaint at the District Police Office, Kaski on July 24, seeking legal action against Acharya.

According to Dhungana, the police summoned both parties to appear at the District Police Office on July 27. During the discussion, Acharya admitted that he was unaware of journalists' rights and the proper procedure of approaching the Press Council Nepal for action against published news. The case was resolved through a mutual understanding, with Acharya's written apology in the presence of police officials.

Obstruction

Reporter at Merosathi Online Television, Suresh Sunar was asked to delete his video footage on August 23 in Kaski.

In a social media post shared on August 23, Reporter Sunar said he had recorded videos of Prime Minister Balendra Shah and his family during their stay at a local resort.

He wrote, "I recorded the video from a distance and outside the premises of the resort, when I saw PM Shah entering the resort.

After army officers saw me, they approached me and asked me not to film or make the footage public. They said it was PM's private family visit. I respected the security officials' request and deleted the footage myself."

Sunar also clarified in his post that he was neither abused nor manhandled during the incident. According to media reports, journalists were not allowed within 0.5 kilometers of the resort.

Attack

Journalist Suraj Gurung at Saranginews.com. np was assaulted over his news reporting on September 5 in Lamjung.

Gurung told Freedom Forum that he had published a news report on the day of the incident regarding a notice issued by the District Administration Office, Lamjung, asking local organizations not to organize any public programs at a time when many people have lost their lives and many remained missing following the devastating Rasuwa- Bhotekoshi flood.

According to Gurung, the news stated that a local youth club had postponed their scheduled football match in Bhorletar, Lamjung, following the local authority's directive.

Following the publication of the news, three to four members of the youth club asked Gurung about the news and hit him on the head. Gurung said that injured area is swollen and he is receiving follow-up treatment.

Further, his mobile phone and camera were also damaged during the incident. According to Gurung, the mobile phone's display and gimbal was damaged and camera's lens sensor is no longer functioning.

Gurung further informed that police refused to register his complaint at the District Police Office on September 7. On September 11, police summoned both parties for discussion, he said.

During the discussion, youth members apologized before the journalist and agreed



to compensate for his treatment and repair of equipment damage.

Misbehaviour

Reporter at emustangnews.com Sundar Kumar Thakali received abusive messages in mobile over news reporting on September 14.

Reporter Thakali shared with Freedom Forum that he had covered video and news reports on the news portal on September 12.

New reports are about container truck drivers' protest outside Mustang Customs Office at the China-Northern Korala border point.

They had staged protest alleging that container trucks were allegedly damaged while taking to Liji Port to load goods. Following this, he received life-threatening and abusive messages through WhatsApp.

Then, he filed a complaint at the District Police Office, Mustang Deputy Superintendent of Police Ram Chandra Tiwari seeking necessary action against the individual on September 14.

Thakali told FF that DPO has assured him of fair investigation in the case.



Karnali Province

Misbehaviour

Karnali Province-based reporter with Annapurna Post, Bisna Prasad Neupane was abused on social media over his reporting.

Reporter Neupane told Freedom Forum that he had covered a news story on the alleged fraud committed by advocate Anil Bahadur Shahi against the public seeking legal services in Surkhet. The report was published in the Annapurna Post national daily on July 25.

Following the publication, advocate Shahi and his relatives posted abusive and offensive remarks targeting the reporter on social media. In response, Neupane lodged a cybercrime complaint against advocate Shahi at the District Police Office, Surkhet.

On July 27, DPO facilitated a discussion between reporter and advocate. During the

meeting, advocate Shahi wrote a written apology and agreed not to make any social media posts targeting journalists in the future, according to reporter Neupane.

Threat

Editor of Nepalkarma.com, Sushil Khadka was harassed over his reporting in Surkhet.

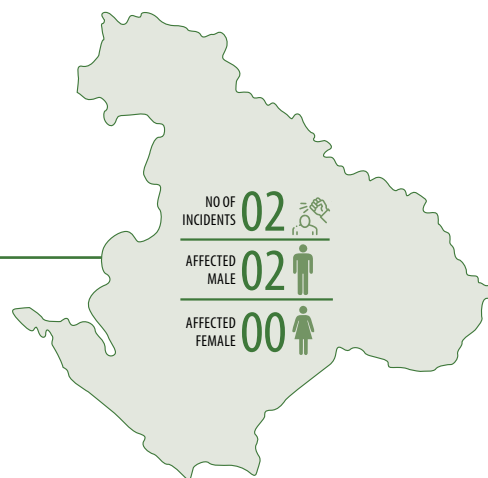
According to Khadka, he had covered a news story about alleged violence against women committed in the name of superstition by a person named Sameer Thapa. A report regarding Thapa's arrest was published on the portal on July 29. Khadka told Freedom Forum that he had reported the story based on video footage circulated on social media platforms.

However, later the same victims and Thapa's family allegedly threatened Khadka. They

accused him of publishing false information and held him responsible for Thapa's arrest.

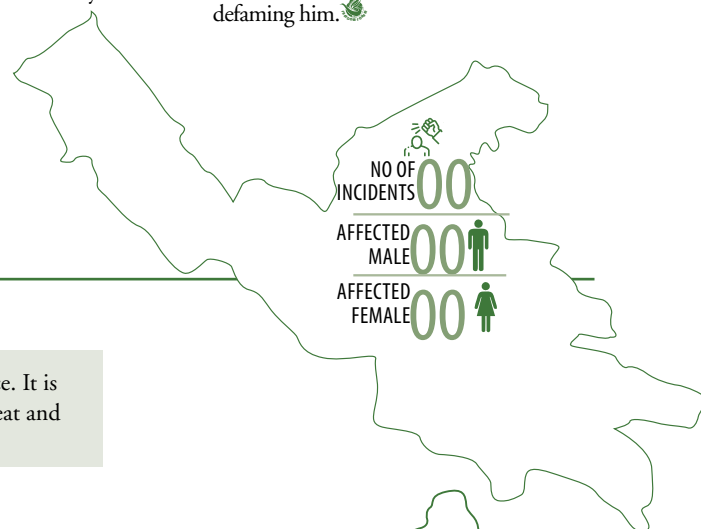
Journalist Khadka further stated in a social media post shared on August 1 that his family had also been threatened in connection with the case. A few local media outlets also published reports based on the women's complaints against Khadka.

