

Wither Press Freedom? More Journalists Targeted Lately

“With the formation of multiple governments and authorities decentralized and devolved in the federal system, there was hope that journalists' role for informed society and campaign of public transparency, democratic system would grow more. But, exactly reverse- this hope is crushed as the places, persons, points are multiple to threaten and attack journalists, and challenge press freedom.”

It was what a journalist visiting the central capital, Kathmandu, from a province shared with the Freedom Forum. It was further seconded by others who talked to the policy attempts and practices that are intended to suppress freedom of expression and information regime. This observation of working journalists clearly signals how the press freedom and journalists' safety situation would unfold in the days ahead.

For the free press to contribute to democracy, depressing situation can not be imaged. But the practices and policy draft procedures in the recent times have damped the hope of favourable environment where journalists' rights would be protected; civil space remained unfettered and informed citizenry became vibrant in the new system- federalism- that is largely expected to empower citizens.

Journalism is always an opposition of the government in a sense that it keeps on criticizing weaknesses and wrong activities of the government. So, journalists are the watchdogs that expose financial irregularities, corruption, administrative malfeasance, social ills and malaises among others, so that public are well informed, government is corrected, public officials held accountable. But for criticizing government activities, journalists are threatened of life, attacked and impunity relating to crimes against journalist remained unaddressed.



FM Station manager Som Diyali thrashed by unknown gang still waiting justice. Photo: Rajan Singh

FF has this time three stories of press freedom violation- merciless attack, arrest and court case and harassment to journalist from three different provinces, which aptly substantiate the appalling observation made by the province journalists. To note together, the first three months of 2019 alone recorded 27 press freedom violations.

These three major stories warrant analyses.

A. Ganesh BK, a young journalist who is an editor with <http://saipalpost.com> online media was arrested by security officials from remote Bajhang district on January 3. He was arrested over news written in his website that disclosed the involvement of security officials in smuggling of drugs in the district.

The security officials arrested journalist BK at 4:00 am in the morning and brought him to

the central capital city Kathmandu after eight hours suing a case of 'cyber crime'. He was booked under Section 47 of the Electronic Transaction Act, 2008.

He was kept in Teku Police Range for 14 days and later released under court order. Freedom Forum represented this case and helped him on the humanitarian ground as emergency support to the journalist.

B. Similarly, Som Diyali, a journalist from Sarlahi district was attacked by an unknown gang on 12 February. Diyali was mercilessly beaten by two persons in a remote place- one and half kilometers away from the Radio Sarlahi office. He was invited there to have tea talk by a person named Balganga Imran Khan where two unknown persons suddenly attacked him from behind.

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Message from Executive Chief

End Party-O-Cracy Save Democracy

Exactly a year back, with the onset of this government, Freedom Forum had shown concern over the draft of the mass communications bill. Upon the awareness of the draft, FF had maintained that the provisions on the draft could curtail the freedom of expression and press freedom. On numerous points, it showed the weaknesses and underscored the need of correction. It was also submitted to the concerned ministry.

A year after now, the struggle for FoE friendly laws and policies with untiring advocacy for transparency, openness, consultation and participation of wider stakeholders in the law and policy making process is continued. It is continued because hostility to FoE practitioners and journalists is growing. During this time, government made several attempts to curtail FoE, to control media, to influence journalists which drew wider criticism. The latest attempt came through the bill on information technology which intended to block social media in the name of revenue flight. With the growing penetration of internet in Nepal, the number of social media users is increased day by day, thereby propelling their voices and concerns over the issues of public importance. They are putting forth their views on government activities. But with the adverse decisions coming to tame the public, overwhelming criticism is natural. Instead of creating digital/internet literacy to curb misuse of the social media, the attempts to foil healthy criticism are deplorable. As the FoE, fundamental pillar of democracy, is attacked one after another, one can say that Nepal's democracy is changed into the 'guided democracy'. Framing harsh law clearly indicates that there won't be the rule of law but rule by law, which is a severe threat to democratic values.

With the federal set up in place after the promulgation of new constitution, all seven provinces and the central government are making new laws and policies to suit the changed system- federalism, which is indeed a mandatory as the laws and policies made for the unitary system were for serving limited people and concentrated to the capital. But, in the name of good governance, the attempts to formulate the laws and policies that are directed against citizens' freedom are quite abhorring. Whether it was replacement of decades long Civil Code with the new one by the federal government or the right to information policy by the provincial government, these alarmed and agitated citizens. Journalists' right to free reporting, photographing were curtailed by the Code while the definition of public agencies has excluded political parties. Not regarding political parties as public agencies means any activities done by the political parties and leaders can not be questioned and seeking transparency discouraged. At a time when the political culture is fast eroding, blocking citizen's right to question political parties with the use of RTI law is to continue political highhandedness. And it is obvious that the political parties dominating government and national affairs would be unbridled to act arbitrarily. Another noteworthy here is Nepal's democracy is changing into party-o-cracy. With the communist party in majority, sheer disrespect and discredit to media with practice and policy, word and speech, is further fostering party-o-cracy, thereby weakening democracy. It means other elements of democracy as independent judiciary, free press, citizens' participation, rule of law are gradually getting shadowed by the political activities. The culture of openness is sharply eroding as the government has avoided consultation and participation of wider stakeholders in law and policy making. Undoubtedly, political parties are also the significant elements of democracy, but the non-cooperation and intolerance meted out against other elements including free press are the maneuver to ruin the achievements of democratic movements.

To remind again, FF has continued regular monitoring of FoE violations, journalists' rights, policy and law making relating to FoE and press freedom in central and provincial governments. The monitoring has recorded more than two dozens of press freedom violation in the recent three months, which signals where the FoE atmosphere is heading and how depressing it would be in future. Keeping this record and above mentioned intolerant practice in mind, further activism and advocacy with close observation, critical analyses and comprehensive understanding on the unfolding developments in FoE sectors are in the to do list. FF is clear in its stand for FoE and free press friendly environment, address to impunity relating to crimes against journalists, transparency and accountability in the public agencies, working in public policies and governance reform, so that climate of democracy would not be polluted.



- Tara Nath Dahal

Adopt OGP for Investment

In the wake of the Investment Summit the government was holding in a bid to draw foreign investment in Nepal, a group of civil society organizations (CSOs) working on transparency and accountability urged the government again to join Open Government Partnership (OGP)-a global campaign for developing trust between government and citizens.

During an interaction organized by Freedom Forum and Accountability Lab on 'OGP and Climate Investment' in the central capital, Kathmandu, on March 28, CSO leaders called for the government to opt OGP for securing better and reliable investment climate which could pave way for economic progress that the country is in desperate need.

OGP stands for transparency, accountability, participation and technological innovation which are imperative to enable environment of investment, the speakers underscored.

Country Representative of Accountability Lab, Narayan Adhikari, suggested the government that it signed OGP to show its commitment to improved transparency and accountability, which play vital role to bring investment in the country. To increase investment, OGP creates further conducive atmosphere, he argued.

Similarly, Freedom Forum Executive Chief, Taranath Dahal, said the availability of data and information along with ownership transparency are imperative factors to build trust among investors and government which obviously help ensure investment climate. Trust matters a lot and it can be created with the adoption of the OGP. Executive Chief Dahal also underscored the need of further activism of OGP campaigners and advocates to bolster OGP debates and discussion.

Researcher Sanjeeb Ghimire opined that Nepal can improve its image with rising status on Doing Business Index with the adoption of OGP, because the variables in both are similar. Currently, Nepal's ranks very low in the Doing Business Index, he added.

Similarly, Krishna Sapkota viewed that Nepal's image in foreign community could be boosted with the improvement in Corruption Perception Index. "If Nepal's status on this Index improves, it helps create investment friendly atmosphere. OGP support for improvement on it," he argued.

Moreover, Chairperson of CAHURAST Nepal, Bishnu Pukar Shrestha, also highlighted the need for the country to adopt the culture of open government and collaboration within citizens, which not only help unlock development potential but also invite foreign capital. The country is in need of investment where the conductive atmosphere in policy and practice are equally significant, Shrestha argued.

Speaking on the occasion, NGO Federation's General Secretary Ram Prasad Subedi, SAP Nepal's Executive Director Narendra Joshi, and Posta KC of GOGO Foundation called for the government to improve business environment for the prosperity of the country. Advocate Bishnu Luitel however said several loopholes in laws and attitudinal problems in Nepali bureaucracy were some major hurdles behind Nepal's inability to draw ample foreign investment.

Press Freedom Violations

PROVINCE 1

ATTACK BY POLITICAL CADRE

Tejan Khadka, journalist associated with hamrakura.com, an online news portal was attacked by a political cadre for writing news against him. The incident occurred at Urlabari, Morang, at mid-night on 19 Januray. Morang lies in Province 1.

According to the information received by FF, the journalist was attacked in his own house by Kamal Fyak, son of Ward Chair Bam Bahadur Fyak. Journalist was called outside his home and manhandled by the cadre. Even the mother of the journalist received injury while rescuing her son. Journalist was attacked as he had written series of news on the corruption the Ward chair involved. After the incident, cadre Kamal Fyak was arrested by security officials.

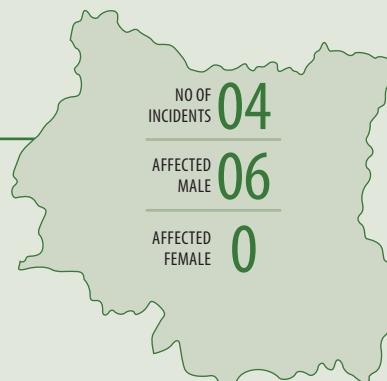
THREAT

A hospital owner issued threat against journalists for writing news on the ongoing fast unto death of Dr. Govinda KC. The incident occurred in Illam, Province 1, on January 15. Illam district reporter for Kantipur daily, Biplab Bhattarai, among others were reportedly threatened by B and C Hospital's owner Durga Prasain for writing the news on Dr. KC's 16th fast unto death.

Dr KC began fast unto death from January 9 for the amendment and enforcement of debated National Medical Education Bill as per his recommendation and the agreement the government had made with him earlier. As per the information received at Freedom Forum, reporter Bhattarai stated that the reason behind threatening is that if Dr. KC's demands were addressed, it would affect the hospital owner Prasain and his business.

