



# FreeExpression

Issue 70 April-June 2025

A NEWSLETTER OF FREEDOM FORUM

## Protect, promote Freedom of Expression

**S**trong and collective movement is essential to protect civic space which is shrinking day by day“, voiced participants univocally at a program Freedom Forum organized in the federal capital on June 30, 2025.

It was what the participants concluded at the workshop FF organized with the support of Ministry of Communications and Information Technology. The event titled ‘Status of Freedom of Expression and Press Freedom and Way Forward’ secured the participation of representatives from diverse sectors spanning government, civil society, media, academia and law.

Freedom Forum’s Executive Chief Taranath Dahal welcomed all the participants and shed light on the objective of the program. He said, “Periodic discussion on the rights provided by the constitution and existing national and international laws is necessary. Right to freedom of expression and freedom of opinion, the fundamental rights guaranteed by our constitution and international human rights instrument, needs respect and be enforced effectively.” Major objective of the program was to analyse whether the laws and policies governing freedom of expression align with the constitution and Nepal’s commitments in the international arena.

He urged policymakers to review the Media Council Bill, the Information Technology and Cyber Security Bill currently under consideration in the federal parliament, as they, he argued, contain provisions that restrict press freedom and freedom of expression. He expressed whether the recent activism of judicial bodies, which are defenders of press



freedom and freedom of expression, were favorable to FoE and press freedom. “Misuse of court to suppress press freedom and free expression is alarming. Freedom activists must not be afraid of the courts at all,” he underscored.

The discussion was held at a time when attacks on media and free speech practitioners is increasing in the recent days. FF is worried about current scenario and outcomes of the discussion is expected to be helpful to sensitize the diverse community and make them aware of scope of freedom of expression (FoE) and press freedom.

Following Dahal’s welcome remarks, FF General Secretary and advocate Sanjeeb Ghimire

shared his comprehensive presentation on legal frameworks for media and FoE in Nepal. In his presentation, Mr Ghimire highlighted major objectives of different laws, policies and draft bills regulating FoE, concerning issues on the bills and suggestions for their improvement. He reminded that the constitution has a provision that new laws with reasonable restrictions and without stifling fundamental rights could be drafted. But, currently drafted laws were less participatory and more control oriented, thereby going against the international frameworks of UDHR and ICCPR, to which Nepal is also a state party.

He also stressed on the need for an umbrella operational/framework law that governs division of authority among three tiers of

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## Message from Executive Chief

### Nurture democracy constantly

Nepal has a negligible number of civil society organizations and think tanks working in the sector of promotion and protection of civic freedoms and democratic governance. About 95 percent non-governmental organizations here are limited to the involvement in welfare and service delivery activities. It is indeed a national setback to not have strong, vibrant, creative and research-oriented organizations that foster evidence-based advocacy and serve as a foundation for a robust democratic governance and open society. Although the issues of democracy and human rights, mainly civic freedom, come to a limelight along with the political movements and revolutions, they gradually subside in Nepal, which is a worrying concern.



Taranath Dahal

The professional organizations and movements in Nepal have a strong network and long history but they are yet to gain pace and development, especially in the wake of rising undue political influence creating division and split in the movement and motive, fueling indulgence in vested interests. Whether they are advocates, journalists, university lecturers, school teachers, engineers, doctors, chartered accountants, nurses, white collar trade unionists or civil servants, they are victims of division based on their political party alignment and ideological beliefs. It has resulted into sustainability issues and dearth of unified organizational voices for the cause of human rights, accountable and responsive democratic governance and entire democracy. Not dispersed but unified voice of CSOs contribute to their sustainability and advocacy.

With this, these mechanisms are subpar to serve as watchdogs, and promote good governance and advocate for effective democracy. Informed campaigns demanding accountability have weakened, prompting the state structures to be increasingly unaccountable and arbitrary. Ultimately, frustration has gripped the public with a heightened fear of uncertainty, which would take a toll not only on good governance and development but on public service and pillars of democracy.

It is worth noting that democracy is a system that requires constant activism for its well-functioning delivery and impact in society and polity. Even though it is never achieved fully, its evolution should be equipped with continuous correction through untiring conversations among its stakeholders. Only well nurtured democracy ensures a nourishing dividend to the public for their fulfilling life and empowerment with rights and justice. Empowered civil society organizations, think tanks and civic activism are vital to this end. Freedom Forum was established two decades back with this in background. Since then, we have been engaging actively in various activities and programs that promote values of a free, open and liberal democracy. FF believes Nepal cannot achieve sustainable political and economic progress without strengthening civic and political freedoms.

FF's activities focus not only on research, policy advocacy and lobby but also on strengthening and defending the free press, ensuring citizen's universal access to information and driving open society's values. An accountable and responsible democratic governance provides space for citizens to play their constructive role. So, we are setting our priorities and continuing activities and strategies accordingly. It is a long campaign, which requires our untiring commitment and struggle. We are clear that the recent disruption in global orders in terms of handling democracy has severely dented resource mobilization for such democratic civic initiatives.

In order to face challenges, there are no efforts made as an alternative solution. FF believes it has its relevance as it is committed to make its campaign further robust. With confidence, we say our objectives and goals are still more relevant, timely and essential. But, how can such a campaign be sustainable is worth pondering. As a founder of this institution, I must say, the coming days will face further uncertainty. Small but meaningful effort, this Newsletter has made a way to the present 70th edition. It certainly helps cater knowledge and information on the pressing issues surrounding democratic governance, open and accountable democracy, civic rights, mainly free expression and press freedom in Nepal. I confidently claim, it is a huge resource center for the researchers, policy makers and shapers, students and media enthusiasts. FF is always committed to generate and document the information and knowledge for an open and liberal democratic future of Nepal. 🌱

### Ensure safety to RTI activist

A noted right to information activist Ishwara Tiwari has been receiving threats since March 14. The incident took place in Jhapa, Koshi Province.

Activist Tiwari reached out to Freedom Forum, seeking support for her safety amid threats on April 8. Talking to Freedom Forum, Tiwari shared that she had requested information at Haldibari Municipality regarding encroachment of a local street on August 21, 2024.

After she received information from the municipality, she has been drawing attention of the local authority through her social media posts regarding the illegal use of public street as personal land.

Through her posts, she has urged the municipality to take action on the guilty ones so that the people affected by the illegal activity would be ensured justice.

After the local media published news based on her posts, the municipality lodged a complaint against her at the District Police Office, Jhapa, she shared. Following the complaint, she was summoned to the police station for discussion.

Additionally, she was threatened by the people involved in the encroachment of public street. Moreover, Tiwari's Facebook account was also locked on March 21, which Tiwari suspected a planned attack. However, the account was recovered later.

Activist Tiwari had requested the District Administration Office, Jhapa and National Human Rights Commission Koshi Province Office, seeking safety to her and her family on April 8.

She is an active RTI campaigner. She has been using RTI to make the local authorities transparent and accountable for six years. 🌱



# Freedom of Expression Violations

## Madhesh Province

### Threats

**A.** Chief Editor at Loktantrakhbar.com, Bakhtiyar Ali, was threatened for covering news on June 24. The incident took place in Sarlahi.

Editor Ali shared with Freedom Forum that he had published a news report on anti-graft body's investigation and confiscation of important documents from Sarlahi Health Office on June 15. Following the news publication, Office Chief Dr Nabal Kishore Jha's supporters called Ali and asked why he published news and with whose permission. They also threatened to attack and sue Ali.

"Again, on June 24 Dr. Jha and Federation of Nepali Journalists Sarlahi Chapter's Bandana Jha spoke foul on me at a public place and ordered me to remove the news from portal or face consequences", shared journalist Ali.

**B.** Photojournalist at www.birgunjcity.com, Raju Baitha, was threatened for his news report on May 18 in Bara.

Reporter Baitha shared with Freedom Forum that he had covered news about illegal excavation in a local river and other irregularities in the Bishrampur municipality on May 8. The video reporting was published on the media's YouTube channel- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UBrV4TgT3yQ>

"I informed the municipality mayor and the local chairperson about the illegal excavation, but it was in vain," said Baitha. On May 16, he shared the news link on his Facebook page, which drew the attention of the municipal authorities, contractors, and local residents.

Following this, on May 18, a local businessman allegedly involved in the river excavation, Tait Yadav, arrived at reporter Baitha's residence with four others and threatened to make him disappear. They even attempted to assault Baitha, but his neighbors rescued him.

"I informed the local police offices about the incident, seeking action against Yadav. I am also preparing to report the incident to the District Police Office and District Administration Office, demanding safety, as I travel 40 minutes every day in my bicycle from my office to home," Baitha added.

**C.** Reporter at madheshmirror.com, Krishna Kumar Mandal, received threat for covering news in Saptari on May 16.

According to Freedom Forum's representative for the province, Rajan Singh, reporter Mandal had published news on May 14 mentioning that Treasurer of District Bar Association Advocate Nilam Kumar Yadav charged the public Rs. 5,110 instead of official Rs. 110 for registration of a complaint. Following its publication on the news portal, Advocate Yadav's brother Santosh Chaman abused reporter Mandal as- blackmailer or a fake journalist- through a post on his Facebook page.

Representative Singh further informed that Chaman had sought administrative action against the reporter for the published news. He threatened Mandal saying, "It won't be good for him if he continued writing news against advocate Yadav."

**D.** Reporter Sandeep Yadav of Sajhedari daily received a death threat while covering a story in Bara on April 26.

According to Rajan Singh, a representative from the province, reporter Yadav had gone to cover the news of Province Chief Minister Satish Kumar Singh's inspection visit at Yogshila Hospital situated in Kalaiya Sub-Metropolitan City. While Yadav was taking pictures during the inspection, the hospital's director, Pawan Gupta, and Dr. Suman Prasad Sah seized his press identity card and mobile

phone, and deleted the photos. Director Gupta also threatened to shoot the reporter.

On his way home, two men and Dr. Sah surrounded Yadav and spoke foul on him.

Singh reported that police officers on duty took Director Gupta under control and grilled him.

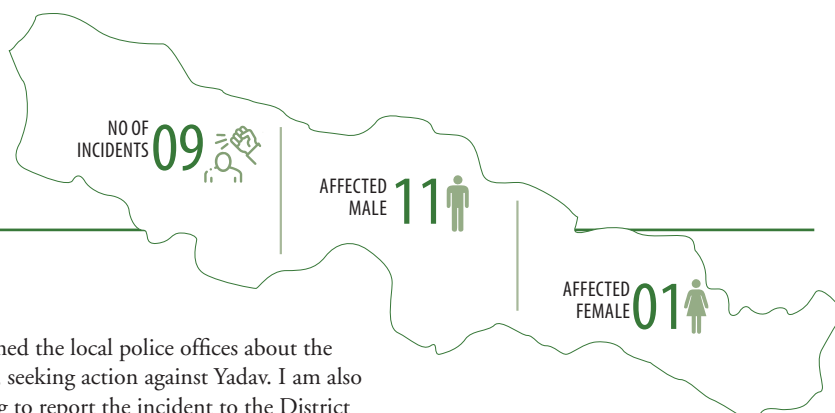
**E.** Dhanusha based reporter at <https://khabarhub.com/>, Sumit Mishra, was threatened over a news article on April 25.

FF Representative for Madhesh Province, Rajan Singh, shared that a news story titled "Nepali Congress Joint General Secretary Yadav's son involved in Bhatbhateni loot case" was published on Khabarhub.com on April 25. The news covers a theft at the Bhatbhateni supermarket complex, where individuals from a protesting group vandalized the complex and looted goods during the pro-monarchists' protest in Kathmandu on March 28.

"On the day of incident, a police official in district called reporter on phone and threatened him to immediately present himself at police station, asked for apology and remove the news from portal", said representative Singh quoting reporter Mishra.

