



# FreeExpression

Issue 72 October-December 2025

A NEWSLETTER OF FREEDOM FORUM

## Unrest Fuels Hostility to Media

### Summary

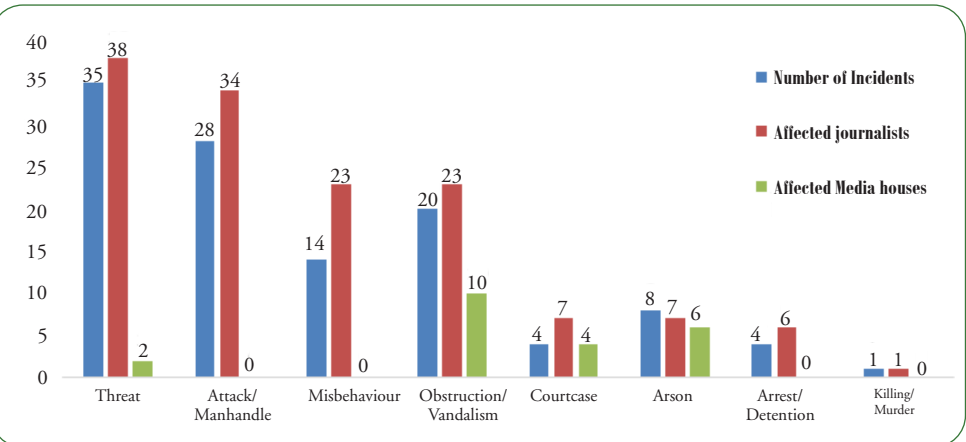
Surge of press freedom violations in the wake of two major protests- first in March and second in September; stalled law-making on media freedom and journalists' rights; shrinking enforcement of RTI law; cooperation and resources in short supply to recover media from financial crisis; misinformation, disinformation and mal-information getting entrenched, creating information disorder; continuous discrediting and criticism of legacy media with misuse of internet-based media; and impunity related to crimes against journalists awaiting proper address characterized Nepali media in 2025. Stable politics with strict adherence to good governance, democracy and human rights are urgency to build an atmosphere conducive to media freedoms and journalists' rights.

### 1. Press Freedom Status

Total 114 incidents of press freedom violations were documented by Freedom Forum in the past one year- January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025. Among these incidents, 35 violations were recorded during the Gen Z movement occurred on September 8- 9 alone. These violations directly affected 139 media persons in total, among which, 13% were female and 87% were male. This year number of press freedom violations stood the highest in the last five years since 2020 and more than a double recorded in the previous year 2024. The number of affected journalists and media houses also remains the highest. Total 22 media houses faced various kinds of attack in 2025.

During Gen Z movement, 16 media houses were arsoned and vandalized in different parts of the country. Around 12 television channels broadcast were disrupted and 38 media persons' vehicles and properties were destroyed in these incidents. Affected media organizations recorded a huge loss of infrastructure and relevant data and archives.

### 1.1 Violations: Threat/ Death Threat tops violation



This year, press freedom violations were recorded into eight categories- a) threat, b) attack/ manhandle, c) misbehavior, d) obstruction/ vandalism, e) court case, f) arson, g) arrest/ detention and h) murder.

The major press freedom violation recorded this year was threat of attack and of life to 38 journalists through different mediums (phone calls, messages, social media platforms), followed by attack on 34 journalists. The misbehaviors and obstruction on reporting stood each at 23. Similarly, seven media persons faced court cases over news reporting, seven journalists were injured in arson attack on media houses, six faced arrest/brief detention and one journalist was killed while reporting.

*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 burn injury.*

FF also recorded incidents of attack on 22 media houses in the past year, 2025. Majority media houses (10) were vandalized followed by arson on six offices. Four media were also charged with different lawsuits- two with contempt of court and two faced defamation cases for publishing critical contents.

*On June 10, Bizmandu.com and Nepalkhabar.com were ordered by the district court to remove news reports about Chairperson of Securities Board of Nepal, following his 'character assassination' case over 'alleged unverified corruption' reporting. The court also issued an interim order not to publish any news on the issue. However, on a June 20 hearing, the court dismissed the earlier order and revoked Shrestha's complaint.*

Data on the attacks upon media houses' significantly increased this past year due to the two violent protests'- Pro-monarchy protest and Gen Z movement.

continue from page 16

## Message from Executive Chief

### Departure for better governance

The year, 2025 remained a period of unprecedented change in Nepali politics, which will be remembered as a historically landmark year in future as well. A one-day Gen Z uprising that shocked the entire world not only toppled the two-thirds majority government but caused the dissolution of the House of Representatives before, the lower house of the federal parliament, with two full years remained to complete its term. During the movement, more than two dozen youths, mostly young students, lost their lives, who were later honored by the government as Gen Z martyrs. The loss of lives of young students on September 8 due to government's suppression resulted into boiling anger of nationwide protest and destruction. The devastation resulted in nearly NPR 100 billion worth physical property and additional deaths of 50 people. The country evidently plunged into a state of uncertainty, fear and utter chaos. Political instability, social insecurity and severe economic losses adversely gripped public lives.

On the other hand, people felt a sense of relief as the autocratic government that had continuously restricted freedom of expression and the senior leaders who had fueled decade-long incumbency in national politics, disappeared from the scene. In the second week of September, the public enthusiasm grew with the hope for good governance and emergence of a capable young generation leadership. The message of welcoming a new era in the nation through parliamentary elections scheduled for March 5, 2026 revived everyone's spirit. This brought a hope to end long despair.

However, as December approached, contrary to the peoples' expectations, the same old leaders again started to appear at the center of national political affairs. Further, public disappointment has resurfaced as the interim government also not been able to perform effectively in delivering democratic values. But, there is still a faith among public because overall processes for holding the parliamentary election is moving forward in a full swing. We, Nepali people are waiting for the House of Representatives election with an expectation that it will bring a new leadership as per the spirit of the youth movement, thereby paving way to bring the much needed reforms to the governance- a corruption-free system where democratic values are nurtured well. This past year, 2025 was eventful not only for Nepal but also across the world with unexpected events and incidents, causing global ripples and shocks. The policies and actions of US President Donald Trump have been interpreted as the reason to create instability and uncertainty in the global order- fear has swayed whether the values and principles of democracy, human rights, global solidarity and initiatives for shared development would remain intact.

Similarly, 2025 was equally alarming in terms of journalists' safety. More than 100 journalists were killed while performing their duty in the Gaza alone. The journalists were killed and independent press faced persecution due to international conflicts such as Russia-Ukraine war, the extremist Taliban ruling in Afghanistan and military coup in Myanmar. These incidents also induced self-censorship among journalists and media. Irrespective of serving as the easy and accessible medium for global connection and communication, the digital platforms were not safe. Surveillance, censorship and internet shutdowns increased alarmingly in the digital spaces. Because of this, the communication sector- believed to be a foundation for human rights- faced increased insecurity and shrinking space for civic freedoms. This trend was observed significantly in Nepal as well. Two working journalists were killed and digital platforms faced extreme repression by the rulers. The suppression of digital medium ultimately became one of the factors to trigger Gen Z revolt.

Nepal also has experienced serious and harsh impacts of Trump government's policies. Specifically, civic movements and voices in Nepal has weakened. The weakening of civic institutions and crisis have further undermined the development and upholding of civil rights and democracy.

However, we feel proud as we look back again at Nepal's September 8-9 youth uprising. Nepalese youths demonstrated their power to uproot the authoritarian government that attempted to control their right to express on social media platforms in a single strike through the revolt. The world was shocked. Despite varying analysis of the uprising, the Gen Z movement set an example for global democratic movements, to which, Nepal is in a state to mark as a departure for better governance and democracy.

Hail freedom of expression and youth movement!  
Happy New Year 2026! 🌱



Taranath Dahal

### Supporting journalists in emergencies

Freedom Forum (FF) has long been engaged in facilitating support for media professionals working in crisis situations. In addition to providing legal assistance to freedom of expression practitioners, FF also facilitates emergency support for journalists in need through international organizations.

During the period from October to December 2025, Freedom Forum sought medical and equipment support for journalists who were seriously injured during the Gen Z movement. Journalists who received support included Dipendra Dhungana, Shambhu Dangal, and Santosh Deuja. Photojournalist Dipendra Dhungana of Nayapatrika was seriously injured by rubber bullets in the neck. Although he recovered after two months of medical treatment, his personal reporting equipment- camera was irreversibly damaged. Freedom Forum connected him with Media in Cooperation and Transition (MiCT)- an organization based in Germany that provides services to media and journalists in challenging contexts. MiCT supported Dhungana in purchasing a new camera.

Another freelance journalist, Shambhu Dangal, was shot in the leg with metal bullets and is still unable to walk without crutches. He was required to travel at least seven kilometers each week for wound dressing and medication from his residence to the hospital. As per his request to FF for medical and living support, FF requested assistance from Free Press Unlimited (FPU), a Netherlands-based organization that provides direct financial support to journalists. Through its Reporters' Respond Fund, FPU provided financial assistance to Dangal, offering significant relief to him and his family.

Journalist Santosh Deuja of Kapurbot Media had his residence vandalized and set on fire by demonstrators during the Gen Z movement. Following the incident, Deuja requested housing support from FF, as his home was severely damaged. FF coordinated with FPU, which provided basic housing assistance to Deuja. Similarly, journalist Gopal Dahal received relocation support to continue his work from Kathmandu after being displaced from Dharan, Koshi Province, due to repeated threats from supporters of the mayor. Dahal received relocation support for a six-month period from both FPU and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). CPJ is an organization based in New York that promotes press freedom worldwide and provides emergency assistance to media professionals.

Another journalist, Jiyalal Sah, received litigation support from FPU for cases he has been facing at the District Court of Parsa. Freedom Forum facilitated the request and coordination process for this support. In 2025, Freedom Forum facilitated emergency assistance of total EUR 3,100 and NPR 709,896 for journalists. 🌱

# Freedom of Expression Violations

## Madhesh Province

### Misbehavior

Journalist Anil Kushwaha was mistreated for covering news on September 29 in Dhanusha. Kushwaha is the operator of Dudhmati media. The media runs online television Dudhmati TV and Dudhmati FM.

Freedom Forum's representative for the province Rajan Singh reported that a police person verbally abused journalist Kushwaha and threatened to detain him for covering statement of a local businessman on his social media page.

"I was broadcasting a live program. A police person approached me and asked me to come to the police station. After reaching the police station, the Police Inspector shouted at me using abusive language and threatened me not to report on the issue", said Kushwaha. He added that they had also reached the media office and intimidated the staffs. As a result, broadcast was disrupted for at least two hours, he shared. Kushwaha told that he was so scared that he shared the incident with fellow journalists after two days on October 1. Following this, the FNJ District Chapter discussed with the police persons about the incident.

### Mayor apologies to journalist for intimidation

Reporter to Ablokit.com, Anish Sheikh was manhandled and barred from reporting in Saptari district on October 14. Reporter Sheikh told Freedom Forum that he had reached Kanchanrup Municipality office to cover the ongoing protest waged by the community school teachers who had not received their salaries. "When I was recording a video of the protest, the Mayor- who was arguing with the Deputy Mayor- approached me and asked whether I was a trained journalist. He also asked me to show my training certificate or leave the venue", said Sheikh.