JOURNO VERBALLY ABUSED FOR SEEKING INFROMATION

Journalists in Sankhuwasabha district were misbehaved in a program conducted by One Heart Worldwide organization. The incident occurred on 17 March. Sankhuwasabha is a hilly district situated in Province 1 of Nepal.



According to information shared by FF's representative, Bikram Niraula, journalist Sujan Bajracharya from Nepal Television, Dipendra Shakya from Kantipur TV and Baawin Karki from Avenues TV jointly were verbally abused by district coordinator of the organization, Rajib Kumar Sharma for seeking information amidst the program. He spoke foul words to the journalists and denied information.

The journalists had demanded information regarding the budget expenses by the organization in the district. One Heart Worldwide organization is an organization working for the health sector reforms. However, their work in the district is reportedly questionable.

ATTACK BY POLITICAL PARTY

Nikesh Baral, a journalist associated with www.ujyalopradesh.com news portal was assaulted by political party's student wing at Sundar Haraicha of Morang district on March 29.

Journalist Baral was assaulted while taking videos of the protest organized by Nepal Student Union, the student wing of major opposition, Nepali Congress. Morang district lies in Province 1 of Nepal.

According to Freedom Forum's representative for Province 1, Bikram Niroula, those in the protest attacked journalist even after he showed his identity card as a reporter.

With the attack, Baral sustained minor injuries on his head and hands and even his mobile phone was damaged. 

PROVINCE 2

OBSTRUCTION

An army officer obstructed and misbehaved with journalist duo Lalan Mandal and Nikesh Khanal at Bardibas, Mahottari on January 5. Reporters were misbehaved by Nepal Army's Major Pushkar Basnet while reporting on illegal sand and gravel excavation from a local river within the army barrack and its transportation to Churiyamai Washing Center.

Reporter Mandal is affiliated to Khabar Darpan daily and Suryodaya Television while Khanal is Mahottari based reporter to Ratopati online news portal and Radio Sungava. Mahottari district lies in Province 2 of Nepal.

According to the information received by FF, the reporters visited the army barrack area to follow up on the sand excavation carried out near the army barrack.

Informing that the activities were carried out as per agreement between Nepal Army and Churiyamai Washing Center, Center's owner Bijay Sah threatened reporters asking, "Where are you from and why did you enter into our premises without permission?".

Major Basnet further added that all the activities were carried out according to the order of Major General and they had right to do anything within their premises. Furthermore, Major Basnet also threatened them not to publish any kind of news about excavation and seized their mobile phones and camera and deleted the pictures they had taken.

MANHANDLE

Reporter with Reja Today daily, Santosh Kumar Mishra, was misbehaved by police officers in Janakpur on January 14. Janakpur lies in Province 2 of Nepal.

According to the information shared by Freedom Forum's representative for Province 2, Rajan Singh, the metropolitan police officers misbehaved with reporter Mishra while taking pictures of dispute among metropolitan police and locals of Janakpur Sub-Metropolitan Ward No. 4. "Even after the reporter gave his identity as journalist and informed that he was recording the incident for news, the officers shoved him

and took his mobile", informed representative Singh quoting reporter Mishra.

"They, then, deleted the photos, videos and returned the mobile back", he further said.

The dispute arose after the officers removed hoarding boards placed in front of the shops by their owners.

DEATH THREAT

Primesh Siwakoti, a journalist associated with Janata Television received death threat from Ajay Timalsena, a crusher operator, for investigating against his illegal crusher factory. The incident occurred in Bara district on 18 January. Bara district lies in Province 2.

As per the information received by Freedom Forum, journalist Siwakoti was about to make story on the illegal smuggling and storage of pebbles at Timalsena owned crusher factory. The storage are done without the permission from the authority. While journalist Siwakoti started reporting on the same, Timalsena warned him not to cover the story arguing it would affect his business so he would bear consequences. Also, Timalsena raged that he would intentionally destroy all the crusher factories in the area if journalists write any news against his business.

ATTACK BY POLICE PERSONS

Four journalists associated with different media were injured in police attack while covering news of a demonstration staged by traders against the Nepal Police in Parsa district on January 24. The District lies in Province 2.

Freedom Forum's representative for Province 2, Rajan Singh, reported that the journalists were taking videos of the traders' demonstration and obstruction of Birgunj- Pokhriya road requesting release of their consignments seized by the Police. And the clash between protestors and traders broke after police started baton-charge.

Police officers also hit journalists namely Shyam Kushwaha (Janata Television), Umesh Dubey (TV Today), Aarohan Sah (Prime TV) and Deepak Chaurasiya (Local NP Daily) asking why they took video of police attacking the protestors, informed representative Singh quoting journalist Kushwaha.

Journalist Kushwaha received minor injury on his face and journalist Sah's camera was damaged in the incident, he informed further.



Photo: Rajan Singh

NEWSPAPERS TORCHED

An unknown gang torched 400 copies of mainstream national dailies early morning on February 22. The incident took place in front of Sita Nobel News Centre, Lahan. Lahan lies in Siraha district of Province 2.

Freedom Forum's representative for Province 2, Rajan Singh, reported that newspapers were already burnt into ashes when the news centre owner Dinesh Dev reached at the site. Owner Dev wondered who burnt the newspapers and for what purpose, said representative Singh, quoting the owner Dev.

The burnt newspapers were The Kathmandu Post, Kantipur daily, Saptahik, Hello Sukrabar and others.

Few weeks back too, newspapers including Kantipur and Kathmandu Post were stolen from the same stationery.

According to the District Superintendent of Police, Rajesh Thapa, the incident was under investigation.

DEFAMATION CASE AGAINST REPORTER

Ward No 4 Chair of Janakpur Sub-Metropolis, Sudarshan Singh, filed a court case against Editor of Janakpur of Today Media Group, Brij Kumar Yadav, for writing news against the Chair in the newspaper. Janakpur city lies in Province 2.

According to the information shared by FF's representative for Province 2, Rajan Singh, the defamation case was filed against the editor arguing that he and the media group wrote series of news against the Ward Chair targeting his image and career. In one of the news published in the Janakpur Today newspaper, editor had claimed that the Ward Chair had denied the entrance of Ward Member Pushpa Yadav in the Ward Office. But, in the complaint filed by the Ward Chair he has explicitly mentioned that no such incident had occurred and the editor has tried to defame him by publishing such content.



RTI Watch INFO OFFICER ATTACKS INFO SEEKER

Freedom Forum was concerned over an incident that Right to Information activist and information seeker Manoj Kumar Rauniyar was attacked by Information Officer Sima Rana and Rakesh Yadav of District Post office at Birjung of Parsa. Parsa district lies in Province 2.

According to FF's representative for Province 2, Rajan Singh, activist Rauniyar was attacked by the officials for seeking information about the annual work progress of the District Office. For this reason, the officials verbally and physically abused the activist, saying he had no right to question about the official activity.

FF condemned the incident as this was sheer violation of right to information practice in the country. RTI is constitutionally guaranteed right where the public is free to ask questions to the public authority about the ongoing events and progress in the offices. Information officers are recruited under the RTI Act in order to facilitate citizens.

Breaching of RTI law by RTI officer itself is condemnable. FF urged the concerned authorities to investigate the issue seriously and take actions against the perpetrators.

POLITICAL CADRES BAR FROM REPORTING

Journalists were barred from reporting on latest political development on March 10.

The incident took place in Janakpur airport, Dhanusha, which lies in Province 2.

Freedom Forum's representative for Province 2, Rajan Singh, reported that cadres of CK Raut (Coordinator of Alliance for Independent Madhesh) obstructed the group of reporters from entering into the airport. Journalists were present there to interview about Raut's recent agreement with the government. Coordinator Raut, who was earlier arrested for his secessionist movement, was recently released from the prison after Supreme Court's order. Representative Singh further informed, "Raut's cadres encircled the airport and did not allow journalists' entry into the airport."

INFO OFFICER THREATENS JOURNO FOR SEEKING INFORMATION

Journalist Upendra Thakur, affiliated with Kantipur television, was misbehaved and threatened by Information Officer at the Office of Parsa National Park, Ashok Kumar Ram, in Bara district on 10 March. Bara district lies in Province 2 which is the southern plains in the eastern part of Nepal. Journalist Thakur had requested Information Officer Ram to provide him information relating to a bridge construction that was taking place at buffer zone of the Parsa National Park.

According to Rajan Singh, Freedom Forum's Representative at Province 2, Information Officer Ram used abusive words and even threatened of mobilizing goons against journalist Thakur. Also, Information Officer warned of damaging journalist's camera.

Brief Detention

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

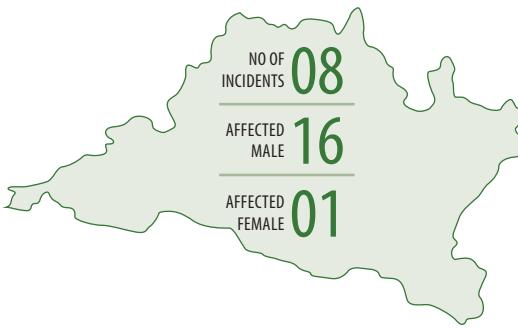
Journalist Kranti who is associated with Ujjyal Network and todayppati.com news portal had covered news regarding the leak of Science and Social Studies SEE question papers before the examination. Following it, journalist Kranti was called by security officials for interrogation at Dhanusa District Police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

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

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PROVINCE 3

ATTACK BY POLICE

Police attacked video and photojournalists in Kathmandu on January 27 while covering a students' demonstration against the government.

Video journalist of Himshikhar Television, Binod Katwal, sustained minor injury after three police persons attacked him with baton and boot, said Ashok Dahal quoting Katwal as saying, "I was capturing footage of male police grab a female protester by neck. All of sudden, the police assaulted me with baton and boot."

Half dozen photo and video journalists were taking video and photos of the torch rally

organized by Nepal Student Union, the student wing of main opposition Nepali Congress at Bharikutimandap in the central capital.

According to the journalists the police pushed them outside the Nepal Police Club, then used force as the journalists entered at the Club premises along with the protesters, who were arrested by the police. "They misbehaved with us at first accusing of taking video and photo then used baton and boot to panic and chase us away," said Katwal to Dahal.