In the threatening call, the police official also warned Mishra that he would file a case against him and arrest him if he did not abide by the order.

According to representative Singh, the news was, however, published from the central desk of the news portal located in Kathmandu, Bagmati Province. Reporter Mishra has also clarified that he did not write the news.





## Misbehaviour

Reporter at TV Today Janakpur, Chandani Jha, was misbehaved while covering a news story in Dhanusha district on June 21.

Reporter Jha had reached the site with her cameraperson for a news story on encroachment of a public road in front of the property belonging to Ward Chairperson of Dhanushadham Municipality-3, Jay Narayan Yadav. However, Yadav's supporters barred them from taking photos and videos and asked them to take permission from Yadav.

According to reporter Jha, she contacted Yadav for his comment on the news regarding the alleged encroachment of the public road. In response, Yadav not only shouted at Jha over the phone, but also instructed his supporters to slap her, damage camera and chase them away. Despite intimidation, Jha continued her reporting from the site.

Reporter Jha informed FF that she tried to lodge a complaint at District Police Office, Dhanusha but the officers refused to register it. She had also informed District Administration Office Dhanusha and Province Office of the National Human Rights Commission next day about the incident.

## Obstruction

Journalist Amarkant Thakur from Kantipur Television was barred from reporting in Dhanusha on May 18.

Freedom Forum's provincial representative, Rajan Singh, reported that journalist Amarkant Thakur was covering a story on local residents who were seeking information about various development and construction projects in the Mukhiya Patati Musaharnia Rural Municipality office. According to the locals, there were irregularities in the operation of such projects in the municipality. The security persons seized journalist Thakur's mobile phone and took him out of the premises. Though they returned his mobile phone back, journalist Thakur left the venue without reporting.

## Koshi Province

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

Representative Singh further shared that Chairperson Jay Kumar Yadav ordered security persons to send the journalist out from the municipal premises, citing his absence from the office. However, journalist Thakur stated that he was mistreated because journalists were not allowed to enter the office premises without Chairperson Yadav's prior approval.

## Attacks

**A.** Police persons attacked journalists while they were covering a protest in Birgunj on April 15.

According to Freedom Forum's provincial representative, Rajan Singh, violent clashes broke out on April 12 during a religious procession, marking Hanuman Jayanti in Birgunj, after a group of people began pelting stones.

Then, Parsa District Administration imposed a curfew until midnight of April 13 to control the situation.

On April 15, journalists had reached the Parsa District Police Office to report on those detained in connection with the clashes.

During this time, both conflicting groups were also summoned to the police station for discussion. However, tensions intensified during the discussion leading to stone-pelting targeting police personnel, informed representative Singh.

Amid this, Arjun Gupta, a reporter for Avenues Television, sustained a head injury from stones thrown by protestors.

Anil Ojha of Madhya Nepal Sandesh and Dharendra Tiwari of Chandra Surya daily were injured by baton charges as police attempted to control the crowd. All three journalists received treatment at Narayani Hospital, Birgunj. Singh further confirmed that the journalists were wearing T-shirts and press ID cards of their respective media houses at the time of the incident.

**B.** Siraha-based reporter for the National News Agency and editor at <https://simapost.com/>, Mukesh Yadav, was attacked on April 3.

Speaking to Freedom Forum's province representative, Rajan Singh, Yadav shared that local transport entrepreneur Parmeshwor Yadav blamed journalists for posting photos of his company's buses, for alleged involvement in illegal transportation of goods. A few days before the attack, Parmeshwor Yadav called reporter Yadav and asked why he had shared the photos on social media.

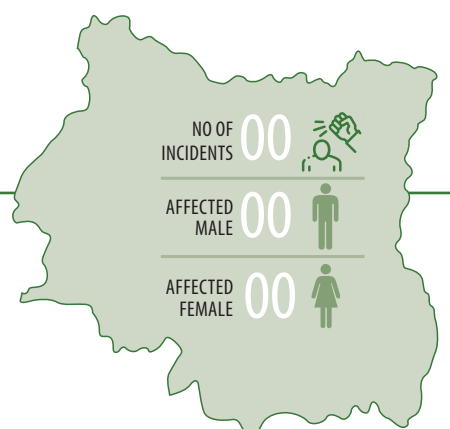
"When I told him that I had not taken any pictures, he verbally abused me," reporter Yadav told Singh. Following this, Yadav informed fellow journalists about the incident and lodged a complaint at the District Police Office (DPO) in Siraha on March 31.

Again, Parmeshwor Yadav's relative called and threatened Yadav for allegedly posting the photos on social media. Then, on April 3, while Yadav was on his way home from DPO Siraha, a group of individuals attacked him. He managed to escape major injury and reach home but lost consciousness after reaching home.

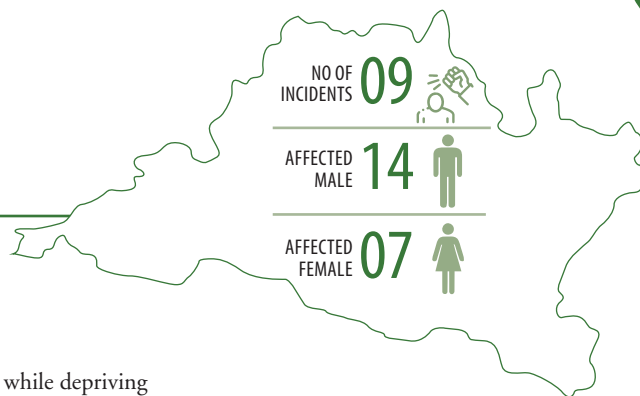
He was rushed to the Provincial Hospital in Siraha for treatment and later referred to the Provincial Hospital in Dhanusha. Yadav sustained injuries to his head, neck, and hands.

"Had the police taken action after my complaint, this incident could have been prevented. I feel unsafe continuing my profession under these circumstances," Yadav worried, "The perpetrator may continue intimidating in the future."

However, Deputy Superintendent of Police, Birendra Kumar Paswan, the Information Officer at DPO, Siraha, informed FF that investigation was underway and police were searching for evidence related to the attack. 🌿



# Bagmati Province



## Court Cases

**A.** The Special Court ordered the Drishti News media to furnish justification of the news published in Drishtinews.com on June 22. The full bench of the court issued an order on June 24, directing media to submit justification within three days.

The court staffs had filed the contempt of court case against the online portal, Drishti Media Pvt. Ltd and its Chairperson Shambhu Lal Shrestha and Executive Editor MP Subba on June 23. Following this, the court issued the order in the hearing held on June 24.

The court order read- The media should submit justification with evidence within three days from the date of receipt of this order as to why action and punishment under contempt of this court should not be taken. The respondents on behalf of the media- Shambhulal Shrestha, MP Subba, and the concerned reporter of the news 'must appear before the court to give their statements'. Moreover, the court also ordered the media that the published news should not be removed or edited in any way.

The news relating to middlemen's influence in special court was published on June 22 on the news portal. The news had quoted its confidential sources to expose the alleged corruptions in the court processes leading to acquittal in the cases registered by the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority.

Chairperson Shrestha said that they were yet to receive official letter from the court. The media had no intention to harm the court's reputation, he said, "However, the media respects decision of the court and we would submit answers to the issues raised by the court as soon as we receive the notice." He further mentioned that the court delivered its order without informing the media on the hearing date.

On it, Freedom Forum's Executive Chief observed, "The media deserves to be evaluated based on the content's truth rather than its intent. In this case, the court has demeaned roles and responsibility of the press. Importantly, the absence of the clear definition of 'contempt of court' in Nepal has been

misused for the court's defense, while depriving media of its rights. Courts' benches have been defining the contempt of court as per their interest."

Media has the right to seek judicial accountability, and a transparent judicial process is essential for justice. "While being proactive to defend rights, other's duties and rights must not be breached. Together, it is the media's role to serve true content," he reiterated.

This incident has highlighted urgency of formulating an act on Contempt of Court.

Later on June 26, the court granted bail Rs. 25,000 to the media persons on the case.

**B.** Kathmandu District Court had issued an order on June 10 to the news portals Bizmandu.com and Nepalkhabar.com to remove published news contents.

The news portals are operated from Kathmandu, the federal capital city.

Chairperson at Securities Board of Nepal Santosh Narayan Shrestha had filed a case of 'character assassination' against the portals at the court for publishing news about him. The portals were publishing news related to Chairperson Shrestha's alleged involvement in several corruption cases at the board.

In the case, the court issued an interlocutory order to immediately remove the published contents and not to publish any news further on this issue.

The court stated that with reference to the possible harm to the plaintiff, the defendants should not publish unverified and baseless news through their websites, online platforms, or any other medium, and must immediately remove the already published articles from their online platforms.

However, on June 20 hearing, the court dismissed its interlocutory order issued on June 10. The court also revoked the complaint of Chairperson Shrestha.

**C.** Nepal Police issued an arrest warrant against senior journalist Dil Bhusan Pathak for his reporting and program presentation.

According to news reports on June 10, journalist Pathak was issued the warrant from the Kathmandu District Court on the basis of complaint over a news story relating to the investment in a hotel.

On May 16, journalist Pathak had shared on his YouTube channel- Tough talk with Dil Bhusan Pathak – about news circulating in Nepali media.

Journalist Pathak was charged under Electronic Transaction Act. On June 16, the Patan High Court issued an interlocutory order not to arrest journalist Pathak except in accordance with the law. Both parties were summoned for a hearing on June 19.

The court granted bail of amount Rs. 25000 to journalist Pathak on July 3.

"Nepal's constitution has guaranteed freedom of expression and journalists' right to free reporting. So, filing a cybercrime offense against journalist for reporting is an absolute misuse of the ETA and is an attempt to panic and control journalists and free press", argues Freedom Forum's Executive Chief Taranath Dahal, adding that there is already a content regulatory body, Press Council Nepal which can be approached in case of dissatisfaction over the news.

## Obstruction

On June 20, around a dozen journalists were barred from reporting at the District Administration Office (DAO) in Makwanpur, Bagmati Province.

According to Freedom Forum's (FF) province representative, Rammani Dahal, the Chief District Officer (CDO) barred journalists from recording videos of two separate meetings among political leaders. The discussions were held to address contemporary public issues.

Representative Dahal from Gorkhapatra national daily reported that while the CDO permitted to take photos, video recording during the meetings were prohibited, citing instructions from 'higher authorities'. "When we, journalists inside the office, reminded CDO that there was a practice of allowing video recording as well. But, we were not allowed after the participant began speaking", Dahal informed.

## Attacks

**A.** A group of hooligans attacked journalists while reporting in Bharatpur, Bagmati Province on June 13.

Journalists from various media were covering a press conference organized by the victims of international education scam. An institute named Education visa services cheated the students and even refused to return their money back. The victims then filed complaints at the District Police Office and District Administration Office but there was no action. Then, they called for a press meet. At the press meet, the hooligans attacked journalists, shoved their cameras and forced them to delete their reporting even in presence of police persons.

**B.** A reporter with the Prime Times Television, Sabina Karki, was injured while reporting a protest in Kathmandu on April 27.

Karki was reporting on protest of the teachers at New Baneshwor, Kathmandu. During the protest, a clash broke between police persons and protesting teachers when they tried to break the police barricade in a restricted area.

Thereafter, police launched baton charging at the teachers. Meanwhile, reporter Karki was injured in her eyes with water cannon targeted to the agitating teachers. A police person rushed her to the Tilganga Eye Hospital, where she received treatment. Her right eye was severely injured.

The Teachers' Federation Nepal had staged protest demanding introduction of a new School Education Act that addresses their demands.