"The Mayor also instructed municipal police officers to seize my mobile phone and delete

the recording. Then, they deleted the video recording, grabbed me by the neck and dragged me out of the office", he added.

Sheikh along with a dozen other journalists in Saptari filed a joint complaint at Area Police Office, Kanchanrup, Saptari on October 15. Reporter Sheikh further informed that Inspector Lekh Bahadur Bista assured them that necessary action would be taken regarding the case.

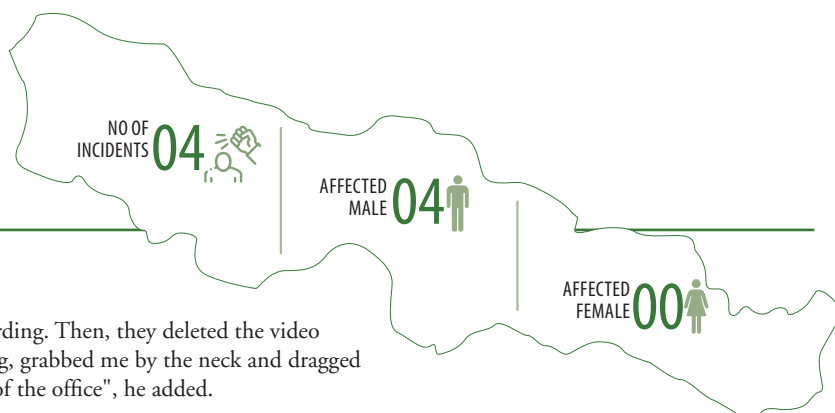
A week later, both the parties held discussion at the police station with the facilitation from FNJ Saptari Chapter. The Mayor apologized to the reporter in verbal and written form and then, the case was closed with mutual agreement.

### Death Threat

Editor at Mithilaratna.com, Shiva Dayal Yadav, received death threats over his reporting on November 28. The news portal operates from Siraha, Madhesh Province. Yadav told Freedom Forum that he had published a news report on November 28 about the alleged fraudulent activities at a local jewelry shop, including complaints from victims. Later, he visited the shop again to gather the owner Raju Sah's comments. As the owner was not present, Yadav recorded a video showing the premises crowded with victims and posted it on the media's Facebook page- Mithila Ratna.

Following the publication, the shop owner, Sah, called Yadav and threatened to "break his legs and shoot him" for publishing news and uploading the video. Yadav reported the threat to the local police. "Deputy Superintendent of Police Ramesh Bahadur Pal assured me that he would call both me and the shop owner for a discussion to settle the matter, but I haven't received any call yet," Yadav said.

"If I don't get any response by the end of the day, I will lodge a complaint against Sah at the District Police Office, Siraha," he added. After a week on December 5, editor Yadav filed a complaint at the DPO. 🌿



## Journalist compensated for equipment damage

A. Saptari based reporter to Rajdhani National daily and Prime Television, Manoj Majhi, was attacked while reporting on October 13.

According to Majhi, he was covering a story related to a disputed land when he was attacked. "I was reporting on the land being fenced with the support from the police after the court's order when a group of 40-50 people surrounded me. They seized my mobile, press identity card and shoved me", he said.

"They even broke my mobile phone and tore my notebook and press card. This incident took place in front of the police persons. Later, police told me they had recorded a video of the incident and that they would take action against the attackers", reporter Majhi added.

Following the incident, Majhi lodged a complaint at the District Police Office and the District Administration Office. Thereafter, police arrested three individuals and kept them in detention for three days. On the fourth day, they were released on bail of Rs. 5,000 each after submitting written and verbal apologies to the journalist. Majhi was also provided compensation amounting Rs. 70,000 for the assault and damage to his belongings. 🌿

# Bagmati Province



## Death Threat

Journalist at 4CAST TV, Parbatraj Ghimire, received a death threat on October 7 over his reporting.

According to Ghimire, he had published a video report on October 5 about Kathmandu Metropolitan Mayor Balen Shah's residence on the online television channel. In the video, he interviewed a person named Subash Sah, who identified himself as the Mayor's brother-in-law.

Following the publication, Sah called the journalist and verbally abused him for publishing the video on October 7. He further threatened to break Ghimire's limbs and kill him. In the call recording, which was uploaded to the television's YouTube channel, Sah warns the journalist to remove the video or face consequences.

"I have been ignoring calls from unknown numbers since then," Ghimire said, adding that he is preparing to lodge a complaint with the police on October 10.

## Threat

Senior correspondent to Nepalpress.com Keshab Bhul has been receiving numerous threats for covering news since September 27. The online is operated from Kathmandu, the federal capital of Nepal.

Journalist Bhul told Freedom Forum that news about critical analysis of a political party was published on the news portal with his byline on September 27. After Bhul shared the news on his social media page, people affiliated to the party flooded the post with abusive comments. The leaders of the party also wrote threatening comments as to get ready to face consequences for writing news. Bhul has also been receiving threatening messages on his mobile phone asking for his location. "They are calling and sending messages from new numbers but I am ignoring those", said Bhul.

Again on the follow-up news published on September 30, people are posting unusual comments discrediting him on the social media.

## Misbehavior

A. Prakash Bam, a correspondent for Kantipur Television, was verbally abused while

reporting in Lalitpur on November 4.

According to reporter Bam, he was covering Nepali Congress (NC) Central Committee meeting held at the party office Sanepa, Lalitpur. During the meeting, reporter Bam asked NC's Joint General Secretary Kishor Singh Rathore a question about the party's upcoming general convention.

"Along with my colleagues, I asked him the question. But Rathore angrily shouted who I was to question him. He further spoke abusively to me and attempted to attack me", Bam shared with Freedom Forum, "Other journalists in the venue stopped him from attacking me."

Reporter Bam added that following the incident, party cadres have been contacting him asking to meet but he has not been able to meet them due to his busy schedule.

**B.** Security forces misbehaved with Laligurans Media reporter Hem Raj Bhatta while he was covering a protest on December 13 in Kirtipur.

Speaking to Freedom Forum, Bhatta said he was forcefully taken into a police van while reporting on a protest staged by youths outside the cricket stadium. The protesters were demonstrating against a fraud in the distribution of tickets for the final match of the Nepal Premier League (NPL).

According to Bhatta, while attempting to control the protest, police persons manhandled protesters and loaded them into a police van. "During the incident, Senior Sub-Inspector BK Chaudhary shouted at me asking who I was and why I was recording the video. He then ordered his officers to put me into the van," Bhatta said.

Bhatta added that he showed his press identity card, but they did not stop. He was taken to the Police Circle, Kirtipur where his mobile phone was seized.

After reaching the police station, another officer suggested releasing Bhatta after confirming that he was a journalist. However, when Bhatta asked the Deputy Superintendent of Police about the reason for the manhandle, the officer again used abusive language and ordered him to leave the premises. Then, Bhatta continued his reporting on the NPL.

## Detention

Barsha Shah, a photojournalist with Deshsanchar.com, was briefly detained while covering a protest at the Prime Minister's residence in Baluwatar, Kathmandu on December 16.

Reporter Shah told Freedom Forum that she was taking photos and videos of a silent protest at the gate of the PM's residence when two female police officers approached her and asked her to delete all her recordings. After she refused, Shah was detained for around two and a half hours for taking photos without their permission.

Recalling the incident, Shah said that she felt like laughing, as the incident occurred just a few hours after she had returned from the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). She had discussed attacks on journalists including herself during the Gen Z protest. "Just few minutes earlier, we were discussing human rights at the Commission, and now my own human rights have been violated", she said. "Although my recordings are safe, my hands are hurting because they thrashed me," she added.

## Threat

Editor at Bhaktapurtimes.com.np Harisundar Chhunka was verbally abused on December 16 in Bhaktapur, Bagmati Province.

Editor Chhunka shared with Freedom Forum that around 6:10 pm on the Tathali- Nala highway, he noticed a motorbike following him. "They suddenly shouted at me using abusive language. They threatened, saying- When others don't care, why are you so interested in writing news and taking photos and videos? Beware! You are being smarter these days. Then, they went away," he said.

"I stopped my bike and tried to call my friends, but I could not and I even could not note the bike number. My whole body was stiff. I did not share the incident with my family too," Chhunka added. Despite the threats, Chhunka published another video recorded on April 2, 2025 on social media on December 17. He has been actively covering news on soil excavation and

exploitation at various locations in Bhaktapur. On December 15, he published news on illegal soil excavation behind a community school and the

Kathmandu Cancer Center in Tathali, Bhaktapur in the presence of Changunarayan Municipality representative. Chhunka added that he would

continue reporting on issues of public concern based on facts, regardless of the threats. 🌱

## Gandaki Province

### Journalists under brief control

Journalists were harassed and briefly taken under control while reporting on the alleged fraud of an employment company in Kaski, Gandaki Province, on November 17.

Journalists Bijay Nepali, Suresh Sunar, Arjun Hitang, and Bishnu Bishwakarma had reached the branch office of Amitya Global Employment Services to collect the recruitment authorities' response to victims' complaints of fraud. The reporters also met victims in the office premises and recorded their complaints.

Journalist Bijay Nepali is associated with Dhorpatan daily, Arjun Hitang with Kaski

Khabar, Suresh Sunar and Bishnu Bishwakarma are affiliated with Mero Sathi TV.

After the reporters recorded videos of the victims inside the office premises, they went to meet the office's Director Dinesh Magar. "We along with the victims were in the room and the victims started sharing their problems. Meanwhile, we noticed that the room was getting crowded. Those entering the room started shouting at us", said reporter Nepali, adding, "They looked like goons. They shouted at us, asking with whose permission we recorded the video. One of my colleagues told them we had been there to know about the victims' complaint. It made them further aggressive, prompting the threat of locking up in the room."



Then, they ordered us to delete the footage we had recorded of victims. For our safety, we deleted all the recordings and apologized to them, the journalist explained.

The reporters were released only after the confirmation that footages were deleted and the victims were also forced to promise that they would not visit the office again or make complaints. 🌱

## Sudurpaschim Province

### Death threat

Station Manager at Melauli FM, Laxman BC, and Marketing Manager Mangesh Dayal, received death threats over a news report on November 10 in Baitadi.

According to Station Manager BC, the online portal of the FM, Melaulikhabar.com, had published a news story on October 26 about a person named Prakash Chand, who had been allegedly convicted of religious discrimination. The news was later published in other local and national media outlets.

Following this, Bhan Bahadur Chand, brother of Prakash Chand and health worker by profession repeatedly called the journalists and issued death threats, saying he would "see them wherever he meets them."