Photojournalists Amul Thapa of Naya Patrika daily, Bijay Gajmer of Nagarik daily, Ujjwal Dangol of Nepal Samacharpatra daily and Samartha Ranjit of pahilopost.com were assaulted by the police.

BATON CHARGE BY SECURITY PERSONS

A journalists associated with www.baahrakhari.com news portal, Keshav Saud, was manhandled and beaten by the police while covering news about scuffle between police and students at Sanepa, Lalitpur on February 24. Lalitpur district lies in Province 3.

According to journalist Saud, police used batons and boots several times on him even after identifying himself as journalist. "After police used force to disrupt the protesting student, we (journalists) came out of the premises. But police started beating me with baton and boot

POLITICAL CADRE ISSUES DEATH THREAT

F Sub-editor with the www.nayapage.com news portal and photojournalist Prabin Kulung was issued death threat by Nirajan Bam, who is a secretary to political leader Deepak Bohora. The journalist was threatened for writing news against the party Bohora is affiliated to. The incident occurred in Kathmandu on 27 February.

As per the information received by FF, the journalist had written news against the political leader Bohora in his news portal for changing his party affiliation. For this reason, the leader's secretary Bam called him over his cell phone and issued a death threat. 

with no reason. I showed my Press Card but they didn't stop," shared Saud. According to FF's representative for Province 3, Ashok Dahal, the police stopped only after two other journalists expressed objection to the police's attacked on Saud.

Police used force after dispute erupted between two student factions of Nepal Student Union (NSU). After the Nepali Congress (NC), mother party of the student wing, decided to impose age bar on the Union, two groups had protested in favor and against the proposal. Later, a police persons, however, apologized for manhandling.

REPORTERS BARRED

Freedom Forum was concerned over security officials' obstruction to journalists on March 18 in Kathmandu. Kathmandu is the central capital in Province 3. According to the information received by Freedom Forum, four journalists from print media (Nayapatrika daily, Nagarik daily and Rajdhani daily) were stopped at the entrance of Office of Prime Minister and Council of Ministers by the on-duty security officials reasoning they were not allowed to enter the office.

"We had gone there to meet spokesperson for reporting but even after showing our Press Cards, they did not allow us to enter the office" informed Tapendra Karki, reporter at Nagarik daily. 

Threat by People's Representative

Chairperson of Sunkoshi Rural Municipality in Sindhupalchowk district, Shrawan Kumar GC, manhandled and threatened of action to journalist Anish Tiwari for writing news about him. Journalist Tiwari is a Sindhupalchowk district reporter to the Kantipur daily. The incident occurred on March 1. Sindhupalchowk district lies in Province 3 of Nepal.

As per the information received by FF, Chairperson GC invited journalist Tiwari to ride on his vehicle while both were traveling to Kathmandu. During the trip, he threatened journalist to stop writing news against the Rural Municipality activities and illegal sand crusher business in the area.

Talking to FF's monitoring desk journalist, Tiwari shared, "Chairman GC called me to ride together in his car while I was waiting for the public bus to Kathmandu. As I know him well I agreed to go together and took the seat. After that, he verbally abused me saying he had managed other journalists in the district and I should be aware of the consequences if I kept writing news about him. I was later dropped on the midway."

A story by Anish Tiwari was published in the Kantipur daily where he had written about the malpractice and irregularities thriving in Sunkoshi Rural Municipality. 

Popular Singer Forced to Lift Satirical Video Song from YouTube after Ruling Party Pressure



To gross attack on freedom of expression in Nepal, popular satirical song deleted from YouTube within two days of release

To the latest episode of government's series of attacks on freedom of expression and press freedom in Nepal, a satirical video song, demanding good governance with an end to corruption, has been deleted from YouTube within second day of its release on 16 February.

Within second day of the release of satirical video song "Lutnasake lut kanchha (Loot, loot, brother, loot as much as you can!) by popular singer Pashupati Sharma, the youth wing of the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) – Youth Federation Nepal- issued a circular to its all cadres to protest against the song by Sharma in all districts across the country.

After the Youth Federation's circular, Pashupati Sharma wrote in the Facebook post that he was lifting the video song for some time because some friends expressed concern over some words in the song. He thanked the large number of viewers as well and was against irregularities and malpractices afflicting the country. The Federation's circular has clearly panicked the singer and spread alarm over the aware populace.

What's in the song?

Lutnasake lut kanchha lutnasake lut
Aru desma paidaina Nepalmai ho chhut (*Loot, loot, brother, loot as much as you can; you're not*

allowed for it in other countries, but free to loot here in Nepal!)

The video song begun this way is an obvious reminder of some notorious cases of corruption and bribe seeking unfolding in Nepal in the recent time. Whether it is the financial irregularities by the government or the public institutions, the video has decried these and ironically encouraged a 'kanchha' (brother!) to loot and plunder as much as he can as he's free and allowed for it in Nepal!" The song clearly signals the horrifying and reeking corruption and bribe-seeking in Nepal. The luxury of public officials at the hardship of the common people is exposed by the song, winning the heart of people.

At a time when the government has recently earned ill reputation over the IT Bill that has blatantly curtailed FoE online, deleting the popular satirical video song has exposed the government's fear over its citizens, and fear over citizens' right to freedom of expression. It is a brazen attack and intolerance the government is showing to the practitioners of freedom of expression. The growing attacks on FoE both in laws and practices show Nepal's democracy is posed to threats day by day. Deleting video song further signals- there is no space for people with critical view; anyone criticizing government and public officials are easy targets; there is no space for criticism in Nepal.

MANHANDLE

Journalists associated with News 24 television were manhandled by security persons while covering a story about the difficulties faced by mobile tea entrepreneurs for selling tea at bus park, Kathmandu . The incident occurred late in the evening of February 21. The central capital Kathmandu lies on Province 3.

Journalists Saligram Pudasaini and Anil Dhungel reached the place to cover the story after they received a complaint about the mistreatment of police persons towards tea vendors in the area. After they had captured the footage of security persons misbehaving with the vendors, journalist were inquired about their motives by the police and later threatened for covering the news.

They were even manhandled by Assistant Sub Inspector of Police, Thulakanchha Gurung, Constables Purna Chaudhari and Min Khadka. The security officials tried snatching their camera despite showing them their identity cards.

FEMALE JOURNO THREATENED

Chief District Officer at Nuwakot, Uddap Bahadur Thapa, misbehaved with a female journalist Rupa Aryal while she was reporting at CDO office on February 12. Nuwakot lies in Province 3. Journalist Aryal is a Station Manager at Mix FM, Nuwakot. During telephonic conversation with Freedom Forum, journalist Aryal shared that CDO Thapa misbehaved with her while inquiring

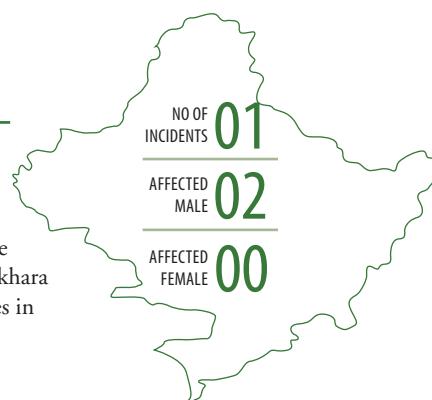
about difficulties local people were facing in course of the extension of Trishuli 3A Hydro-power project. "CDO Thapa also threatened me asking- who was she to capture the photo without consent and ordered police officers to drag me out of the office", journalist Aryal further complained.

Thapa further threatened journalist Aryal that she would face punishment for capturing photograph that is against law, according to him. He also warned her not to capture any public person's photos who have been working in public area/offices. She was further threatened of case at Press Council Nepal and getting her mobile damaged.

Gandaki Province

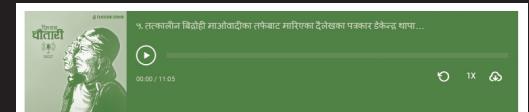
MANHANDLE

Station Manager at Fewa Television, Hemraj Adhikari, and cameraperson, Samir Sunar, were manhandled by a doctor while reporting in Pokhara of Kaski district on January 7. Kaski district lies in Gandaki Province.

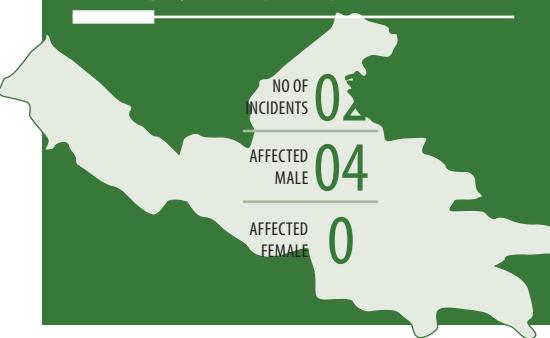


Listen to Freedom Forum Podcast Freedom Chautari Here.

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



PROVINCE 5



ATTACK

Journalists duo Rajesh Aryal and Bijay Kumar Baudel were attacked by locals in Tansen Municipality, Palpa, on March 29. Palpa is the hilly district situated in Province 5.

Journalists Aryal and Baudel are station manager and reporter at community radio Madan Pokhara respectively.

Freedom Forum's representative for Province 5, Sudeep Gautam, reported that the journalists

were attacked by locals for broadcasting news on the municipality's decision to extend the road from Holangdi to Dhungakhani in the district. The locals, who were protesting against the proposed extension project outside the Municipality office, not only attacked journalists but also threatened those of death.

Following the incident, Nepal Police arrested Baburam Bista, Laxman Regmi and Sailendra Bhattarai for their alleged involvement in the attack.

Karnali Province

THREAT BY WARD CHAIR

Surkhet based reporter with www.lokaantar.com, an online news portal, Sher Bahadur Thapa, received threat from a ward chair for writing news on January 18. Surkhet is situated in Karnali Province.

As per the information shared by FF's representative for Karnali Province, Laxmi Bhandari, Aathbish Municipality Ward No. 3 Chair Prayag Shahi threatened the reporter over phone for writing news about him on the news portal.

Reporter Thapa had written about ongoing ill-practice of hiring relatives of political leaders despite their incompetence in different organizations, informed representative Bhandari.

Quoting reporter Thapa, Bhandari further said not only Shahi but also other political leaders were threatening him to stop writing news about those.