## Misbehaviour

**A.** Reporter at the Rastriya Samachar Samiti (RSS) Purna Prasad Mishra was misbehaved while reporting in Kathmandu on April 22.

According to Mishra, while he was taking pictures of ongoing road construction in Kageshwori Manahara Municipality, a person identifying himself from the construction company approached him and questioned why he was taking pictures. He further threatened reporter Mishra, ordered him to delete the photos and videos, claiming he was not allowed to take photos at the site.

In response, Mishra told him that the road was public property, and as a journalist and citizen, he had the right to record the construction activities. Mishra further shared that the individual also took a photo of Mishra as he was leaving the site. Later, Mishra was informed that someone in the locality had been inquiring about him. "Thereafter, I filed an application at the Police Circle Baudha on April 23 seeking safety", Mishra said to FF.

## Threat

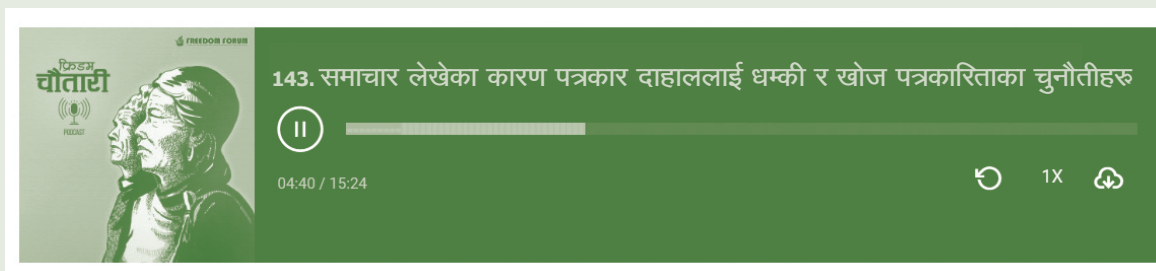
Director at Nepal Republic Media Limited, Shova Gyawali, wrote a letter to FF, informing about the intimidation over a news, while the concerned Minister denied it.

The Republic Media wrote to FF that for Foreign Minister threatened Director Gyawali for editorial- 'Press Council Nepal, FNJ must act to restore media-judiciary trust and news-Arrest warrant issued against journalist Dil Bhusan Pathak over news broadcast' published on Nagarik and Republica national dailies on June 11 and 12. Both the national dailies are publications of the media house.

According to Director Gyawali, she received a call on Whatsapp from personal secretary of the Minister and got the warning of action on the media office, with the claim that the published content was 'baseless'.

The media house also wrote a letter on June 13 to the National Human Rights Commission's Chairperson urging to initiate an impartial and independent inquiry on warning. However, the Minister claimed the conversation was distorted. She took to social media (Facebook) on June 13 and wrote - "I had called Director Gyawali to inform her that as the matter was in the court, we would follow whatever punishment the law prescribes on the case. In fact, I had suggested that a reputed media outlet, which I regularly read, should verify facts before publishing news, rather than relying on such misleading videos as sources. I am surprised that our phone conversation was distorted and reported as threat in the news published." 🌿

# Listen to Freedom Forum Podcast - Freedom Chautari



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

# Actress Panta faces online harassment over her remarks

Actress Surakshya Panta faced harassment on social media following her remarks during an interview aired on April 20.

During the interview aired on 'The Prakash Subedi Show' on the Rajatpat Online TV, host Prakash Subedi asked Panta whether she recognized Hridayendra Shah. Actress Panta

first got confused by the name, later recognized him and said that since many people admire him and he is good-looking, he could join the film industry. Her comments initiated a wave of backlash on social media, particularly from pro-monarchist groups. The hashtag campaign #BoycottSurakshyaPanta was launched, with calls to boycott her upcoming film.

"An individual's comments during an interview reflect her personal views. Every citizen has rights to speech," said Taranath Dahal, Executive Chief of Freedom Forum, "Such coordinated attacks aimed at harming her career could create fear among other artists and contribute to self-censorship."

## Gandaki Province

### Threat

Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Syangja district has filed a complaint against journalist Roshan Lamichhane on April 13.

Lamichhane is associated with [www.aandhikholaxpress.com](http://www.aandhikholaxpress.com) and is also a Syangja correspondent for Kantipur Television.

According to Freedom Forum's provincial representative Rajan Pokhrel, Chairperson Mahadev Shrestha and General Secretary Rabin KC of the Chamber filed the complaint at the District Administration Office, accusing journalist Lamichhane of publishing misleading news.

The news on alleged illegal activities during the inauguration of a fair organized by the Chamber in Syangja, and the sale of inedible food items at the event were published on the portal. Following the publication, local authorities conducted an inspection of the fair.

Representative Pokhrel further informed that former Chief District Officer forwarded the complaint to the police, seeking action against the journalist.

Pokhrel also quoted journalist Lamichhane as saying that he was being targeted because the

Chamber was forced to pay taxes for a previous fair after news reports were published.

However, current CDO, Ishwari Prasad Aryal, stated that the complaint was forwarded to the Press Council Nepal.



## Lumbini Province

### Obstruction

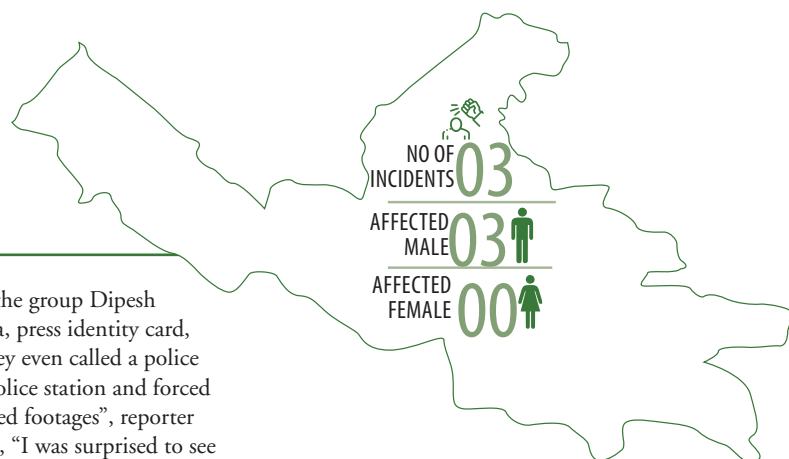
Radheshyam Bishwakarma, a reporter with AP1 TV and the Rastriya Samachar Samiti (RSS), faced harassment while covering an event in Rupandehi district on April 21.

Reporter Bishwakarma shared with Freedom Forum that while reporting on an official visit of a Minister, he noticed the presence of some miscreants at the venue and began recording their activities.

"Meanwhile, leader of the group Dipesh Yadav seized my camera, press identity card, and motorbike key. They even called a police officer from a nearby police station and forced me to delete the recorded footages", reporter Bishwakarma informed, "I was surprised to see the police officer's silence in the incident. He deleted the photos and videos from the camera and returned my asset."

Thereafter, I reported the incident at the District Police Office. Deputy Superintendent

of Police assured me of the group's arrest and asked me to file a First Information Report against Yadav. But, when I called the police station to inquire about Yadav's arrest, they said that he was yet to be arrested.





# Karnali Province

## Attack

Police persons attacked journalists Angaraj Pariyar and Prajwal Chunara while covering a demonstration in Surkhet on May 8.

Reporter Pariyar works at Janachaso Khabar daily and Chunara is associated with Khulanajar.com.

Reporter Pariyar shared with Freedom Forum that they were covering a sit-in protest in front of the High Court, Surkhet. While Pariyar was taking video of police manhandling a protesting woman and her children, a police person allegedly grabbed his hand from behind and kicked him. Reporter Chunara was also attacked and police seized their press identity cards, mobile phones and camera.

Although the police later returned their belongings, all photos and video footage were deleted. Reporters sustained minor injuries on chest, hands and neck during the attack.

"We have informed the National Human Rights Commission about the incident and we demand action against the police persons", reporter Pariyar informed.

## Death threat

Journalists Karna Bishwakarma and Khadka Bishwakarma received death threat for

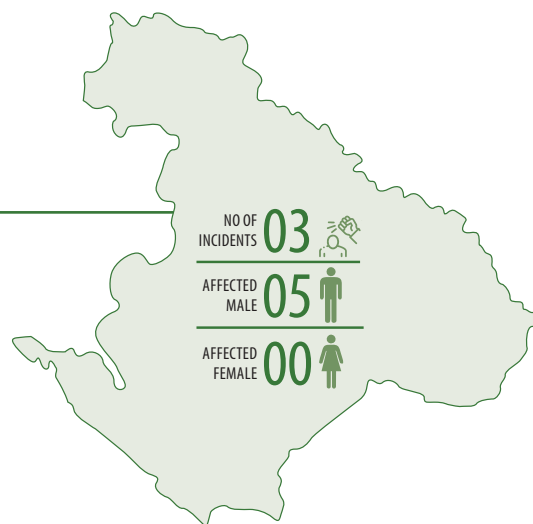
publishing a news article on April 30 in Kalikot.

Freedom Forum representative for the province, Laxmi Bhandari, reported that journalist duo had published news relating to commission scandal from the Former Chief Minister to local leaders: hundreds of thousands extorted from schools in Raskot. The news described involvement of Former Chief Minister and local leaders in extorting money from community schools luring them of allocating various projects in schools.

Editor at the news portal Karna Bishwakarma shared with representative Bhandari that Mayor Dharmaraj Shahi threatened both the journalists over the phone. "Mayor Shahi threatened to maim their hands and kill them", said Bhandari, quoting Editor Bishwakarma, "The Mayor even attempted to frame the journalists by creating a fake payment voucher from the municipality in their names." Journalists later informed the local administration and police about the incident, seeking protection. Karna is currently residing in Jumla for his safety and has been working from there to avoid potential attacks.

## Obstruction

A journalist with the lokaantar.com news media, Sher Bahadur Thapa, was barred from reporting in Surkhet on April 9.



Freedom Forum's representative for Karnali Province, Laxmi Bhandari, informed that reporter Thapa reached Town Development Committee to cover a raid conducted by the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) at the Committee office. While Thapa was taking pictures and videos of CIAA's raid, a police person seized his mobile phone and deleted photos and videos.

"I had not taken any photos and videos that would affect their investigation but the police deleted eight photos and one video and threatened me saying he had encountered many journalists like me", said representative Bhandari quoting reporter Thapa.

Reporter Thapa informed the National Human Rights Commission Province Office and the Federation of Nepali Journalists about the incident.

# Sudurpaschim Province

## Threat

A. Mohan Paneru, reporter for the Kantipur daily from Doti district, has been issued threat of physical attack for reporting on irregularities in construction works in Doti.

Construction entrepreneur Ravi Prakash Singh spoke foul and threatened Paneru over the news about 'contractor ditching construction works' which was published in the online version of Kantipur daily on June 25.

B. Publisher and editor of Najaronline.com, Jhalak Pali, has been facing threats and abusive messages since May 28 after publishing a news

report on the portal from Doti.

Talking to Freedom Forum, journalist Pali shared that he had published a news story titled- 'A youth died after falling from the roof' based on information shared in a closed Messenger group named 'Journalists with Police'. The group was created by the District Police Office (DPO), Doti to disseminate official information to journalists so that credible news can be reported. The information was shared in the group chat at 6:19 a.m. on May 28.

"Based on the information, I published the news on the portal, and other news outlets



also published it. Meanwhile, the family and relatives of the deceased had blocked the highway, demanding a prompt investigation



and punishment for those responsible in the case. On June 14, the police circulated a memorandum of understanding (MoU) among the police and victim's families, which stated that journalists, including myself, should be present in judicial questioning for publishing the news, which they claimed was baseless and misleading," said Pali.