Following this, Khadka lodged a complaint against those media outlets at Press Council Nepal on July 31, accusing them of publishing biased reports based solely on the victims' allegations and defaming him.



Lumbini Province

No incident of press freedom violation was recorded this quarter in Lumbini province. It is welcome in deed that journalists and media houses did not face any obstruction, threat and intimidation.



Sudurpaschim Province

Court case

On June 25, police arrested senior journalist Khem Bhandari from Sudurpaschim Province in a criminal defamation case following the verdicts of the Kanchanpur District Court and Mahendranagar Bench of the Dipayal High Court. The arrest was based on Kanchanpur District Court's order to sentence Bhandari to one month's imprisonment and impose fine amount Rs. 10,000 on May 15, 2025. The High Court upheld the district court's verdict

on April 5, 2026 and additionally sentenced him to seven days in prison along with an additional fine of Rs. 2,100.

Both the courts found Bhandari guilty of defamation in connection with his reporting for Manaskhanda Daily and social media posts relating to the rape of a minor eight years ago. Although Bhandari had filed a petition before the Supreme Court seeking review of the High Court's decision, he was taken into custody.



Journalist Bhandari was released from the police custody on August 8 after a month and seven days term.

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- Journalist Nirajan Paudyal (Ratopati.com) have been missing since the flood. They are missing from Sole village in Nuwakot district. With no information about their whereabouts, journalist Paudyal and his wife journalist Bidhya Rajput performed final rites in Kathmandu on September 2, 2026.
- b. Journalist Shekhar Dhungana, his wife, mother-in-law and father-in-law are also missing following the flood. According to his son Swaroop Dhungana, they were out of contact from the immigration office in Kerung, bordering town in Tibet. Swaroop and his brother also performed their final rites on the eighth day of flood.
 - c. Journalist Suresh Simkhada, his mother and sister are missing from Kerung since the flood. Simkhada's wife Sangeeta Simkhada is still waiting for him to return back safely.
 - d. Mother-in-law and father-in-law of Journalist Logshari Kunwar have been missing from Kerung border. They were also on a trip to Kailash Mnasarovar. On September 25, they performed their final rites.
 - e. Former reporter at Ratopati.com, Maya Shrestha's husband Nikesh Shrestha had gone to Rasuwa for business purpose and he is out of contact since August 26 following the flood.
 - f. Journalist Anu Acharya (Pardafas.com)'s brother's son was missing from Ghattekholra Rasuwagadhi since the flood.

3. Journalists who lost residence and properties

- a. Editor of Sundaradevi Sandesh weekly Kiran Adhikari's residence was flooded on August 26. He was living in a rented house in Dhungebazaar, Nuwakot. His media archives and laptop were also swept away from the office in Dhungebazaar.
- b. Editor of Uttargaya daily from Nuwakot, Shiva Devkota lost his motorcycle in the flood from Devghat.
- c. Lokpath online's reporter Sunny Shrestha's house and land was swept away in the flood. His house was located in Bhainse, Nuwakot.
- d. Radio Rajmarga reporter Bipin Malla's residence in Dhading was also flood and filled with debris. Malla shared that eventhough the building looks fine; it is not residential. He also lost his vehicle in the flood.
- e. Revoscience.com's editor Laxman Dangol lost his house and land in the flood in Betrawati, Nuwakot.
- f. Kantipur daily's Rasuwa reporter Balam Ghimire's land was swept away in the flood.

4. Media houses affected in the flood:

In Rasuwa and Nuwakot district, community radio stations have been reported the most affected due



to electricity and internet disruptions. Most have started their operation normally. However, few are still operating partially due to irregular power supply and few lack internet support.

- a. Nuwakot FM: Around 2.9 kms long optics fiber was been completely damaged. Station Manager Shri Ram Adhikari however, repaired the wires and resumed operation after few days.
- b. Radio Chinteshwor: Following the flood, radio operation was completely halted for three days. Thereafter, the radio service was resumed normally except for disruption during power outages.
- c. Radio Rasuwa and Langtang FM also suffered problem in operation due to power and internet disruptions after the flood. Moreover, radio Jalapa and Trishuli also operated partially for few days due to irregular power supply.

Field visit to Nuwakot district post-flood

FF team also visited flood-affected areas of Nuwakot district on September 18, 2026. During the visit, we met with local journalists, visited local radio stations and observed properties and sites affected by the flood.

Station Manager at Radio Chinteshwor Ram Hari Neupane shared that they have not been provided with full access to information about the government's relief and rescue efforts. In addition to irregular electricity, local media are expected to face severe revenue challenges due to significant damage to major market areas.

Of the five newspapers registered in the district, only three are currently operating: Nuwakot

Pukar, Trishuli Prabaha weekly and Image Weekly. Senior journalist Sharan Utshuk Sapkota, who also owns a stationery shop, shared that he previously sold at least 600–700 copies of various newspapers. Following the flood, however, sales have dropped to fewer than 100 copies. Print media were already facing financial difficulties due to readers' shifting interest and economic challenges. The flood is likely to deepen this crisis affecting media revenues and physical and psychological state of journalists.