NO OF INCIDENTS	01
AFFECTED MALE	01
AFFECTED FEMALE	00

Far West Province

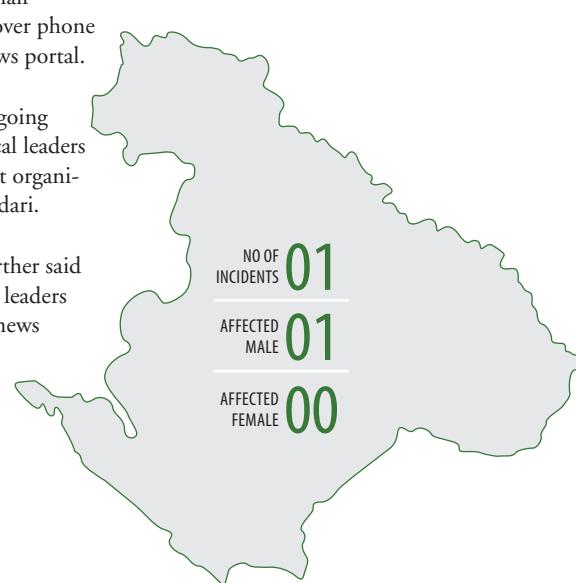
THREAT BY POLICE PERSON

District Superintendent of Police in Bajura, Uddhav Singh Bhat, publicly threatened against journalist Dayaram Pandit and Radio Paurakhi in the district on 25 January.

As per the information received from FF representative in Province 7, DSP Bhat threatened journalist that he would shut down the FM station as the news about police involvement in obstructing road expansion was aired by the radio. DSP claimed the news was made without investigation. Being based on this fact, DSP threatened journalist of arrest if he continued writing news about police.

Speaking at a public program, DSP directly warned journalists, "Who are you? What is your position to write news against us? I will show you my power."

Talking to FF media monitoring desk, journalist Dayaram Pandit informed that he felt nervous and scared when he was threatened in a public program.



Continued from page 1...

Following the incident, journalist was rushed to the hospital for primary treatment and later referred to the hospital in central capital Kathmandu for further treatment.

Although police arrested and booked the person who had invited him for the tea, he was released after court order. Other persons involved- although identified-are not arrested. He was attacked for publishing news against the Mayor of the Haribar municipality.

Freedom Forum submitted a concern letter to the police in Sarlahi district and district administration office to book the assailants as soon as possible, but no further action is taken till the preparation of this newsletter. Freedom Forum has also initiated the process to help the journalist financially and cover the medical expenses.

C. Moreover, on 21 March, journalist Karna Bishwokarma of Radio Naya Karnali was arrested from the radio station at 9:00 pm. Before his arrest, he asked security officials for the permission to let him complete the news broadcast at the time. After he finished the program, he was taken to the police station at Kalikot and detained for a week.

The security officials argued that he was arrested and detained for his affiliation to Biplab-led Maoist party, whose activities were banned by the government. He was further accused of helping in Maoist campaign in the area.

However, after tremendous pressure from human right activists, civil society as Freedom Forum, and media fraternity across the country, he was released from the detention after seven days of his arrest.

In this connection, Freedom Forum's representative for Province 6, Ms Laxmi Bhandari, visited the rural Karnali area to know more about the incident and views of the local media towards this incident.

She reported: Bishnu Neupane, a journalist from Kalikot district, shared that journalists in Kalikot are under threat from both Maoist party and security sides. Biplab-led Maoist party press journalists to broadcast their activities in the local channel on the one hand, the security officials arrest and harass journalists who write and publish news about the activities of the Maoist party.

Freedom Forum maintained that irrespective of Karna Bishwokarma's affiliation, his right to journalist must not be violated. While the security apprehended him, he was not acting for the party, but disseminating news at radio station. He was not arrested from the field where he was acting anything other, but arrested from the media house.

Similarly, not finding the assailants of Som Diyali in Sarlahi for long is sheer ignorance of local administration and security. Such ignorance help abet impunity. Before the attack, he had written news about the irregularities where the mayor was involved. Similarl is in case of Ganesh BK from Bajhang. He was tortured merely for writing news about security persons.

Another point to mull is: all these three journalists belong to Dalit community- a down-trodden community in Nepal. They might have spoken about the suppressed community they belong to in course of journalism. Arrest, detention, court case and attack on the journalist from marginalized community further warrant analyses. It is worrying that the situation of healthy criticism is eroding. 

Awareness Materials on WMGs

With the aim of promoting participation of women and marginalized groups (WMGs) in democratic decision making processes and making them aware on integrated technologies, Freedom Forum developed two awareness materials- informative notebook and television public service announcement (TV PSA). These awareness materials are developed under the support of CECI-SUSASAN Project.

The notebook has informative contents on various themes and issues surrounding WMGs and constitutional provisions relating to WMGs participation in the decision making mechanisms. The major contents of the notebook are- constitutional and legal provisions relating to WMGs, and provisions of WMGs in electoral process, list of authority and recommendations provided by ward level of local government, planning, budgeting, implementation and monitoring process in the local level. User committee related

provisions, legal provision on gender and domestic violations and on single women and people living with disabilities are also included in the informative notebook.

Likewise, FF developed six TV PSAs on various themes by filming short clips featuring views of experts/socially renowned personalities from different sectors. Following are the brief of TV PSA:

a. Dr. Hikmat Bahadur Bista, Local Government Expert:

Dr. Bista highlights the importance of local democracy and meaningful participation of WMGs in local government.

b. Dinesh Kumar Thapaliya, Secretary, MoFAGA:

Thapaliya speaks on the provisions of constitutional, legal and service delivery for meaningful participation of WMGs.

c. Krishna Prasad Sapkota, Local Government Expert:

Sapkota emphasizes on local democracy and area of representation

and participation of WMGs in local government.

d. Dr. Usha Jha, Member, National Planning Commission:

Dr. Jaha focused the role and responsibilities of the local representatives focusing WMGs.

e. Durga Sob, Social Activist:

Sob underscored the constitutional and legal provisions of WMGs, especially on Dalit.

f. Dr. Gopi Krishna Khanal, Joint Secretary, National Natural Resources and Fiscal Commission:

Dr. Khanal underlines the access of local resources for WMGs and guarantee of meaningful participation of WMGs in the process of resources allocation, its use and expenditure.

These awareness materials can be used in all trainings or other events under SUSASAN project and in all techno-hubs. The experts' views can be shared through social media and broadcast on local TVs. It is indeed helpful to disseminate information on pressing issues of governance and WMG. 

Measures for Improved WMG Participation in Decision Making Systems

In a bid to amplify voice for better participation of Women and Marginalized Groups (WMGs) in the decision-making process and systems in the local government, Freedom Forum organized a National Advocacy Campaign under the Sustainable Use of Technology for Public Sector Accountability in Nepal (SUSASAN) project in Kathmandu on February 18, 2019. The national advocacy event had brought together total 49 people including a Member of Parliament (member of state affairs and good governance committee), public policy-makers and shapers, experts, media professionals, participants from project districts, representatives from SUSASAN project partners and staffs and practitioners whose role will be imperative to position WMG in decision-making systems.

The advocacy campaign focused on positioning women and marginalized groups (WMGs) in the decision-making systems with the use of integrated technology. Three themes were prepared for discussion for the advocacy campaign. The themes of the discussion were: Roles and Responsibilities of elected representative from WMGs in local government; meaningful participation of WMGs in local government's planning, budgeting implementation and monitoring process, and effective engagement of WMGs in different service delivery at local government. Thematic papers on these topics were prepared by Dr. Sangram Singh Lama, local governance and social inclusion expert, Hem Raj Lamichhane, decentralization expert, and Purusottam Nepal, joint-secretary at Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration, Government of Nepal, respectively. Bibhusan Bista from Young Innovations, one of the national partners of the project, highlighted the importance of using proper integrated technologies to aid in improving the participation of WMGs in the local government.

Speaking on the occasion, lawmaker Dr Dila Sangraula emphasized on the importance of strengthening the local government and decentralizing power to the local levels. She also added that the various quotas imposed by the government have aided in increasing the participation of women in the local body by a whopping amount and more such policies are being formed.

Among other contributors of the workshop were SUSASAN Project Team Leader Hem Tembe and Governance Advisor Binod Upadhyay.



All of these presentations emphasized the current condition of women and marginalized groups in the decision-making process and how different actions taken were gradually positioning WMGs in the decision-making levels in the local government. A discussion among all the participants in the national level workshop was organized with the aim of providing a road map to the District CSOs to discuss and raise the issues while conducting similar kind of advocacy campaigns at local level. This discussion brought forward the need to identify the potential development and various existing barriers in order to improve the participation of the WMGs in an efficient manner. Constructive suggestions for conducting an effective advocacy were also received from national level experts and policymakers.

While concluding the event, Freedom Forum's Executive Chief Taranath Dahal stressed the need for positioning women and marginalized groups in the decision making process through integrated technologies.

Also on the occasion, journalist Ranjit Tamang and Freedom Forum Policy Advisor Krishna Sapkota presented the summary of the overall discussion of the whole workshop. This summary indicated that addressing the need of every individual group in the WMG is important to empower them. The system and people in our country still have orthodox thinking and this is one of the main reasons why we haven't been able to be completely inclusive. There is also a donor-recipient syndrome between the local and central authority. The laws of the government give room for the WMGs and there is substantial potential growth that can

be achieved. So, it is important to formulate a legal framework according to the citizen's needs by taking into consideration the constitutional, political, bureaucratic and physical factors of governance. The key points raised during the workshop can be summed up accordingly.

- Bringing into action the laws and directives promoting participation of citizens, including WMGs in decision-making and governance process at local level
- Amplifying voice for the formulation of necessary laws at local level to leverage the participation of WMGs
- Strengthening knowledge and capacity of people elected representatives focusing those elected from the WMGs as well as the community and citizens for utilizing the legally-defined space for participation
- Analyzing stakeholders to identify strategic actions, plans and policies and align them with the Goal 5 and 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs i.e gender equality and peace, justice and accountable institutions at all levels
- Increasing WMGs' access to information related to planning, budgeting, implementation and monitoring process
- Engaging intermediaries to enable demand side, particularly WMGs in the use of technology for improved access to services and information on decision-making systems
- Improving interfaces between demand side, supply side and intermediaries for augmenting accountability practice.
- Building disaggregated data systems at local governments so that there will be granular data on WMGs from different perspectives and plan/policy will be guided by evidence.

