



FreeExpression

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A NEWSLETTER OF FREEDOM FORUM

Ensure Transparency in COVID Fiscal Management

CCOVID-19 has had an enormous impact on Nepal and the region more generally. The first case of COVID-19 was found in Nepal in January 2020 and by the end of March, the authorities imposed a nationwide lockdown, a ban on domestic and international flights, and a closure of land border crossings. The government has re-imposed restrictions, after lifting them in July 2020, due to the rapidly rising Covid-19 cases, according to International Monetary Fund.

The scale of the interventions needed to confront pandemic challenged the government in unprecedented ways. The Government of Nepal introduced four key emergency fiscal packages to respond to the COVID crisis, including a stimulus package to regularize business and enterprises, a guideline to provide relief to the working class and people belonging to the unorganized sector and a refinancing procedure to facilitate the revival of industry, professions and business affected by COVID.

In the budget speech for fiscal year 2020/21, then Finance Minister Dr Yubaraj Khatriwada announced additional measures in the areas of healthcare, including the establishment of additional hospital facilities; support to business, such as a lending program for small and medium-sized enterprises and those in the tourism sector; and job creation, including in the labour-intensive construction sector, and training for work in the manufacturing and services sectors. In addition, the government announced the expansion of the child grant

social support program by an additional 11 districts to cover 25 districts in total.

The country's economy was hit extremely hard and COVID-19 emerged in a situation of growing inequality. The very unequal impact of the pandemic, with disadvantaged groups bearing the brunt of the health and economic fallout, risks making the situation worse. But even in this challenging context, the role of the government is essential to help the country get through the hardest parts of the crisis.

How open and accountable has the COVID response been in Nepal?

Responding to an open and accountable manner to the pandemic is not only a way for the government to show its commitment to the well-being of its citizens, but also to ensure real benefits for everyone, from reducing the risks of corruption and misuse of public resources to ensuring more equitable and effective policy outcomes. In other words, shortcuts and limitations are neither necessary nor inevitable. Even during terrible crises, accountability can work if everyone does their part in an open and collaborative effort. An urgent and speedy response does not have to come at the expense of accountability.

As such, civil society partners across 120 countries, including Nepal, worked with the International Budget Partnership (IBP) to undertake a rapid assessment of “emergency fiscal policy packages”—sets of policy initiatives like the “Health Care, Business Support and Job Creation measures in the Budget Speech of Fiscal Year 2020-21” adopted in Nepal, aimed at addressing the impact of the COVID-19 emergency—in the period from March to September 2020. Our goal was not just to assess how governments fared, but to generate lessons on how they can respond better, both to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis and to future ones.

Most countries, almost two thirds of those surveyed including Nepal, published very limited information on the introduction and use of simplified pandemic-related procurement procedures, making it difficult to assess if governments were getting value for money in purchases of medical equipment or other goods and services.

“When the crisis broke, we urged governments to be transparent and accountable because we knew from our Open Budget Survey there were weaknesses in accountability systems globally,” said Vivek Ramkumar, senior policy director of the International Budget Partnership. “Unfortunately, this scorecard shows too many governments are falling short, to the detriment of the publics they serve. It doesn’t have to be this way—we encourage countries to incorporate the good practices our report highlights in ongoing relief efforts and international donors to support country-led efforts to strengthen accountability norms.”

“This crisis is far from over. We must keep mobilizing resources for the pandemic response, including ensuring everyone has equitable access to vaccines,” said Sofia Sprechmann Sineiro, Secretary General of CARE International. “If we are serious about equity and justice, we must be serious about accountability. This is about ensuring assistance reaches those who need it most.”

This rapid assessment of “emergency fiscal policy packages” focused on three critical pillars of accountability - public access to relevant information, oversight by the legislature and na-

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Message from Executive Chief

Unceasing commitment to democracy



Nepal got the federal democratic republic 15 years back. It was resulted after the struggles for and debates on democracy continued for 70 years. The hope of sustainable democracy further coupled with constitutional provision of secularism, mixed electoral system, local and province governments with authority and participatory, inclusive and proportional representation. It has been six years these new features put in place with the promulgation of constitution of Nepal, 2015. The people's representatives following the elections held in all three tiers- local, provincial and federal levels- are now nearing the final years of their term. These four years' experience have faced numerous challenges on governance. Worryingly, the major challenges on effective implementation of the constitution and the salient features as mentioned above are caused by the activities of current Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli. The authoritarian rule imposed and fostered by him are sheer obstruction on enforcement of the new system, achieved with such struggles and sacrifice of the people. He is the leader of the political party which two-thirds majority in the parliament. But, he neither showed capacity to keep the party united nor took initiative to protect, promote and institutionalize the achievements. Rather, his activities badly dented the constitutionalism for he emerged so totalitarian that he repeatedly dissolved the House of Representatives merely because of the disputes within his party. The dissolution of the supreme body of people's representatives ruined the atmosphere of checks and balance of power in the country. The government's decision to dissolve parliament was quickly questioned and case filed at Supreme Court. The court annulled the parliament dissolution, arguing that it was against constitution. With gross ignorance to the court order, the PM again dissolved the parliament for the second time. It has badly impacted Nepal's constitution, rule of law and good governance. It is a treachery to people, constitution, parliament. Such reckless act of the PM has resulted in frustration among the people, thereby giving them space to doubt the system and vent ire on national politics and behaviour of political parties. The country at present is therefore engulfed against in uncertainty and instability.

The governance situation is further exacerbated with sheer mismanagement of COVID-19 pandemic. Transparency and accountability eluded during the efforts government took to control and prevent the spread of virus and the treatment of the infected people. With the dissolution of the parliament, the federal budget was brought via ordinance. It evaded people's and lawmakers' debate and discussion in the entire processes of budget making.

Such shortsightedness and vested interests of the political leaders have impeded the campaign of promoting democratic culture in a durable manner and dampened people's hope of political stability and sustainable peace. The salient provisions of human rights in the constitution are in a state negligence. Consequently, citizen's rights are violated and civic space shrunk. It is therefore the civil society has been forced to be agitated and worried over the human rights situation in Nepal. Time has come again for the civil society to unite for waging struggle to protect constitutional achievements and improve human rights situation which contribute to constitutionalism, democracy and sustainable development. For this to happen, Freedom Forum is in the frontline to raise voice for democracy and human rights being aware whether citizen's rights are trampled. It has stirred the conscious groups to continue struggle for democratic values.

Freedom Forum has been continuously showing severe concern and protesting the undemocratic activities of PM Oli. We object to the activities which are against constitution. The PM has dampened Nepalis' hope and aspiration for good governance, socioeconomic progress, equality and justice. His government, since inception, has continued suppression of freedom of expression, press freedom, freedom of assembly. The authoritarian moves suppressed the civil and political rights- with introduction of restrictive laws, policies. These ill efforts however received huge criticism from wider circle. Finally, his activities are intended to fail the constitutional and political systems. More alarmingly, the President, which is the prime institution to correct the arbitrary decisions of government, backed the Prime Ministers in his ill-efforts which are against constitution. The dissolution of the parliament twice is severe blow to democratic system, which has fueled the uncertainty.