Local radio stations are also struggling to maintain regular local news coverage. Some stations are currently unable to produce local news bulletins and instead connect with national-level community radio networks for news content.

Local journalists stressed that at this critical time, it is particularly important for journalists to report on the government's management of the flood aftermath, missing persons, rescue efforts and receipt and distribution of relief materials. There is currently no comprehensive record of how much funding and relief has been received, how much has been distributed or whether the assistance has reached the people most affected by disaster.

Victim journalists who lost their family members also identified the documentation of their missing members and management of their financial transactions as major concerns.

To support these journalists, psychosocial support is needed to rebuild their confidence and resilience. Journalists also need training on disaster safety and safe reporting, along with essential equipment to enable them to continue reporting safely and effectively from affected areas.

Beyond immediate relief, sustained support is essential to ensure that journalists can continue documenting the emergency response and long-term recovery. Journalists working in the affected districts contribute to a range of national and international media outlets, yet there remains a significant need for more sustained, critical and in-depth reporting.

It is important to continuously document emergency relief and rescue efforts, rehabilitation, resettlement and recovery of affected communities. Journalists also require support to examine the wider impacts of the climate crisis, particularly its consequences for communities already vulnerable. For this, long-term fellowship support could provide a

meaningful mechanism for strengthening this work. Such support would enable journalists to pursue investigative and crisis reporting. Currently, FF is providing required support to the victim journalists and their families with support from Free Press Unlimited. This support is based on needs assessment and field observation done following the flood. 🌱

Support to flood-affected journalists

Freedom Forum has provided various forms of support to journalists severely affected by the Rasuwa-Bhotekoshi flood on August 26. The support aims to help them resume their professional work and continue reporting safely.

The support was provided based on a needs assessment conducted among affected journalists and the families of victim journalists. With support from Free Press Unlimited under the Reporters Respond program, FF has been providing reporting fellowships, livelihood assistance and equipment support according to the needs of the affected journalists and their families.

Two-month reporting fellowships were provided to journalists Kiran Adhikari and Sunny Shrestha to help them continue their journalism profession. They also received power banks and laptops as equipment support. Both journalists lost their homes and properties in the flood.

Receiving the support, journalist Adhikari said it would be very helpful in reviving his media outlet, Sundaradevi Sandesh weekly and carrying out field reporting. Similarly, Shrestha, a multimedia journalist at Lokpath Online and Nuwakot Online, said he had also lost his laptop and camera in the flood and that the equipment support would be very useful for continuing his reporting.

"I will try my best to bring in-depth reporting from the field as much as possible," Shrestha said.

Journalists Bidhya Rajput and Nirajan Paudyal were also provided with equipment support, including laptops and power banks. Paudyal, a reporter at Ratopati Online, has been continuously reporting on the plight of flood victims and government interventions in the affected areas. The support is intended to encourage him to continue in-depth and investigative reporting on issues that remain unheard and unseen.



Equipment support to Kiran Adhikari and Sunny Shrestha

Rajput said the support was an important relief for both journalists and that such recognition and encouragement motivates them to continue their work.

"I will bring more in-depth reporting on the post-disaster challenges facing communities, their rehabilitation and resettlement," Paudyal said.

Journalist Maya Shrestha was also provided with a laptop to encourage her to resume her journalism career. Former reporter at Ratopati.com, Shrestha had stopped working after birth of her younger child. She subsequently lost her husband, Nimesh Shrestha, in the Rasuwa-Bhotekoshi flood on August 26.

"I had to stop working a few months ago after birth of my younger child and then this disaster took away my husband. However, I will continue my journalism career. I am determined to resume reporting. Thanks to Freedom Forum! They asked me what kind of support I needed and, as per my request, provided me with a laptop. This will be very helpful for me to work from home while taking care of my children," Maya Shrestha said.

Livelihood support was provided to Sanu Darji, father of journalist Raj Kumar Nepali, who

has been missing since the Rasuwa-Bhotekoshi flood. During a field visit, Darji shared that among his four sons, Raj Kumar was his only source of livelihood and support.

FF also provided livelihood support to Swaroop Dhungana, son of journalist Shekhar Dhungana. Swaroop and his younger brother lost both their parents and grandparents in the flood.

Similarly, journalist Shiva Devkota was provided with transportation support and power bank. Devkota lost his motorcycle in the flood. The support will help him travel to affected areas to collect information and continue his reporting. Other local journalists Sharan Sapkota (Trishuli Prabaha), Shri Ram Adhikari (Nuwakot FM), Ram Hari Neupane (Radio Chinteshwor) also received powerbanks as support to operate media without interruption.

Each of these forms of support was provided based on needs identified by affected journalists and their families in Nuwakot district.

Freedom Forum stands in solidarity with flood-affected journalists and media professionals and remains committed to supporting them, encouraging their resilience and helping them continue their work in the public interest. 🌱

FF submits RTI applications at 17 ministries and PM office

Freedom Forum filed a total of 18 RTI applications with the Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers and 17 ministries today (September 28). This initiative is part of FF's celebration of International Day for Universal Access to Information (IDUAI) 2026. Executive Chief Taranath Dahal filed the applications under Article 27 of Constitution of Nepal and Sections 3 and 7 of Right to Information Act, 2064 seeking information for the purpose of study and analysis.

