

Improvement in Press Freedom

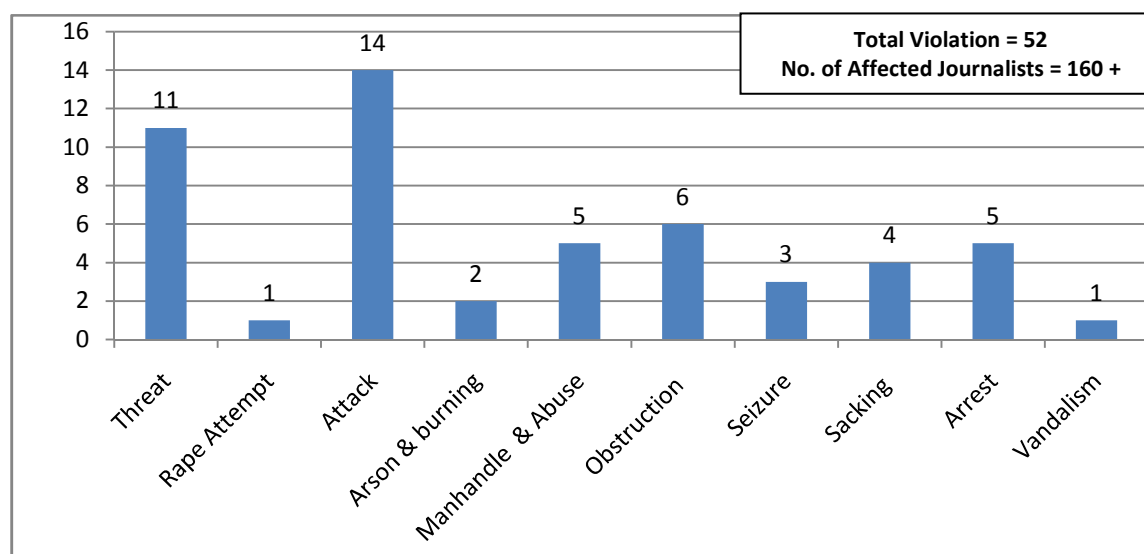
New Media at Receiving End

World Press Freedom Day Report 2014*

- I. Despite the year of the general election, the incidents of press freedom violation have radically declined in Nepal. Freedom Forum recorded a total of **52** press freedom violations in the monitoring period- a year from May 2013 to April 2014. Last year, the violations stood 131. The improvement is because of comparatively stable politics the country had.
- II. The strict vigilance of the State over the emerging new media (news portal, facebook, twitter, blogging) - a new trend in Nepali media- is quite disappointing. Three journalists were detained for news updates in the new media. It points out urgent need of policy that encompasses the rights of journalists working in online media and speaks further on social media.
- III. Impunity is not fully ended but the independent judiciary and Labour court has helped a lot to reduce it. Various journalists arrested by security agencies have been released due to prompt action of the courts. So, the level of impunity is positive to some extent.
- IV. There has been no specific works on policy reform regarding media and communications sectors, which therefore has slowed the pace for media democratization.
- V. Lack of professionalism and bad practices are continuous thereby questioning the news credibility. For enhancing professionalism with quality journalism, journalists too have enough roles to play. Respect to code of conduct cannot be denied.
- VI. Remuneration to the working journalists is very low (many unpaid and working without appointment letters). It has affected the professional security of journalists. Here, media owners' respect to the rights of working journalists is essential. Only cooperation between the media owners and employees can best utilize media as effective platform for freedom of expression.
- VII. Lately and importantly, Nepali media began facing question of transparency in investment. The issue is emerged again. It suggests- as in other sectors, media, which advocates for rights, should be transparent in its own investment so that it would garner public trust.

- VIII. Out of the total 52 violations, highest are attacks (14). Categorizing the attack, one is injury, one murder attempt and 12 attacks. Similarly, total threats are 11. Under this, threats of physical attacks are 7 and death threats 4. Obstructions stand 6, while arrest, and manhandle and verbal abuse 5 each. News paper burning and arson are one each. During this period, 4 journalists were sacked from job while a rape attempt was made on a female journalist.
- IX. The attacks, threats, manhandles and verbal abuse to journalists, and newspaper burning, vandalism have come from political parties' cadres, security persons (Nepal Army, Nepal Police), government employees, unknown person, businesspersons, goons and even from the media owner.

Press Freedom Violation from May 2013 to April 2014



Some important events of the year:

- I. Two online journalists, Sushil Pant and Santosh Bhattarai, were arrested for news from the capital city, Kathmandu, on June 20, 2013. Police arrested guest editor to an online daily www.nepaliheadlines.com, Sushil Pant, and its owner Santosh Bhattarai, reasoning a news story their media published about a women's college was against Electronic Transaction Act. Later, they were released with the campaigning of the civil society organization including Freedom Forum arguing that journalists could not be arrested by police merely because of news writing.

- II. Dinesh Acharya, editor of Share Bazaar weekly was detained for a day over the facebook post of a news story his weekly published. On September 30, 2013, police arrested him over the complaint an industrialist lodged against facebook post, which the police argued as against Electronic Transaction Act. Later, he was freed. Both of these arrests were misuse of Electronic Transaction Act which harassed the working journalists.
- III. An Army person Upendra Basnet made a rape attempt on a female journalist in Khotang, an eastern hilly district of Nepal, on April 4, 2014. The radio journalist was returning from her office. Later, army person Basnet was arrested by police and handed over to Nepal Army.
- IV. To a positive note on impunity, a master mind behind the murder of Uma Singh, a Janakpur-based journalist was arrested from Dhangadhi, a district in the far western region of Nepal on September 16, 2013, almost four years after the incident. Uma Singh, reporter with a local FM radio- Janakpur Today- was hacked to death on 11 January 2009.
- V. Another noteworthy decision came for the rights for the working journalists- that is- a media house was asked by the Labour Court to restore the sacked journalists and pay them proper remuneration. Nepal Republic Media did not extend the contract period of five journalists- Manoj Dahal, Madhav Dhungel, Govind Pariyar, Nabin Aryal and Shyam Bhatt since 12 February 2013. But with complaint at the Labour Court the Media house, on January 2014, was ordered to restore them and pay the salaries they were made to quit the office.

In conclusion, Nepal is still in transition because it is yet to bring the new constitution ensuring every fundamental rights of the citizen. Therefore, it needs effective vigilance whether free press, freedom of expression and access to information with broader scope is guaranteed in the new constitution. Effective monitoring of media for free press is equally important, for political debates on pressing contents of new constitution on the run-up to the promulgation of the constitution many invite demonstrations for rights where journalists can witness threats and attacks as it was in the last year.