At such critical moment, Freedom Forum, as an aware CSO, bears responsibility to continue its campaign to protect and promote human rights. The situation warrants further activism to defend democratic values where citizen's rights are protected. FF, with its unabated commitment to democracy, obviously remains active despite adversity. 🌱

- Tara Nath Dahal

Misuse Of Press Council Unabated

Press Council Nepal (PCN), a media content regularly body, has 'blacklisted' four online media, arguing that they disregarded its instruction on June 24. It has further discredited media researcher and journalists by questioning over the content they shared on social networking site, Facebook.

The PCN warned of blocking www.ghimaytimes.com in Nepal by writing to Nepal Telecommunications Authority for it. Three other media blacklisted are – www.birgun-jcity.com; www.nrnkhabar.com; and www.koshipati.com.

Since the inception of this government, it has continuously exerted ill influence to the state institutions to discredit media, panic journalists and foil atmosphere for free expression.

www.nepalaja.com; www.karnalikhbar.com; www.deshsanchar.com; and www.setopati.com are other media which are questioned over their news title.

On June 10 too, PCN had issued such warning to www.sagarmathadaily.com for not being registered or listed as per the Council's regulation and allegedly for publishing misleading news. It is too ridiculous that PCN has also questioned media persons for sharing cartoons.

FF has the stand: Gross intervention of government in Press Council Nepal has been growing, thereby suppressing free speech. PCN has not only gone beyond its jurisdiction but also being a government tool to create single narrative where criticism has no space. Arbitrary move to control online media and FoE on social media is intended to counter anyone making critical comments on government activities. Broader collaboration is essential to fight such suppression of media and misuse of PCN. Protection of free press needs top priority at present to protect Nepal's democracy. Moreover, the recent question of PCN over news seem politically motivated. 🌱



Freedom of Expression Violations

Province 1

No incidents were recorded during this period. 🌿



Province 2

Obstruction

Nepal Police misbehaved with Shyam Paswan a photojournalist associated with Birgunj television while reporting at the border area in Parsa on June 5. Parsa district lies in Province 2 of Nepal.

Talking to Freedom Forum, reporter Paswan shared that earlier on May 31, he had reported news about open cross-border smuggling amid the prohibitory order declared by the government to contain COVID-19. Following this, one of the police officers reported to be involved in smuggling called on reporter Paswan's mobile phone and threatened him for writing the news without his consent.

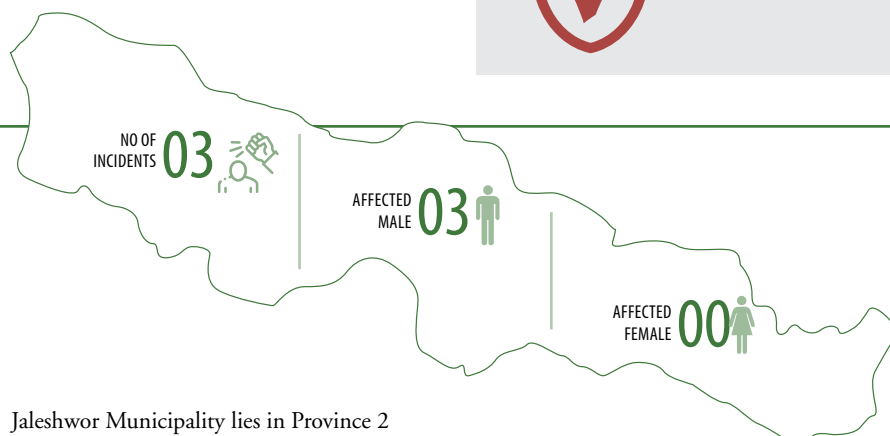
Thereafter, on June 5 Paswan again reached the border area to report on the illegal transport of goods. The police persons on-duty asked him to produce his identity card, license, and mobile phone.

Although he showed his identity card, they not only deleted the photos and videos from his mobile phone but also took him under control for 30 minutes at a local police station.

"After the incident, I'm discouraged to visit the site for further reporting", Paswan said.

Misbehavior

Mahottari based reporter with AP1 television Nabin Chaudhary was misbehaved while reporting at Jaleshwar Municipality on May



27. Jaleshwar Municipality lies in Province 2 of Nepal.

According to Freedom Forum's representative Rajan Singh, reporter Chaudhary was taking video of a local road constructed on May 26 which was damaged the other day.

Meanwhile, the local users' committee chairperson Sanjeeb Kumar Ray verbally abused reporter Chaudhary for taking pictures and videos of the road and deleted the recordings.

Death Threat

Reporter to <https://eshirishnews.com/>, an online news portal, Dharvendra Kumar Yadav (Yadubanshi) was issued death threat in Mahottari district on April 25. Mahottari district lies in Province 2 of Nepal.

According to FF's representative Rajan Singh, a contractor at Aurahi Municipality named Nathuni Thakur called reporter Yadav and issued death threat for publishing a news critical to him in the online portal.

Earlier on April 23, reporter Yadav had written a news story about the contractor's hooligan-

ism to close the market. Representative Rajan quoted Yadav as saying he had written the news based on the complaints of locals against contractor Thakur. 🌿

Right to Protest

Nepal Police arrested three local youths for protesting against a minister in Rautahat on June 22. Rautahat district lies in Province 2 of Nepal.

According to Freedom Forum's representative Rajan Singh, Lalan Yadav, Bijay Yadav and Dipendra Yadav displayed black flags while Minister Anil Kumar Jha was heading towards the office of the ministers.

Jha was recently appointed as minister of water and sanitation. 🌿

Bagmati Province

Obstruction

Reporter to the Chitwan Post daily Kul Prasad Kafle was barred from reporting in Bharatpur on June 24. Bharatpur, Chitwan lies in Bagmati Province of Nepal.

Reporter Kafle reached the BP Koirala Memorial Cancer Hospital to report on the ongoing meeting of Bharatpur Metropolitan Office's municipal assembly. Meanwhile, the press advisor at the metropolitan office Suresh Chandra Adhikari stopped reporter Kafle from entering the venue, reasoning no journalists were invited to the meeting.

Reporter Kafle finally returned without reporting.

Verbal abuse

A social activist Gyanendra Shahi spoke abusively with reporters to the News 24 television on June 16.

Reporters duo Dhiraj Basnet and Shikha Shrestha broadcasted news about Shahi's misbehaviour with the locals.

On this, Shahi called the reporters and spoke foul on them for reporting his misbehavior.

Arrest

Nepal police arrested executive editor Anish Tamang and director general Durga Lal Tamang at <https://www.ujyaalonetwork.com/>

(an online news portal) from Kathmandu on April 25. Police also picketed the Kathmandu based office of the media and seized camera and mobile of the editor Bibek Lopchan while he was working on his desk.

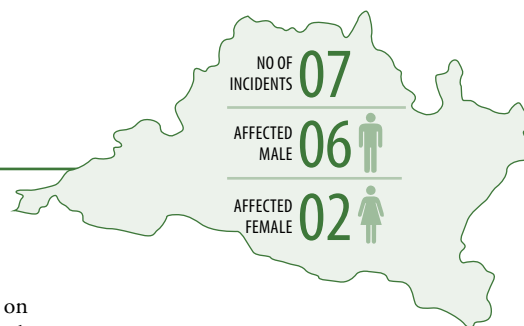
As per the information received, they were arrested for publishing news on their portal critical to Nepal's Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli on April 15. Following the news publication, Press Council Nepal had asked for clarification over the contents within 24 hours on which the media house had furnished clarification and apologized for news publication.

Few days later, police arrested the journalists under 'Electronic Transaction Act and Crime against State' charge.