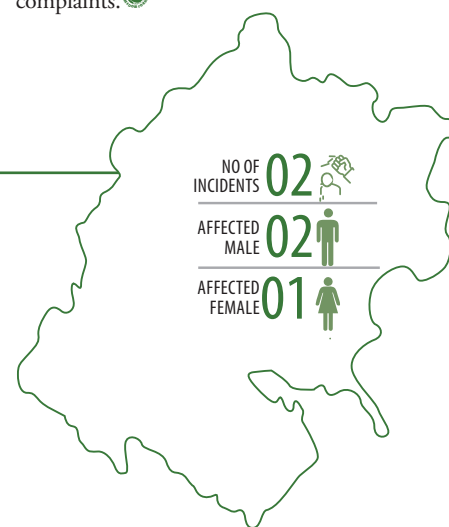
Journalist BC. told Freedom Forum that he informed the local administration about the incident.

### Misbehavior

Chief Editor of Nayasandesh.com, Rama Chand, faced misbehavior while covering a news report in Kailali on December 15.

Editor Chand has shared the video of misbehavior on her social media. In the video, while she was speaking in front of the camera about Sudurpaschim Festival, a person deliberately shoved her. Sharing the video, she stated that the man's intentional act even in a crowded place is a sheer violence against her.

She demanded both a fine and imprisonment for the individual. Following this, the District Police



Office, Kailali arrested the individual and initiated an investigation.

According to Freedom Forum's representative for the province, Min Bam, the police released the person on December 16 after a public apology and with consent of the journalist. 🌱

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

# Safety tools essential for protest coverage: Injured journalist Dhungana

Nepali youths from Generation Z staged nationwide protests on September 8 and 9 against corruption and government mismanagement following the government's ban on social media platforms. The demonstration initially begun peacefully turned violent, to which security persons resorted to firing that took the lives of 19 youths and massive injuries including five journalists on the same day. Among the injured were four photojournalists working for different media. They are- Dipendra Dhungana (Nayapatrika), Shyam Shrestha (Kantipur TV), Umesh Karki (Nepalpress.com), and Barsha Shah (Deshsanchar.com).

Dipendra Dhungana, a photojournalist with Nayapatrika daily was shot with rubber bullets just below his right ear. He is currently recovering from his injuries. Photojournalists, as frontline workers often risk their lives while covering unrest. To document their experiences, Freedom Forum talked to Dhungana about the attack, challenges journalists face while reporting during protest, journalist's awareness of safety issues and preparation and possible way forward.

The interview is taken on the occasion of the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists (November 2), 2025.

## How about your health condition now? Are you ok?

Yes, I'm gradually recovering. I'm still under medication.

## How long have you been in journalism? How are you faring the job?

It's been about 10 years. I began my career from the ABC Television, then shifted from freelancing to photojournalism for the Nayapatrika. I have also done feature writing on topics like sports and armed conflict and photo stories.

I enjoy being a multimedia journalist that gives me flexibility to work across diverse beats. Exploring different subjects rather than being confined to one area is exciting.

## In your career, what types of challenges and problems have you faced?

Over the years, I've covered many protests and clashes, but lately, I've noticed that protests have become more violent. From pro-monarchist movements to MCC-related protests, violent incidents are now more common. It feels as precedent has been set that protests must be aggressive and/or destructive.

To cover these incidents, we (journalists) are yet to be unprepared due to lack of skills and safety equipment. No media house or newsroom speaks about additional safety of frontline media persons reporting in such crises.

## Why are journalists being attacked? Is it targeted?

Sometime ago, I and my colleagues were reporting on a sports event. Meanwhile, public started calling us- यो बाह्र भाइ हैन, हान् यसलाई (Attack them. They are consort of 12-media) this obstructed our reporting. This way blanket political allegations against media also present risk to our work.

Moreover, Press Council Nepal is losing its credibility as a regulatory body to monitor media contents. Hence, the people do not go to the Council to complain or publish rebuttal. It has further encouraged the anti-press elements to misuse social media or direct methods to attack and threaten journalists and media.

Also, during protests, journalists don't have a fixed place to settle and do reporting. We report from whichever spot we can best capture the story. While reporting from fields, I have learned that public trust and media credibility are declining. Mainstream media is losing its popularity as compared to social media, where misinformation spreads rapidly. The misinformation often provokes people to question journalists and media organizations, sometimes leading to targeted attacks.

We know that mainstream outlets need time to verify and process information, but by the time they publish, social media is already flooded with similar unverified contents which creates confusion and reduces public attention. Moreover, political affiliations of media owners have further damaged credibility. However, this doesn't necessarily affect the integrity of frontline journalists.

I believe we now need to define minimum standards for journalists and media organizations with ethical norms and professional integrity.

Furthermore, there are still areas in Nepal where access to media and the internet is poor, and there, media credibility remains strong. Media houses should prioritize remote areas,



particularly in the Madhesh Province, and invest in reporting local stories through local reporters.

Even today, mainstream media tends to focus primarily on political news as front-page content. It's time to adapt to changing audience interests and broaden the coverage.

**You recently faced a violent attack while covering the Gen Z protest. Could you describe what happened?**

On the day of protest (September 8), I had been following the protest updates from the very planning stage. We initially thought it would be a peaceful and creative demonstration, different from previous political protests, using face painting and symbolic acts, etc.

Thinking that I reached Maitighar at around 9:00 am. The crowd later, began marching towards New Baneshwor from Maitighar. Everything was peaceful until they reached New Baneshwor when few protesters tried to break the police barricade to enter a restricted area.

In past protests, the police often used water cannons and batons as soon as the demonstrators entered the restricted area, but this time they seemed moderate in action. When the crowd reached the Federal Parliament gate, it went out of control. None of us expected it to turn that violent.

We couldn't take shelter inside buildings because, during the Tinkune protest six months back, a journalist had been burned alive in a torched building, from where he was covering the protest. Suddenly, I heard that Kantipur TV cameraperson Shyam Shrestha got a rubber bullet.

Then, we got scared realizing anything could happen then. My friend Umesh Karki suggested the I wear a helmet but I had left it at the motorcycle service center.

As I was filming behind an electric pole near the police line, I suddenly felt a something like a sharp stone hit me. My friends told me that I had been shot. When I touched the wound, I realized I had been shot with a rubber bullet. I was bleeding immediately after gunshot. A journalist from AFP helped me get to the nearby Civil Hospital.

On the way, we also saw protesters attacking journalists. At the hospital, the situation was more chaotic- full of injured people and doctors in hustle and bustle. I requested a nurse to check my wound. She told me I would need a surgery to remove the bullet, so I went to

I believe we now need to define minimum standards for journalists and media organizations with ethical norms and professional integrity.

Patan Hospital, where doctors confirmed it was sensitive area and that surgery may take time.

For the first time, I truly felt scared. Thoughts of paralysis and loss of mobility gripped me. Thankfully, the operation went successfully, and I was discharged after eight days. I am still under medication.

**Did you receive any support from organizations after the incident?**

Yes, I received Rs. 25,000 from the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) and Rs. 10,000 from the Press Council Nepal. All four injured journalists were provided the same support.

Regarding my treatment, the government had announced medical support, but my media house covered my expenses, which totaled around Rs. 75,000–80,000. However, the hospital has asked me to submit required documents for reimbursement.

**What about your reporting equipment? Was it damaged during the incident?**

Yes, my two camera and their lenses were badly damaged. The display was broken, and the buttons not functioning. I haven't tested it yet, but the total damage may be around Rs. 2,00,000. Those were my personal equipment. I am unable to resume my work until they are repaired. I am not even sure if they can be repaired.

Having faced such challenges, what do you think should be done to ensure journalists' safety- both personal and professional?

Talking about professional safety, we have been hearing about resource cuts in many media houses. Even in mine, layoffs have occurred. Professional safety is rarely prioritized- be it about journalists' salary or other facilities.

As I said before, when we go out to cover protests or disasters, we are not provided with

safety gear or protective equipment. We're simply told to "take care of ourselves and better not report if impossible". Neither media houses conduct training for their staffs nor they provide equipment and institutional support with few in exception.

The government too seems insensitive to journalists' safety, especially during crises and disasters.

Hence, I strongly believe media houses should conduct at least two safety and field-reporting training per year. If the media is unable to conduct on its own, collaborative efforts among multiple outlets would be a good option. Nepal has experts in disaster and crisis management, including police and army trainers - who can guide journalists on safety protocols.

Moreover, insurance for reporting equipment like cameras should be made mandatory. In Nepal, this topic hasn't received the attention it deserves- neither from media houses nor from insurance companies. Equipment insurance and journalists' safety need to be essential part of the media sustainability.

Regarding the insurance of journalists, it is heard that a journalists' insurance scheme has been proposed by the Federation of Nepali Journalists. Did you get this opportunity?

Yes, I have heard about the insurance scheme by the Federation of Nepali Journalists, but unfortunately, I am not benefitted with this.

**What is your opinion about the mental well-being of frontline journalists?**

Yes, the mental health of journalists is absolutely important. It needs adequate attention. Not only frontline journalists working in the field but also those working at office desk can face mental health issues. For instance, we sometimes feel burnt out from reporting on the same issues

every day. Conflicts within newsrooms can also cause stress and frustration. Further, incidents like those we faced recently may cause mental trauma resulting in difficulty to continue the profession.

Media houses should be more open and proactive in addressing journalists' mental health. They could organize in-house counselling sessions at least once every three months. These sessions can be conducted either in groups or individually as needed. Media organizations should also consider investing in the mental well-being of their journalists. In my view, it is essential for a healthy and productive newsroom.

**As we discussed earlier, you including four other journalists- three male and one female- were injured during the Gen Z protest. What needs to be done to ensure justice for the victim journalists?**

As I mentioned before, journalists are always at risk of attack from both the government and protestors sides whenever they go to the field to cover unrest. I remember my uncle once told me that even during the armed conflict,

journalists were one of the targets. These days, some protestors deliberately target journalists that may be due to personal grudges, political bias or negative narratives that cause public distrust in the media.

Another challenge is the changing pattern of demonstrations. In recent protests, we have seen attacks not only on public and private properties but also on media houses.

One March 2025, we witnessed a tragic death of Suresh Rajak, who died while covering a protest from inside a building. His case is still pending and his family is waiting for justice. There are several such cases of impunity where crimes against journalists are overlooked.

Moreover, decisions related to journalists' code of conduct, minimum wages, and media law reforms are yet to be implemented. Similarly, the media itself should take responsibility and act to address these issues to regain credibility and public trust. However, I am hopeful that the government will initiate a proper investigation into Rajak's case and the attacks on journalists during the Gen Z

protests. In light of still unsettled political situation, what should media houses and individual journalists do to ensure the safety of journalists?

Yes, news reports are there on future protests. We have no choice, we must go and report from field. But how we do it safely is still uncertain. Whether media houses have prepared or oriented their staffs for safe reporting is a big question. Worryingly, the media houses themselves do not write about the problems facing their reporters.

As discussed earlier, the houses should at least orient its field staffs to stay safe while reporting the crisis.

However, the difference would be that this time we (reporters, photojournalists) will be more aware ourselves and wear helmets. I have also heard that the Photojournalists Club is preparing to distribute bulletproof jackets to all frontline journalists, which is a positive step.

**Thank you for your time, and wish you speedy recovery. Thank you.** 🌿

## Insurance to journalists, reporting equipment urgent: Journalist Barsha Shah

**B**arsha Shah is a photojournalist at Deshsanchar.com. She is also one of the injured journalists during the Gen Z protest- September 8-9, 2025. She was hit in the stomach with a stone and sustained a minor injury while covering the protest. Freedom Forum talked to her about her career, challenges faced as a photojournalist and female journalist and way forward to ensure safety of the journalists in Nepal's context.