Applications were submitted at :-

1. Office of Prime Ministers and Council of Ministers
2. Ministry of Defense
3. Ministry of Home Affairs
4. Ministry of Foreign Affairs
5. Ministry of Finance
6. Ministry of Youth and Sports
7. Ministry of Energy, Water Resource & Irrigation,
8. Ministry of Infrastructure Development
9. Ministry of Law, Justice & Parliamentary Affairs,
10. Ministry of Science, Technology & Innovation,
11. Ministry of Labor & Employment,
12. Ministry of Industry, Commerce & Supplies,
13. Ministry of Agriculture, Forest & Environment
14. Ministry of Information and Communication
15. Ministry of Culture, Tourism & Civil Aviation
16. Ministry of Health & Food Safety
17. Ministry of Land Management, Co-operatives, Federal Affairs & General Administration
18. Ministry of Women, Children, Gender & Sexual Minorities and Social Securities

The applications sought detailed certified information on appointment of advisors, experts and secretariat staff through political decisions following the formation of new government under the leadership of Prime Minister Balendra Shah. Through the initiative, FF aims to promote transparency and accountability in government appointments and expenditure and strengthen the government's commitment to good governance.

Global campaign on Implementation of RTI laws

Freedom Forum participated in a global campaign to assess implementation of Right to Information laws worldwide. Civil society organizations and information advocates across 90 countries, filed a total of 173 information requests using RTI. The campaign was led by Center of Law and Democracy (CLD), with support from UNESCO.

The campaign was aimed at assessing how effectively RTI laws are being implemented in practice globally through submission of two information requests in as many countries.

On behalf of Nepal, FF Executive Chief Taranath Dahal submitted two RTI requests at two ministries- Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (MOCIT) & Ministry of Women, Children, Gender and Sexual Minorities and Social Security (MoWCGSS) as per Nepal's RTI Act. The information requests were submitted through email.

At MOCIT, information was sought on details about any formal investigations, reviews and/

or supervisory actions, enforcement actions or compliance proceedings involving the social media platforms operating in Nepal, undertaken by the Ministry.

At MoWCGSS, information was sought on a separate year wise breakdown of amount allocated for programs related to child development programs from 2079-2083 BS.

Further, information on budget allocated in each fiscal year for the school-meal program to improve the educational status of children from the Dalit was also requested.

CLD published a report on the IDUAI (International Day for Universal Access to Information) assessing compliance of RTI upon the requests in different countries. The findings reveal several important aspects of RTI

implementation. In 36% of cases, authorities provided no substantive response at all. At least one "mute refusal" occurred in nearly half (47%) of the countries surveyed, although this figure is an improvement from 38% in 2025 as per the report.

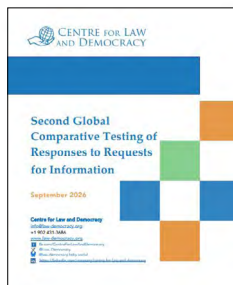
Incomplete information was provided in

38% of cases, including full disclosure in 33%, although 10% of these responses were provided after the applicable deadline. In 19% of cases, requested information was either not held by the authority or in cases involving investigations of social media platforms, no such investigations had been carried out. Explicit refusals accounted for only 2% of cases, suggesting that the main challenge is not the use of legal exceptions but the failure of public authorities to respond to requests at all.

There were also significant administrative shortcomings. Receipts confirming the submission of requests were issued in only 55% of cases. In cases where receipts were issued, 80% were provided within five days or less. Response times were generally positive, with an average of 21 days and 79% of requests receiving a response within 30 days. Fees were rarely a barrier: only five countries charged applicants to submit requests, while just one charged applicant for receiving the requested information.

Full report can be downloaded here: https://www.law-democracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/10/IDUAI-Report.26-09.final_.pdf

International
Right to
Know Day
celebration



FF joins Global Democracy Coalition

Freedom Forum (FF) is excited to announce that it has become a member of the Global Democracy Coalition (GDC), a multi-stakeholder alliance of more than 180 democracy organizations from around the world. The global coalition works to strengthen democratic governance globally through strategic partnerships, data-driven insights and inclusive decision-making processes.

On July 9, 2026, the GDC officially welcomed Freedom Forum as its newest member. Program Associate at the Coalition Secretariat, Nicolette Karina Kalfas congratulated FF on its membership and recognized that the organization's commitment to upholding and

advancing democratic values closely aligns with the coalition's mission. Nicolette expressed confidence that FF's insights, experiences and contributions would enrich the coalition's collective efforts to strengthen and protect democracy worldwide.

FF is honored to join this global community. As an organization dedicated to the protection and promotion of freedom of expression and the right to access information in Nepal, FF takes this membership as an important opportunity to contribute to global efforts to advance democratic values.

Executive Chief Taranath Dahal stated that joining the coalition provides an opportunity

for FF to advance democratic values irrespective of border through collaborative efforts. He noted that Nepal is currently witnessing a range of challenges that threaten democratic values, hence collective advocacy for the protection of freedom of expression, civic space, media freedom and access to information has become more important.

Freedom Forum believes that this collaboration will create greater synergy in strengthening democracy in Nepal through continuous advocacy for the protection of fundamental freedoms, freedom of expression and right to information.

GDC was first convened by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) in 2021 to foster collaboration among democratic organizations. GDC is guided by the principles of inclusive, transparent and authentic collaboration among organizations committed to fostering democratic governance around the world. To date, the coalition has convened four global forums and several regional forums. The Fifth GDC Global Forum is scheduled to take place on October 1, 2026 in Athens, Greece 🇬🇷



*May this festivals of 2083 BS inspire everyone
to create atmosphere for unobstructed exercise of
human rights including freedom of expression and
information to pave way to better democracy.*

Happy Dashain, Tihar and Chhath 2083

Freedom Forum

Peer learning exchange in health expenditure monitoring

Freedom Forum participated in a three-day global peer learning exchange titled "Health Expenditure Monitoring: Beneath the Numbers," held in Nairobi, Kenya, from July 21 to 23, 2026. Organized by the International Budget Partnership (IBP), the convening brought together more than 30 civil society representatives from 17 different countries to address a critical challenge of approved health budgets failing to reliably translate into vital frontline health services in public finance management.