Manhandle

Senior reporter to the Naya Patrika national daily Kedar Dahal was manhandled by the police persons while reporting in Kathmandu on April 13.

Reporter Dahal told Freedom Forum that he was reporting on the people waiting in line at the gate of Indian Embassy to receive travel permission letter. Meanwhile, on-duty police officers thrashed him and tried to snatch his mobile phone saying he was not allowed to take pictures and videos.



"They not only accused me of being a fake journalist but also tried to take me under control. However, I was released as soon as a senior officer arrived", said Dahal.

Death Threat

Producer and reporter with <https://www.nepalaja.com/> (a web-based news portal), Madhav Prasad Guragain, was attacked and issued death threat while reporting in Kathmandu on April 12. Kathmandu is the federal capital of Nepal.

Talking to Freedom Forum, reporter Guragain said, "I reached the construction site of Kathmandu View Tower to report on the complaints of sub-contractor. As I started to record the video from my mobile, contractor Manoj Bhetuwal seized my mobile and threw it."

Guragain had reached the site with one of the sub-contractor who had complained of nonpayment after finishing his construction assignment.

"Supervisor Gyan Bahadur Ray issued death threat to me. Even the police officers did not take any action against the incident", informed Guragain.

Female journo receives threat of attack for reporting on COVID-19 vaccine misuse

Associate editor at a news portal- <https://annapurnatimes.com/>- Gyanu Shrestha was issued threat of attack for publishing news on misuse of vaccine on June 14. Ramechhap district lies in Bagmati Province.

Talking to Freedom Forum, editor Shrestha shared that she had published news about the misuse of vaccination drive where groups other than targeted people were

administered vaccine on June 11. They shared photos taken during vaccination as well.

On this, a local teacher Khyan Bahadur Shrestha called her by phone and threatened her of attack for publishing his photos in the news. He also spoke foul on her and said that the photos tarnished his image.

Editor Shrestha, however, said that she had received those photographs from other sources

which were also posted on Shrestha's own Facebook page. She also confirmed that the teacher along with others misused the vaccination drive which was open only for people aged 60 to 64 years.

"I have filed a complaint at the district police office, and the senior official has assured me of fair investigation", she informed.

Ex-Minister threatens editor Minya of physical assault

Editor at Kantipur daily, Abdullah Minya, was threatened of by an ex-minister merely for writing news relating to environment and forest.

Former Minister of Forest and Environment, Prem Bahadur Ale, issued threat to senior deputy editor at Kantipur daily and former central member of FNJ, Minya, during a telephone call Minya made for

interview yesterday (?). Minya is a noted environmental journalist.

"I know what you deserve. Wait, how I assault you," said Ale being angry in course of receiving information about his works during his ministerial stint. Ale was relieved of responsibility in the recent Cabinet reshuffle. News reports were rife about the irregularities in the ministry earlier.

The threat of physical assault on editor is a sheer violation of press freedom. In case the former Minister had any concern over the news content, he could take legal recourse as going to Press Council Nepal, but issuing threat for writing news is against press freedom. It has harassed the journalist. The ex-minister must respect press freedom and journalists' right to free reporting. 🌱

Gandaki Province

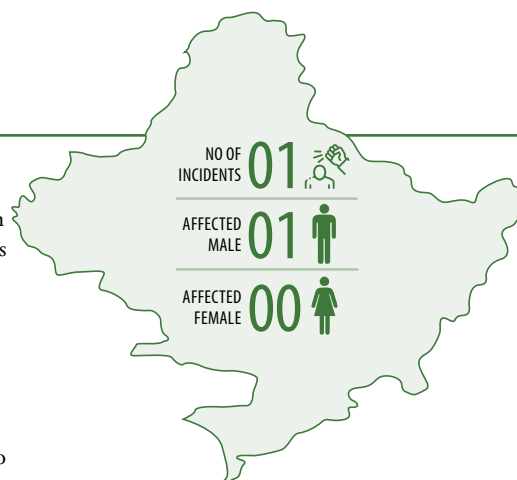
Threat

An unknown person threatened Arjun Giri, editor at <https://www.tandavnews.com/> - an online news portal-for publishing news on his portal on May 30. The news portal is run from Pokhara, Gandaki Province.

On the day of incident, Giri had published news about a local citizen's suicide case. Following this, an unknown person calling himself

Ramesh Bista, Vice-President of Federation of Nepali Journalists, called on editor Giri's mobile and threatened him to delete the news or bear consequences.

The person declined the call when Giri tried to confirm whether he was really the vice-president. Later, Giri informed vice-president Bista about the incident who said he was unknown about the call. 🌱

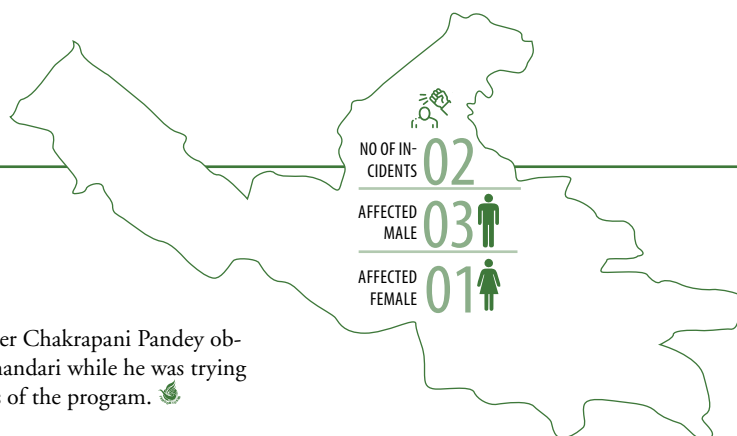


Lumbini Province

Obstruction

Kapilvastu based reporter at Avenues Television Gopal Bhandari was barred from reporting a program at District Administration Office Kapilvastu on May 18. Kapilvastu lies in Lumbini Province of Nepal.

Chief District Officer Chakrapani Pandey obstructed reporter Bhandari while he was trying to take photographs of the program. 🌱



Apology after misbehavior

Reporters at Eastern Rukum FM Jitendra Budhathoki and <https://www.lumbinivoice.com/> - online news portal- Bikram Pariyar were misbehaved while reporting on May 4.

The incident took place in Lumbini Province of Nepal.

Ward Chair Sur Bahadur Roka misbehaved and attempted to attack the reporters while reporting

about the Puthauttarganga Rural Municipality. Later, the ward Chair Roka apologized for his misbehavior and expressed commitment to respect journalists' right to free reporting in future. 🌱

Karnali Province

Manhandle

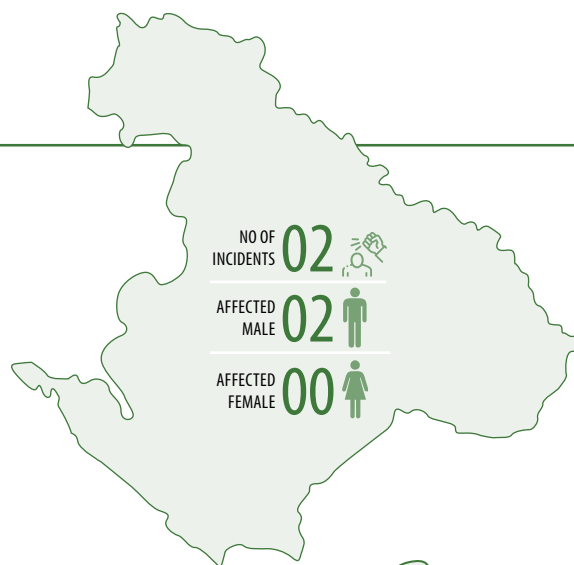
News editor at <https://ekarnalikhbar.com/> - a news portal- Lalit Bista was manhandled while reporting in Kalikot on June 24. Kalikot lies in the Karnali Province of Nepal.