Welcome in a conversation with Freedom Forum. Would you please share about your journalism career. My journalism career started from radio- a technician and later a photojournalist. I am still learning, there is always something new to learn in this field. It has been more than eight years I'm in this field.

**Do you find your job challenging? Have you faced any risks?**

Yes, challenges definitely exist. This profession itself is full of challenging, as we have to go the field to report where we witness the incidents

closely. It is costly as well because cameras and other equipment cost a lot, while there are already the financial challenges. Since we work in the field, we face various sorts of risks. However, it is my profession of choice. I enjoy working despite challenges.



Photojournalists' job is to inform people through photos and videos, so we have to capture real events from the field. Whatsoever the situation, we must face it.

Thus, as we work on the frontline- be it during a protest, crisis or disaster- we are always at risk.

**Many incidents of attacks on journalists during protests have been recorded. Do you think these are targeted?**

We, photojournalists report from the field to show the reality whatever the situation. I cannot say for sure whether such attacks are targeted. Earlier, it did not seem that way, sometimes such incidents occur due to misinformation or misunderstanding.

For instance, once I was briefly detained near the President's Office while taking photos. I felt that might have been due to a misunderstanding or miscommunication at that time. However, in recent times, I feel that some

attacks are targeted because in some places, people shout at reporters not to take photos or videos and attempt to attack for reporting.

Although we are sometimes targeted, other times it is just coincidence. For example, during the recent Gen Z protest, while I was reporting, police were stopping people on bikes and scooters and interrogating. One officer even pointed at the bullets being fired and told me, "Hey, be careful, you too may be blown away when it is mob." It really shocked me. So, human psychology and tense situations may also affect reporting atmosphere.

### How were you injured during Gen Z protest?

Actually, I don't even want to remember the day and incident. But I cannot ignore too, for I still have a scar on my body. On September 8, I reached Maitighar before 10:00 am. As the crowd swelled and moved toward New Baneshwor, where there is federal parliament building, people grew increasingly agitated, shouting slogans against the government and political leaders. After they breached the barricades and started vandalizing near the parliament building, police started firing bullets in response.

Amidst the chaos, one of my colleagues was shot. Then, I realized I had to protect myself, so I hid myself behind a tree and an electric pole. Suddenly, I felt something hit my stomach and froze for a moment. When I checked, I noticed that it was a stone. Someone nearby helped me apply balm. The injury was minor so I could continue reporting.

### Was your equipment damaged?

Although stone hit my camera, my equipment was not damaged. Most of us use our own equipment for reporting which makes it even more risky and expensive for us.

### What about personal and professional safety of journalists?

Personal safety is important. We have to protect ourselves first while performing duty.

As for professional safety, I think it should be addressed at the policy level and the organizations like the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) and the government should support journalists' agenda to ensure their professional safety.

In my view, journalist safety has not yet been prioritized by any sector. We have seen that even during the war in foreign countries, journalists' safety was ignored. So, those who

**"In my view, journalist safety has not yet been prioritized by any sector. We have seen that even during the war in foreign countries, journalists' safety was ignored."**

write or report critically are often seen as enemies. Hence, the watchdog role is very risky.

### Should journalists' equipment be insured?

Yes, insurance of equipment is essential. Both journalists' insurance and equipment insurance are important. Moreover, copyright issues should also be addressed because we risk our lives to capture those photos and videos, but others use them easily and sometimes, even without our consent.

If the government takes initiative on insurance and copyright protection, that would be great. We even raised the copyright issue with FNJ, but it has not been addressed yet. Also due to political influence, such issues have been neglected.

### Have you enrolled in the journalists' insurance scheme?

No, I am not aware about this in detail. I have found that most insurance companies don't provide coverage for journalistic equipment's damage and loss.

### What are your thoughts on journalists' mental well-being and digital safety, especially for women journalists?

We are still backwards in addressing mental wellbeing in any sector. Reporters' mental well-being is often ignored, but to be strong professionally, we need to be mentally strong. In my case, I myself try to counsel so that I don't lose courage, and prevent myself from breaking down. I try my best to ignore thoughts that affect me. Most importantly, counseling after incidents like the Gen Z protest is imperative.

In terms of digital safety, it is a huge challenge not just for women journalists but for all the women in general. Women journalists, however, face additional intimidation and harassment due to their profession.

In today's age, many women are strong academically but they still face some kind

of harassment in digital space. We have seen many cases where women are being trolled and harassed on and via social media. So, we ourselves should work out to be strong, enhance our skills and be independent and capable so that no one can take advantage of us.

### What should be done to ensure journalists' safety in the current situation?

Yes, upcoming situations are also risky as the election is approaching. There are many conflicts ongoing. So, we should always think about our safety when we are in field. For instance, we can use helmets, glasses, and masks when reporting in risky situations.

At the policy level, the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MoCIT) should take journalists' safety seriously. I am hopeful because current minister was also a journalist. So, I think he understands these issues. MoCIT can coordinate with the Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA) to develop effective insurance schemes and safety protocols. All three aspects—physical, digital and mental safety—are essential for journalists. Unfortunately, most media houses do not provide orientations or safety training. It is good that my media house supports me when I request for a leave or share my situation. But I do not know about other media houses.

The government recognized other victims of the attack but whether it recognized injured journalists is a question. I heard that the journalists were also provided some support but justice is yet to be catered to them. My injury was minor but my colleagues were seriously injured. MoCIT, FNJ like organizations are our guardian, so what steps they will take for our justice is important. I believe both MoCIT and MoHA should take proactive steps to ensure journalists' safety and justice, especially for those injured or attacked while reporting. We heard about the Press Council inviting victim journalists recently—but MoCIT should also address these issues more seriously since we fall under its jurisdiction. 🌱

# Emergency support essential for journalists : Injured journalist Dangal

**S**hambhu Dangal is a journalist with over a decade of experience in various media outlets. He has been running an online news portal, nayapost.com, for few months. He was severely injured by a metal bullet in his left leg while covering the Gen Z protest in the Kathmandu Valley on September 8, 2025. He is still under medication and unable to walk freely.

Freedom Forum spoke with journalist Dangal about the attack, the challenges journalists face, the actions needed to ensure justice, and the ways to reduce impunity relating to crimes against journalists.

## **Namaste. Would you please share about your journalism career?**

I studied journalism and have worked in different media. My career began with the Madhyapur Post in print, where I worked for two years. Then I joined a radio program for almost five years. After that, I worked with Sagarmatha Television and later with ratopati.com, reporting on parliamentary affairs. I have been in this profession for around 17–18 years.

I realized that instead of continuing job in the established media houses, there was growing scope in digital media. So, I registered the nayapost.com at the Department of Information and Broadcasting on May 2025. As digital media is gaining audience of late, I set up a studio and working on current affairs. I, along with some friends, was in the preparation phase to formally operate the portal.

During my career, I gained experience in print, online, TV, and radio. I have also participated in various trainings, including mobile journalism and multimedia production. In some media, my colleagues used to call me a “one-man army” because I used to handle photography, videography, editing, and reporting on my own.

## **In your career, have you faced intimidation for reporting?**

Yes, many times. I have faced different sorts of attacks while covering protests and received threats for my reporting. Once, while reporting

a Janajati movement, the protestors attacked media persons, where I was injured. There are several incidents where I faced attacks or threats for continuing my profession.

## **You recently faced attack while covering the Gen Z protest. Could you describe what had happened?**

On September 8, I was following updates on the protest. My team went to the Chabahil area to cover it. At Gaushala, we followed a group of students joining the larger Gen Z crowd on the way to New Baneshwor. That same day, there was another protest by the victims of loan-sharking. We also recorded their demonstration.

Then, we followed the Gen Z crowd towards New Baneshwor. After the protestors crossed the police barricade, the situation went uncontrolled. It felt unusual because crowds could not pass the Baneshwor area, but this time security arrangement seemed insufficient. Most protestors were students and youths, so they easily broke the barricade. I also noticed that police were using a weak sound system, whatever they announced could only be heard within a short distance. If the crowd had heard clear warnings, the situation might have been controlled.

After police used water cannons and tear gas shells, students became more agitated. The situation went out of control within an hour. Social media updates and politically motivated voices further provoked the crowd to enter the parliamentary premises. Around 1:00 pm, people from different sides joined the protest, leading to vandalism in the parliamentary premises. Police then, began firing metal bullets indiscriminately.

Around 2:30 pm, while I was taking videos standing behind a group of students which was destroying the compound wall, a bullet fired by police struck my leg. I fell down immediately, my camera broke, and I called for help. The metal bullet thrust, pierced and cut through my leg. I was bleeding heavily. I was first taken to Everest Hospital, where doctors referred me to the Trauma Center due to the severity of the wound.

At the Trauma Center, doctors bandaged the wound to stop bleeding and gave me

medicines. They asked me to wait for two days for undergo surgery because there were many other injured patients needing emergency treatment. After two days, the surgery was performed. I stayed in the hospital for 16 days. However, later due to high risk of infection, I had to request the doctor to discharge me. Currently, I have to visit the hospital every three days for dressing. Doctors say it will take six months for me to walk again and at least a year for complete recovery.

## **Did you receive any support for treatment?**

The treatment was free as per the government's order. However, the cost of food, and medicines was high.

I received Rs. 25,000 from the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) and Rs. 10,000 from the Press Council Nepal, which was provided to all other victim journalists.

Right now, I feel helpless. I am the sole breadwinner for my seven-member family, but I cannot work. As I failed to continue my work and run my own media, it has been difficult for me to manage both treatment and family expenses.

Regardless of the support, the state showed no concern toward me or other victim journalists. Even though the current Minister for Communications and Information Technology was once a journalist, he did not speak about our situation. There are more than 100 journalists' organizations, yet none spoke for us. If I was affiliated with a political party, perhaps they would have shown concern. But I was ignored because I am an independent journalist. I believe journalists must remain independent and free from political influence.

Despite having the severe injury, very few people spoke about my case.

## **Given these challenges, what should be done to ensure journalists' safety?**

In Nepal, the government and organizations plan to give better opportunities for journalists but implementation is weak. Institutions like Ministry of Communication and Information

Technology, Department of Information and Broadcasting and the Press Council do not work effectively for journalists' safety.

Every journalist must be trained, and media houses should provide safety gear, especially to photojournalists and those who work on the frontline.

Those at high risk should receive safety equipment, self-defense training, and awareness on possible risk while covering protests or disaster. Further, when journalists are injured during reporting, there must be a proper mechanism that addresses whether they are able to return to work, and how they will cope up and how their families will survive.

In my view, the government and journalist organizations should establish a dedicated emergency fund for journalists injured or attacked while reporting. Such a fund would help someone like me, who is unable to work for a long time.

I have heard about the insurance scheme of the Federation of Nepali Journalists, but unfortunately I did not get the opportunity. Such insurance schemes are often discussed but rarely implemented effectively due to political influence.