Across developing nations and low-income settings, a persistent gap exists between allocated public funds and actual service delivery on the ground. As external development assistance for health declines and domestic fiscal pressures mount, civil society advocacy is pivoting. Rather than solely questioning whether health budget allocations are large enough, civil society groups are now diagnosing why approved funds encounter bottlenecks, stall in procurement, experience delayed releases, or fail to reach health facilities entirely.

Over the three days of structured dialogue and problem-driven workshops, participants applied root-cause analytical methodologies—such as the "Five Whys" technique—tracing specific health service delivery failures back to underlying public finance management (PFM)

bottlenecks. The workshop also served as a platform to introduce IBP's new Open Budget Survey (OBS) Health Budget Credibility Module. Designed to measure how far health spending strays from original government plans and evaluate how transparently governments explain execution gaps, the module will be piloted across participating countries this year.

During the peer learning exchange, Subash Dahal, Researcher at FF delivered a focused presentation on Nepal's country experience, drawing directly from Freedom Forum's core analytical works—including Open Budget Surveys, Examining Budget Credibility in Nepal's Health Sector and Nepal: Budget Credibility and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Dahal illustrated how rigorous budget credibility analysis empowered Freedom Forum to pinpoint systemic PFM bottlenecks, severe underspending, and off-plan reallocations across health sector programs like the National Health Insurance Scheme. Expanding on Freedom Forum's Citizen Participation in Audit (CPA) involvement, Dahal outlined concrete pathways to leverage Office of the Auditor General (OAG) report findings as a baseline for future action.

Concluding his presentation, he laid out strategic opportunities for reform, emphasizing community-led social audits, subnational

advocacy for local procurement, public awareness campaigns, and evidence-based policy dialogues with government authorities and oversight bodies to drive policy change and demand accountability in public health spending.

The peer learning exchange concluded with participants drafting actionable, multi-stakeholder engagement strategies tailored to their respective national contexts. By equipping civil society groups with sharper diagnostic tools and fostering a cross-border peer network, the initiative aimed to ensure that public health budgets deliver on their promises. Following this exchange, further peer convenings focusing on subnational budget transparency and public participation were slated for later dates.

The high-level exchange brought together civil society organizations from Albania, Cambodia, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Kenya, Kyrgyz Republic, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda and Zambia.

Facilitated by IBP led by Sally Torbert, Andrés Ponce Morales, Cuba Houghton, and Trisha Viecco, alongside regional representatives from IBP Nigeria and IBP Afrique Francophone the program was co-funded by the European Union under the "Collaborating for Open and Accountable Budgeting" (COAB) programme and supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.



FoE under threat in Nepal

Lately, protestors, journalists and social media users have been facing various kinds of attacks for the expression in Nepal. While legal instruments exist to address cybercrime, defamation, threats and public disorder, use of administrative forces against individuals expressing dissent or criticizing government activities can have a chilling effect on the exercise of fundamental rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly.

These concerns are particularly significant because the Electronic Transactions Act (ETA) has long been criticized for being used against journalists and general public exercising their freedom of expression in online spaces. Section 47 of the Act has repeatedly been used to criminalize online expression and silence critics on social media platforms.

Freedom Forum (FF) recorded several serious incidents as follows:-

1. Social media expression

- On July 6, health officer Navesh Adhikari was briefly detained in Dhanusha following a social media post criticizing Minister for Health and Food Safety Nisha Mehta and the government's performance in the health sector. District Police Office, Dhanusha Information Officer Madhusudan Neupane informed FF that the police initially received instructions from Cyber

Bureau in Kathmandu to present Adhikari before the bureau. They later, received an order to release him and he was handed over to his family.

- On July 22, Nezamuddin Ansari of Bara, Madhesh Province was arrested from his residence in connection with a critical social media post. According to Ansari, he had criticized Member of Parliament Arbind Sah's performance, particularly his failure to fulfill promises made in his election manifesto. In the post, Ansari also challenged Sah to meet him and said that he would throw black ink at him because the lawmaker had failed to deliver even one percent of his promises. Ansari was kept in custody for approximately 24 hours. He further stated that Abhinandan Sah, the lawmaker's brother, filed a cybercrime complaint against him following his arrest. According to Ansari, he was released only after deleting the social media post.

These incidents indicate increased hostility of government officials and political leaders towards citizens exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly. Criticism of the performance of public authorities is an essential component of democratic accountability. Moreover, the repeated use of Section 47 of the ETA to criminalize citizens' expression on online platforms further risks undermining freedom of

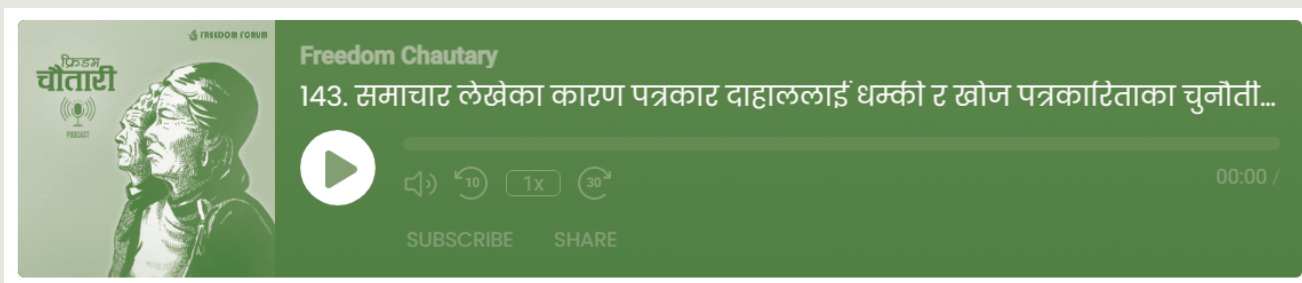
speech and expression.