On the day of incident, cadres affiliated to Nepal Communist Party displayed black flags at Karnali Province Chief Minister Mahendra Bahadur Shahi while he was heading towards his home. Editor Bista was manhandled while taking pictures of the protest.

However, editor Bista escaped any injury.

Death Threat

Reporter to the Rajdhani national daily from remote Kalikot district, Bishwonath Simkhada, was issued death threat for writing news on April 20. Kalikot district lies in Karnali Province. District coordinator of All Nepal National Independent Students' Union (Revolutionary), Mansingh Shahi, issued death threat over the news relating to political interference among school children. Shahi warned Simkhada of breaking his limbs, vandalizing his media house and even taking life. The coordinator was angry why the news was written about his organization.



Sudurpaschim Province

No incidents were recorded during this period.



COVID-19 toll on Nepali media

The second wave of COVID-19 took heavy toll on Nepali media sector as well. Hundreds of journalists were infected with the coronavirus. Among them, 20 lost their lives. Irrespective of the health and safety measures in place, the journalists lost battle against the deadly virus. Freedom Forum pays tribute to the departed media persons and extends condolences to the respective family members. Together, FF demands full vaccination to all media persons and their families to save them and journalism. The demise of journalists is a huge loss to Nepali media and journalism. FF remembers their role to bring journalism to this stage. The following list of fatalities was maintained by Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ).

List of journalists died due to COVID 19 infection in Nepal

Name	Affiliation	Date
Banarasi Burma	Nepal Television, Kapilvastu	September 7, 2020
Bikram Shakya	Kathmandu	NA
Bishnu Chaulagain	Kavre	November 2, 2020
Sitaram Burma	Dhading	November 6, 2020
Mahendra KC	Nepal Television, Parbat	December 17, 2020
Damodar Adhikari	Gorakshya National Daily, Dang	April 20, 2021
Kamal Mishra	Drishti daily	April 14, 2021
Santan Raut	Radio Nepal, Dipayal	May 7, 2021
Dinesh Dahal	www.cpostnews.com	May 8, 2021
Manoj Chaudhary	Janakpur Today daily and Madhesh Masala FM, Rautahat	May 12, 2021
Ganesh Paudel	Gandaki Television, Kaski	May 13, 2021
Rama Yadav	Red Television	May 11, 2021
Shanti Ram Karki	Channel Nepal Television	May 15, 2021
Laxman Basnet	Radio Hapure, Dang	May 17, 2021
Hikmat Chaudhary	Rupandehi	May 19, 2021
Krishna Prasad Ojha	Radio Nepal	May 21, 2021
Chandra Neupane	Saptakoshi FM	May 28, 2021
Ekraj Bhandari	Freelance	May 29, 2021
Rabindra Gautam	Annapurna Post and Radio Bhimeshwar, Dolakha	May 30, 2021
Yagya Prasad Bastola	Kaski	June 10, 2021
Rahees Shahi	www.khabarnepalgunj.com	May 15, 2021

Continued from Page 1

tional audit office and opportunities for citizen engagement. These pillars help ensure resources are used effectively to meet peoples' needs and that governments can be held accountable.

Key findings: Limited transparency and minimal citizen engagement opportunities, but promising oversight practices that can strengthen accountability.

The findings of assessment in Nepal indicate that the overall transparency of the stimulus and response packages was limited and the mechanisms for citizen engagement in their formulation and implementation were minimal. There are opportunities to build on oversight measures to ensure greater accountability of the response and recovery.

Our three key findings are as follows:

1. Decision-making on the formulation and implementation of the stimulus and response packages included very little or no input from the public, especially from those most impacted by the crisis.

Citizen participation in the formulation and execution of the COVID fiscal and policy responses did not take place, excluding the public from having a voice in decisions on priority-setting during the pandemic, and depriving the government of contributions which could greatly improve the effectiveness of their actions. While the government had established mechanisms for public participation through its pre-budget submission process and e-consultations during budget implementation through Hello Sarkar, it did not extend these practices to the current crisis for a more effective response, maintains the Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers.

2. The government has provided minimal information on the implementation of the COVID response package.

The government has been more open during the introduction of the emergency fiscal policy response, providing adequate macroeconomic and aggregate budget information and some

information on policy measures, but transparency on COVID-19 spending has been lacking. The government's opacity has brought youth to the streets in the thousands as part of their Enough is Enough campaign to demand spending information and improve the handling of the COVID-19 crisis, reported www.myrepublica.com.

3. While there has been adequate legislative oversight, accountability measures can be strengthened.

The House of Representatives has been playing an important accountability role during the pandemic until its dissolution. It received and debated regular or special reports including information on the execution of emergency fiscal policy packages and heard testimony from executive members to get a better picture of emergency-related policy execution. Furthermore, the Parliamentary Public Accounts Committee investigated irregularities in procuring medical equipment and supplies to ensure those responsible can be held accountable. According to the Office of the Auditor General (OAG), there is no practice of real-time audits and concurrent monitoring from the supreme audit body, though the OAG has changed its audit plans and schedule to audit COVID-related expenses. It is yet to be seen how the government will respond to the findings of the special audit on the COVID-19 spending.

Recommendations: Accountability during and beyond the crisis

Ensuring transparency, participation, and oversight now and over the long term is crucial both for accountability and the effective and equitable use of precious resources. The 2019 Open Budget Survey found that there was significant room for improvement in Nepal. It is imperative to address the accountability shortcomings of COVID-19 fiscal and policy responses, both during the crisis and beyond. In light of this, we call on the government to work with state and non-state actors to take the following steps:

Recommendation 1. Act now to strengthen accountability in order to ensure an equitable and effective response to the COVID-19 crisis.

- Publish monthly progress reports on the implementation of the measures in the budget speech, including data and analysis on budget execution and performance, disaggregated by impact on disadvantaged groups, including women and girls
- Disclose all details related to procurement contracts linked to the emergency spending, wherever possible in open formats
- Establish inclusive public participation mechanisms in the formulation and implementation of emergency fiscal measures, such as those above. There are opportunities to build on pre-pandemic participation mechanisms with the executive and parliament, as well as the Office of the Auditor General, which has long been engaging civil society and citizens in the audit process to enhance accountability.
- Empower and resource the Office of the Auditor General to conduct expedited audits on emergency spending programs, and ensure the government takes remedial measures in response to audit findings
- Restore the role of the legislature as keeper of the public purse, including approving expenditures, consulting with the public and interest groups, monitoring policy implementation and following up on audit findings

Recommendation 2. Strengthen systems for accountability to ensure the equitable and effective use of precious public resources in the future

- Introduce and/or review and update the legal and regulatory framework to clarify roles, responsibilities and approaches to be adopted during times of crisis, for example in the areas of resource management, procurement, oversight and participation.
- Ensure that the audit findings of the Office of the Auditor General are acted upon swiftly and that substantive audit follow-up is strengthened beyond the emergency. 🌱

(The briefing note was prepared based on the findings of COVID Module of Open Budget Survey with a rapid assessment of the transparency of emergency fiscal policy packages introduced by Nepal government between 1 March and 30 September 2020. Policy Advisor Krishna Sapkota and Project Staff Subash Dahal involved in the research/survey.)