He further informed that DPO Chief Binod Sharma called him and urged him to apologize to the victim's family so that they would lift the blockade on the same day. "This was very concerning. So, I issued a statement on my Facebook wall on June 15, expressing solidarity with the victim's family and calling for a fair investigation into the case," he added.

## Misbehavior

On World Press Freedom Day (May 3), Secretary of Law at the Sudurpaschim Province Office of the Chief Minister and Council of Ministers, Liladhar Subedi wrote a post on his social media- "Best wishes to the journalists and media houses who write news for money on Press Freedom Day."

On this post, Secretary Subedi also shared an online portal Ebigul.com's post about news related to his vengeance on Director (Officer, Tenth Level) of the Education Division under the Ministry of Social Development Ganesh Bahadur Singh who was transferred to the Provincial Public Service Commission following his comments on a news. Subedi has

specially quoted journalist Shivaraj Bhatta and two media houses Ebigulnews.com and the Annapurna Post national daily on his post.

On May 4, Journalist Bhatta along with fellow journalists submitted a protest note to the province's Acting Chief Minister Bahadur Singh Thapa demanding action against the Secretary for his statement on social media. According to Bam, Acting Chief Minister showed serious concern on the incident and has expressed his commitment to initiate investigation on the case soon.

The post of secretary came after news about misconduct of Secretary Singh in the ministry and his social media posts was published in Annapurna post daily on April 26. 🌿

### Continued from page 1

government- federal, provincial and local. He specifically highlighted problematic provisions on National Broadcasting Act 2049, National Criminal Code 2074, Online Media Operation Directive, Social Media Directive 2080, Electronic Transaction Act 2008 Section 47, Film Act 2081, Social Media Bill, Media Council Bill, etc. He compared the provisions in these laws with Nepal's constitution and international instruments.

Through his analysis, he made following suggestions:

- Draft a framework law as mentioned in the constitution's schedule
- Ensure that laws being drafted on free expression and press freedom align with Nepal's international commitments on FoE, and amend existing laws accordingly.
- Draft an umbrella law on Communications and repeal outdated laws
- Guarantee freedom of expression and press freedom both online and offline platforms.
- Develop a system based on principles of self-regulation, editorial independence, autonomy, and pluralism.
- Ensure that media and communications are subject matter of federal level, province and local governments and should be facilitators.
- Formulate laws that protect and promote artistic expression.
- Speed up the drafting of a law related to contempt of court.

Following Ghimire's presentation, the floor was opened for discussion.

Starting the discussion, expert and civic society



and freedoms, Mr Pranav Bhattarai, said that all the rights related to freedom of expression are also connected to civic space. Media, civil society organizations, advocates and academia are the components of civil society. To make democracy functional in present context, vibrant advocacy of cs and media, multi-stakeholders is essential, he underlined.

Filmmaker and director Mr Manoj Pandit informed the problematic provisions in the proposed Film Act 2081. The lawmaker's perception on filmmaking is discouraging, he said, government's attempt to impose moral lessons on filmmakers rather than ensuring rights to artistic freedom draws concern. The act should be revised, Pandit suggested.

Devi Khadka, General Secretary of NGO

Federation Nepal, also expressed concern over shrinking civic space in Nepal due to various reasons. As this space is increasingly facing hostility, the freedom of expression, one of the core agendas of civil society remains under threat. CSOs should be protected in Nepal, she stressed.

An officer from the Parliament's Legislation Division, Ms Saraswati Rijal, shared that such programs are important to sensitize the government officials. She, with her involvement in the lawmaking process, found the program very effective and insightful.

Senior journalist and columnist Ms Namrata Sharma said, "Democracy faces problems if media are not free and journalists forced to work in fear."

Similarly, senior journalist and rights activist, Mr Rajan Kuikel, expressed concern over increasing encroachment of not only of physical spaces for exercise of freedom of peaceful assembly and expression but also virtual spaces. Hence, collective effort is must be continued, he marked.

Tech journalist Anujraj Dhungel drew attention of the participants towards current issue of freedom on virtual platforms which is massively used by the new generations. Lawmakers should also address their rights as technology and freedom evolve side by side.

Seconding to journalist Dhungel, Executive Chief Dahal reminded that though it was said that ETA would be replaced by the new drafted laws, Section 47 of the ETA was included into Social Media Bill, which is worrying. Moreover, the Film Act is not only about filmmakers and making movies, it will also govern video contents posted on social media platforms, he informed.

Journalist Mr Krishna Sapkota added that political and bureaucratic powers are often misused to suppress freedom of expression through restrictive laws.

Member of Press Council Nepal, a media regulatory body, Mr Nakul Aryal, expressed commitment that the Council will correct its flaws and always support the movement for protection and promotion of press freedom in

future. Recalling recent incident of the Court's order to take down the contents published on news portal Nepalkhabar.com, editor Mr Kuber Chalise, stated that though the court later dismissed the complaint filed against published news, intent of the judicial body is what matters. Had it been published on print version, they would not have asked to remove the content, he claimed.

Professor at Kathmandu University, Dr. Sudhamshu Dahal, said the current IT and Cybersecurity Bill must be reconsidered because IT and cybersecurity are completely different topics. They should be addressed separately. Moreover, newly drafted laws should also accommodate the needs and realities of Gen Z and Gen Alpha users.

Moreover, civil society expert Dr. Nirmal Rijal stressed that with the advent of technology and evolving Artificial Intelligence market, we have no choice but to continue advocacy for safer digital world.

Seconding to Dr. Rijal, Executive Chief Dahal said the platform accountability is a serious issue but due to less understanding, laws are being drafted in a more controlled manner. Senior advocate Dr. Dinesh Tripathi claimed that while our constitution is liberal, implementing organizations are of intimidating nature. Democracy is about the right to speak and express ourselves and right to dissent, he reminded.

Joint Secretary at the National Human Rights Commission, Mr Yagya Prasad Adhikari, reiterated that freedom of expression is a fundamental human right and being state party to UDHR and ICCPR, none has right to suppress freedom of expression and speech. The nation is strong only when its citizens are able to exercise their rights freely and fearlessly. He also informed the participants about NHRC's unique mechanism for protection of freedom of expression at central as well as at province levels.

Vice-Chair at Federation of Nepali Journalists Umid Bagchand expressed worry about current situation where media and journalists are being threatened. "Activism of court in recent days has drawn serious attention in terms of media freedom," he added.

Lastly, concluding the session, FF Chairperson Hari Binod Adhikari said respecting one another's freedoms while exercising own rights help foster better atmosphere for exercising rights and freedoms. "FF is always committed to the cause of democracy and the protection of civic freedoms. We are ready to cooperate with Information Ministry to generate knowledge and advocate for reform in FoE and media laws and policies," he reminded.

The program was attended by 48 participants including 18 female participants. 🌿

## Executive Chief bags Outstanding RTI Activist award

**F**reedom Forum Executive Chief Taranath Dahal was conferred on the First-ever 'Vinaya Kasajoo Outstanding (सर्वोत्कृष्ट) Right to Information Activist Award 2082' by the National Information Commission on May 5. Dahal was honoured with the award in recognition of his contribution to implementation, promotion and advocacy of RTI in Nepal. The award was conferred by the Honorable President of Nepal, Ram Chandra Poudel amid a function held at President's office on the occasion of 18th anniversary of National Information Commission (NIC). The award carries a purse of Rs. 55,000 and a letter of appreciation. 🌿





# NHRC pledges robust FoE protection mechanism



National Human Rights Commission, in collaboration with Freedom Forum, held a meeting of the Direction committee for protection and promotion of freedom of expression and journalists' safety in Kathmandu on April 22.

The meeting focused on strengthening the committee and charting the way forward for its sustainability. In the meeting, members of the committee pledged to make it a robust mechanism to address ongoing problems in freedom of expression and civic space in Nepal.

The committee comprises members from the Office of Prime Ministers and Council of Minister, Nepal Police, Nepal Bar Association, Federation of Nepali Journalists, NGO Federation, and CSOs working on FoE and journalists' rights.

In the meeting, Secretary at NHRC Murari Kharel highlighted objective of the meeting

reminding the members that the mechanisms in provinces should act not only in a reactive way but also in a corrective and proactive way to achieve their mission. He asked the members to suggest how these mechanisms can be made more effective.

Following him, Joint Secretary at NHRC Yagya Prasad Adhikari shared about international practices of safety mechanisms e.g in Brazil and Mexico. He shared success stories of the mechanism's action in Koshi Province. He also informed all the members that NHRC was in preparation to form mechanisms even at district level for direct and immediate actions.

Member of the committee representing civil society, Taranath Dahal stressed that the mechanism must be owned by all the members for its continuity and effective action. He also suggested that all sides should conduct fair investigation through NHRC-anchored safety mechanisms on the cases of foe violations. He

praised that the mechanism is a unique and best platform formed in line with the UN Plan of Action for Safety of Journalists.

All the members vowed to secure resources from their level for operation of the mechanism. Joint Secretary at Office of Prime Minister and Council of Ministers Rajendra Thapa suggested that continuity of the mechanism should also be mulled in the ongoing NHRC amendment bill; on which discussions are ongoing seeking feedbacks.

NHRC's Member Hon. Manoj Duwadi shared that NHRC, itself was also reeling in crisis of budget and resources constraints. However, the mechanism should be given impetus and made more effective, he said.

In the meeting, members committed to prod the government for fair investigation on the case where journalist died, injured and media houses were attacked. The meeting gathered 13 members of the committee. 🌱



# Collaboration on Digital Bagmati campaign

Every year Nepal marks May 2 as the National Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Day.

This year the National ICT Day 2025 was celebrated under the theme of 'Campaign for Information Technology: Building a Digital Nepal'.

In line with this theme, Bagmati Province Office of Communication Registrar organized a discussion program on 'Digital Bagmati: Opportunities, Priorities and Challenges' in collaboration with Freedom Forum on May 7 in Kathmandu.

The program gathered 43 (including eight female) technology experts and enthusiasts from civil society, academia, government authorities, and media. The program was chaired by Communication Registrar Rewati Sapkota along with dignified guests including Minister for Internal Affairs and Law, Suraj Chandra Lamichhane; Province Assembly Member, Chhiring Dorje Lama; Province Policy and Planning Commission's Vice-President Dr Ganga Datta Nepal; and Political Advisor for Office of Chief Minister and Council of Ministers, Binod Sah.

Communication Registrar Rewati Sapkota welcomed all the participants and initiated the program, highlighting the importance of ICT Day and objective of the program. He shared the latest updates on ICT in the province. The province has been successful to include online journalism into the syllabus of higher education. Startup programs involving Gen Z and drafting laws on information technology are few progress towards digital space in Nepal. Digital Bagmati is a vision of the province, he said, expecting cooperation from all the sectors to this end.

The discussion was also aimed at receiving more feedbacks on the province government and communication registrar office to make the vision a reality, Sapkota underscored.

Freedom Forum (FF) Executive Chief Taranath Dahal shared a presentation on existing legal provisions on ICT and possible interventions by the government to realize the Digital Bagmati concept. The presentation jointly



prepared by Dahal and FF's General Secretary Advocate Sanjeeb Ghimire highlighted a multi-stakeholder dialogue and partnership approach as essential for implementation of the province government's vision.

Executive Chief Dahal shared that existing Information and Communication Policy, Broadband policy and recently drafted Digital Nepal Framework 2025 were not clear on scope and roles of three tiers of government, especially for the province government. He also informed that according to Government's Policy and Program for fiscal year 2024/25, industries related to information technology will be developed as employment sectors with service delivery in coordination with the federal government. Moreover, a suitable provincial information technology work station will be operated for this purpose.