**In Nepal, we continue to see deepening impunity in cases of journalists' attack since the conflict period. Recently, a journalist died while reporting and the case is yet pending. Similarly, journalists including you were shot while covering the Gen Z protest. In your view, how can justice be ensured for victim journalists and their families? What concrete steps should be taken to reduce or end impunity for crimes against journalists?**

Yes, these recent incidents were a grave violation of human rights. We were attacked while doing our job. We were neither on the government's side nor on the protestors' side. We were simply reporting. Whatever happened that day was a dreadful experience. Thank God! We are alive today, anything could have happened that day.

There is no doubt that the state should take responsibility for whatever happened that day because State is the ultimate guardian of every citizen. The suppression that day was excessively forceful. I was holding a professional camera; the police clearly saw that I was a journalist, yet they opened firing. This incident clearly indicates that police persons must be trained on



lawful measures of crowd control. International practices show that when protestors are civilians and without any weapon, security authorities should not attack with weapons.

But I saw security forces inside the parliamentary building openly firing towards students. This attack reflects a serious institutional failure.

So, to ensure justice and end impunity, those responsible must be held accountable and punished as per law. Such violent actions are unacceptable. Authorities from higher to lower levels failed to plan proper security strategies resulting in a huge loss of human and public property.

Moreover, institutions like MoCIT and DoIB must pay special attention to journalists' safety and justice. It has been over two months I am bedridden due to a police bullet, but no state agency has made a follow up. Impunity should have no place in a democratic state like Nepal that follows the rule of law.

**What should media houses do to ensure journalists' safety in future?**

Talking about my media, my team members have left for other jobs, as I cannot pay them. Running new media is difficult due to limited resources and revenue. However, I try to update the news portal myself from the desk.

What I learned from this tragic incident is that journalists must protect themselves while reporting protests as unpredictable incidents may befall them. Also, there is a lack of resources or guidelines in Nepal on how to report safely in crowds or demonstrations. Thus, I am planning to create a video or resource that will be useful for frontline reporters.

After I fully recover, I will again return to field reporting. Field reporting with photos and videos is my passion. I always carry my camera. I do not like sticking to a news desk and preparing news based only on information; I prefer being on the ground. It makes me dynamic and updated.

Today, audiences are more aware and verify news across multiple sources so visual evidences like photos and videos have become essential. I have been practicing this since my days at Ratopati. I also advise my colleagues to always carry a camera while reporting to capture visual stories which are impactful assets. For journalists' safety, all sides- journalists, media houses and the state- must be responsible.

**Thank you very much for your time. Wishing you a speedy recovery.**

Thank you for the opportunity. 🌿

## Executive Chief honored with 'National Anti-Corruption Citizen Award'



Freedom Forum congratulates Executive Chief Taranath Dahal on being conferred on the 'National Anti-Corruption Citizen Award'. The award was presented by the Bageshwori Asal Shasan (BAS) Nepal on the occasion of International Anti-Corruption Day (December 9, 2025) at a program organized in Nepalgunj City, Lumbini Province.

BAS Nepal is a youth-led organization actively engaged in anti-corruption initiatives and advocacy for transparent and accountable governance. Since 2010, the organization has been honoring individuals who have made outstanding contributions to good governance drive in the country.

Executive Chief Dahal, also a former President of the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ)

and a prominent advocate of the Right to Information (RTI) was honored in recognition of his significant contributions to democracy, good governance, freedom of expression and anti-corruption efforts, BAS stated.

Previous BAS Nepal awardees include- Good Governance activist Kedar Khadka, Former Chief of the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) Suryanath Upadhyay, Journalist Hari Thapa, Activist Sharda Bhushal Jha, Development Officer Bharat Kumar Sharma, Former Information Commissioner Krishna Hari Baskota, Mayor of Nepalgunj Sub-Metropolitan City Dr. Dhawal Shamsher Rana and Former Chief District Officer of Banke Ram Bahadur Kurumbanga, among others. 🌿

## Victim journalists share plight before NHRC officials

Few politicians have set such a precedent against media that we have to hide our identity while reporting in field", said a journalist at a program held in Kathmandu on December 11, 2025.

To mark this year's Human Rights Day, Freedom Forum organized an interaction program, bringing to light the threats and attacks journalists faced, especially during the recent Gen Z protests in Kathmandu valley.

Representatives from the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), victim journalists and media representatives participated in the program held to voice the journalists' concerns, expressed solidarity to their rights and engage with the rights watchdog.

Executive Chief at Freedom Forum, Taranath Dahal, mentioned increasing risks faced by frontline journalists and emphasized the need for practical discussions to advance justice to the journalists so that impunity for crimes against journalists could be reduced.

Media attacks are more direct and violent in



recent days. Multimedia journalists working on frontline are particularly vulnerable, stressed Dahal. Attack upon journalists, damage to their equipment, lack of insurance and lack of institutional support are some of pressing issues these journalists have been facing while carrying out their professions, according to him.

He also reminded FF's facilitation to seek medical and emergency support for the victim journalists.

On the occasion, five journalists were honored by NHRC Joint Secretary Yagya Prasad Adhikari, offering them shawls.

One of the victim journalists, Shambhu Dungal from Nayapost.com shared his difficulty in seeking justice despite repeated attempts to reach the authorities. He was shot with metal bullets in leg while covering Gen Z protest on September 8. "It has been 75 days and I am still unable to continue my work as that of normal time. I have to walk with the help of crutches. To sheer disregard to us, the state felt no urgency at all to support us or ensure justice to us", Dungal shared the plight, adding, "I do not trust the police, nor the enquiry commission and the government that they address our issue."

He rather underscored the need for strong leadership from FNJ and better protection mechanisms for frontline reporters.

Another photojournalist from Deshsanchar.com, Barsha Shah, recalled the moment she faced harassment at the Parliament while trying to enter the women's restroom. She shared the incident of being hit by stones while covering the protests and expressed frustration over lack of action even after informing NHRC. She also pointed out the lack of protective equipment in Nepali media houses.

Dipendra Dhungana, photojournalist at Nayapatrika daily questioned why NHRC was not present during violent protests. He shared few incidents that depict increasing hostility from both security forces and political groups towards media. The severe incidents should be taken to the court to reduce the entrenched impunity for crimes against journalists.

Dhungana wondered whether they will be safe when police themselves investigate the cases involving police violence. "I am seriously concerned whether the police would support us and conduct the investigation fairly", he said.

On this, Dahal informed the journalist about NHRC's mechanism for protection of FoE and Journalists' Safety which have Nepal Police representatives' as member. Thus, once the mechanism directs the investigation, the concerned authorities are obliged to follow and carry the investigation ahead.

Adding to the journalists' statement, senior photojournalist at Kantipur Television, Shyam Shrestha, shared his experiences from the conflict reporting and recent incidents where he was beaten despite clearly identifying himself as a journalist. He also shared the whole incident how he was shot while covering Gen Z protest in front of the parliament and then watching the television building and his own vehicle burning.

He expressed concerns that Nepali journalists lack the basic protective measures available in international conflict reporting contexts. He urged government and media houses to ensure safe gear such as bulletproof vests and helmets for frontline reporters

On September 9, office of an online news portal Thahakhabar.com was also vandalized. Sharing about the incident, Editor at Thahakhabar.com Narendra Sapkota stated that journalists are being targeted both by protestors and by authorities. He also highlighted the impact of incendiary political speeches that further endanger journalists. He expressed concerns over self-censorship and the lack of accountability from both the state and media organizations.

"As like in the case of journalists, we were also asked to submit details of loss in the media house due to attack but no action has been taken yet. I think even operators of media houses should be given orientation to prioritize journalists' safety. With approaching election,

the situation is unpredictable, hence the commission should take a concrete step towards ensuring safety of journalists", Sapkota marked.

Another journalist who witnessed attack upon Annapurna Post national daily's office on the same day, Ramkala Khadka thanked Freedom Forum for psychological support and emphasized the need for media houses to responsibly support injured journalists. She also shared cases where equipment was destroyed and no compensation was provided.

NHRC's representatives acknowledged the concerns raised by the journalists.

Under-Secretary at the commission Maya Sharma committed to revise the commission's monitoring methodology, prioritize journalists' safety in their human rights agenda through the established nationwide safety mechanisms.

Adding to Sharma's commitment, Joint Secretary at the Commission Yagya Prasad Adhikari stated that journalists are frontline human rights defenders even before the commission. Hence, their contribution should be respected as freedom fighters and witness of this historical movement. He assured of investigating the cases, though they noted possible delays. Reminding the role of NHRC's mechanisms for journalists' safety, Adhikari called upon the journalists to use the existing mechanisms for justice in this regard. He stressed upon strengthening coordination with the police and relevant authorities and building trust upon the commissions and judicial process.

In the concluding observation, Executive Chief Dahal stressed the importance of sustained advocacy and collective action. He suggested raising the issue collectively with Nepal Police, NHRC, and the Gauri Bahadur Karki-led enquiry and investigation commission over the Gen Z movement.

He further recommended:

- Mobilizing Freedom Forum's legal team to support affected journalists.
- Coordinated dialogue with state bodies to ensure accountability.
- Continued follow-ups on individual cases to reduce impunity.
- Building trust in justice mechanisms by reminding their roles and mandates.

The program concluded with a shared commitment to continue advocacy for journalists' safety, justice and accountability. 🌱



# Digital Rights Conference 2025

## Ethical Governance and Digital Rights

Digital Freedom Coalition, a group of civil society organizations in Nepal working on digital freedom, cybersecurity, digital resilience, and internet governance, organized Digital Rights Conference 2025 on December 16 in Kathmandu. The conference- hosted by the Internet Governance Institute with the support from UNESCO- brought together policymakers, judges, civil society members and digital rights experts to discuss how technology, governance, and human rights are connected in Nepal.

Discussions in the conference were focused on digital rights under the Constitution, transparency in algorithms, Artificial Intelligence (AI) policy, and misinformation.

In the opening session, Chief Guest Hon. Justice Dr. Nahakul Subedi of the Supreme Court of Nepal stressed that digital rights are not abstract ideas but should be treated as fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution. He explained that digital rights are closely linked to freedom and equality.

Justice Subedi raised concerns about the growing use of algorithms in decision-making, noting that these systems often lack transparency and human oversight. He said that while courts do not design technology, they must protect people's rights, and thus, technology should support justice, not replace it. He further warned that without ethics and accountability, digital systems could increase digital divide. So, people should know how automated decisions that affect their lives are made, he marked.

Special Guest Ms. Hanaa Singer-Hamdi, UN Resident Coordinator in Nepal spoke about the importance of ethical and human-centric technology. She encouraged participants to think beyond technology infrastructure and focus on how technology affects human lives. She asked critical questions to the floor about the future of technology and stressed that digital progress should serve human values and well-being.

Keynote speaker, Chairman at LIRNEasia Prof. Dr. Rohan Samarajiva compared Nepal and Sri Lanka, pointing out that both countries face problems due to poor governance and political dissatisfaction. He said the main issue is not

technological availability, but limited access to and reach of digital platforms for common people.