March for More Women in Media



Need of woman empowerment for achieving sustainable development goals, where the media could also help from their sides.

This year too, the International Women's Day was celebrated globally. Nepal too joined the bandwagon. Freedom Forum, a frontline CSO in Nepal, along with various other organizations, including NEFEJ, organized a program gathering more than 150 people from different walks of life. With the theme of GENDER EQUALITY IN NEPALI MEDIA, a rally was organized from a local Exhibition Road to the Kathmandu Durbar Square. In the rally named 'Move for Women', the participants carried placards, reading: Respect Women; Let's Think for Women's Rights; Protect Women's Right; More Female in Media, Inclusive Media etc. The march was for sensitization of women rights and advocacy of equal rights of women in media.

Reaching the Kathmandu Durbar Square premise, the rally converged into corner gathering, which was addressed by representatives from various organizations. Addressing the meeting, Secretary at Federation of Nepali Journalists, Ramesh Bista, urged the media to keep female inclusion in the top priority.

President of the Working Women Journalists, Ambika Rajthala, stated that such events were important to sensitize and build pressure for the stakeholders to increase the number of female journalists in the media.

Similarly, FF's Chairperson Hari Binod Adhikari pointed out the need of woman empowerment for achieving sustainable development goals, where the media could also help from their sides. General Secretary of NEFEJ Nepal, Nimesh Regmi, claimed that inclusion of socially excluded and marginalized groups including women should be of prime concern. Representatives from Working Women Journalists, Sancharika Samuha, Minimum Wages Fixation Committee, Federation of Nepalese Indigenous Journalists, National Sports Journalists Forum too, were univocal about need to implement gender policies in the media houses for gender balanced news rooms.

The event also included poem recitation, song and dance performances by the journalism students from Dibyabhumi Multiple College in the theme of women empowerment and gender equality.

FF Fellowship Story Awarded



Photo Credit: Nabin Poudel

Freedom Forum is delighted to share that one of the fellowship stories on public interest reporting has been awarded 'Best Feature Award for Province 3' on 19 February. The story was written by Mr. Aditya Dahal, one of the fellows to which FF had provided fellowship for the investigative reports on reconstruction issues. Mr. Dahal, associated with the National News Agency (RSS), was awarded by the RSS on its 58th anniversary. He is one among 13 investigative reporters FF provided fellowship. The public interest reporting fellowship was provided to explore major issues concerning public interest in post-earthquake reconstruction works. It aimed to seek the attention of policymakers, stakeholders and the general public.

Mr. Dahal's news titled, "Sankhu Dwellers Facing Constraints to Build Houses in Traditional Style". The news covered the issues of post-earthquake where the households suffered due to lack of construction materials, human resources and the grant from the government. After the coverage of the news story in media, the reconstruction works of Sankhu, an old settlement, gained apace. The fellowship relating to the reconstruction activities supported Mr. Dahal to dig out the issues of reconstruction at Sankhu, which lies in Shankharapur Municipality, the northern-east outskirt of the Kathmandu Valley. Minister for Communications and Information Technology, Mr. Gokul Prasad Baskota, conferred the award on Dahal with a certificate and Rs 5,000 cash.

The 'Public Interest Reporting' training was provided to 33 working journalists from 14 earthquake-affected districts. It was organized under the project- Civil Society Mutual Accountability Project (CS: MAP)- supported by USAID and implemented by FHI 360. To this, FF's Executive Chief Mr. Taranath Dahal observes, "The capacity enhancement of journalists with public interest reporting training has helped them cover the hidden issues of reconstruction works." After receiving the award, fellow Dahal thanked Freedom Forum and committed to write continuously on such issues of public interest and concern.

Refresher to Stringers

Freedom Forum held a 2- day Review and Orientation Workshop on Freedom of Expression and Gender Content Monitoring in Kathmandu from March 22 to 23. The workshop was organized to orient its representative from seven provinces on monitoring of media contents through gender perspectives and sensitize them on broader areas of FoE, RTI, FoE on internet and impunity for crimes against journalist.

Bikram Niraula (Province 1), Rajan Singh (Province 2), Rajan Upadhyay (Ganadaki Province), Sudeep Gautam (Province 5) and Laxmi Bhandari (Karnali Province) and Min Bam (Far-Western Province) were the participants in the orientation.

The workshop held in capital city committed one for day gender content monitoring and another one day for review and refresher on issues of FoE.

On first day, representatives were provided orientation about the new online media mon-



itoring platform called Mediascan where they can directly update their monitoring data into the website developed by Free Press Unlimited. They were engaged in entering data into the platform the whole day.

Similarly, on the second day, representatives were made aware about the emerging issues

of FoE and RTI and also updated on FF's new website of www.nepalpressfreedom.org, updates on cases of murdered and disappeared journalists and newly formulated media policies in provinces. They were urged to be more active to know about the policies and laws efforts relating to media, FoE and journalists' rights at the province governments.

RTI Draft Amendment Submitted for Legislating Open Data Provisions

As part of its lobby and advocacy for legislating Open Data provisions in the under-amendment Right to Information laws in the country, Freedom Forum submitted a draft outlining areas for amendment to the RTI Act and Regulation to the government, Ministry of Communications and Information Technology and National Information Commission on February 20.

The draft outlined technical recommendations in seven areas including four in the RTI Act-2007 and three in its Regulations-2009. Key



areas recommended for amendments to the law include existing definition, information obtaining process, proactive disclosure arrangement, roles and responsibilities of information commissioners, costs involved in requesting information and medium and formats of information disclosure stated in the RTI Act and Rule.

“The recommendations for amendment are outlined and finalized through a process of consultation with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) championing the cause of access to information through RTI and Open Data”, shared Taranath Dahal, Executive

Chief, Freedom Forum.

A face-to-face consultation and frequent distance communications were held with representatives of Civil Society Organizations, including individual champions, advocates and practitioners to produce a technical recommendation for the RTI amendment from open government data perspectives.

The discussion was based on the review as how Open Data has been legislated in other countries, in particular where it has formed part of the RTI/FOI legislation, and how this has been put into implementation.

Comments on Media Related Bills

Review of Press and Publication Bill submitted to Province 5

Freedom Forum submitted preliminary comments on draft of Province 5's Press and Publication bill to the Minister for Internal Affairs and Law, Ministry officials and other stakeholders in January. The comments pointed out the provisions that are inconsistent with the international and constitutional standard and best practices.

Based on that FF's comments, the Ministry called a meeting with stakeholders for finalizing draft bill where FF's representative Ram Bikash Chaudhary showed its concern. Meanwhile, other stakeholders even set their agenda as per FF document.

The major highlights of FF's observation:

- Recommendation to change the name of the respective Bill, from 'Press and Publication Bill 2075' to 'Bill Regulating Newspaper Publication';
- Remove the words having negative connotation such as: prohibited publication, negated publications etc;
- Provision related to the press should be regulated by different laws such as: Company Act, Copyright Act etc;
- Newspaper registration provision should be replaced by enlisting newspaper which would be compatible with the National Mass Communication Policy.
- The unconstitutional provision regarding newspaper De-registration should be removed.
- The press representative provision is against the independent journalism, so it should be removed;
- Autonomous and independent audit bureau of circulation should be established for newspaper classification;
- Provision regarding social inclusion in media's structure and content should be incorporated;
- Capacity building initiative and institution of journalist should be established;
- Issues related to journalist safety should be addressed in the new law.

Review of Mass Communications Bill of Gandaki Province

Freedom Forum also submitted preliminary comments on Integrated Mass Communication Bill of Gandaki State to the Minister of

Internal Affairs and Law, Ministry officials and stakeholders on 22 February with the objective of facilitating the Ministry in making policy decisions and formulation of new law in the field of information and communication. FF had direct contact with Mr. Suman Bhattacharya a Section Officer who was assigned work for drafting the proposed law. Other officials were also contacted via telephone and emails. The bill has 10 chapters and 56 section in total.

FF's major recommendation on draft bill:

- Section 2 (dha) regarding management of press representative should be removed;
- Right to information provision in the bill should be removed and need to make a separate law on it;
- The shape, style, size and space of the newspaper have been determined by the government which seems to be improper in FOE standard;
- As section 14 of this bill recites, the rules and regulation related to press registration should not be incorporated in the bill;
- In regards to section 24, broadcaster's rights, duty and responsibility should be tangible and clear;
- The code of conduct related to mass media should be re-arranged (section-38) with the incorporation of self-regulation mechanism as a part of legal obligation;
- The qualification of journalist cannot be measured by any law and government agency, so this part is found unnecessary;
- Section 43 enshrines press representatives provision which is against general standard of FoE. So, it should be removed from the law;
- To produce, broadcast and disseminate any program, permission letter is said to be compulsory (section 48). If not, harsh punishment- imprisonment- is provisioned. Less punishment can be provisioned;
- As per the section of 53 and 54 of the bill, book enlistment is not necessary and doesn't come under the domain of media law.

Review of Management and Regulation of IT Bill

FF reviewed and asked the federal parliamentarians to amend the provisions in the bill regarding to Management and Regulation of IT Bill. IT Bill seeks to curtail freedom of expression by introducing harsh punishments for posting improper contents on social media websites.

Concern Over Court Order

Freedom Forum was concerned over the interim order issued by the Supreme Court against a writ application that aims at scrapping newly proposed remuneration to employees and workers in the media houses.

Nepal government had urged the minimum remuneration fixation committee to recommend the minimum salary for the employees (journalists, staffs and workers) working in the media houses. As per the Working Journalists Act of Nepal, a minimum remuneration fixation committee was established under the Working Journalists Act, 2051 B.S.

This is a system of an old act established in the year 2051. The act has divided three layer structures as working journalist, employee and workers and minimum remuneration for each is fixed by the Minimum Remuneration Fixation Committee. Also there is the provision for review of the remuneration fixation every two year.

Latest order from Supreme Court has affected the rights of new journalists and employees working in the media. FF therefore urged the court to review the order in favor of all media staffs and workers and hoped that SC will consider this fact while delivering the final verdict.

FF is however positive upon the response of Communications and Information Minister for his efforts to vacate such decision and requests the government to submit review application at SC. 