The presentation Dahal shared pointed out strategies for 'Digital Bagmati' as – policy-level preparations, strong institutional structure, digital infrastructure, skilled human resources, appropriate resource mobilization and investment attraction, and smart government. Through his presentation, Dahal also called the government to identify the province government's priorities, limitations and challenges and act accordingly to make this vision successful.

On the occasion, IT expert Binod Dhakal extended wishes on the occasion of National IT Day and said that a shift in mindset and corruption free environment is necessary for effective intervention to make Digital Bagmati successful. He requested the government to allocate sufficient budget, create more opportunities and collaborate with multi-stakeholders to make the province technology friendly. He also committed that all 77 district branches of Computer Association of Nepal Federation was ready to cooperate government in this movement.

Seconding Dhakal, Computer Engineer Dr Sameer Kharel suggested to prioritize STEM in education at all levels. Moreover, while developing infrastructure, it is essential to consider the broader ecosystem. Also, developing chatbots tailored to provinces' needs and available budgets is feasible.

Another ICT expert Hempl Shrestha commented that the concept of Digital Bagmati sounded good but practical implementation might be challenging. While developing an action plan, existing policies of provinces should be consulted, compared, problems identified and acted accordingly. Coordination between federal and provincial government is vital, he marked.



Executive Director at Samudayik Sarathi Tara Bahadur Bhandari shared that many government websites lack digitally skilled staffs; websites are rarely updated; and responsiveness is poor. To realize this digital dream, one should be committed and prompt. Dovan Rai, Executive Director at Body and Data, appreciated the Digital Bagmati concept and suggested the government that it worked in collaboration with the Gen Z, trusted them and motivated for building digital infrastructures. Advocate Sribha Shrestha mentioned that technology had become a cross-cutting agenda. Hence, it should also be included in the law curricula for better collaboration in future.

Chief Executive Officer at Open Knowledge Nepal Nikesh Balami stressed on research and laws favourable to digital ecosystem. He urged the government to interact with the academia, tech-savvy youths, host innovative programs like hackathons to generate ideas on digital transformation. According to Ananda Gautam, Co-Founder of Open Internet Nepal, implementing agencies must be strong for its successful intervention. He said, "While the federal government discusses banning platforms like TikTok, provincial government's aim for digital transformation is a welcome step." Development is possible if the government invests in skilled human resources and allocates necessary budget.

Rajan Lamsal, Chairperson at ICT Foundation Nepal, highlighted the importance of digital

governance and capacity building of all the concerned sectors to overcome implementation challenges. Further, collaboration among youth, government and private sectors is essential. Journalist Anuraj Dhungel recommended the government to initiate Information Bank concept with usable and shareable data formats at the provincial level to boost efficiency. "Digital Bagmati is feasible because there are various positive examples of online transformation of government service delivery. For this, STEM education must be prioritized, and policy-level intervention is essential to attract Gen Z," he added.

Advisor from the OCMCM Bagmati Province, Binod Sah, shared government's positive initiatives in digital service delivery, for instance in travel license renewal, Nagarik app, etc. He proposed that in future application processes at schools and local-levels' services should also be digitized. This will be a milestone. Sah also expressed commitment that Bagmati Province government will incorporate the suggestions furnished by the discussion into the upcoming 2082/83 program with a commitment to proper budgeting. Vice Chairman of the Policy and Planning Commission, Dr Ganga Dutta Nepal, informed that the Commission was focusing on data synchronization and IT management. "Moving forward, we will prioritize these points in upcoming policies and budgets. To a positive note, project bank has been launched where ministries submit plans as per standard manuals. Inclusion of ICT

into all the curricula should also be a priority," he mentioned. Similarly, lawmaker Chhiring Dorje Lama stated that till date no MP has proposed any program on technology in the province assembly. Many MPs have limited understanding on IT that is why, technology development is of less priority. He viewed development priorities must now shift toward employment from infrastructure development. Government's focus on budget allocation should shift towards policy formulation and implementation, he underlined.

Bagmati Province Government's Spokesperson Suraj Chandra Lamichhane mentioned about the presence of Generation Alpha beyond Generation Z. He discussed positive evolution of technology from the age of TV, radio to digital platforms like YouTube, Netflix, etc. Furthermore, integrated data management, telemedicine, and distance learning are few progresses made so far. "To develop technology along with governance, public trust should also be prioritized. Today, digital literacy is vital – at least 80% of the population should be literate. We value suggestions furnished here and will act accordingly. For a holistic development, collaboration with the private sector and civil society is necessary", he remarked.

Lastly, Registrar Sapkota committed that despite 47% budget cut to the Office of the Communication Registrar, they remain dedicated to fulfilling their responsibilities. The suggestions will be noted and implemented accordingly, he vowed.



FF in int'l event

# Peer Learning Exchange



**F**reedom Forum participated in a horizontal exchange program hosted by the International Budget Partnership (IBP), with support from the European Commission, from May 13-15, 2025. The program was organized in partnership with IBP Indonesia in Jakarta and Lombok, uniting civil society representatives from Nepal, Kyrgyzstan, Sri Lanka, and Cambodia. Researchers Subash Dahal from Freedom Forum and Anirudra Neupane from Committed Nepal participated in the program from Nepal. The initiative focused on fostering peer learning and strategy sharing to promote inclusion, responsive governance, and improved public service delivery through budget analysis and community-led advocacy.

Over three days, around 25 participants engaged in workshops and field visits to explore how budget analysis can serve local communities, emphasizing the role of grassroots engagement in connecting local advocacy to national-level change. On the first day, the discussion held in Jakarta focused on public financial management (PFM), coalition-building, and success stories of citizen access to government accountability in service delivery. Likewise, other sessions highlighted innovative ways to link technical research with grassroots needs and strengthen advocacy coalitions as shared by the CSOs from Indonesia.

The next two days involved meeting with local CSOs as well as field visit in Lombok island. In Lombok, participants visited a community health center and learned how accessibility audits and CSO's advocacy assisted in improving healthcare services for women with disabilities. They also learned about the PRIMA Coalition's social audit process, engaging with health center and district health officials on responsiveness to audit findings.

In Pemas Village in Lombok, the group met with the Indonesian Coastal Women's Union (KPPI) to study community-led monitoring and advocacy for better water, sanitation, and waste management in coastal regions.

The major highlight of the program was a visit to a fishing village, where participants explored the impact of advocacy for subsidized fuel for small-scale fisher folk. With 60% of Indonesians living in coastal areas, fishermen are central to the economy. Though, diesel accounts for 60% of their operating costs, small fisher folks were unable to get subsidized fuel. Despite being allocated 12% of Indonesia's fuel subsidy quota, many fisher folk face barriers like distant fuel stations and bureaucratic red tape.

In this context, an organization Kesatuan Nelayan Tradisional Indonesia (KNNTI)

conducted a social audit with support from IBP, revealing that 82% of surveyed fisherfolk could not access subsidies. Their advocacy led to streamlined registration through the KUSUKA card and the establishment of dedicated fuel stations in coastal areas as pilot projects.

The exchange, enriched by partnerships with Himpunan Wanita Disabilitas Indonesia (HWDI), KPPI, Serikat Peranakan Rakyat Indonesia (SPRI), KNTI, Perkumpulan Inisiatif, and Seknas FITRA, underscored the power of global solidarity and local action.

The program inspired participants to connect local and national advocacy, align budget monitoring with service delivery, and integrate technical analysis with grassroots movements. IBP Indonesia and its partners expressed gratitude for the opportunity to share knowledge and strengthen global networks for equitable governance.

Looking ahead, participants from different countries hope and aim to build on this problem-focused approach, fostering reform-oriented alliances to address public resource governance challenges and drive transformative change. 🌱



# Keep platforms running

## Digital Freedom Coalition

Freedom Forum, a founding member of the Digital Freedom Coalition, joined the members of Digital Freedom Coalition, underscoring the need for running digital platforms obstructed. The Coalition asked government to not make effort to close down Meta, the parent company of Facebook, Messenger, and Instagram.

Digital Freedom Coalition, a consortium of organizations working on digital freedom, cybersecurity, digital resilience and internet governance in Nepal, issued a press release on April 26, reminding Nepal's constitutional provisions on freedom of expression and its international obligations.

The coalition urges the government, service providers, and the concerned stakeholders to respect laws protecting digital rights, develop inclusive and legitimate social media regulations, and avoid actions that undermine democracy and fundamental freedoms.

### Press Statement of Coalition

April 26, 2025 Kathmandu

Digital Freedom Coalition is deeply concerned over the government warning to impose bans on social media platforms without following Nepal's constitutional and international obligations, giving networks a seven-day ultimatum.

Such actions lack transparency and public consultation, raising alarms about arbitrary decision-making that could severely impact digital freedoms. Regulatory measures that affect citizens' rights must undergo thorough legislative scrutiny, ensuring alignment with constitutional principles and democratic norms.

We recall that social media platforms have become indispensable tools for fostering free speech, enabling the right to association, and exercising democratic rights. They also play a pivotal role in driving Nepal's digital economy, empowering individuals, and amplifying the voices of marginalized communities. Any attempt to curtail these platforms jeopardizes these critical contributions.

Restrictive measures on social media will have far-reaching consequences, shrinking the space for the right to information and freedom of expression, which are essential to a functioning democracy. These controls also threaten the sustainability of media outlets, making it harder for journalists to report freely and amplifying the risk of censorship. The blocking of social media platforms would have far-reaching adverse effects on the digital economy, employment, and the overall quality and cost of internet services.

A significant number of businesses — almost all, whether small, medium, or large enterprises — depend on social media for marketing, customer engagement, sales, online support, and more. These businesses would suffer major operational disruptions, resulting in widespread job losses across sectors such as digital marketing, content creation, online commerce, and customer service.

The government's threat to ban platforms under "Directives for Managing the Use of Social Networks, 2023" is insufficient to restrict citizen's rights to access to information and free speech. The Directives, brought in the absence of parliamentary law has raised concerns from the stakeholders from the beginning. The enactment of these directives, without meaningful consultation with stakeholders, violates the principles of transparency and accountability. Any law affecting citizens' rights must align with constitutional mandates and legislative processes. Arbitrary administrative actions should not infringe upon the constitutional rights of Nepali citizens.

The banning or undue restriction of social media platforms will erode civic engagement, stifle democratic practices, and undermine citizens' rights to freedom of expression and association. We call on all stakeholders to prioritize the protection of these rights and work collaboratively to create a legal framework that fosters a free, open, and inclusive digital environment.

We urge the government, platform owners, and all concerned parties to:



1. Uphold transparency and respect for national and international laws, commitments and practices on the protection of freedom of expression and digital rights.
2. Ensure that any legal framework governing social media is developed through inclusive consultations and adhere to constitutional and international standards.
3. Avoid actions that threaten democratic values, civic engagement, and the exercise of fundamental rights.

### Coalition Member Organizations

Taranath Dahal	Freedom Forum Nepal
Laxman Datt Pant	Media Action Nepal
Prabesh Subedi	Digital Media Foundation
Rajan Parajuli	Antenna Foundation Nepal
Roshan Pokharel	Internet Governance Institute
Suraj Adhikari	Forum for Digital Equality
Ananda Gautam	Youth IGF Nepal
Ashirwad Tripathy	Internet Society Nepal Chapter
Binod Basnet	Educating Nepal
Susmeera Aryal	Women's Group for Disability Rights
Sanjeeb Ghimire	Media Lawyers Association

# FF in Global South drive Concern on UN AI panel and dialogue

## Joint Statement

Contribution from the Global South regarding the Terms of Reference and Modalities for the Establishment and Functioning of the Independent International Scientific Panel on Artificial Intelligence and the Global Dialogue on Artificial Intelligence Governance (rev2)

We, the undersigned civil society organizations from the Global South, respectfully submit this joint letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil, the co-facilitators of the negotiation process—Spain and Costa Rica—and the Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology, through the Office of Digital and Emerging Technologies.