2. Journalists & Media

Journalists are also vulnerable to legal and judicial pressure when reporting online. Journalists should be able to investigate and report on matters involving public expenditure, government officials and public institutions without facing intimidation, harassment or online abuse.

- Senior journalists Khem Bhandari and Saroj Mishra faced criminal charges for their news reporting. They were subjected to imprisonment along with compensation amount on criminal defamation charges. Journalistic works should not be criminalized and rather prosecuted through civil laws.
- On July 15, journalist Bhuvan Bahadur Singh of Saipalkhabar.com published a news report titled "10 Lakhs Allowance Kanda" concerning alleged irregularities in allowances at a municipality in Bajhang. Following publication of the report, a finance auditor of a municipality in Bajhang reportedly posted abusive content targeting Singh on social media.
- A further concerning incident occurred on July 13, when few private-owned vehicles were found parked at the entrances of media houses, obstructing access. Three media

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

houses - Onlinekhabar, Kantipur Television and Himalaya Television - were affected when unusually parked vehicles covered their entrances, making it difficult for journalists to enter and leave the premises for reporting. Kathmandu Traffic Police later, removed the vehicles using cranes. The vehicle owners were reportedly fined Rs. 500 before the vehicles were released.

Media owners suspected that the incident may have been deliberate and raised concerns about indirect intimidation of the press. Regardless of the intent behind the incident, obstructing access to media organizations affected journalists from carrying out their reporting.

In most of the incidents, Press Council Nepal, an authorized regulatory body responsible for monitoring and addressing concerns regarding published media content is often ignored and journalists are slapped with the lawsuits for covering news. PCN's role is often overlooked when complaints concerning journalistic content are pursued through the police and courts, which has serious impact on press freedom.

3. Artistic Expression

Freedom of artistic expression is a fundamental right. Artists should be free to express their creativity and talents in public spaces without fear of intimidation. They should not be threatened, intimidated or censored because of their expressions. However, several incidents involving comedians, singers, actors facing intimidation have been recorded. They have

also faced coordinated attacks on social media over their expressions and opinions.

- On August 18, Comedian Amarendra Yadav wrote a social media post describing continuous threats and death threats he had faced since broadcast of his comedy show on YouTube. In the show, Yadav roasted political leaders and according to him, their alleged supporters threatened him for roasting their leaders.

Threatening artists simply because they criticize political leaders or express views is unacceptable and undermines freedom of expression.

4. Protestors' arrest:

- On July 23, police detained six youths during a protest outside Tribhuvan University in Kirtipur during its 67th anniversary program. The protesters were protesting against Education and Sports Minister Sasmit Pokharel and chanting slogans including 'Nepo Baby Murdabad'. They demanded merit-based appointments, end to political interference in universities and amendment of provisions related to appointing Prime Minister as Chancellor and Education Minister as Vice-Chancellor of universities.

Together, these incidents reveal a troubling pattern where legal and administrative measures have been used to silence dissents and harass journalists. Nepal's constitutional framework fully protects freedom of opinion,

“Journalists, social media users, artists and peaceful protesters in Nepal continue to face arrests, intimidation and harassment for expressing dissent or criticizing those in power. The government must protect the fundamental right to question, criticize, protest and dissent without fear of reprisal.”

expression and press and these protections should apply equally to both online and offline spaces. Protecting these rights is vital in Nepal's evolving political landscape. The government must honor the spirit of historic Gen Z movement that brought this revolution.

These incidents also underscore the urgent need for state accountability, respect for the rule of law and stronger safeguards for fundamental freedoms. Laws regulating online spaces must be clear and precise to prevent arbitrary enforcement. Regulatory frameworks should protect citizens from genuine harms and promote human rights rather than serving as tools to silence dissent.

Hence, the government must guarantee that these rights are protected in both online and offline spaces. Although regulation of digital platforms is necessary, it must not infringe on fundamental rights. In a democratic society, the right to question, criticize, protest and dissent must be fully respected and protected. 🌱

Open Letter for meaningful civil society participation in AI for Good Global Commission

Freedom Forum joins more than 45 civil society organizations, academics and experts in respectfully urging the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) to ensure active participation of independent civil society organizations, academia and experts in the Commission.

These organizations jointly signed an open letter to ITU Secretary General further encouraging to establish mechanisms

that enable civil society to provide their expertise and contribute meaningfully to the Commission's work.

Read the full open letter here.

Dear Secretary-General Bogdan-Martin,

We, the undersigned individuals and civil society organizations, welcome the International

Telecommunication Union's (ITU) continued leadership in fostering international dialogue on artificial intelligence through the AI for Good initiative and Summit, through its critical support to the UN Global Dialogue on AI Governance and, most recently, through the establishment of the AI for Good Global Commission.

Artificial intelligence presents extraordinary opportunities to advance sustainable development, improve public services, and

accelerate scientific discovery. At the same time, it raises profound questions about human rights, democratic governance, accountability, equity, labor, environmental sustainability, and international security. Addressing these opportunities and challenges requires meaningful international cooperation, and we recognize the ambition behind the Commission in helping to shape that conversation.

We write, however, to express our concern about the apparent absence of meaningful civil society and academic representation in the Commission's membership and governance.

For more than two decades, the ITU has served as one of the principal custodians of the legacy of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). That legacy fundamentally reshaped global digital governance by recognizing that governments and the private sector alone cannot address the complex policy challenges posed by rapidly evolving technologies.

Instead, WSIS established the multistakeholder model as a defining principle of Internet governance, one in which governments, the private sector, the technical community, academia, and civil society each contribute distinct expertise, perspectives, and sources of legitimacy.