He strongly criticized internet shutdowns in both the countries, calling them strict violations of freedom of expression that stifle development. He also highlighted a "governance gap," saying many political leaders and governance sector lack understanding of digital issues, which slows progress in the digital age.

Concluding the inaugural session, Chairperson of the coalition and Freedom Forum's Executive Chief, Taranath Dahal emphasized the need to move from discussion to action. He said that digital spaces have evolved into primary civic space for the young generation and referred to the "Gen Z revolution" as an example of digital activism.

The conference had several panel discussions. In the first discussion- Human rights protection in digital spaces- Hon. Dr. Lily Thapa, Commissioner at the National Human Rights Commission, spoke about how digitalization can be both helpful and harmful. While it improves services, it also creates new risks like online harassment and exploitation, which require careful monitoring.

Former Minister Mr. Pradeep Paudel argued that the government should promote digital platforms rather than ban them, as bans limit freedom of expression and halt digital growth of the nations.

In the second panel discussion- Algorithmic transparency and AI governance- speakers discussed transparency and bias in algorithms. They noted that AI systems often reflect social biases and that regulatory frameworks developed in Global North must be

adapted to contexts of Global South nations like Nepal. The panel stressed the need to balance innovation with accountability and transparency.

Again in third panel- Nepal's AI Policy development- panelists showed that while awareness has improved, major gaps remain between policy plans and real implementation. Speakers emphasized the need for inclusive policymaking, education, and a change in mindset to ensure marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities, are not left behind. President of Disabled Care Nepal Birodh Khatiwada urged the lawmakers to rethink personally whether the laws they draft support all kind of disability keeping their needs in center. The final session focused on misinformation and the importance of digital literacy. Dr. Jana Wilbricht from Bergen University Norway, shared findings of a research that shows more than a half of people struggle to differentiate accurate and false information online. Chief Advisor to the Prime Minister, Ajay Bhadra Khanal, criticized platform bans saying they often create more problems than solutions. He stressed that digital rights, literacy, and access to information must go hand-in-hand.

All the panelists in the session further argued that education and awareness are more effective than strict regulation and that the state should facilitate digital literacy rather than censorship. The conference concluded with closing remarks from the President of Nepal Bar Association, Prof. Dr. Bijaya Prasad Mishra. Participants agreed that Nepal's digital future depends on strong collaboration among government, justice bodies, civil society, and technology developers to ensure technology benefits everyone while protecting fundamental human rights. 🌱



# FF spearheads Citizen Engagement in Nepal's Performance Audit process

As an organization committed to advancing transparency, accountability, governance reforms and citizen participation, FF has taken a lead role in mobilizing civil society organizations (CSOs) for the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) Nepal's participatory performance audit initiative.

Responding swiftly to OAG Nepal's call for CSOs to submit expressions of interest in Citizen Participation in Audits (CPA) for the current fiscal year's audit cycle, FF launched an intensive nationwide outreach effort. The organization shared detailed guidelines and encouraged the concerned CSOs to submit letters of intent, enabling them to contribute directly to strengthening public sector accountability. To maximize reach and effectiveness, FF activated its robust networks, including the Citizen Auditor's Group, which includes more than 90 trained representatives from CSOs across Nepal. It also provided targeted support to the recently formed CSOs' Public Finance Management (PFM) Working Group, offering step-by-step guidance on the application process to promote wider and better-informed involvement.

This mobilization forms part of FF's longstanding commitment to fostering citizen engagement across the entire budget cycle from planning and formulation through execution to oversight and audit. By promoting inclusive PFM reforms, FF works to enhance fiscal



transparency and ensure accountable use of public resources.

The OAG's steering committee previously finalized 16 key topics for the ongoing performance audit cycle, addressing vital aspects of public sector operations. While incorporating CPA into all 16 topics would be logistically demanding, FF advocates for a strategic, targeted approach. Achieving meaningful citizen participation in 7-8 selected topics would substantially improve evidence collection, enrich stakeholder input, boost audit depth and create a replicable model for future cycles.

Nepal's CSOs have expressed strong enthusiasm for CPA, recognizing its value in amplifying

grassroots voices in governance and accountability processes. Challenges persist, however, particularly in terms of limited human resources and funding. FF underscores the potential for OAG to address these gaps by offering capacity-building training, technical support and modest resource assistance to empower CSOs for more impactful participation.

Through proactive facilitation including suggesting relevant audit focus areas, aiding in topic prioritization and guiding the submission of intent letters, Freedom Forum continues to serve as a vital bridge between citizens, CSOs and state institutions. This collaborative effort holds promise for elevating audit quality, building greater public trust and advancing Nepal's ongoing governance and accountability reforms. 🌱

*May this year of 2026 AD inspire everyone to create atmosphere for unobstructed exercise of human rights including freedom of expression and information to pave way to better democracy.*

## Happy New Year 2026

Freedom Forum Family

continued from page 1

Moreover, 22 media persons including three female- were attacked and assaulted while covering the Gen Z movement in different places. Out of 22, three photojournalists and a reporter- were seriously injured with the bullets fired by the security forces in Kathmandu. A female photojournalist was also injured with stones thrown by the protestors in the same incident. Their reporting devices were also damaged.

Two injured journalists- Dipendra Dhungana and Shambhu Dangal- are recovering and have not yet been able to resume journalism fully.

## 1.2 Bagmati Province with majority violations

As in the previous years, the highest number of press freedom violations were recorded in Bagmati Province with a total 49 incidents followed by Madhesh Province (28) and Sudurpashim Province with 12 violations. Similarly, eight incidents took place in Gandaki Province and Lumbini Province each, seven in Karnali Province and two in Koshi Province.

With maximum violations in Bagmati Province, number of affected journalists is also the highest in this province- 53 male

and 12 female journalists. It is followed by 38 journalists (including 3 females) facing violations in Madhesh Province, 11 journalists (including two females) in Sudurpaschim Province, nine each in Gandaki and Karnali Provinces (with one female in Karnali), and seven male reporters in Lumbini Province.

During two different protests held in the federal capital, Kathmandu,, the agitated mob attacked various public properties, including media houses . They set on fire Kantipur Television and publication house, and the Annapurna Post daily building. Various television channels- Avenues, AP1, Prime TV, News Nepal, Himalaya, ABC and Space 4K - were also forced to stop their operation for at least 24 hours.

Looking into attacks on media houses, majority comes from Bagmati Province (14).

## 1.3 Online journalists most targeted

Of the total affected media persons in 114 incidents, the highest- 68 journalists are associated with Online media followed by Television channel (22), Print media (20), Radio (16) and 13 media persons associated

with news agencies and/or attacked while reporting collectively are categorized under 'Others' category.

*A woman reporter with Prime Times Television, Sabina Karki, was injured while covering a teachers' protest in New Baneshwor, Kathmandu, on April 27. Clashes erupted when protesting teachers attempted to breach a police barricade in a restricted area, prompting police baton charges and use of water cannons. Karki sustained severe injury in her eyes after being hit by water cannon .*

With a rise of vibrant digital spheres promoting digital media, FF has recorded an increasing number of attacks on journalists associated with online media. It is reflected in the media monitoring report this year as well- a significant rise as compared to that in 2024. It is again followed by television journalists.

This data correlates with the rising number of online news portals in Nepal. According to Press Council Nepal, total 5,155 news portals have been formally listed till mid-October 2025.

## 1.4 Hostile elements

Out of 139 affected journalists, 34 faced intimidation specifically from public officials . They were most often intimidated for reporting on corruption and malpractices at the public offices.

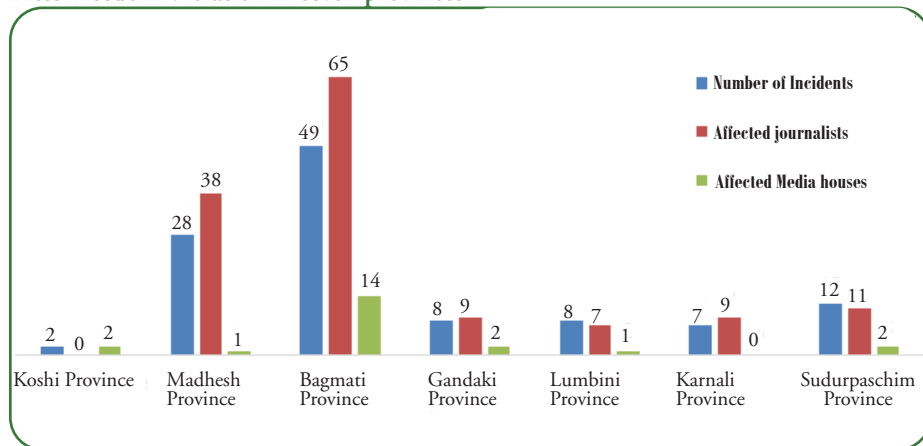
*Political cadre registered a complaint against Sheersha Khabar's reporter Dinesh Parajuli at the local police office in Saptari, on January 23, over his critical reporting on the President of a political party. Parajuli was also threatened of assault before the complaint.*

This number is followed by 29 media persons victimized by the political leader or cadres for their critical reporting. Similarly, 24 journalists faced violation from security persons and five from criminals and goons.

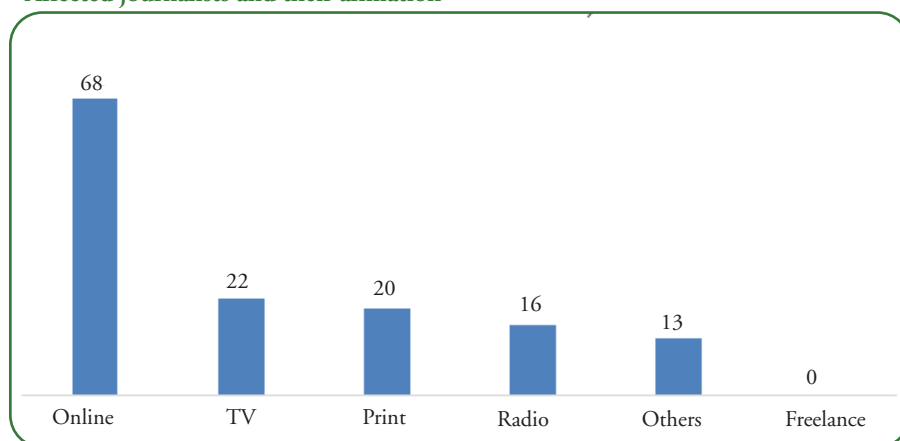
However, the highest number of journalists (47) faced violation over their reporting from general public, local contractor, entrepreneur, private entities, unknown sources, etc. in different incidents. These are mentioned under 'Others' category in the figure.

*On July 7, Htpkhabar.com chairperson Diwakar Sah and cameraperson Manoj Pariyar were manhandled and had their equipment damaged while reporting alleged financial irregularities at the Infrastructure Development Office in Madhesh Province. Despite prior coordination with authorities and security persons present at the scene, a group claiming to be a consumers' committee obstructed and assaulted the journalists . Following*

### Press Freedom Violation in seven provinces



### Affected journalists and their affiliation



*the incident, Sah fled to Kathmandu for few days seeking safety.*

This year, total 18 journalists faced violations from protestors when they were covering different protests and demonstrations.