As Global South organizations working for digital rights and inclusion, and as organizations that were actively involved in the making of the Global Digital Compact from the civil society standpoint, we would like to express our concerns with the current negotiations on the AI Panel & Dialogue.

We also present some inputs on critical matters to stakeholders, as follows, in four different areas.

## Transparency

To uphold the principles of **scientific independence and credibility** outlined in paragraph 1(a), the process of appointing members to the Independent International Scientific Panel on Artificial Intelligence must be guided by a transparent and participatory mechanism. The selection process, led by the Secretary-General as per paragraph 3, should include **clear public criteria**, reinforcing the **legitimacy and impartiality** of the Panel, human rights expertise (so that human rights considerations are prioritised in the planning and implementation of subsequent activities), while safeguarding its mandate from potential conflicts of interest or political interference.

Also, the Panel is tasked with producing one report to be presented at the Global Dialogue on AI Governance, but there are no clear guidelines on whether drafts, data, or dissenting

opinions will be published or made available for scrutiny. Given the interdisciplinary nature of the Panel and the deep scientific disagreements on the topic of AI, the global community can benefit not only from access to the report but also from transparency regarding the disagreements and divergences.

## Stakeholder participation

To ensure that the Global Dialogue on Artificial Intelligence Governance fully reflects the diversity of perspectives required to address the multifaceted challenges of AI governance, it is essential to **define “relevant stakeholders”** in a manner that guarantees substantive and balanced participation. Stakeholders should be identified based on their demonstrated engagement with AI-related issues and multilateral processes, with particular consideration for actors from the Global South, to foster inclusive and multidisciplinary deliberations. It is unclear how “relevant stakeholders” are identified and what role they have in agenda-setting or decision-making during the Dialogue.

## Inclusion and access

The Panel and the Dialogue must ensure the inclusion of persons with disabilities, who are often sidelined in key decision-making processes. The Global Dialogue should also be geographically diverse in its organisation and outreach. While paragraph 5 rightly anchors the Dialogue within the margins of existing United Nations events, specific attention should be given to **convening meetings in countries of the Global South** and during forums such as the Internet Governance Forum, which already support multistakeholder engagement and are accessible to a broad range of actors. Events should not be hosted in countries **where visa or entry restrictions could hinder the inclusive participation of stakeholders, particularly from developing countries.**

## Coordination

Both the Independent International Scientific Panel and the Global Dialogue must be

## FF aggrieved over founding member Kifle's demise



**F**reedom Forum was deeply shocked to know the death of Chiranjivi Kifle, a founding member and former treasurer of Freedom Forum. He passed away while undergoing treatment for cancer at Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital in Maharajgunj on May 25.

Late Kifle had actively involved in Nepali journalism for over two decades and was recognized as an untiring advocate for press freedom, freedom of expression, and the right to information. His invaluable contribution to strengthening and institutionalizing democracy and good governance will be forever remembered. He was also an associate Professor of English literature at Ratna Rajya Campus, Tribhuvan University. In different capacities, the late Kifle contributed to the press freedom and free expression initiatives of International Press Institute's Nepal Chapter and foundational years of Freedom Forum. He is lived by his wife and a daughter.

Freedom Forum pays tribute to late Kifle and extends condolences to the bereaved family members at this hour of grief. 🌿



firmly grounded in the international human rights framework. Moreover, **the two mechanisms should be designed to inform and complement each other:** the Global Dialogue providing a platform for identifying challenges and knowledge gaps through stakeholder input, while the Panel offers scientifically rigorous and policy-relevant guidance and solutions. This reciprocal relationship would strengthen evidence-based governance and ensure responsiveness to the evolving needs of the international community. Finally, the

document should reinstate the Independent Appointment Committee as pointed out in Rev1.

### **This contribution is endorsed by the following Global South organizations:**

Data Privacy Brasil  
Tech Global Institute  
Fundacion Internet Bolivia  
Dukingire Isi Yacu (DIY) – Burundi

Center of AI and Tech Innovation for Democracy (PIKAT), Indonesia

Freedom Forum, Nepal  
KICTANet (Kenya)  
Digital Access  
Jokkolabs Banjul, The Gambia  
Derechos Digitales  
Research ICT Africa  
Aláfia Lab  
Fundación Multitudes  
Paradigm Initiative

# Cybersecurity mistakes: Tips to avoid in journalism

**H**umans have a natural tendency to protect themselves from danger: pulling a hand away from a hot stove, avoiding dangerous places, or running from physical threats. But we don't have these instincts fully developed when it comes to the digital world.

"In the case of the internet, many times we're doing things and we don't have the slightest idea of the danger we're facing out of pure ignorance," Luis Assardo, a digital security trainer and investigative data journalist, told LatAm Journalism Review (LJR). "Especially in Latin America, we don't have the necessary knowledge, so that skill or instinct hasn't yet developed."

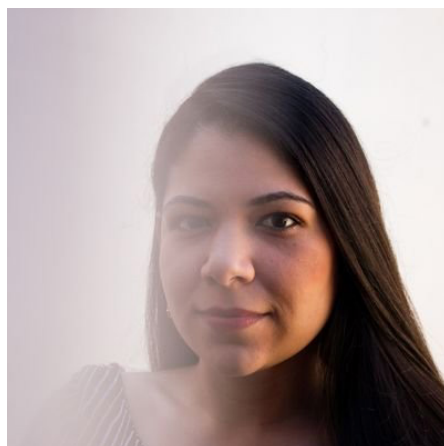
Assardo will be the instructor for the new course, Digital Security for Journalists in Times of Crisis, offered by the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas and the Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN). The course will be free and held online from July 7 to August 3.

In a conversation with LJR, Assardo listed the most common mistakes he sees journalists make that they should avoid to maintain their digital security. Risks will always be present, he said, but it's important to identify them to mitigate them.

## 1. Using Wi-Fi in Public Places

Luis Assardo, a digital security trainer and investigative data journalist, will be the instructor for a new course offered by the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas and GIJN. Image: GIJN

Latin America continues to see a digital divide. Some 28% percent of Latin Americans live



*By Katherine Pennacchio*

in areas with low mobile broadband coverage, according to GSMA Intelligence. For this reason, Assardo said, journalists tend to take more risks and connect to public networks in restaurants, plazas, hotels, or airports.

Ideally, public networks should not be used, but if there is no other option, Assardo recommends using a VPN — a virtual private network that creates an encrypted connection between the device and a remote server, thereby masking the IP address and routing internet traffic through that server.

It's also important to avoid online purchases while using an unknown Wi-Fi and, once internet use is complete, immediately delete the Wi-Fi connection from the device.

"Perhaps this is one of the biggest problems I find when I open any journalist's Wi-Fi. I find hundreds of past Wi-Fi connections that are no longer useful," Assardo said. "That way, anyone

can know that you were at 'Pepito's' restaurant and clone that Wi-Fi's information."

## 2. Not Protecting Data Privacy

In Latin American media, the use of WhatsApp is widespread, not only as a way for journalists to connect with audiences but also with sources.

WhatsApp uses end-to-end encryption, so only the original sender and the final recipient can see the message. However, the privacy practices of WhatsApp and its parent company, Meta, are concerning, according to the Electronic Frontier Foundation's Surveillance Self-Defense (SSD) guide.

Assardo explains that there is a difference between security and privacy. And while WhatsApp is secure, it is not necessarily private since it is possible to know who you talked to even without having access to the conversation.

"Meta, Google, Amazon, and all the large technology empires are data brokers. What they seek is to obtain data because that is basically what they trade with; it is part of their business model," Assardo said. "We cannot fully trust them."

According to Assardo, newsrooms should ideally use other more secure applications such as Signal, Threema, Session, or Wire.

## 3. Ignoring Device Updates

Software updates are essential for maintaining the security and performance of devices and applications. Updates provide protection against cyber threats, improve the user experience, and ensure compatibility with other software and hardware.

Backing up — creating a security copy — is an easy solution that allows journalists to navigate threats and reduce the impact of vulnerabilities.

Not updating leaves an open window for vulnerabilities.

“I have met journalists who have had a device for two or three years and have never updated it,” Assardo said. “You can have a very secure password, but if you never updated the software, any attacker could access the device, take whatever they want, do whatever they want, leave, and you would never even know it.”

#### 4. Not Backing Up Data

One of a reporter’s jobs is to go out to gather information or travel for a story. In this process, especially in countries where security or freedom of expression are at stake, a journalist’s devices can be compromised by theft or review by authorities.

Assardo said that backing up — creating a security copy — is an easy solution that allows journalists to navigate threats and reduce the impact of vulnerabilities.

“How long will it take me to do a backup? One hour, okay, I’ll leave it [backing up] and go to lunch,” Assardo said. “There are solutions. We can plan things in advance, even if we don’t have many resources.”

#### 5. Falling for Attackers’ Distractions

Online harassment is a phenomenon used in a coordinated manner against journalists and can include confrontations and smear campaigns on social media.

Assardo said these types of attacks are not only used as a form of discrediting but also

to distract the journalist from other problems that may be happening in tandem, such as legal harassment, surveillance, or financial harassment. Therefore, it is important to avoid acting or responding impulsively to attackers.

“In a newsroom, there should be a computer that is not connected to the internet and is only for downloading information in these types of situations.” — Luis Assardo

“Today, attacks on journalists occur not only with online harassment but also with legal harassment,” Assardo said. “They may be filing one or more lawsuits and need the journalist to be distracted, hooked with a troll, and not talking to their lawyer or with the defense they will need for their legal issues.”

#### 6. Indiscriminately Downloading or Clicking

Microsoft says phishing is a way of tricking internet users into revealing personal or financial information through an email or a website. A common phishing scam begins with an email that looks like an official notice from a trusted source, such as a bank or credit card company. In the email, recipients are directed to a fraudulent website where they are asked for personal information, such as an account number or password. This information is usually used for identity theft.

Phishing can also be used with the intention of infecting a device with malicious software. A journalist who falls victim to phishing can lose confidential information about reports or sources.

Assardo said journalists should also be careful when using USB drives given by sources on their devices, as they could have hidden malicious codes.

“In a newsroom, there should be a computer that is not connected to the internet and is only for downloading information in these types of situations,” Assardo said.

#### 7. Writing Down Passwords on Paper

Post-it notes are one of the most feared objects by digital security experts. Some people are accustomed to writing down their passwords on paper and leaving them accessible to anyone.

Digital literacy and security are not just for privileged people but that knowledge can be adapted to the context, levels, and resources that are available.

For Assardo, having a password written down on paper is a resounding no.

“In these workshops, I always ask attendees if they know the key they use to enter their house by heart, if they could draw it from memory,” Assardo said. “Everyone tells me they couldn’t even recognize it. That happens because it is part of a keychain. What the journalist needs is their keychain, a password manager that efficiently allows them to enter any door they need to enter.”

There are free and paid password manager options. Some options are LastPass, 1Password, or NordPass.

#### 8. Storing Sensitive Information with Large Technology Companies

Assardo’s last recommendation is to try not to keep sensitive information on platforms owned by large technology companies, since, although they offer data encryption, there is a higher probability the data will be compromised.

“Suppose I am doing an investigation about gang members, and there is very sensitive information there from some sources. I would never put it on the drive,” Assardo said. “What I would do is use other tools like Cryptee or Tresorit, where I can have the information encrypted, and no one else will have access.”

Assardo concluded by saying digital literacy and security are not just for the few — but that knowledge can be adapted to the context, levels, and resources that are available.

This story was originally published by the LatAm Journalism review and is republished here with permission.