As one of the organizations entrusted with carrying forward the WSIS process, the ITU has played a unique role in keeping this model alive within the United Nations system. Through initiatives such as AI for Good, its role in the Internet Governance Forum and the UN Global Dialogue on AI Governance, and its broader work on digital cooperation, the ITU has consistently affirmed that effective governance depends on openness, transparency, and meaningful participation across stakeholder groups.

The multistakeholder model is not simply an institutional arrangement or a distribution of seats around a table. As the Net Mundial Internet Governance Process Principles 2014 highlight, a democratic multistakeholder process is one that ensures the meaningful and accountable participation of all stakeholders, including governments, the private sector, civil society, the technical community, the academic community and users, as per their respective roles and responsibilities. It is important to create the democratic space for diverse communities to deliberate openly, articulate and debate diverse interests, challenge one another's assumptions, and build outcomes that command legitimacy because they reflect a broad range of expertise and lived experience,

especially of affected communities.

The strength of multistakeholder governance lies in its ability to manage disagreement transparently, build trust across communities, and produce more durable and legitimate outcomes through inclusive participation. Against this history, the limited presence of civil society within the AI for Good Global Commission is difficult to reconcile with the governance principles that the ITU has spent more than two decades helping to advance.

This question is particularly important because many global discussions on AI governance are already perceived as increasingly top-down and undemocratic. While governments and industry are indispensable participants, AI governance cannot be shaped solely by state and corporate perspectives.

Civil society organizations and academics are uniquely positioned to articulate and advocate around the wide range of human rights and development impacts that AI creates, encompassing a range of fundamental human rights and freedoms, including children's rights, access to information, free expression, privacy, non-discrimination, labor protections, environmental sustainability, consumer protection, and democratic accountability. Civil society and academia have often served as the bridge between international policymaking and the communities most directly affected by technological change. The UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science further highlights that, beyond the scientific and technical community, the meaningful engagement of civil society, and broader societal actors is essential. In the context of AI governance, perspectives that may be considered non-technical remain critical to ensuring that deliberations are grounded in societal needs, lived experiences, and human rights. Indeed, we are particularly appreciative of the efforts of the Co-Chairs of the UN Global Dialogue on AI Governance and all parts of the UN supporting this critical effort, including the ITU, to meaningfully include civil society organizations and academia. Yet across many international AI processes, opportunities for meaningful civil society participation remain limited. Too often, civil society and academia are invited to observe rather than participate, to comment after priorities have already been established, or to engage through consultation processes that have little influence over outcomes.

At a time when AI systems are becoming increasingly powerful and deeply embedded in societies, meaningful civil society and academic

participation is not optional; it is essential. Governance frameworks must be informed by those whose work centers on protecting the public interest, promoting inclusion, and ensuring accountability. Without those perspectives, AI governance risks becoming less responsive, less trusted, less accountable, and ultimately less effective.

The ITU has earned global respect for its role in advancing international cooperation and for preserving the multistakeholder spirit that emerged from WSIS. The establishment of the AI for Good Global Commission offers an opportunity to demonstrate that international AI governance can remain faithful to the multistakeholder principles that have guided Internet governance for more than twenty years. Doing so requires more than consultation. It requires ensuring that civil society and academia can participate meaningfully in shaping priorities, informing deliberations, and contributing to outcomes from the outset.

We therefore respectfully encourage the ITU to provide opportunities for meaningful, independent civil society and academic participation within the Commission itself and also establish structured mechanisms through which civil society expertise can meaningfully inform its work on an ongoing basis.

We also respectfully ask the ITU to clarify the role of the Commission vis-a-vis the UN Global Dialogue on AI Governance, the Independent Scientific Panel, and other key initiatives across the UN system. At a time when there are multiple AI governance processes ongoing, understanding their complementarity is key for strategic engagement.

We offer these observations in a spirit of partnership and with a shared commitment to ensuring that international AI governance remains inclusive, transparent, rights-respecting, and genuinely multistakeholder.

Many representatives from the undersigned individuals, academia and civil society organizations are in Geneva this week (6-10 July), providing an opportunity to discuss this matter in person. We understand that schedules are incredibly busy, but if the opportunity presents itself, we would greatly value a meeting with you.

We stand ready to contribute under your leadership.

Sincerely,

The undersigned civil society organizations, academia and individuals

Organizations

Ada Lovelace Institute
Amaranta
Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism (ARIJ)
Association for Progressive Communications (APC)
Centre for Communication Governance, National Law University Delhi
CCAOI
Center for Democracy & Technology
Center for the Study of Organized Hate (CSOH)
Centre for Artificial Intelligence Ethics and Governance in Africa (CAIEGA)
Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Multidisciplinary Solutions in Africa (CAIMSA)
Collaboration on International ICT Policy in East and Southern Africa (CIPESA)
Committee to Protect Journalists
Data Privacy Brasil

Derechos Digitales
Digital Rights Foundation (DRF)
Digital Rights Nepal (DRN)
Diversa
European Center for Not-for-Profit Law
Freedom Forum, Nepal
Fundación Karisma
Global Network Initiative
Hiperderecho
International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES)
InternetLab
IT for Change
KICTANet
Lawyers Hub Africa
Mtoto News
ONG Amaranta Chile
Paradigm Initiative
Penn Center on Media, Technology, and Democracy (Penn MEDIATED)

Southeast Asia Freedom of Expression Network (SAFENet)
Tech Global Institute
The Future of Free Speech
WITNESS
Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET)
5Rights Foundation

Individuals

Dr. Konstantinos Komaitis
Dr. Sanjana Hattotuwa
Francesca Bosco
Dr. Margaret Nyambura Ndung'u
Prof. Dr. Joan Barata Mir
David Kaye
Iria Puyosa, PhD.
Linda Bonyo
Paola Gálvez Callirgos
Professor Sonia Livingstone
Dr. Courtney Radsch

Political analyst Arrested under cybercrime charge

Political analyst Bharat Dahal was arrested in Morang, Koshi Province, on September 20. Dahal was in Morang to attend a political event when he was arrested. It is said that he was arrested over his expressions on social media and for allegedly spreading false information about the government. According to the national daily Republica, he has been accused of sharing a report published by The Gray zone, an independent news website, on social media on September 12. The report is about Gen Z protests held on September 8-9, 2025.