Suggestion regarding IT Bill

- Without the approval of IT court, access to any computer system is restricted.
- Appeal to IT court for the parties who are not satisfied with administrative decisions.
- To provide public service through e-governance modality by all layers of government i.e. Federal, Provincial and State.
- Archive information on open format
- Remove the provisions regarding widening restrictive scope of exercising FoE.
- Repeal the provision which limits the opinion and free expression of individual in different social media platform and ensure citizen's right to free expression.
- Remove the provision addressed by other specific laws.
- FoE related wrong doings and minor issues shouldn't be criminalized.

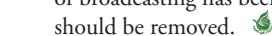
Therefore, FF had strongly urged the parliament to consider these points to make the bill tolerant to citizen's rights.

Review of Broadcasting Bill of Karnali Province

Freedom Forum has submitted a review document on Broadcasting Bill of Karnali Province to the Minister of Internal Affairs and Law, Ministry officials and stakeholders on 1 March with the objective of facilitating the Ministry in making policy decisions in the field of information, communication and freedom of expression in the changed context. The reviewed document and recommendations are shared with state assembly members. Freedom Forum representative for Karnali Province, Ms Laxmi Bhandari, handed over the review report to the above mentioned agencies.

The major concerns to the bill:

- In the section 2 of the bill, it is said that permission must be taken for broadcasting any program. Instead of this, the broadcasters (news agencies) should take approval.
- Various provisions of the bill have provided excessive power to the executive by phrases such as prescribed by law, defined by agency. Such kind of provision should be removed because it diminishes law making power of the legislative.
- Positive connotation term can be used regarding the prohibition or negative term in the law for barring issues of broadcasting.
- Controlling provision concerning the producing, broadcasting and issue selection of broadcasting has been questioned so, should be removed.



CASE FILED FOR EXPOSING MISDEED OF SECURITY

Journalists Are Not Criminals

— Ganesh BK

I am a journalist from remote Bajhang district of Nepal. I belong to a marginalized backward family where I live with my parents and four other members.

Although I haven't done my formal education, I pursue journalism and work as managing editor at an online news portal called <http://saipalpost.com/>. In the news portal, I post news on real incidents that happen in my society and district. I have pursued journalism and write about real stories with the hope that it will help change the society and country at larger scale.

In my district, I have found that security officials are associated with robbery and theft along with drugs smuggling. I had covered a story about the same in my news portal on January 13. Immediately after five minutes of the news upload, I was arrested by security officials of Bajura District. I was threatened for publishing such news and placed in the police van that brought me to Kathmandu. I was arrested at 4:00 in the evening and reached Kathmandu at 12 am next day. It took me 20 hours to reach Kathmandu and on my way, security officials harassed me for targeting them and writing news about their misconduct.

During and after my arrest, neither the officials explained me about the crime I committed nor did they hand me the arrest warrant. Even my family members were not informed about the arrest and case was filed against me.

After they brought me to the Metropolitan Police Range Teku, Kathmandu, I found out that I was arrested for committing Cyber Offence and was charged under Electronic Transaction Act 2008.

I was detained at Teku for 14 days and later released after the order from District Court Kathmandu. During my detention, Freedom Forum helped me with the legal and logistic support and provided me warm clothes.

Although I am released now, I think I was tortured without any misdeed. I do not believe I had committed such grave crime which ended me in detention for 14 days like a criminal. No authority investigated about the truth of the news I had published yet. I was the one punished for nothing wrong.

I'm not discouraged

Even after all this experience, I am not discouraged. I will continue my passion for journalism and will never stop writing news and investigative stories. Nevertheless, the experience has certainly introduced me to the bitter reality on how state power is misused as per one's will to suppress the voices who speaks against misdeed and irregularities. ETA is misused as a tool to suppress journalists like me who are at the start of their career. No one should face this kind of intimidation for writing news.



Journalism a risky job

After this incident, I have realized that journalism is a risky job and rights of journalists are at stake because of the misuse of state power and power vested in some authority. In any democratic country investigative stories are taken seriously by the authorities that give them background to further reach the truth but in case of Nepal, journalists working with the investigative stories are threatened and targeted even by the authorities and have to face the intimidation and cases as of cyber crime.

With this I would like to urge the authority to respect press freedom and let us do our job. Also before arresting us, investigate the case seriously and verify the story published. We are not criminals and do not treat us the way they are treated.

(Based on interview given to legal officer at Freedom Forum, Ms Ashmita Pokharel)

Freedom Forum in Int'l/National Media

Most of the major Nepali media- both English and Nepali language- including BBC Nepali service, covered FF remarks in the form of views, comments, news relating to its concern and stand on unfolding law and policies on freedom of expression and press freedom. In these three months, government's activities- both in the practice and law/policy formulation- showed growing hostility to free expression and press freedom, which left entire media fraternity and rights activists panicked.

In January, FF was quoted in most of the mainstream media relating to its annual press freedom report. The report encloses freedom of the press and expression updates from January to December 2018 which depicts a sharp rise in press freedom violation cases. It was the highest in violation from last six years and media outlets covered the issue highlighting the rise of press freedom violation cases in Nepal.

In February, a draft bill on Management of Advertisement Regulation, IT Bill and Provincial Media Bill which aimed to curtail freedom of expression and press freedom got extensive coverage in Nepali and international media referring to FF stand. The national dailies like: The Kathmandu Post, Kantipur, Republica, The Himalayan Times dailies and so forth and international media as Daily Mail, AFP, and IFEX had coverage on it mentioning remarks from FF. National dailies published more than 30 news, views, articles and even editorial mentioning FF opinion on it. In three months, broadcasting media like Sagarmatha television, Kantipur television, BBC Nepali Service also included FF views in their news and talk show.

The Kathmandu Post daily published editorial including FF quote as: , "Press freedom cannot be curtailed in the name of regulation". The citation of editorial which has mentioned as: "Freedom Forum recently flagged Province 3 for provisions in its 'Provincial Broadcasting Bill' that overtly digressed from constitutional and international standards and Province 3's 'Mass Communication Policy' has also been severely criticised for its role in stifling free speech in digital platforms. "

Likewise, the Republica daily published news with headline "Bill poses 'danger of economic blockade of media' mentioning Executive

Provincial media bills will curtail press freedom, experts warn

Provincial assemblies should take into account the importance of fourth estate in democracy and governance, observers say

TIKA R PRADHAN
KATHMANDU, FEB 10

Some provisions of media laws being drafted by provincial governments are detrimental to press freedom, experts have warned.

While some provinces have criminalised media-related offences with provisions for jailing journalists, others have clauses that contravene constitutional guarantee of the free press.

Province 2 has drafted its Integrated Communication Bill-2075 that criminalises "the offences of the media". The bill has a provision that a person publishing or broadcasting any products without licence would be liable to fines

vincial government could order a ban on news related to a subject, incident or place in question for a specified period of time by issuing a notice on the gazette. Province 2 also aims to ban translating or quoting such news, information or matters in educational curricula after the provincial government issues the order.

"Authorities seem to be trying to insert some provisions in such a way that they can be used to control the media," said Bhurban KC, chairperson of the Center for Media Research Nepal that is studying the provincial media laws. "These laws are being drafted without taking into consideration the concept of the fourth estate, press freedom and international standards."

Province 2 media bill is also against the National Mass Communication Policy-2073 and existing media related laws of the federal government.

"Provinces are drafting media-related laws arbitrarily and most of them are against the constitutional provisions, press freedom and freedom of expression," said Tara Nath Dahal, chairman of Freedom Forum, an NGO that advocates democracy, human rights, press freedom and equitable development of society.

The Integrated Communication Bill of Province 2 has defined the work, duty and rights of the publisher and broadcaster and intends to scrutinise the content before it is published or broadcast.

Chief, Taranath Dahal views. The news was about Draft Bill on Management of Advertisement Regulation where Executive Chief, Dahal said, "The government should think of more constructive ways if it wants to promote decency in advertising. There are other ways to regulate anomalies in the advertising industry without criminalizing advertising content." Also, the BBC Nepali Service published news entitled "Strict Advertisement Regulation; Positive or Negative Step." including opinion of FF Executive Chief, Dahal.

The Kathmandu Post daily with headline "Nepal government's new Information Technology bill draws battle lines against free speech" published news and quoted views of FF Executive Chief, Dahal. Dahal said to the Post, "If you start criminalising these things, the state will use its weapons to stifle the voices and people who criticise, who disagree and whom they don't like."

Moreover, the Kathmandu Post daily published an opinion article penned by Executive Chief Dahal on February 21 (<http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/news/2019-02-21/assaulting-free-speech.html>). In this article, he has argued how the new bill on ICT could curtail freedom of expression.

radio, television and newspapers. Yet another provision intends to restrict journalists having press pass issued by the federal government. The province is planning to introduce its own system of issuing press accreditation card for journalists working in the province and handing out temporary passes for those coming to the province for a brief period of time.

The Province 3 media bill has provisions for scrapping the licence and banning broadcasting media and barring advertisements of political nature. It has also kept room for banning even newspapers. Like Province 2, Province 3 has a provision of issuing temporary passes for journalists coming from the Centre or other

Likewise, The Himalayan Times daily and many other media published news mentioning opinion of FF. THT published news entitled, '1.5 million rupees fine, five year jail sentence or both proposed 'Information Technology Bill'. International media such as AFP published news regarding IT Bill with Headline "Nepal social media bill sparks freedom of speech concerns" mentioning remarks from Executive Chief Dahal. While talking with AFP, Dahal said, "The bill is against the freedom of expression and justice as it criminalizes online expression (https://amp.france24.com/en/20190220-nepal-social-media-bill-sparks-freedom-speech-concerns?__twitter_impression=true)." The Daily mail also published same news mentioning AFP as its source.

IFEX with Freedom Forum byline published news with headline, "Nepali singer pulls anti-corruption song after receiving threats" quoting Executive Chief's views on it. The news was about popular folk singer Pashupati Sharma, who pulled out the viral song Lutnasake lut Kanchha after the youth wing of the ruling Nepal Communist Party issued a circular addressed to its cadres to protest against the song. Likewise, in March, the coverage on follow-up of advertisement bill, International Open Data Day, and OGP related news were published in various Nepali media referring to FF.

