

# Media misuse to erode media credibility, invite threat to journalists and propel misinformation

## BACKGROUND

*Butwal city, located in the southern plains of western belt in the country, is the capital city of Province 5 in Nepal after the federalism is put in place. It is the second most vibrant city for media after the federal capital, Kathmandu. The concentration of media with staggering number of journalists has made media active. In addition to this, the local levels and provincial levels filled with the people's representatives from almost single party and its impact on media is a matter of study. Even the harassment of working journalists in the name of cybercrimes is reported lately. Safety of journalists is always the most important concern. With this in mind, Freedom Forum conducted a media mission and held discussion with the reporters and editors at various media, right to information activists and human rights activists where they shared their views and experiences.*

The mission was conducted in the final days of June 2019.

## VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES

### **Bishnu Prasad Bhushal, Chief Editor, Buddha Television**

- Role of journalists is getting limited to just relaying information- no issue-focused reporting, no investigative reporting.
- There is growing chance of media use and misuse to hide information of public concern and flow the 'guided information', or let's say misinformation. The governments at local level do not share factual information, which the journalists are bound to make news for their media.
- Advisors to the people's representatives have become helpful to kill the news from the very field, exerting undue pressure on the fellow reporters not to write news on pressing issues that question government at local and province levels.
- For the journalists, information seeking process is getting complicated and full of hassles.
- Owing to pressure, fear, and deepening self-censorship, media are not able to dig deep to bring forth facts behind institutional corruption.

- Contractors are also harassing and threatening journalists.
- Some journalists have themselves become obstruction to the good governance by contracting with the government on 'information sharing'. It is sheer politicization of media.
- Above points and the divisive journalists are inciting governments to capture media.

#### **Ram Bikas Chaudhari, RTI activist and journalist**

Policy and decision making process are nontransparent at local level. Even the Mayor does not allow its team members to read the budgetary documents, keeping financial information secret.

#### **Radhesyam Bishwokarma, AP 1 Bureau Chief**

- When making news on the irregularities at local government, the journalists become target on social networking sites.
- There is no investigative reporting at all.

#### **Sharada Malla, associated with Avenues TV, and Siddhartha FM**

There is scarcity of in-depth news in the province.

#### **Dipak Ghimire, reporter to nepallive.com and Image Television**

- The security/safety to journalists from State side is weakening day by day
- If there were anyone on the close watch- surveillance- of government, they are journalists at present.



### **Dipendra Baduwal, Bureau Chief, Kantipur daily**

- After federal capital Kathmandu, Butwal is considered the place for active journalism, where some longtime journalists are still continuing this career. In Butwal city alone, there are more than 100 active journalists; bureau offices of the national media.
- Major threat to press freedom are – low wage to reporters (though not in all case), deepening self-censorship, majority of single political party at local level.
- I can't criticize any political party here because I'm criticized immediately by my own friends.
- Journalists are giving priority to '*satta* (power) and *bhatta* (allowance as lure), which is huge threat to media professionalism indeed. It results in not *khoji* (investigative) but *goji* (money) journalism.
- Number one news killers are those who advise people's representatives.
- Case of physical threat is quite low. Death of investigative reporting/critical journalism is seen in the province.
- Sheer political division among journalists killing news and fueling misinformation in the province where those doing fair journalism are isolated.
- Media is becoming a tool for government to impose their rule and views.
- However, there is fertile advertisement atmosphere for media sustainability.
- It is time to mull seriously on IT Bill and Media Council Bill

### **Ram Raj Pokhrel**

- Divisive media has tarnished the image of journalism. Writing news for and against is rife.
- The IT Bill and Media Council Bill are suicidal to free press.

### **Naresh KC**

Low consultation resulted in such poor bills that intend to curtail FoE. Experts' view must be considered while drafting such important legal documents.

### **Binod Pariyar**

Why the government at present is growing negative sense to media? Why is the leadership prevailing to suppress media?

#### **Tanka Sunar associated to darpanpost.com**

I've been undergoing a psychological fear because I'm facing a case with criminal liability in Jhapa district, the district in the east of Nepal, though I'm here running a news portal- darpanpost.com. I don't know why such case was filed against me by chairman of a rural municipality in Jhapa district. I was implicated by the police just

because a newspaper in Jhapa district having similar name to my news portal published a news story. Currently, I have to visit Jhapa district every month to face the case. I don't know why I was charged because I had no newspaper but the news portal which coincided with the name of a newspaper. I've been charged of defamation.

**Binod Pahadi, senior journalist and human rights activist**

- It is worrying that journalists are divided on any serious issue of public concern. Divisive journalism in the Province is severe threat to professionalism and fair reporting.
- In the name of favouring governments, some journalists are encouraging government to control media and sabotaging free press.
- Although the Province government brought Broadcasting Act, why aren't all journalists speaking in univocal manner?

**Balkrishna Chapagain, senior journalists, editor, Janasangharsha daily**

- After the second people's movement, Nepali media is largely dominated by commercial journalism. Political division with certain favour is reflected in news contents. News and views on any issues in different media are utterly divided and contradictory.
- Comparing media trend in the last two decades, media professionalism has witnessed tremendous downfall in the past two years!
- I kindly request the government not to make journalists slave of the system.
- Despite having faith to the present government, I've severe concern over the recent bill- IT Bill and Media Council Bill- because these would curtail press freedom and damage democracy.

**Krishna Malla, editor, Butwal Today**

Pressure to publish or not any news to media is commonplace. But, professional media maintain integrity.

**Rekha Bhushal, reporter with Nagarik daily**

There is sheer ignorance among media owners and publishers to promote women in media. Only male are promoted in the responsible posts. Women journalists are not recognized for capacity building as well. Even the local levels ignore women journalists, giving priority to males to share news.

**Usha Kiran**

Social bias is reflected on the journalism by male and female

**Kalpana Tiwari, Station Manager, Radio Mukti FM**

Trust on women in press is yet to be built. No pressure on news selection.

**Niru Gautam, reporter, National News Agency (RSS)**

- As compared to the males, women journalists are deprived of public information. There is not a single woman as advisor at local levels.
- However, investigative reporting is increasing for correcting government.

**Maya KC, associated with Butwal Today**

Women journalists are not allowed influential post in the media.

**Gaurab Khanal, associate editor of [onlineaawaj.com](http://onlineaawaj.com)**

I, an associate editor of [onlineaawaj.com](http://onlineaawaj.com), was charged with cybercrime merely for having my news portal's name similar to some extent to another news portal. I was arrested by police last March but without any reason. There was not arrest warrant. It came to know later in Kathmandu that the fake news was posted by [onlineaawaj.net](http://onlineaawaj.net), but I was detained for 10 days and case filed under cybercrime. My news portal- [www.onlineaawaj.com](http://www.onlineaawaj.com) had neither created the fake news nor posted it on social media. It was tremendous torture to me. Another website ([onlineaawaj.net](http://onlineaawaj.net)) did mistake. But, why was I arrested and case filed? Now, I have to go to Kathmandu every month to attend the hearing of the case but the court is rescheduling the date.



## CONCLUSION

*The above views and experiences of working journalists made the mission conclude that the local/provincial levels exerting its power on media with its sheer misuse is highly likely to invite more threats to journalists, to erode trust on media and to set stage to propel misinformation.*

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Freedom Forum