Don't suppress civil and political rights

Freedom Forum is cautious and worried of imminent threat also to the fundamental freedoms of the citizen in the emergence of an anarchic political context with recent activities of the Head of the State/President and country's Executive Chief/Prime Minister against the letter and spirit of the Constitution and Supreme Court verdict.

Now is the situation when the citizens have been facing multiple crises and are being grossly deprived of basic health services in the wake of life-threatening COVID-19 pandemic. Against the backdrop of these troubled and unprecedented times, an unexpected move has been taken ahead to push the country to elections by overstepping the Constitution's assumptions. In this context, we also call on all citizens and

stakeholders to remain cautious and vigilant towards the growing risks of suppressing the citizens' freedom of expression, right to information and freedom of the press with the undemocratic and untimely move of the incumbent government. Also, we would like to caution the government to not take any move to suppress political and civil rights of the citizens. 🌱

Court grills journalists over news

Freedom Forum was alarmed over interrogation of journalists by the Supreme Court over news on May 25.

Chief Editor at www.imagekhabar.com, Rajan Kuikel, and Editor-In-Chief at www.nepalsamaya.com, Narayan Amrit, were summoned by the Supreme Court on May 25 and interrogated why they published 'baseless news'. Chief Editor Kuikel shared with Freedom Forum that the Supreme Court summoned them, arguing that the news they published about the meeting of Prime Minister and Chief Justice was 'fake and misleading'. "Why did you publish such unverified news? What's your news source? Why can't you share with us the news source," grilled the court when they reached the court on Tuesday afternoon. The court insisted that the news damaged Supreme Court's image.

Adding further apprehension and panic, the media regulatory body Press Council Nepal issued a letter to editors the same day, seeking clarification over the news contents and source. At a time when the editors have published the Supreme Court's version along with the news, the misuse of

Press Council by the government is upsetting. These incidents have harassed the journalists and discredited independent media. The intimidation on journalists who are working despite adversity caused by Covid-19 has jeopardized the atmosphere of free press.

To this, Freedom Forum's Executive Chief Taranath Dahal, commented, "The government has repeatedly been misusing Press Council's authority to intimidate the independent media and question its credibility. Adoption of legitimate procedures is imperative to verify the news content in case of concern over it. Similarly, interrogation of journalists and asking them for news sources by court officials is worrying and risk journalists' safety. Free press and independent judiciary are equally important pillars of democratic system. Harmonious relations between them contribute to foster democratic values. FF therefore urges both sides to respect each other. But, it is rare incident in Nepal that Supreme Court intimidated journalists in such way. Similarly, the content regulatory body, Press Council Nepal, needs to protect journalists' rights rather than issuing order and panicking media repeatedly. All sides are urged for respecting press freedom guaranteed by constitution."

Moreover, it is the responsibility of editor to protect the news sources while the image of court must not be tarnished by the fake news. Balance in news essential, at the same time, editors have right to take stand on news, Mr Dahal added. While Nepal is suffering worst with coronavirus pandemic lately, the political situation is also messy with repeated dissolution of House of Representatives (HoR) by the government of UML party, which many constitution experts and opposition parties have called an unconstitutional move.

After the Prime Minister KP Oli dissolved HoR lately, the President called the parties for proposing a leader for forming the new government which was also failed with political bickering. The media carried the news of meeting between PM and Chief Justice in the night after the opposition parties reached Supreme Court on the day, seeking justice and demanding order to appoint opposition leader they proposed as new Prime Minister and restore parliament, arguing PM's move was unconstitutional. 🌱

Letter in solidarity with Ivan Pavlov

Freedom Forum, in coordination with The Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD), joined more than 90 other organizations and individuals in endorsing a letter in solidarity with Ivan Pavlov, a Russian human rights activist and lawyer who has been criminally charged with disclosing data of a preliminary investigation which has been declared secret. The likely reason for these charges is Pavlov's role, along with other members of Team 29, which he heads, in defending opposition leader Alexey Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation (FBK) and campaign offices against criminal accusations of advocating extremism.

Pavlov was detained on Friday, 30 April, and, although he was later ordered to be released by a judge, this was on condition that he not use a telephone or the Internet. Pavlov has been a tireless campaigner against government secrecy

"He was charged with making information public, he had accused Russian authorities of abusing secrecy rules in the Navalny case and lodged another legal case to have those materials declared open to the public."

and in support of human rights. Just the day before he was charged with making information public, he had accused Russian authorities of abusing secrecy rules in the Navalny case and lodged another legal case to have those materials declared open to the public.

The various measures against Pavlov, including the charges and communications ban, are a manifest breach of his rights to freedom of expression and criminal due process. They represent a broader attack on the rule of law,

including respect for the independence of lawyers.

We call on democratic States and intergovernmental human rights bodies to take action to defend the rights of Pavlov and all Russians.

The letter with the full list of signatories is available in English original, as well as in Arabic, French, Russian and Spanish translation: <https://www.law-democracy.org/live/russia-letter-in-solidarity-with-ivan-pavlov>. 🌱

FF signs joint statement urging state actors to defend democracy, constitution in Nepal

Freedom Forum along with social activists, human rights activists, journalists, professionals and civil society organizations signed a joint statement- Defend Democracy and Constitution in Nepal on May 25, 2021. The signatories have called on political parties, members of parliament, civil society, professionals, constitutional experts, lawyers, health professionals, academicians, media and other concerned groups to jointly protest against the undemocratic and unconstitutional move of the Prime Minister and the President for their recent move to dissolve House of Representatives which is undemocratic and unconstitutional.

The statement reads:

Joint Statement of Social Activists, Human Rights Activists, Journalists, Professionals and Civil Society Organizations
25 May 2021

The world is severely affected from the COVID 19 pandemic. New variants of the virus appearing in the second wave are deemed more lethal and high-speed spread, which has caused so much pain in the country. Citizens are compelled to lose their lives due to inadequate supply of oxygen and unavailability of hospital beds, and absence of timely medical attention. The medical system of the country remains ineffective to respond to COVID 19 at the moment. Unfortunately, the Government has

not been able to manage vaccines for all. In this crisis, three-tier Governments, political parties, and entire state mechanisms must focus their actions towards health security of the people, protect their lives from infection, and assure the relief support for the survival of deprived populations. In this circumstance, we are deeply concerned about the dissolution of the House of Representative decided by the President upon the recommendation of the Prime Minister. Instead of giving attention on treatment of patients, effective control of the COVID 19, and emerging social and economic problems, the Federal Government has been involved in unconstitutional and undemocratic moves.

As one of the key partners of the democratic movement, we have been closely observing the moves of the Government and political parties. It is our conclusion that recent moves of the Federal Government have posed threats to the Constitution and the historical achievements gained through the sacrifice of the peoples and people's movements, including democratic polity, republic state, federalism, secularism, fundamental rights and inclusion. We condemn the repeated actions of the government that encroaches the Constitution. In addition, the recent moves of the President are explicitly a violation of the Constitution and against the aspiration of the people and the verdict of the Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court dated on February 23, 2021. Furthermore, it is against the spirit of popular democratic norms and values.