### 1.5 Violation trend in five years

The annual trend this year showed the number of violations standing highest of last five years from 2020 to 2025. Further, the number of journalists affected this year has also increased notably from last year.

Moreover, the number of female journalists facing violations is increasing every year, highlighting the urgent need for stronger safety measures for women in journalism. In terms of news coverage, media persons reporting on social issues- particularly protests- faced the highest number of violations (37), followed by those covering politics (15) and corruption (16) among others.

## 2. Impunity watch

Cases of impunity for crimes against journalists awaiting investigation and justice were not addressed in 2025 as well. The mechanisms responsible for adjudication of these cases- the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Commission for Investigation of Enforced Disappeared Persons (CIEDP)- got appointments of commissioners and chairs on May 2024 and started receiving complaints from victim families. But justice process has not gained pace, thereby dashing hope for reduction of impunity with victims' trust in decline.

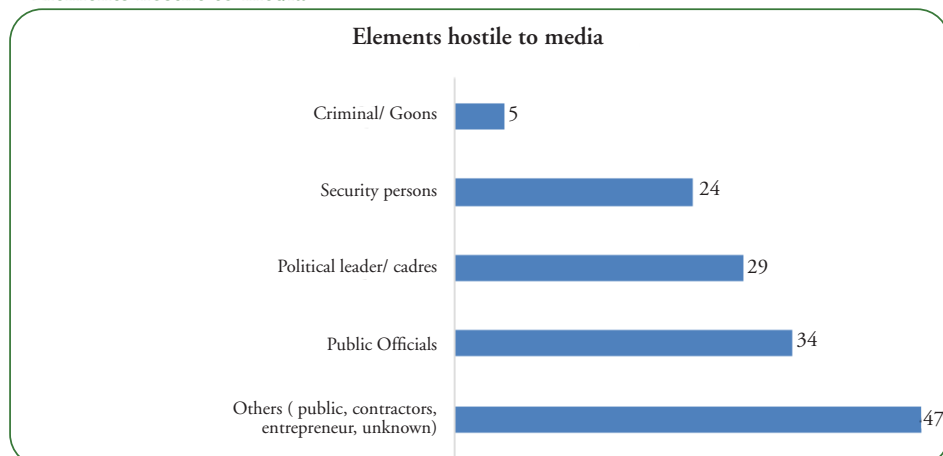
However, to a positive note, the interim government placed after the Gen Z movement declared a dead journalist Suresh Rajak as a 'martyr' on December 8 and provided employment to Rajak's wife as a support. Four of the injured journalists- Shambhu Dangel, Dipendra Dhungana, Shyam Shrestha and Umesh Karki- during Gen Z movement were also honored and provided monetary support.

## 3. Law and Policy watch

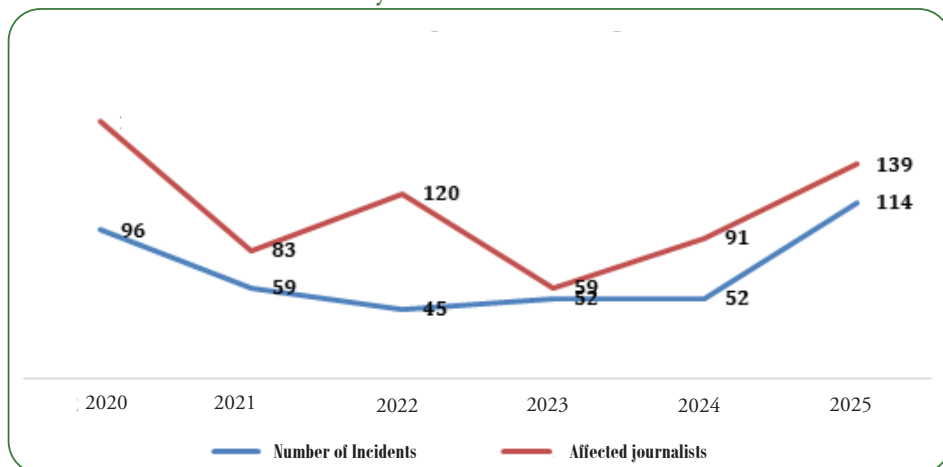
This year failed to see any development for overall law and policy environment. On a positive note, the Government of Nepal endorsed the National Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy on August 11 and inaugurated the National AI Center on November 10. This policy outlines specific measures such as awareness-raising, orientation, literacy, skill development, and capacity-building programs on AI at the federal, provincial, and local levels.

Moreover, the Printing and Publication Act, 1991 was amended on July 30. Its fourth

### Elements hostile to media



### Press Freedom violations in five years



chapter dealing with print and online media regulation requires online media outlets to register and renew their registration through the concerned district authorities, instead of the previous provision under the Department of Information and Broadcasting. This amendment raised serious concerns among media professionals and added a financial burden to the online media outlets.

The regulation based on this act has a separate section for online media regulation. According to the rules 8 (a) and (b) the online media should pay Rs. 5,000 for registration and Rs 2500 for renewal process. The registration will be valid for one fiscal year.

Furthermore, authority for online media regulation by the Press Council Nepal has also been transferred to the local administration, which is viewed as a regressive move.

An independent regulatory mechanism is essential to ensure fair and credible regulation of online media. Regarding the Public Service

Broadcasting (PSB) Act, a year has passed since its approval and implementation on October 8, 2024. Even after a year of enactment, the meaningful transformation of state-run media- Radio Nepal and Nepal Television- into independent public service broadcasters is awaited. The regulation still contains control oriented provisions. Provisions on editorial independence and an ombudsman mechanism for grievance handling are urgent needs in the PSB regulation. The PSB Board is also yet to form a Governing Council.

Amid these developments, the House of Representatives was dissolved and an interim government formed following the Gen Z movement that took place in Nepal on September 8–9, 2025. As many as 30 bills- including the Media Council Bill, and the Information Technology and Cyber Security Bill went to 'zero' status, causing utmost uncertainty.

Similarly, Social Network Management and Operation Bill has been pending at the National Assembly, upper house. Mass Media

Bill was also waiting entry to parliament.

## 4. Acute financial crisis

Nepali media facing severe financial crisis since Covid-19 has met further crisis with a loss of data and valuable infrastructure during the protests in 2025. Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) claims 19 media organizations across Nepal suffered financial losses worth approximately NPR 599 million. Similarly, as per the details shared by the media organizations with FNJ, personal losses of the media persons account to approximately NPR 178 million.

## 5. Digital sphere and artistic freedom

With 92.39 population penetration on mobile internet, approximately 72.8% of the population aged 18-34 years are active in social media in Nepal. Contrary to this, Nepal Government took a strict action to ban around two dozens of social media platforms from operating in Nepal on September 4. The government demanded each platforms must designate a point of contact, a Resident Grievance Handling Officer and a Monitoring officer to ensure compliance with self-regulation.

As per government decision, Nepal Telecommunications Authority on July 18 issued a directive to all telecom and internet service providers to ban Telegram App, citing the application's increasing use in online fraud, money laundering, and other serious cybercrimes as primary reasons for the ban.

Banning of these platforms and rising corruption contribute to a build against government move, to which, Gen Z youth took a lead. These bans were lifted following the Gen Z movement.

Moreover, general public and media persons felt unsafe in the social media platforms for exercising their rights to freedom of expression. Journalists were abused and threatened for sharing posts related to activities of public offices and services .

Flood of misinformation and disinformation on social media not only polluted entire information ecosystem but also played a significant role to discredit media, during the Gen Z movement. These posts also contributed to trigger panic and violence at different places of the country .

The Film Censor Board censored two movies: Rajaganj and Tandavam. They were ordered to remove the scenes before getting permission certificate. Rajaganj movie team was asked to remove scenes containing statement by the then Prime Minister .

An actress faced massive backlash for her statements during an interview given to a television channel. It was sheer violation of her right to free expression .

Citizens making critical posts on social media platforms were also arrested in several incidents.

## 6. Journalists' safety mechanism strengthened

To a positive note, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) central and provincial mechanisms for freedom of expression and journalists' safety worked on protection and promotion of freedom of expression in 2025. With the formation of provincial mechanisms in 2024, these mechanisms were further strengthened with orientations on freedom of expression monitoring, keeping record and investigation at province levels.

The central mechanism- Steering Committee has decided to include budget for these mechanisms in the upcoming yearly program plan, form a five-member mechanism in each district in coordination with district chapters of Federation of Nepali Journalists, Nepal Bar Association and the NGO Federation.

Further, NHRC has mainstreamed freedom of expression issues into its regular human rights monitoring. Lately, the media monitoring team at NHRC has been deployed across the nation to study the status of FoE, press freedom and journalists' safety. The team is planning to develop a checklist as a standard format for regular FoE monitoring and annual report publication. NHRC also discussed with the journalists injured during the reporting of Gen Z movement and assured them of full support in justice seeking process.

## 7. Emergency support to victim journalists

The journalists seriously injured while covering the Gen Z movement on September 8 were provided support for their treatment and equipment damage. Nepal Government honored Dipendra Dhungana, Shyam Shrestha and Umesh Karki with cash prizes worth NPR

25000 each and NPR 100000 to Shambhu Dangal. FNJ supported these journalists with NPR 25,000 each and Press Council Nepal awarded them with Rs. 10,000 each.

In addition, the international organizations like the Free Press Unlimited (FPU), the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) and the Media and Cooperation and Transition (MICT) also provided emergency support to the journalists- Dipendra Dhungana and Shambhu Dangal- for their treatment and equipment damage. Journalist Santosh Deuja, whose residence was vandalized and set on fire during the Gen Z movement, received support from FPU. Similarly, journalist Gopal Dahal was provided relocation support to continue his work from Kathmandu after being displaced from Dharan due to repeated threats from the mayor's supporters. Another journalist Jiyalal Sah received litigation support from FPU for cases he has been facing at District Court Parsa. Freedom Forum facilitated the request and support process to these journalists.

## Trends And Analyses

- With rising youth frustration towards government resulting in demonstration and protests, a specific trend of this year, was severe attacks on photographers and their equipment. The multimedia journalists, who are on the fields for news coverage, faced more intimidations.
- FF prepared a special report on the impact on freedom of expression and journalists' safety in the wake of September 8-9 Gen Z movement in Nepal. The protest called by the youths of Gen Z group in the federal capital, Kathmandu, was initially peaceful on September 8, but in the afternoon, the youths demanding the lift in social media ban and good governance became victims of indiscriminate firing opened by the security persons. It caused as many as 19 deaths till late night on September 8.
- The attack on media houses eroded sense of security among journalists. They were forced to work under panicked situation.
- Populist politics took a heavy toll on media, flaring narrative against mainstream media and inciting violence and attacks. The misinformation and disinformation on the mainstream media content and journalists was further augmented during the crises where the entire security was paralyzed.
- The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) visited some media houses which suffered much in the protest occurred on September 9. The NHRC mechanism

on freedom of expression and safety of journalists provided orientation to the provincial mechanisms. Even the journalists in need were enquired by the province and central level mechanisms of NHRCs.