#Move4Women for Inclusive Media



-Nanu Maiya Khadka

International Women's Day on March 8 in Kathmandu. Well said, it is an important fact to realize that Women's Day is not only for women; men can actively and equally celebrate the day advocating for their counterparts' equal rights with empowerment, thereby contributing to achieve Sustainable Development Goals. March 8 is celebrated worldwide to advocate for women's rights and gender parity in various sectors. This year too, the day was marked with campaign #BalanceforBetter along with various other themes.

In Nepal too, the day was celebrated with national as well as organizational themes. Freedom Forum, a frontline CSO working for right to information, democracy and freedom of expression for a decade too celebrated the day. It

"How exciting it would be if more number of men march for women on International Women's Day! Isn't it?" I heard a youth talking to her colleague during a rally marking Interna-

organized the march named #Move4Women to stand for women in Nepali media with Gender Friendly Behavior: Inclusive Media as major theme. The rally brought together more than hundred media persons-both male and female-moving for the right of female journalists and gender equality in the media.

Even though gender equality has been a pressing issue worldwide, it is likely to take a long time for Nepali media. At a time when Nepal government secures at least 33% inclusion of women in parliament as well as in local governments, their presence in media as well as other sectors may bear significance. According to Federation of Nepali Journalists, among 1,305 journalists across the country, there are only 18% female. Similarly, several studies suggest 40.5% are associated with print media whereas 1.7% with online media.

Despite considerable presence in print media, their visibility in news contents is largely dominated by male journalists, according to the report published by Freedom Forum. Freedom Forum has been continuously monitoring main news contents of nine national broadsheets, six online news portals and 21 provincial newspapers for

three years. According to the recently published 2018 annual reports, women comprise 9% byline and 12% as news sources in the national broadsheets while their presence is found 18% in byline and 11% as news sources in online media. Similarly, monitoring of articles published on the op-ed pages for their author/columnists from the same nine national dailies showed that almost 22% articles are female-authored.

The report further stated that political news (above 50%) are dominant on the main pages of the media monitored where women are less visible as both reporters (17%) and sources (21%) as compared to their male counterparts. Instead those are much more visible and presented in the role breaking gender stereotypes in most of the news about social and legal issues (36%). Remarkably majority of female reporters were found reporting on economic issues (30%) as revealed by data from online news portals.

Again, newspapers monitored from provinces reported 12% news with female byline and 14% women quoted as sources in the news stories. Three year long monitoring however shows gradual improvement in data for women in the mainstream media contents. FF's monitoring continues. 

Editors for Promoting GENDER INCLUSIVE Newsroom

"Achieving gender equality requires the engagement of women and men, girls and boys. It is everyone's responsibility."

-Baan Ki Moon, Former Secretary-General of the United Nations



-Deepa Adhikari

the practice of gender inclusive- female-friendly newsroom though most of the media outlets are occupied largely by the male journalists. The editors believed in gender inclusive newsroom and were trying to incorporate more number of female journalists. As they shared, female sources and gender stereotype subjects are regularly discussed during the in-house meeting.

Editor-in-Chief of the Kathmandu Post daily, Anup Khaphle, in conversation with FF said, "Since my appointment, KTP has al-

ready recruited seven female journalists. I am still in search to increase female journalists. Likewise, Annapurna Post recently promoted Ms Ramkala Khadka as an editor to a special edition of children focused content, 'Annapurna Ankur.'

Similarly, almost 40% journalists are the female ones at Setopati.com, according to Editor-In-Chief, Amit Dhakal. Dhakal is planning the newsroom constituting 51% female journalists. According to Freedom Forum annual report 2018, Setopati published 41 stories under female byline. It is the highest number of female byline among other media outlets. Also, it has incorporated 54 female news sources outnumbering others. Interesting it is: Setopati has a logo on the top of the website where female replica is larger than male replica, which Mr Dhakal said his media's logo was symbolically advocating for women empowerment.

The Kantipur daily also said it was making tremendous efforts to increase number of female journalists. Editor-In-Chief, Mr Narayan Wagle stressed, "Kantipur is planning to appoint at least one female journalist in every bureau." It was good to learn that Kantipur daily has already adopted a policy to publish at least one female authored opinion article on it, which also reflected in FF report. According to FF annual data of OP-ED authors, Kantipur succeed to include 43 female authors which is highest among other media outlets in 2018.

Likewise, the Himalayan Times (HT) has promoted 4 female journalists in the leading role- Online Head: Richa Thapa, Business Bureau Head: Prasanna Chitrakar, Feature Head: Adona Lee and Sharada Adhikari. It is another good news indeed. In case of state owned media, The Rising Nepal and Gorkhapatra dailies both have recently recruited more number of female journalists aiming to make gender inclusive newsroom. In total, 5 female journalists are working currently at The Rising Nepal, where there was only one female journalist some time back. Compared to the past, the number of female bylines has sharply increased in the recent days. Likewise, Gorkhapatra daily is also following the steps to make gender inclusive newsroom. Republica daily's THE WEEK edition is led by Ms Shila Khatry and she is accompanied by other female journalists Anviti Upadhyay, Urja Acharya and Rakhsya Khadka. It is of course appreciative that female team solely handles one day's edition of the daily. Some editors admitted that newsroom in Nepal are dominated by male mindset. According to them, it may also be one of the reasons the female journalists to discontinue this profession.

After this visit in media outlets, Freedom Forum concludes that media houses are gradually making headway to gender inclusive newsroom by increasing the number of female reporters, giving them favourable atmosphere. Also, editors of late are mulling how more number women could be attracted and retained in journalism. 

Slow but Gradual Increase Women Representation in Media

The first report of 2019- from January to March- still presents low but slightly improving statistics on presence of women in the contents of monitored media outlets- nine major national dailies and six mainstream online news portals.

Some of the major findings are as below:

Print media

- Among total 1,060 news stories scanned from the main pages of broadsheets, 64% showed named byline with 10% names of female and remaining 90% names of male journalists.
- While scanning the same news stories for sources quoted, 13% were found to be women with 87% men.
- Likewise, total 196 op-ed articles were also scanned for their authors from the same nine broadsheets, which revealed 21%

female against 79% male authors.

- Political news continue dominating the major space on the broadsheets by 36% followed by 25% news on social and legal issues.
- Highest number of female in news and op-ed byline (42%) and as news sources (30%) are found in news on social and legal issues.
- Among the broadsheets monitored, the Nagarik daily published the highest number of news with female byline and surprisingly The Himalayan Times contained the highest number of female-authored op-ed articles.
- The Kathmandu Post, on the other hand, is found quoting the highest number of female as news sources as compared to others.
- As compared to previous quarter, this quarter witnesses increase in the number of female byline by 1% with equal percentage of those as sources.

GENDER MONITORING REPORT

Online media

- Total 360 news stories published on the home page of six online portals were also scanned for bylines and sources quoted. Scanning resulted 20% bylines of female and 80% of male among 134 stories with named byline.
- The news stories quoted only 11% women as news sources against 89% men.
- While majority of the news are related to politics and governmental affairs (29%), maximum female bylines are found in the social news (30%), whereas their presence as sources is found in the business news.
- Comparison among the online portals resulted the highest contribution of Setopati (almost more than 50%) to both the female in news bylines as well as sources.
- Moreover, this quarter witnesses 5% increase in the number of news with female in bylines whereas, their presence as news sources decreases by 1% as compared to the last quarter (Oct-Dec 2018).

Publications

1. Open Data Initiative Mapping Report:

This study is a mapping and analysis of existing public sector open data initiatives (ODI) at the central and local levels. It reviews and analyses supply-side initiatives of the government and intermediaries and access to information to women and marginalized groups (WMGs). <http://freedomforum.org.np/content/download/open-data-initiative-mapping-report/?wpdmld=3502>



2. KAP Survey Report:

KAP Survey report seeks to gather baseline information on existing knowledge, attitude and practice (KAP) on citizen-state engagement, the mechanisms and tools used to promote such engagement. <http://freedomforum.org.np/content/download/kap-survey-report/?wpdmld=3501>



3. SUSASAN Training Manual:

The Training of Trainers (ToT) manual focusing on four themes of Open Data, Budget Transparency, Citizen Reporting and Grievance Reporting is framed to promote citizens' participation in local governance. <http://freedomforum.org.np/content/download/susasan-training-manual/?wpdmld=3500>



4. Impunity and Political Party's Role

Another recent publication of the FF- booklet titled 'Ending Impunity relating to crimes against journalists and role of political parties' has made a brief overview of the media related impunity, defined impunity, Nepal's commitment to international forums, FF's efforts to end impunity and what political parties can do to end impunity related to crimes against media persons/journalists.



Assaulting Free Speech

The provisions in the new bill could further curtail free speech and silence dissenters

-Taranath Dahal

The Nepal government recently tabled 'Information Technology Regulation Act' in Parliament. This bill aims to replace two existing technology laws: The Electronics Transaction Act 2063 and the National Technology Development Board Order 2058. The government hopes that these pieces of legislation will support its intentions to develop and expand information technology infrastructure to enable easy access to information technology to the general public. According to the Minister of Communication and Information Technology Gokul Banskota, the bill is introduced to defend and protect the constitutionally guaranteed fundamental rights of individual privacy and consumer protection.

The preamble of the bill states its main objectives: Regulate the Information Technology industry; Regulate electronic records and signatures; Provide public service through information technology; Ensure cybersecurity; protect users' data, control cybercrime, regulate domain names, social media, among others. The bill envisions three different institutional mechanisms: A National Information Technology Center, an Information Technology Court and an Office of The Comptroller on Digital Signatures.

Breaking it down:

The bill defines 'crime and offense' through the Information Technology medium and also proposes a procedural approach for tech-related investigations and judicious processes. Fines ranging from five to 15 lakhs and prison sentences from one year to five years are proposed. Most of the Information Technology-related offenses will be categorised as criminal offenses and will be prosecuted by government authorities under the code listed in the Criminal Procedural Act 2074.

The bill, after being tabled in Parliament, has been received controversially for its ambiguous regulations on social media. The legislative attempts to curb free expression online has garnered much attention and public discourse. Specifically, Article 91 requires people operating social networks to be registered in the Information Technology Department. The government has also devised legislation to ban 'unregistered' social networks.