The Prime Minister appointed as per the Article 76 (3) is mandated to face the Vote of Confidence of the House of Representative within 30 days of the appointment. The direct invocation of article 76 (5), skipping article 76 (4), is indeed unconstitutional. It is our conclusion that the decision of the President's Office for the dissolution of the House of Representative on the basis of self-presumption, while its members of the Opposition Parties were claiming to form the new government, is absolutely undemocratic and unconstitutional. We call on political parties, members of parliament, civil society, professionals, constitutional experts, lawyers, health professionals, academicians, media and other concerned groups to jointly protest against the undemocratic and unconstitutional move of the Prime Minister and the President. The joint efforts against the Government's move are essential to protect the democratic values, including constitutional supremacy, rule of law, freedom of expression, right to information, and civil and political rights at this juncture.

During this critical period of the health crisis, we urge the Government to manage vaccines as soon as possible, provide free treatment service to all COVID 19 patients, and protect the lives of poor, marginalized and of those living in vulnerable conditions. Finally, we urge the Supreme Court to take optimum efforts to safeguard the Constitution, prevail the rule of law, and guarantee constitutional supremacy in the country. 🌱

Social activists arrested during peaceful protest

Nepal Police arrested 18 persons including social activists from Kathmandu for protesting against the government's action on June 11.

The Police took under control the social activists from near the Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli's residence while they were staging peaceful protest against the government's recent move

to grant affiliation to a disputed medical college. Granting affiliation to the college was on hold after the criticism and protests initially launched by Dr. Govinda KC and his supporters which later drew the attention of civil society members gathering solidarity against commercialization of medical education.

The protest is a part of a campaign named Broad Citizen Protest ongoing in the capital

city against the government's every unconstitutional move in recent days. Freedom Forum condemned the arrest of demonstrators as it is violation of freedom of assembly and peaceful protest. Because the constitution has guaranteed citizens right to freedom of assembly, every citizen has right to protest peacefully. The activists were released later in the evening 🌱

Comedian Pranesh Gautam acquitted, FF welcomes court decision

Freedom Forum welcomes the Patan High Court decision to acquit comedian Pranesh Gautam in case of character assassination over a film review. The High Court upheld the Kathmandu District Court decision that the film review made by comedian Gautam does not assassinate character. In the very beginning- before two years- Freedom Forum had condemned the arrest of the artist Gautam. Film Director Milan

Chams (film Bir Bikram-2) had complained in the police initially arguing that the film review made in a satirical way by Gautam assassinated the character of filmmakers and artists.

Although the case was decided by Kathmandu District Court in favour of Gautam, it was later reached the Patan High Court.

With the complaint by Chams, the police had detained Gautam for eight days two years back.

FF maintains that the High Court decision in favour of comedian Gautam has respected well citizen's right to freedom of expression. Also, it clearly shows that Electronic Transaction Act is the most misused law to silence people in Nepal. The progressive decision of Court sets a precedent so that anyone exercising freedom of expression online/offline would not be victimized in future. 🌱

New budget in flux with political crisis

The upcoming federal budget is reeling under uncertainties after the dissolution of Parliament. This event unfolded just before a week when the executive was obliged to present the upcoming budget in Parliament on May 29. This comes at a very critical time of health crisis with Covid-19 cases wreaking havoc throughout the nation. The budget formulation is a continuous process and it has to go through a rigorous timeline before tabling the budget in the Parliament. A budget is presented following the preparation and publication of the pre-budget statement and discussion and inputs from civil society and other stakeholders including experts, business communities. The budget process has been adversely hit this year following the first dissolution of Parliament.

The first issue came to the fore when President Bidya Devi Bhandari dissolved the HoR on December 20. The budget-making process saw a big blow when the Parliament was dissolved and the government turned to be a caretaker. There was a reawakening of optimism for a normal course of action when the apex court of Nepal reinstated the Parliament. A pre-budget statement of standard norm is a must for a standard budget. Publication of pre-budget statement and discussion is an essential framework of any democracy as well as budget-making process. The government should publish pre-budget statement latest by the end of the year of Nepali Calendar as per the House of Representatives Operation Rules, 2018 and



By Subash Dahal

the Economic Procedures and Fiscal Responsibility Act 2019 so that there can be an ample time for discussion with different stakeholders. With no such pre-budget statement in place, the government only provided email and web portal to seek inputs and suggestions on budget from the public. There has been the tendency of holding various meeting in the name of pre-budget discussion with selected groups and individuals. The Finance Ministry held budget discussion with various ministries, previous finance ministers, some selected experts and representatives from Nepal Chamber of Commerce among others. It's not clear whether these discussions were merely ritual or there were systematic consultations based on the pre-budget statement. Along with this, there is no information disclosed on the inputs and suggestions provided by the stakeholders in the meetings and how these deliberations will be taken into the consideration for upcoming budget. It is important to be disclosed as what inputs were received and how they will enrich the formulation of the upcoming year's budget.

The uncertainty arises again after President yet again dissolved the Parliament, a week before the date set by the Constitution to table the fiscal budget. Against the backdrop, it is quite uncertain and opaque as to how and when the new budget will come in what form. Being the caretaker government, it is unlikely to present the full-fledged budget as the mid-term election dates have also been announced. Likewise, it is most likely that the budget will be unveiled through the ordinance.

While people are in confusion on the new budget, ex-finance ministers, outgoing lawmakers and experts are on the view that the caretaker government cannot bring a full-fledged budget. Experts are of the view that the current government should bring budget through ordinance with the presentation of only regular recurring expenditure and not with a new policy and other new programs by the end of the fiscal year. It's a huge blow for the country and the people as all are eager to know how the federal government budget will address the Covid pandemic through fiscal measures and allocations.

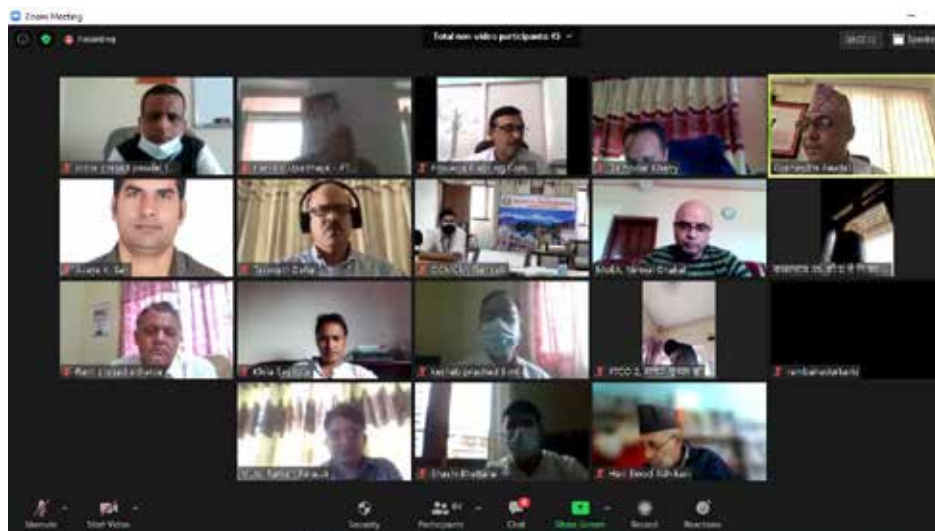
Amid the pandemic when Covid-19 the second wave is raging and our health infrastructures are not sufficient to respond to the needs, the upcoming budget is much awaited to be a strong measure to fight against the pandemic. The current political crisis has put the budget in flux as to when and in what form will the budget come within the constitution-stipulated date for the budget presentation. 🌱

Stakeholders consulted to draw up national strategy of citizen engagement in PFM

In order to elicit inputs from diverse stakeholders, including government, CSOs, media and individual experts/champions on the strategic areas and entry points of citizen engagement in public financial management (PFM) in Nepal, Freedom Forum in collaboration with the Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) Secretariat organized consultations at all three tiers of the government.