. However, a further active role of NHRC will be helpful to protect and promote FoE and journalists' rights in difficult time

- The government declared martyr to a journalist Suresh Rajak who died while covering the pro-monarchy protest on March 28 and provided monetary support to four journalists injured during Gen Z movement. However, further supportive and positive roles are expected from the government for the cause of FoE and journalists' rights in adverse situation.
- Gen Z movement toppled the government, causing the new government in place that dissolved the House of Representatives, the lower house of federal parliament. With this, the status of dozens of bills, including those relating to mass communications and journalists' rights were rendered zero. Media reform came to stand still.
- Although the enforcement of Social Security Fund (SSF) scheme in state-run media comes in a positive development, many other journalists and employees at private media are waiting for this facility for their financial security.
- The contents generated with artificial intelligence (AI) went viral, creating utmost confusion among the consumers of digital information. The ill-intended content including hate speech and gender-based violence made round on social media, especially during the tense political unrest and foreign visits of dignitaries.
- Efforts of legacy media remained inadequate to dispel the confusion created by the misinformation and disinformation over pressing issues. Even the political cadres resorted to amplifying AI-generated contents to create narrative in particular favor, which ultimately invited criticism.
- Incendiary remark of political leaders gave impetus to the spread of hate content online.
- It was positive that number of internet-based media, YouTube channels have increased lately. Although the shift towards digital media is encouraging in number, it is partly a measure to avoid financial burden of running legacy media and lure to new model of income. But, professional values are eroding to the extent that it has caused discredit.
- The financial crisis has continued to the legacy media, especially the community

radios. Resources decline and reduction in project-based programs resulted to decrease income. As many as 35 community radios were closed, according to the ACORAB (Association of Community Radio Broadcasters' Nepal). There is massive retrenchment in the running ones as well.

- Although the local media emerged vibrantly in the wake of federalism, they are badly co-opted by the local governments, thereby rendering media to lose credibility and trust. Several issues surrounding local government, good governance and development activities are left underreported or unreported due to this. It not only ruins media professionalism but also kills local democracy and fuels non-transparency.
- The liberal approach from judiciary is expected for better protection of journalists' rights and safety.
- The right to information (RTI) campaigners and activists found their role shrinking. The intervention from the National Information Commission (NIC) to expand RTI regime was slow off the mark.
- It was evident that the more the protest and political unrests, the more the vulnerable the media were. The March protest and September 8-9 movement exposed media vulnerability.
- It is positive that Nepali media have gradually begun utilizing AI to create relevant photos and videos for stories. Similarly, AI has been helpful to journalists to find new ideas for writing stories, summarization of long stories, and presentation in an impressive way. Translation and editing are also assisted much by AI. However, hasty use and ultimate trust to AI is detrimental, eroding public trust in media content and journalists.
- Chasing after viewership, professional media practices and ethics have eroded, especially in new media, creating gross confusion among information consumers.

## Observation And Forecast

- With the election to the House of Representatives (HoR), lower house of the federal parliament, scheduled for March 5, 2026, political campaigning would be intensified, thereby creating opportunities for active reporting by the media. However, in case of fragile security and political protests, the media persons would face attacks.
- In view of the past incidents where media houses and journalists on fields suffered worst, safety measures along with adequate training is imperative to field reporters.

Both the media houses and reporters need to pay adequate attention to avoid untoward activities against them.

- The political polarization- new or the alternative force on the one hand and the parties with legacy- is likely to emerge in a bid to consolidate their strength in view of the coming election. At such, the media houses must be aware to remain independent, fair and professional, to cater right and credible news and information to the consumers and contribute to functional democracy.
- However, manipulation of media with the use of technology can not be denied. The political parties and media are equally important actors in a democracy, so parties must realize the fact that manipulation of media would ultimately dent democratic values.
- Practicing self-regulation and professional values is imperative to protect media credibility.
- Adequate training to media houses on modern technology, especially to navigate digital spheres and utilize AI is a pressing need. Both the journalists and employees at all media must be equipped with AI so that they would be able to protect themselves and media credibility while staying away from downsides of AI and intimidation waged by other elements with misuse of AI.
- Moreover, the insurance of journalists and their equipment has become an acute need in view of the serious attack upon them during the Gen Z movement.
- The more the protest and political unrest, the more the vulnerable the media.
- The code of conduct to be issued by the Election Commission for the upcoming HoR election, should facilitate journalists' rights to free reporting rather than keeping provision to suppress independent media in the name of election integrity. Journalism's watchdog role should not be dented by election code of conduct. Free media is imperative to help ensure electoral integrity.
- Proper training is essential to security persons mobilized in mob control and protest so that attacks on journalists covering tense situation would decline.
- State institutes' transparent and accountable functions are essential to help create an atmosphere free for journalism.
- Accountability of tech platforms can be helpful in fostering FoE and journalists' rights.
- Stable politics with strict adherence to good governance, democracy and human rights are urgency to build an atmosphere conducive to media freedoms and journalists' rights. 🌱

# FF participates in peer workshop for Open and accountable budgeting

Representatives from Freedom Forum (FF), Subash Dahal and Aruna Adhikari, participated in the COAB Peer Learning Convening, held from September 30 to October 2, 2025. The program took place in Istanbul, Turkey.

Organized by the International Budget Partnership (IBP), a Washington, D.C.-based organization committed to promoting transparent and accountable public budgeting globally, the in-person gathering convened representatives from various IBP offices worldwide, along with civil society partners from nine countries: Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Jamaica, Kyrgyz Republic, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, and The Gambia. Participants from Madagascar were unable to attend due to political turmoil and a curfew in the country's capital.

The convening centered on reflecting on Phase II of IBP's **Collaborating for Open and Accountable Budgets (COAB)** initiative. Launched in 2020, COAB has supported civil society organizations (CSOs) in building capacity, conducting research, and advocating for reforms in public finance management (PFM). Over three intensive days, participants and IBP representatives shared lessons learned, celebrated successes, addressed common challenges, and outlined a forward-looking path toward more inclusive budget governance.

Key highlights included in-depth discussions of case studies demonstrating the COAB model's

tangible impact. One case focused on **Sri Lanka and Nepal**, illustrating how capacity-building and collaborative strategies empowered diverse CSOs to engage effectively in PFM reforms and influence policy outcomes. In Nepal's context, this has strengthened civil society efforts to advocate for greater budget transparency and citizen participation amid persistent governance challenges.

Another case examined advancements in restrictive environments, drawing on experiences from **Cambodia, Kyrgyz Republic, and Rwanda**. It emphasized how fostering trust through informal engagements and collaborative approaches can create openings for fiscal reforms, even under political constraints. These narratives underscored that persistence and strategic alliances produce results across diverse settings. A third case from **Tanzania** showcased how CSOs capitalized on political opportunities to drive concrete changes, including the reinstatement of **Public Expenditure Reviews**—an essential mechanism for aligning government spending with national priorities in critical sectors such as agriculture, education, and health.

Throughout the sessions, participants reflected on COAB's core goals: building diverse reform coalitions involving CSOs, grassroots organizations, technical partners, government reformers, and international actors. Field evidence shows that such ecosystems enhance accountability, broaden participatory spaces, and produce strong evidence to support meaningful change. Discussions explored ways to extend

beyond COAB's foundational phase toward a shared vision of enduring budget advocacy that improves how governments raise and allocate public resources. The convening cultivated a profound sense of community. Participants connected deeply, valued one another's journeys, and exchanged innovative practices—ranging from data-driven advocacy and seizing political windows to building trust in challenging contexts. They openly shared obstacles, including restrictive policies and resource limitations, while identifying future opportunities to refine the COAB model, align it with national priorities, and advance their organizations' agendas.

As professionals deeply engaged in budget advocacy in their home countries, all attendees departed Istanbul with renewed ownership of the approach. Concrete examples and lessons will enable CSOs to build capacity strategically, pursue targeted research, and advocate more effectively to influence decision-makers. The event reinforced a fundamental principle: understanding public budgets is the critical first step in transforming public resource governance for the benefit of all citizens. IBP's initiative continues to grow this global network of champions, reminding participants that progress is achievable through cross-border collaboration. Freedom Forum expresses deep gratitude for the opportunity to participate in this journey and looks forward to applying these insights in Nepal to advance more open, accountable budgets at home and contribute to similar efforts worldwide. 🌱



# 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>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
	Open Budget Survey	International Budget Partnership	17th March 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 amounting <b>Rs. 5,85,571.80 (October to December 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		

## FF in international forum:

Executive Chief Taranath Dahal participated in Global Investigative Journalism Conference (GIJC) from November 20-24, 2025. The conference was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. GIJC is world-class gathering of investigative reporters, editors, and media organizations

across the globe. It serves as a vital platform for sharing tools, techniques, and best practices in investigative reporting, with sessions focused on data journalism, cross-border collaboration, media ethics, and press freedom.

This year Global Forum for Media Development (GFMD) also convened an official meeting to announce its newly selected Steering Committee during the conference. Freedom Forum is a member of GFMD.

# Press killings in 2025 Equal record high of 126 killed in 2024

December 10, 2025 9:00 AM EST

**Update:** The total number of journalists and media workers killed in 2025 is now 127, exceeding the 2024 record.

New York, December 10, 2025

With more than three weeks still to go to the end of the year, the number of journalists and media workers killed worldwide in 2025 already equals 2024's record figures, data gathered by the Committee to Protect Journalists shows.

Led by Israel's attacks on journalists in Gaza, Iran, and Yemen, the number of journalists and media workers killed globally so far in 2025 stands at 126. An increase in killings in Sudan, Mexico, Ukraine, and the Philippines also drove up this year's total.

"At a time of rising global instability, access to accurate information is more important than ever yet journalists continue to be killed in record numbers," said CPJ CEO Jodie Ginsberg. "In too many cases, those responsible for journalists' deaths are getting away with murder. Another record year of killings show not enough is being done globally to tackle attacks on the press."

Israel has killed almost 250 journalists since the Israel-Gaza war began in 2023, more journalists than have been killed by any other nation since CPJ began keeping records in 1992.



This year, Israel was responsible for killing at least 86 journalists and media workers (2024: 85), according to CPJ's research, including after the October ceasefire. In many cases, journalists were deliberately targeted. CPJ has repeatedly called on international authorities to hold Israel to account for its actions in what human rights groups and U.N. experts agree is a genocide.

Ongoing and escalating conflicts have caused a recent surge in civilian killings worldwide: In Sudan, nine press members were killed, taking the total killed to 15 in a two-year civil war in which journalists have been abducted, raped, and forced to flee by the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces. In Ukraine, the Russian military killed four journalists, an increase from 2024, when one death was recorded.

Elsewhere, gang violence and political corruption are driving a rise in unsolved killings of journalists. In Mexico, six deaths were recorded in 2025, up from five last year. In the Philippines, killings rose from zero in 2024 to three. In Mexico, there have been no arrests for the 2025 assassinations, and in the Philippines there was only one arrest – but no confirmation that the assassinations were in connection with the journalists' work. These countries, along with Iraq, India, and Pakistan, have continued their consistent record of journalist killings in 2025, one that has lasted for nearly three decades.

Source: <https://cpj.org/2025/12/press-killings-in-2025-equal-record-high-of-126-killed-in-2024/>

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