Freedom Forum contacted the Cyber Bureau of Nepal Police regarding Dahal's case. A police officer told FF that Dahal has been charged under the Section 47 of Electronic Transactions Act (ETA). He further said the Court remanded Dahal in police custody for two days on September 21 for further investigation. However, the police declined to provide details about the grounds for the investigation and complainant.

Following his detention, Dahal's daughter Denika Dahal filed a habeas corpus petition at the Supreme Court challenging his detention. The Court issued a show-cause order on September 22 in connection with the petition. The court has directed defendants to submit written response within 24 hours of the order.

The Supreme Court ordered to release Dahal on personal recognizance on September 24.

Bharat Dahal
12 September at 18:58 · 🌐

अमेरिकी पत्रिकामा अर्को विस्फोट !

२०८२ भदौको अमेरिकी हमला र ठूलो लगानीमा सो हमला अघि र पछि प्रयोग गरिएका अपराधिहरुको नालिबेली। See less



THEGRAYZONE.COM

As criticism grows over landslide inaction, leaks show Nepal's new leaders groomed by US regime change outfit

Nepal Police Cyber Bureau Spokesperson SP Dilip Giri told FF that Dahal will be released today (September 24) and handed over to his family on a personal guarantee. Freedom Forum is concerned over the arrest and detention of Dahal. Arresting an individual solely for sharing a report on social media is a sheer violation of freedom of expression and opinion.

If the shared report contains false information or disputed content, the concerned media outlet should be approached directly. Resorting to cybercrime offense merely for sharing a news report and expressing political views on social media risks misuse of the Electronic Transactions Act (ETA) and has chilling effect on freedom of expression. 🌱

Self disclosure update

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 Manager looks after accounting and administrative affairs and performs responsibilities as the Information Officer.		
	Nanu Maiya Khadka: Program Coordinator		
	Manju Dahal: Program Assistant, Ganga Kumari Gurung: Office Assistant		
Roster of Consultants/ Researchers	Subash Dahal		
Ongoing Project Information	Project Name	Supporting Agency	Date of start of project
	Collaborating for Open and Accountable Budgeting-III	International Budget Partnership	25 th September, 2026
	Reporters' Respond	Free Press Unlimited	4 th September, 2026
Services and Activities	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/Current Activities	Please follow the link: http://freedomforum.org.np/content/category/activities/		
Information Officer	Aruna Adhikari		
Financial Information	Freedom Forum received grants NPR 38,13,699.10 from July to September 2026.		
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/		
Information Dissemination	Websites- http://www.freedomforum.org.np/ ; www.nepalpressfreedom.org , and Newsletter-Free Expression		

FF in international forum

Freedom Forum Executive Chief Taranath Dahal participated in the first UN Global Dialogue on Artificial Intelligence Governance, held in Geneva on July 6–7, 2026. The dialogue aimed to foster open, transparent and inclusive discussions on AI governance and strengthen international cooperation.

The event brought together more than 3,000 participants, including delegations from 163 countries, six Heads of State and Government, over 60 ministers, and representatives of more than 1,000 stakeholder entities from industry, civil society, academia, the technical community,

and international organizations. The inaugural dialogue served as an important step toward advancing global cooperation and coordination on AI governance. It was also helpful to set benchmarks for the second dialogue, scheduled to take place in New York in May 2027. 🌱

GFMD Stands with Nepali journalists and media affected by the Rasuwa/Bhotekoshi floods

On 26 August 2026, devastating flash floods entered Nepal through the Bhot Koshi River from the Nepal–China border, severely affecting communities in Rasuwa, Nuwakot and Dhading and causing displacement and destruction.

GFMD extends its deepest solidarity to everyone affected, and especially to the journalists, editors and media workers who are covering the disaster while many of them, their families, colleagues and newsrooms are themselves living through its impact.

The impact on journalists and local media

Information shared with GFMD by our Nepal-based members, Freedom Forum and Media Action Nepal, shows that the disaster has had a significant impact on journalists, media workers, their families and media organisations.

Four journalists remain missing following the floods: Tekraj Thami of Naya Patrika National Daily, Shekhar Dhungana, a freelance journalist, Raj Kumar Nepali of the National Dalit Journalists Association, and Suresh Simkhada, publisher of Shilapatra.com. Family members of journalists are also among those reported missing. Freedom Forum and Media Action Nepal have called for intensified search and rescue efforts.



Journalists and their families have also experienced significant loss and damage to homes, land, vehicles and other personal property, with some displaced from their homes. Local media organisations have suffered substantial damage as well. Freedom Forum has documented media houses that were swept away or damaged, while several community radio stations have been operating with limited capacity because of power outages, internet disruptions and damage to equipment and communications infrastructure.

For journalists documenting the disaster and keeping communities informed, these challenges are compounded by damaged roads, limited transportation, high travel costs and difficulties accessing affected areas.

The disruption to local media also affects communities, which depend on journalists and media outlets for timely, accurate and public-interest information during a crisis.

For more: <https://gfmd.info/gfmd-stands-with-nepali-journalists-and-media/>



GFMD Stands with Nepali Journalists and Media Affected by the Rasuwa/Bhotekoshi Floods - GFMD

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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