FF has conducted the consultations for verification with key stakeholder participants where detailed discussions of findings, recommendations and conclusions were presented and the proposed CE Strategy was reviewed by key stakeholders. The virtual consultations were hosted as part of the review of the current situation of citizen engagement in PFM and develop a comprehensive Strategy for CE in the PFM system in Nepal that will guide the process of mainstreaming citizen engagement throughout the budget process for all tiers of the government.

Findings of the assessment of existing and potential forms of CE, along the budgeting cycle for federal, provincial and local levels, have been structured around three questions: 1. What are existing policy commitments and regulatory entry points for CE (based on analysis of policies and regulations)? 2. How the existing policy and regulatory entry points are being used in practice? What is working and what is not and why (limitations and challenges)? 3. What is missing in policies and regulations (based on review of international standards and best practices)?



The diagnostic assessment along with recommendations were made in six phases of the budget cycle in all three tiers of the government, including strategic and periodic planning and fiscal forecasts, budget formulation, budget enactment, budget execution, accounting and reporting and external audit and oversight. Altogether 200 stakeholders had provided their inputs in refining the national strategy for citizen engagement in PFM of Nepal.

The strategy would build upon and leverage existing experiences in-country and internationally. It would provide guidance on institutionalizing and strengthening sustainable systematic practices for CE across all tiers and all budget phases in line with the principles of participation and inclusion, transparency and accountability, effectiveness and responsiveness.

During the consultations the participants recommended improving policy and legal frameworks related to citizen engagement in the PFM process. Among the key inputs with recommendations are --

- Based on this analysis, the PEFA Secretariat in consultations with key stakeholders should approve a Strategy for Citizen

Engagement in PFM in Nepal, followed by an Action Plan (including communication/ awareness building and capacity building measures for those involved in its implementation).

- The MoF should produce and make public the MTEF in timely manner and disclose it through its website.
- The federal parliament should amend the Financial Work Procedure and Fiscal Responsibility Act and the Ministry of Finance to improve Budget Formulation Guidelines to mainstream the concept of public engagement in the budgetary process. Existing provisions related to preparation and disclosure of financial reports enshrined in federal, provincial and local Financial Work Procedures and Fiscal Responsibility Acts should be reviewed to make them compatible with federal Right to Information laws.
- The Parliament should review and adjust the Right to Information Act, 2007 and Regulations, 2009 to improve the practice of proactive disclosure of the stipulated PFM related information and also reflect the recent Open Data and ICT trends in information and public data domain.
- There should be institutional mechanisms within Ministry of Finance regarding disclosure of fiscal information including allocations, virements and expenditure every month and interface for public feedback and inputs during emergency



- An Independent Fiscal Institution (IFI) should be set up to conduct studies and analysis of macroeconomic status, budget and different aspects of public finance management. IFI can be mandated with the responsibilities of preparing tools and instruments of CE, monitor their implementation and collect public opinion and inputs on different stages of the budget process and institutions. IFI should prepare reports of their work and submit to the government and the parliament in a timely manner.
- Existing capacity of the federal level budget agencies including ministry of finance and national planning commission should be optimally utilized in systemic disclosure of financial information on open and accessible formats
- A training manual containing procedures for citizen engagement in different stages of the budget cycle should be prepared and training on PFM and CE should be provided to the concerned representatives and staff in different agencies under line ministries, departments or units at federal, provincial and local levels. Central budget agencies (MoF/NPC) should take this responsibility. Ideally, PFM training center under the Ministry of Finance can be strengthened and mobilized.
- Federal PFM training center and provincial training academy or good governance center should design and deliver training to the CSOs, media, elected local representatives and concerned local staffs on fiscal transparency and different aspects of CE in PFM. Training manuals for such training should include components of CE in PFM.
- All three levels of governments should review and make required improvements on the practices of citizen engagement and make sure that inputs and feedback collected and used from both representatives

and open citizen participation approaches are well documented, reported and published.

- The budget agencies or units at each level should have minimum human resources and technical capacity in course of the preparation of key budget documents and related data, releasing them in timely fashion and implement the citizen engagement strategies and approaches throughout the budget cycle
- All three tiers of governments should identify and map CSOs with experiences or interest to work on different aspects of PFM should be identified and mapped at their respective level.
- All tiers of the governments should widely disseminate public service announcements through mass media and social media to strengthen demand side of budget information and citizen engagement, and enhance budget oversight. Moreover, budget literacy campaigns should be launched at each level. Governments should collaborate with media to promote budget literacy and improve citizen access to budget information
- Special departments, divisions or units should be established or assigned the responsibilities of preparation and disclosure of fiscal data and information, development and execution of CE tools and other aspects of public finance management in key PFM agencies including federal ministry of finance, provincial ministry of finance and planning, OAG, federal and provincial parliamentary secretariat and office of comptroller general
- List of projects to be implemented at sub-national level from federal budget and local projects to be implemented from provincial



budget should be listed separately, sent to the concerned provincial ministry of finance and local level and made public before finalizing the provincial and local budget. The purpose is to reduce duplication in resource allocation and execution.

- Provinces should make or amend good government policies and laws and include the provisions of budget information disclosure and citizen engagement in budget processes
- Local government self-assessment tools should be institutionalized to align the indicator of fiscal transparency and citizen engagement in budgeting process and linked with extra federal and provincial grants
- Local best practices such as development of budget transparency portal and releasing budget data, formation and engagement of citizens' advisory councils and thematic groups in periodic plan development and annual budgeting process etc. should be replicated by local levels to promote fiscal transparency, citizen engagement.
- With few exceptions, municipalities and rural municipalities do not have dedicated budget or PFM units, and secretariats under the program and budget formulation committee are weak. Therefore a dedicated budget unit should be established and also given responsibilities of executing strategies of CE in local PFM.
- CSOs and media should promote practices of filing RTI application to get budgetary data that have not been publicly disclosed and use them for facts-based budget advocacy
- Local CSOs should receive individual audit reports, demystify audit recommendations and widely disseminate to the public to promote citizen advocacy for settling arrears and monitoring the progress. CSOs should conduct budget literacy campaigns and social accountability tools including public expenditure surveys.



ANNUAL DATA

Press Freedom Violations from May 2020 to April 2021

Total no of press freedom violation incidents decreased this year (88) as compared to the last year (107). The highest number of violations took place in Bagmati Province (29) followed by Province 2 (20) with the least number of violations recorded from Province 1 (2).

Among those incidents, a majority was the incidents of threats and death threats (29) followed by attacks (23) and misbehavior (19).

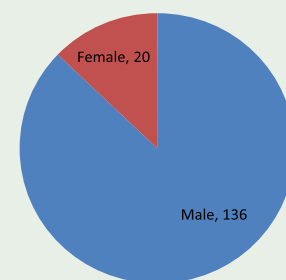
In the incidents recorded during a year, 136 male and 20 female journalists were directly

affected. Among those, the highest number of journalists affected were from Province 2 (69) followed by Bagmati Province (47).