*Luis Assardo, a digital security trainer and investigative data journalist will be the instructor for the new course, "Digital Security for Journalists in Times of Crisis," offered by the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas and the Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN)*

Source: <https://latamjournalismreview.org/articles/the-8-most-common-cybersecurity-mistakes-journalists-should-avoid/>

## WORLD PRESS FREEDOM DAY (MAY 3) REPORT

# Year of Journalists' Killings: Press Freedom in peril

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

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

year from May 2023 to April 2024, had only 60 incidents of violations which had affected 88 media persons including 11 female and three media houses.

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

### 1. Violation Type

#### Killing: A horrible trend after decades

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

Photojournalist at Avenues Television Suresh Rajak died in a fire set at a building by the protestors on March 28, 2025. Rajak was

reporting the pro-monarchy group's protest at Tinkune area of Kathmandu Valley from the building. As the mob set the building on fire, Rajak could not escape, but succumbed to death.

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

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

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

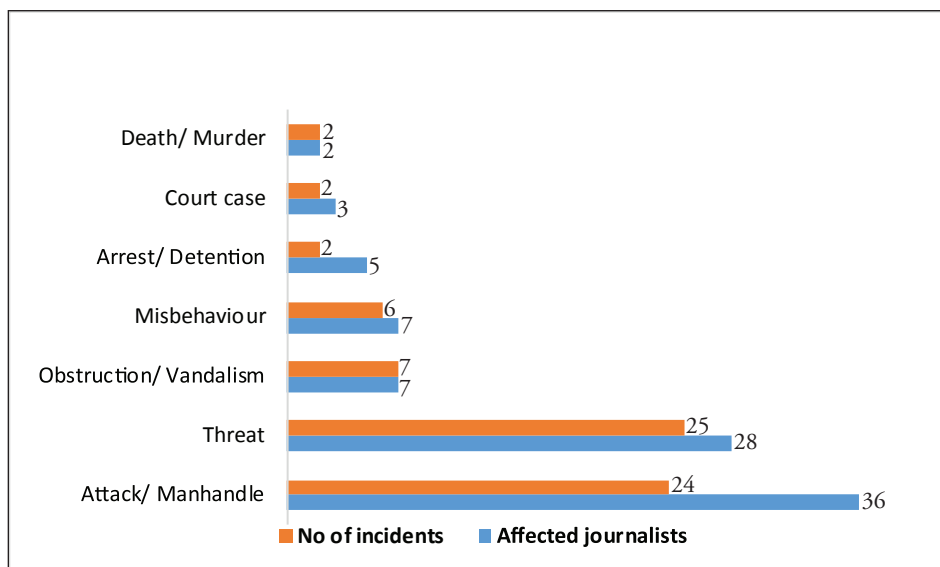
Similarly, four media houses were vandalized, three received threats for publishing news and one has been facing court case.

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

### 2. Violations in Provinces

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

Lately, Kathmandu has turned the most hostile place to on-duty journalists, spreading alarm



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

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

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

over safety and press freedom. FF recorded devastating incidents where a journalist was killed other were seriously injured, media houses faced vandalism and arson attempt.

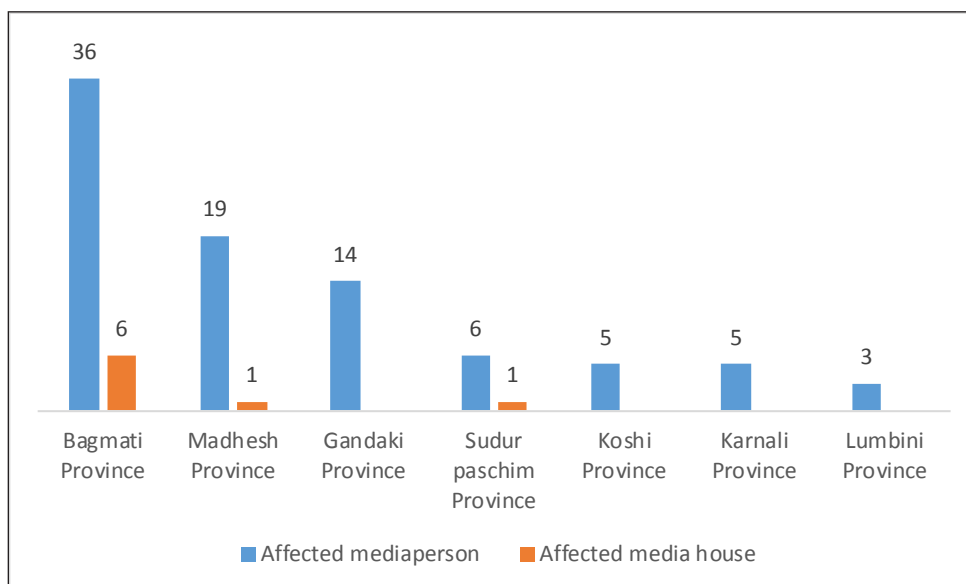
*Reporter with the Prime Times Television Sabina Karki was severely injured in her eyes while covering a protest in Kathmandu in April. She was injured by the water cannon thrown by the police targeting the mob as they tried to enter the restricted area. She has been undergoing treatment.*<sup>4</sup>

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

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

### 3. Affected journalists and media affiliation

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



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

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

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

### 4. Elements hostile to journalists

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

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

Additionally, 29 media persons were targeted by elements such as businesspersons, locals, contractors,

etc. It is worrying that both state and non-state actors on frontline to intimidate journalists.

### 5. Topics of the news reported

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

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

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

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

### TREND ANALYSES

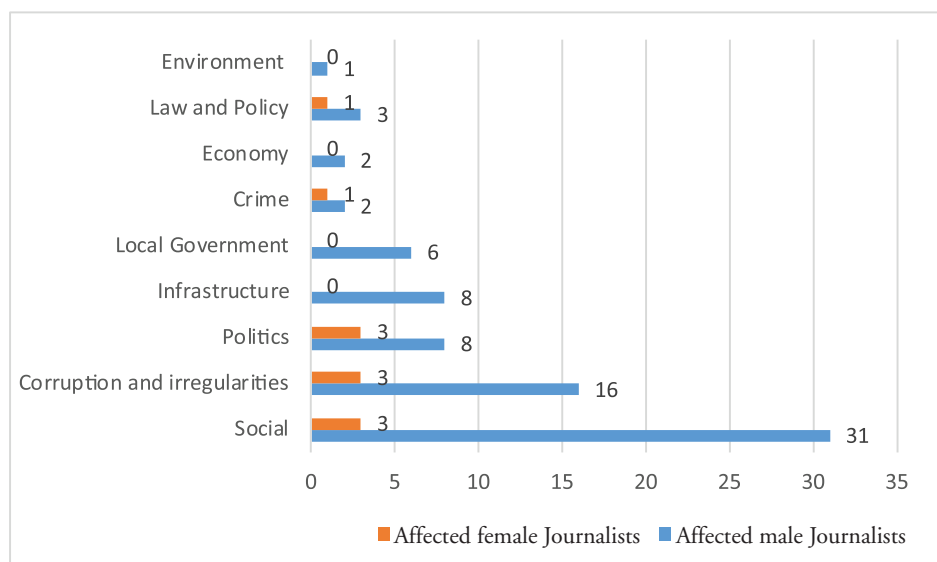
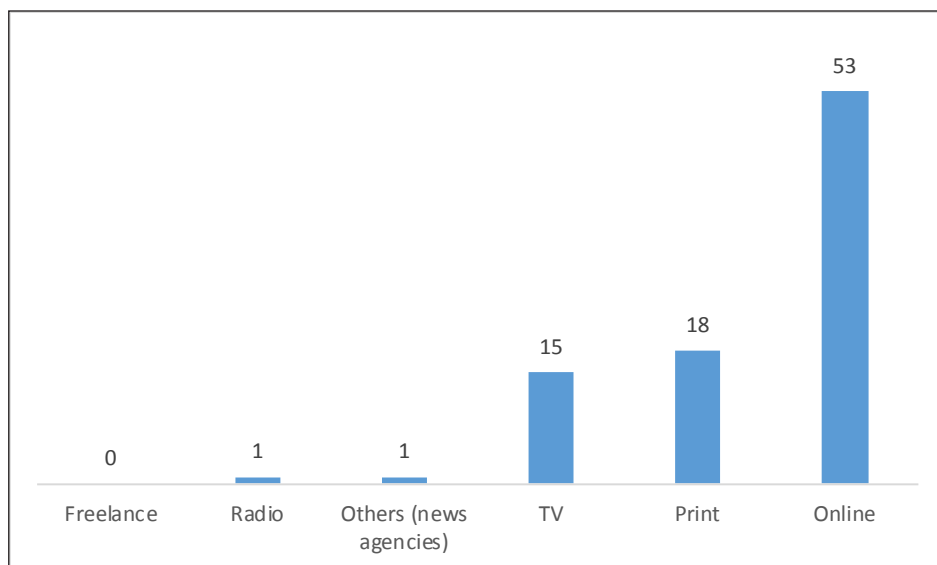
- After a decade, Nepal's media faced the most horrible moment, exposing utter lack of safety. A journalist on job lost his life while covering a protest in the federal capital itself on March 28, 2025. Suresh Rajak, photojournalist associated with Avenues Television broadcast from Kathmandu, was burnt to death in the fire set in a building from which he was visualizing the protest held at Tinkune, Kathmandu.
- Another serious incident- killing of a journalist Suresh Bhul in Dhangadhi city drew equal concern this year. Importantly, whether Bhul was journalist or not remained debated initially, diminishing chance of proper advocacy for his rights and justice to the family. Was he killed for his reporting or for other reason is still debated. But, his activities like seeking information at public offices and threats he received from various sides over his campaign of transparency and his affiliation to a local media clearly indicated he was a journalist. The attention this case deserved was meagre, thereby giving impetus to the rogue elements and increasing hostility to journalists and media houses.

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

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

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





- At a time when impunity relating to crimes against journalists during the conflict-era are still awaiting address, the torching alive the on-duty journalist and lackadaisical investigation into the incident exposes journalists are at high risk.
- In the March 28 incident, another journalist Dinesh Gautam affiliated to the onlinekhabar.com and Rajesh Gurung from The Himalayan Times were brutally attacked by the protestors. The media houses- Kantipur, Annapurna Post and a vehicle of Himalaya Television were attacked on the same day.
- These incidents make it clear that once there are political protests be it in the federal capital or outside, the journalists are at the receiving end. The more the political protests, the more risk to media.
- The death of on-duty journalist in the protest raises questions on multiple fronts- government agencies' safety arrangement, media house's plan of protest coverage and mobilization of reporter, media associations' training to build capacity for reporting at risk, and personal risk assessment level.
- In a democratic society where press freedoms and journalists' safety must be a multi-stakeholders' concern, the inadequate advocacy for these shows a reflection of shrinking civic space in Nepal.
- As was the case in the past, the investigative journalists who expose political and financial corruption and irregularities and contribute to good governance are however the butt of attack. Both the state and non-state actors on prowl to assail the journalists who question officials and their cabals linked to irregularities.
- Irrespective of the political parties being one of the significant pillars of democratic system, another pillar of system, free press, is consistently victimized by the political cadres at district and local level, which paints double standard of the political parties- verbal and even written commitment to protection and promotion of free press but hostility in action. It warrants change in political perspective towards role of media and free press for a functional democracy.
- The capacity building of Nepali media houses and journalists to navigate disruptive changes is in a sorry state, thereby putting journalists and media houses at receiving end of the flood of disinformation, misinformation and mal-information. It has ruined the healthy information ecosystem, creating information disorder, and depriving people of their right to right information. It has further shadowed the role of free press and traditional media.
- Another worrying trend that witnessed continuity in the past one year was- discrediting media and journalists. Public officials and social networking sites influencers giving views against media houses and journalists not only disheartened journalists but also discredited media profession. It has a role to incite the elements that want news in their favour or warn of consequences.
- Media co-opting is a disastrous trend, eating up the value of free press. Co-option is gaining a pace, controlling and manipulating media houses and journalists in a certain favor. It is a serious threat to press freedom.
- In the wake of no chance of recovery in media finance that saw record low in the Covid-19 time, the shift towards digital media is continuous. As the financial health of media houses have not improved, chances of violating media professionalism have upped.
- The violations of press freedom are largely related to online media, which is indication that traditional media are fast losing the workforces to digital spheres.
- The retrenchment at media houses is on rise, prompting media persons to job hopping. A comprehensive study and research on how press freedom can be promoted and journalists retained is the need of hour.
- Artificial intelligence (AI) is another frontier bringing hope and stress together in Nepal's press as well. But, sustainable use of AI for better press freedom is not witnessed except some facilitation at work like translation, editing, content generation. Nepali journalists and media houses still lack proper liter-

acy of AI along with the skills to minimize its harm to the media profession caused by spread of mis- and disinformation.