This ambiguous provision creates more confusion than clarity on how social networks are supposed to operate legally, which has left

the public flummoxed. The proposed definition of social networks vaguely incorporates 'any computer and internet-based interface', which only adds more uncertainty as to which platforms can be classified as social networks. It also leaves ample room for interpretation with high variance and possible misuse.

Article 94 details six categories of content which are forbidden to be disseminated via social networks. The first category forbids expressions against national security, national unity, and sovereignty, a relation between the federal units, provocation of hatred in regional, communal and religious issues, among others—which are legitimate restrictions on freedom of expression according to Article 17 of the Constitution of Nepal.

The second category restricts broadcast of 'contents with provocations of the caste based discrimination, contempt of labour, harm on law and order and public morals and integrity'. However, this category also includes some novel restrictions which are not defined as legitimate restrictions in Article 17.2.A of the constitution.

The third category restricts communications and broadcast materials with the intentions of denigration, deceit, discouragement, vituperation, provocation of hate and contentions, and hoodwinking. The language in this provision is very subjective in nature and is thereby open for personal interpretation—which simply widens the space for misuse. Such egregious provisions may be misused by the authorities conveniently.

The fourth category prohibits the sharing of content with intentions of defamation which is quite reasonable. But it seems rather redundant as the Criminal Code contains its own defamation law. This also demonstrates the control-oriented intentions of the government. The fifth category restricts the publication, broadcast, and exhibition of advertisements and sales of prohibited materials through social networks. However, the existing Consumer Protection Act and the advertisement regulations are already in place to oversee these types of offenses.

The final category of the restriction leaves an open-ended window for any activity against the proposed act. These offenses carry punishments up to five years of jail sentence and Rs15 lakhs of fines along with punishments dictated by other existing laws. These offenses would be also classified as state crime, which comes as

a shock as most of these actions are just along the lines of civil offense. This has resulted in heavy criminalization of freedom of expression regulations in Nepal.

Vague words

The provision of Article 88 is related to the misuse of electronic systems. This theme is itself very ambiguous and can be interpreted as an attempt to regulate for internet-based mediums and devices based on expression or journalism. This provision is a tightened copy of Article 47 of the existing Electronic Transaction Act 2063. There are four categories: The first two are the same as the categories of social network regulations stated above.

The third category restricts the use of electronic devices in the aid of human trafficking, kidnapping and drug abuse which are also already regulated by criminal code. And the fourth deals with advertisement and sales of prohibited materials. Upon cursory examination, this article may not seem like a direct threat to freedom of expression. However, similar provisions have been misused to curb online journalism and free expression against the government.

Along with several other issues, Article 83 related to cyberbullying, Article 85 on sexual harassment, Article 86 of pornography, and Article 87 on deceit are very vague, redundant, and open to misuse. The provisions already covered by the existing criminal law in this act are not relevant to be included in an information technology law as criminal law.

The provisions in chapter 11 related to 'privacy and data protection' are also redundant as the parliament had already passed the Individual Privacy Act amidst controversy and discourse last session. This bill is again introducing the few conflicting issues on privacy which were satiated by the privacy act. Therefore, the tabled Information Technology bill needs to be heavily reformed in order to align with its claimed objective of 'maximising technology for nation building and achieving prosperity'. As such, the draconian provisions, which are against freedom of expression, internet freedom, and democratic values, should be amended to reflect the spirit of the constitution.

This calls for more public discourse, more attention, and further proactivity by lawmakers and political leaders. If the bill is passed as it is, it will have catastrophic effects against civil rights and democracy.

Self Disclosure Update

Type and Nature of Organization	NGO working for Democracy, Right to Information, Freedom of Expression, Fiscal Transparency and Open Data, Media Policy and Law, Internet Freedom		
Legal Status	Registered at District Administration Office Kathmandu. DAO Registration Number: 127/062/63, SWC Affiliation Number: 18518		
Location	Adarsa Marga, Prasuti Griha Road, Thapathali, Kathmandu		
Staffs and Roles	Taranath Dahal: Executive Chief, coordinates overall organizational and administrative affairs Aruna Adhikari: Finance and Administration Officer, looks after accounting and administrative affairs and performs responsibilities as the Information Officer. Nanu Maiya Khadka: Gender Monitoring Officer, responsible for monitoring media content on gender perspectives Manju Ojha: Front Desk Assistant, Kamal Poudel: Driver, Ganga Kumari Gurung: Office Assistant		
Projects	Krishna Sapkota- SUSASAN, Narayan Ghimire- CACFRIM, Pramod Bhattarai- SUSASAN, Sanjeeb Ghimire- EEMIR Bhawana Poddar- EEMIR, Bobbish Dhakal- EEMIR, Kumar Chaulagain- EEMIR, Ashmita Pokharel- CACFRIM Deepa Adhikari- CACFRIM, Shanti Chaulagain- CACFRIM		
Ongoing Project Information	Project Name	Supporting Agency	Date of Signing the Contract
	Amendment of the Right to Information Act	The Asia Foundation TAF)	26th September 2018
	Enable Environment for Media Law Reforms and Improved RTI Practice (EEMIR) (CS-MAP)	FHI 360	30th Dec 2016
	Contributing to the Atmosphere Conducive to FoE, Reduced Impunity and Inclusive Media (CACFRIM) in Nepal	Free Press Unlimited (FPU)	5th March 2019
	Sustainable use of Technology for Public Sector Accountability in Nepal (SUSASAN)	CECI	17th April 2017
	Campaign and Advocacy of Impunity Grant	IFEX	6th November 2018
	Updating Nepal's Citizens Climate Budget: Some Ideas	International Budget Partnership (IBP)	26th November 2018
	Open Budget Survey 2019	International Budget Partnership (IBP)	18th January 2019
Services Offered/ Activities Carried Out	Research, capacity development and policy advocacy including media monitoring, trainings on RTI and journalism, meetings, workshops, seminars and other campaigns to promote issues of democracy, RTI, FoE, fiscal transparency, human rights, local governance. It also provides legal aid to journalists, media and information seekers.		
Responsible Authority	Chairperson: Hari Binod Adhikari, Executive Chief: Tara Nath Dahal		
Decision Making Process	General Assembly: Making policies, rules and regulations of organization Executive committee: Formulation of action plans as per constitution of organization, rules and regulation Management team: Running projects and daily operational affairs and reporting timely to the Executive Committee.		
Past and Current Activities	Please follow the link: http://freedomforum.org.np/content/category/activities/		
Information Officer	Aruna Adhikari		
Financial Information	Freedom Forum received grants announcing Rs. 11320549.60 (January to March 2019)		
Official Website	www.freedomforum.org.np		
Publications of Freedom Forum	Freedom Forum has over 50 Publications (printed) Please Follow the Link: http://freedomforum.org.np/content/publications/		
Annual Report	http://freedomforum.org.np/content/publications/reports/annual-reports/		
Mechanism for Information Dissemination	Websites- http://www.freedomforum.org.np/ ; www.nepalpressfreedom.org , and Newsletter-Free Expression		

Time to Listen to Podcasts

A mid spurt of media enabled by internet disseminating news and views, contributing to building knowledge-based and informed society with the creation of credible and convincing contents bears significance. Similarly, growing use of smart phones coupled with the increased presence of internet in Nepal, the option to the media of anyone's interest is also varied. In this very scenario, popularity of podcast is gradually gaining pace. As a frontline CSO generating knowledge and skills with continuous advocacy and research on the issues relating to freedom of expression, press freedom,

right to information, impunity, open data, and transparency, among others, Freedom Forum can not remain aloof from linking itself quickly to the digital populace which is in need of quality contents on such pressing issues. So far, FF produced nearly two dozens of Podcast and 17 have already been uploaded on its website- <http://freedomforum.org.np/podcast/>. These podcasts have added new dimension to FF's publicity indeed and paved easy way for anyone interested in study and work on democratic issues for the connection to FF. The podcasts prepared with the supports from IFEX, and FPU

for different projects, features the matters as reminiscence of the family member of journalist killed during insurgency and desperate wait for justice; impunity related to crimes against media persons still unaddressed, representation of women in Nepali media, budget practice and transparency on climate change, campaign for rights to freedom of expression and information, misbehaviour meted out to information seeker, provisions suppressive to the FoE in the Information and Technology bill, views of human rights institute on impunity and human rights situation and so on. Don't you think it is time to listen to these podcasts? 

AU Special Rapporteur writes to Chadian president regarding social media blackout

This statement was originally published on africafex.org on 29 March 2019.

The African Freedom of Expression Exchange (AFEX) welcomes the appeal to President Idriss Deby Itno of the Republic of Chad by the African Union Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression and access to information in Africa (the Special Rapporteur), Commissioner Lawrence Mute, regarding the on-going social media blackout in the Central African country.

The appeal of the Special Rapporteur, Commissioner Lawrence Mute was contained in a press release issued on March 22, 2019 by

the Special Rapporteur, exactly ten days after the African Freedom of Expression Exchange (AFEX) on behalf of 80 prominent press freedom organisations working across the globe, petitioned him to intervene in the situation in Chad.

The petitioners urged Commissioner Mute as well as the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, Prof. David Kaye to call on President Idriss Deby of Chad to restore access to social media platforms including Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter which have been shut down in the country following orders from the government on March 28, 2018.



Several calls by local and international rights groups appealing to the government of Chad to restore these platforms have proven futile over the past months. The petitioners therefore called on the AU/UN special rapporteurs to intervene in the matter.

AFEX commands the move by the AU Special Rapporteur as the African Commission's commitment to advancing freedom of expression rights of citizens both offline and online.

We appeal to The Special Rapporteur to pursue this case to its logical conclusion by ensuring that the government of Chad ends the ongoing blackout and uphold the freedom of expression and access to information rights of the people of Chad at all times.

Members of AFEX:

- Africa Freedom of Information Centre
- Association for Media Development in South Sudan
- Center for Media Studies and Peace Building
- Freedom of Expression Institute
- Human Rights Network for Journalists - Uganda
- Institute for Media and Society
- International Press Centre
- Journaliste en danger
- Media Foundation for West Africa
- Media Institute of Southern Africa
- Media Rights Agenda
- West African Journalists Association



Chadian President Idriss Deby. Photo: Middle East Monitor

Source: <https://ifex.org/chad/2019/03/29/social-media-blackout/>

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



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