Moreover, on the types of media- majority of the affected journalists were affiliated to print media (56) followed by online media (48).

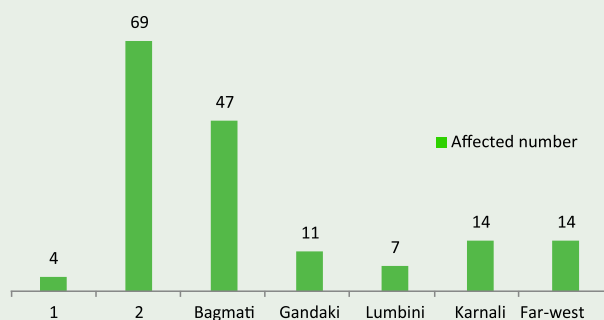
Again comparing the data for hostile elements, majority of the violations were caused by criminals/ goons (43) followed by security officials (33).

Number of total affected journalists

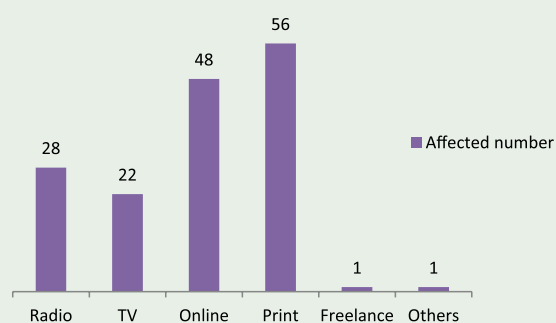


Total number of incidents - 88

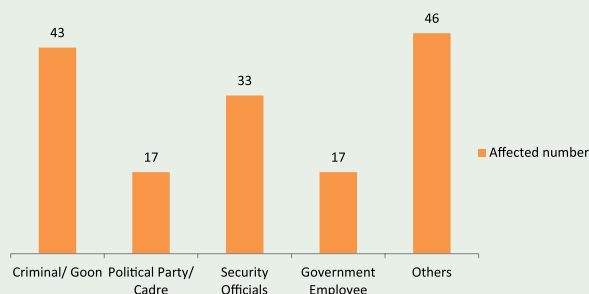
Number of affected journalists by Province



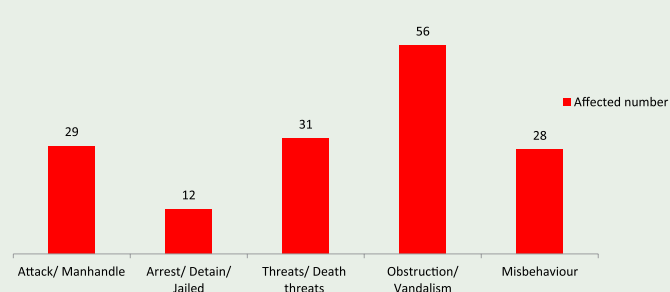
Number of affected vs type of media



Number of journalists affected by hostile elements



Number of journalists affected in different types of violation



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		
	Aditya Dahal: RTI App and website operator		
	Manju Ojha: Front Desk Assistant, Ganga Kumari Gurung: Office Assistant		
Projects	Krishna Sapkota- Public Expenditure Financial Accountability- PEFA (CONSULTANT), Narayan Ghimire- MAINSTREAMING HUMAN RIGHTS IN CYBERSECURITY AND CYBERCRIME POLICY (CONSULTANT), Subash Dahal - DAA		
Project Information	Project Name	Supporting Agency	Date of Signing the Contract
	Contributing to create atmosphere for Free Expression and reduction of impunity on crimes against journalists	IFEX	October 27, 2020
	Review of Statistics Bill	The Asia Foundation (TAF)	November 4, 2020
	Driving Audit Accountability : Audit Reports for Collective Action to Strengthen Government Responsiveness (DAA)	IBP	30th September 2019
	Mainstreaming Human Rights in Cybersecurity and Cybercrime Policy	Global Partners Digital	15th March 2021
	Consultancy service for Development of Citizen Engagement Strategy in Nepalese Public Finance Management	PEFA	28th December 2020
Services and Activities	Research, capacity development and policy advocacy including media monitoring, trainings on RTI and journalism, meetings, workshops, seminars and other campaigns to promote issues of democracy, RTI, FoE, fiscal transparency, human rights, local governance. It also provides legal aid to journalists, media and information seekers.		
Responsible Authority	Chairperson: Hari Binod Adhikari, Executive Chief: Tara Nath Dahal		
Decision Making Process	General Assembly: Making policies, rules and regulations of organization Executive committee: Formulation of action plans as per constitution of organization, rules and regulation Management team: Running projects and daily operational affairs and reporting timely to the Executive Committee.		
Past/Current Activities	Please follow the link: http://freedomforum.org.np/content/category/activities/		
Information Officer	Aruna Adhikari		
Financial Information	Freedom Forum received grants amounting Rs. 1083579.57 (April to June 2021)		
Official Website	www.freedomforum.org.np		
Publications of Freedom Forum	Freedom Forum has over 50 Publications (printed) Please Follow the Link: http://freedomforum.org.np/content/publications/		
Annual Report	http://freedomforum.org.np/content/publications/reports/annual-reports/		
Information Dissemination	Websites- http://www.freedomforum.org.np/ ; www.nepalpressfreedom.org , and Newsletter-Free Expression		

UN: States must embrace free expression to tackle disinformation

JULY 02, 2021

Summary

ARTICLE 19 made this statement on behalf of 11 NGOs during the interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of freedom of opinion and expression the 47th Session of the Human Rights Council.

We commend the Special Rapporteur for her timely and important report on disinformation, an issue which has been brought into the spotlight in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We share concerns over the impact of disinformation on human rights. Yet, this is a problem that has only been exacerbated by many States taking a repressive approach and using disinformation as a pretext to crackdown on open public discourse and the essential work of journalists, human rights defenders and other civil society actors who contribute to flourishing information ecosystems.

Worldwide, many States have adopted repressive laws with vague terminology criminalising the spread of disinformation, which are inherently incompatible with the principles of legality, necessity and proportionality. In their path, these laws have led to the arbitrary detention of civil society actors simply for expressing critical or dissenting views.

In flagrant violation of various resolutions passed by consensus at this Council, many States have

also responded to disinformation with Internet shutdowns and other disruptions which stop the free flow of information online, such as website blocking and filtering.

We deplore such measures, which are not only fundamentally at odds with international human rights obligations, but ultimately facilitate the spread of disinformation throughout societies and hamper fact-checking efforts.



It is clear that States must take a different approach to the problem.

The Special Rapporteur concludes her report with a powerful statement: "The right to freedom of opinion and expression is not part of the problem, it is the objective and the means for combating disinformation."

We urge States to approach disinformation with a holistic response which embraces the right to freedom of expression, including by promoting a diverse and independent media, protecting journalists and whistle-blowers, ensuring access to information held by public bodies, and investing in media and digital literacy.

We also call on this Council to recalibrate all resolutions that contend with disinformation



to align fully with the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur.

Thank you, Madam President.

Signed by:

- Access Now
- Amnesty International
- ARTICLE 19
- CIVICUS
- DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project)
- Human Rights House Foundation
- IFEX
- International Bar Association
- International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL)
- International Commission of Jurists
- International Service for Human Rights

(Source: <https://www.article19.org/resources/un-states-must-embrace-free-expression-to-tackle-disinformation/>)

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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