- The financial crisis in media has resulted into non-reporting and under-reporting of significant issues of public concern. The underreporting has not only triggered atmosphere of non-transparency at multi-layer governments but also the retrenchment in local and national media. The layoff of media staffs and closure of media houses have deprived many journalists of their right to continue press freedom. It has also hindered the people's right to information.
- The number of online media is in continuous rise- around 5,000 media portals have been registered at Press Council Nepal as journalistic platform but their sustainability is not clear. Need of capable human resources, affordable internet facility, and favorable business environment are required to foster online media and promote press freedom online in Nepal.

## LAW AND POLICY: LITTLE PROGRESS

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

- Government failed to bring an integrated mass communications regulation law including the Mass Communication Bill as planned in early 2024.
- The Media Council Bill, which was approved by the National Assembly on February 10, was registered in the House of Representatives on February 11. It entered theoretical discussion among parliamentarians on February 25, leading to a decision allowing lawmakers to submit amendment proposals. As many as 19 amendment proposals were submitted in the House. Freedom Forum also submitted 24-point suggestions on the bill. The points for the amendment were relating to the structure of the Press Council, recommendation committee, code/ethics and self-regulations, journalists' accreditation, independence and accountability. It is still in parliament.
- The Social Media Bill drafted to regulate social media platforms and users was tabled in the Upper House as the 'Social Network Bill, 2081' on January 28. It was later presented by Minister for Communications and Information Technology in the Assembly on February 9. The Assembly

decided to continue theoretical discussions on the bill. The bill aims at regulating the platforms through mandatory registration, strict penalties, and content.

- A positive development is that the President of Nepal approved the Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) Bill on October 8, 2024. It includes a provision to merge two state-owned media: the Radio Nepal and the Nepal Television, to function as a public service broadcaster. The Board instituted along with its Chair and members is currently in operation. However, fully functional PSB and its independence and autonomy, as envisioned by the law, are yet to be awaited. PSB should not be limited in name but in action.
- As in the past, for lack of new laws and policies, the old law as Electronic Transaction Act (ETA) has continued inflicting journalists.

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

## ON IMPUNITY

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

## SAFETY MECHANISM AT NHRC: A POSITIVE STEP

The FoE and journalists' safety mechanism anchored by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) under its Directive on Formation of a Safety Mechanism and Work Procedure for Protection of FoE, 2019 has been expanded to seven provinces along with orientation to its members. It is positive development in deed that the mechanism formed for the protection and promotion of FoE and journalists' safety would be instrumental in adopting multi-stakeholder approach to create safe atmosphere for the journalists across the country. The meetings in the province level have sensitized the stakeholders to stand together on the pressing issues of press freedom and journalists, to which FF notes positively. However, for the effectiveness and broader visibility of the mechanisms in the centre and provinces require utmost support and cooperation from its members. Equipping it with data and information on FoE and press freedom violations regularly is equally significant.

## DISCUSSION AND WAY FORWARD

- With deepening financial crisis in Nepali media, further decline of media profession, impacting press freedom atmosphere can not be denied in Nepal.
- Digital surge in information landscape requires positive interventions with favorable law and policy. Sheer lack of policy and laws in the past year backgrounds the prediction of further disorder in press freedom surrounding digital spheres.
- The attempts of guided political stability would jeopardize the safety of media persons and press freedoms because it will invite political protests and demonstrations of various kinds.
- Rising intolerance in multiple fronts will keep press freedom at further risk. So, it is essential for all sides to build consensus and abide by rule of law where press freedom and journalists will be respected. Intolerance towards media and press freedom must end.
- Capacity building of journalists must be continued throughout the year. The media houses, media educators, journalists' unions, government agencies and CSOs require collaborative initiatives to train journalists for their physical and psychological safety considering the hostile atmosphere they face during reporting. The role of trained and professional journalists and media experts will grow further to keep constant watch on anti-press elements and attitudes. Skilling, re-skilling and upskilling of journalists should therefore be continued as a campaign in the face of growing challenges posed by volatile politics, digital disruption and unexpected disaster. Empowerment of journalists will help foster press freedom.
- Government and state agencies' and public officials' perspectives towards media and free press must improve to foster democratic practices and values. For press freedom to function as one of the pillars of functional democracy, other pillars' cooperation is required at present.
- Strict adherence to code and professional values will help media persons minimize threats and discredit to journalism. Erosion of trust in media requires immediate check. Journalists and media houses' role counts much to check such erosion so that it helps create atmosphere favorable to press freedom.
- Progressive approach in media, IT and digital/cyber related laws and policies is essential to ensure press freedom and journalists' safety.
- Nepali press and media persons are likely to face continuity of populist politics. So, informed approach of news along with better digital/IT awareness and skills will be essential to ensure rights and save free press.
- The prolonged impunity relating to crime against journalists has further victimized the families of victim journalists. So, the government's seriousness is utmost need to this regard.

<sup>7</sup> <https://nepalpressfreedom.org/main/issue-single/14715>

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

# Self disclosure update

<b>Type and Nature of Organization</b>	NGO working for Democracy, Right to Information, Freedom of Expression, Fiscal Transparency and Open Data, Media Policy and Law, Internet Freedom		
<b>Legal Status</b>	Registered at District Administration Office Kathmandu. DAO Registration Number: 127/062/63, SWC Affiliation Number: 18518		
<b>Location</b>	Adarsa Marga, Prasuti Griha Road, Thapathali, Kathmandu		
<b>Staffs and Roles</b>	<b>Taranath Dahal:</b> Executive Chief, coordinates overall organizational and administrative affairs		
	<b>Aruna Adhikari:</b> Finance and Administration Officer, looks after accounting and administrative affairs and performs responsibilities as the Information Officer.		
	<b>Nanu Maiya Khadka:</b> Media Monitoring Officer, responsible for monitoring updates on freedom of expression, media rights and right to information		
	<b>Aditya Dahal:</b> RTI App and website operator		
	<b>Manju Dahal:</b> Front Desk Assistant, <b>Ganga Kumari Gurung:</b> Office Assistant		
<b>Roster of Consultants/ Researchers</b>	<b>Subash Dahal</b>		
<b>Ongoing Project Information</b>	<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Supporting Agency</b>	<b>Date of start of project</b>
	COAB Initiative (Collaboration for Open and Accountable Budgeting)	International Budget Partnership	21st April 2024
	Enabling Safety of Journalist (ESAJ)	UNESCO (Global Media Defense Fund)	7th May 2024
	Open Budget Survey	International Budget Partnership	17th March 2025
	Status of Freedom of Expression and Press Freedom and Way Forward	Ministry of Communications and Information Technology	17th June 2025
<b>Services and Activities</b>	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.		
<b>Responsible Authority</b>	<b>Chairperson:</b> Hari Binod Adhikari, <b>Executive Chief:</b> Tara Nath Dahal		
<b>Decision Making Process</b>	<b>General Assembly:</b> Making policies, rules and regulations of organization <b>Executive committee:</b> Formulation of action plans as per constitution of organization, rules and regulation <b>Management team:</b> Running projects and daily operational affairs and reporting timely to the Executive Committee.		
<b>Past/Current Activities</b>	Please follow the link: <a href="http://freedomforum.org.np/content/category/activities/">http://freedomforum.org.np/content/category/activities/</a>		
<b>Information Officer</b>	Aruna Adhikari		
<b>Financial Information</b>	Freedom Forum received grants announcing <b>Rs. 200,000 (April to June 2025)</b>		
<b>Official Website</b>	<a href="http://www.freedomforum.org.np">www.freedomforum.org.np</a>		
<b>Publications of Freedom Forum</b>	Freedom Forum has over 50 Publications (printed) Please Follow the Link: <a href="http://freedomforum.org.np/content/publications/">http://freedomforum.org.np/content/publications/</a>		
<b>Annual Report</b>	<a href="http://freedomforum.org.np/content/publications/reports/annual-reports/">http://freedomforum.org.np/content/publications/reports/annual-reports/</a>		
<b>Information Dissemination</b>	Websites- <a href="http://www.freedomforum.org.np/">http://www.freedomforum.org.np/</a> ; <a href="http://www.nepalpressfreedom.org">www.nepalpressfreedom.org</a> , and Newsletter-Free Expression		

# ‘Take action against spyware threat’

The European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) joined CDT Europe and 11 civil society and journalists’ organisations, all members of the Spyware Coordination Group, in an open letter to the EU institutions expressing its grave concerns about the continued unchecked use of spyware within the European Union. We hence urge EU Institutions to take concrete, coordinated action to respond to the growing threats posed by spyware, strengthen the security and resilience of Europe’s digital infrastructure and cyberspace, and address the proliferation of commercial surveillance technologies within the EU internal market.

Global  
Watch

The letter highlights that despite continued evidence of spyware misuse, including recent cases involving the deployment of Paragon’s spyware against journalists and human rights defenders, little meaningful follow-up has occurred since the European Parliament’s PEGA Committee issued its key recommendations in 2022.

The coalition also raises concerns that, in the absence of an EU regulatory framework, several EU Member States have reportedly emerged as key hubs for the spyware industry, a result of fragmented national laws and uneven oversight, which have allowed certain jurisdictions to become entry points for spyware vendors into the EU internal market.

While there is growing recognition of the need to regulate spyware, as reflected in international, non-binding multi-stakeholder



The leader of the Polish Law and Justice (PiS) party (L) testifies in front of a parliamentary committee investigating the alleged use of Pegasus spyware by the previous PiS government, in Warsaw, Poland, 15 March 2024. Foto Olimpik/NurPhoto via Getty Images

efforts such as the Pall Mall Process, the letter stresses that the EU can provide the necessary political momentum, regulatory coherence, and oversight to translate national pledges made by Member States through the Pall Mall Code of Practice into an effective, union-wide response that upholds democratic values and fundamental rights.

The letter calls for urgent and coordinated EU action to address the ongoing violations and ensure the protection of the rule of law

and fundamental rights enshrined in the EU Charter and European Convention on Human Rights. In particular, we urge EU Institutions to adopt transparent regulatory action, particularly in areas that fall within the EU’s competence, including fundamental rights, the rule of law, internal market regulation, export controls, and cybersecurity.

Source: <https://ifex.org/csos-call-on-eu-to-take-urgent-action-on-spyware-threat/>

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.



## 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](mailto:info@freedomforum.org.np)  
[monitoring@freedomforum.org.np](mailto:monitoring@freedomforum.org.np)

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

Editor: Nanu Maiya Khadka

Design and Processed by: Spandan Design Communication, 5435884