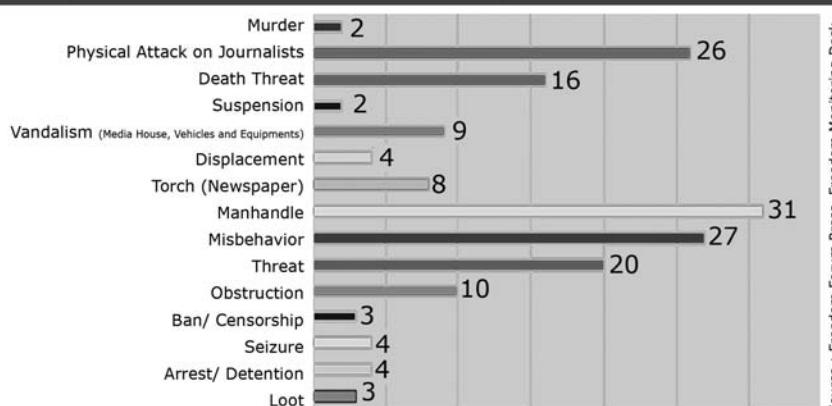




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“Free and Independent” Press still in Limbo



Total Incidents 169
No. of Journalists Affected 215

Nepali media and media workers have continued to face constant threats to their personal and professional safety and institutional security despite peaceful change in the political atmosphere followed by the establishment of democratic governments.

The lives of journalists who take up responsibility of imparting information to people have been increasingly at risk for covering and publishing news. Journalists are compelled not only to experience inhuman torture and life-threatening assaults, but also to face deaths when they dare to report the wrong doings of political parties, sectarian interest group and even government officials.

The acts of impunity are simply rising unabated as the state security apparatus is ineffective in dealing with the breach of law and order situation. As a result, journalists are experiencing a hard time to freely exercise constitutionally guaranteed right to freedom of expression and, thus, are compelled to compromise their rights for personal security.

During the period of a year from May 1, 2009 to April 30, 2010, journalists and media houses throughout the country came across a total of 169 incidents of press freedom violations

mainly due to the effect of their works. Over the period, two media entrepreneurs, including Chairperson of Space Time Network Jamim Shah, 47, and Publisher of Janakpur Today Arun Kumar Singhaniya, 50, were shot dead in a broad daylight in two separate incidents on February 7 and 30, respectively. The two murder incidents occurred in the gap of three weeks serves as the testimony that crime against media has increased posing a serious threat to free and professional journalism.

The Monitoring Desk of Freedom Forum recorded 26 incidents of physical attacks on journalists, 16 death threats, 27 misbehaviors, 2 cases of suspension from media house, 9 cases of vandalism (media house, vehicles and equipments), 20 threats, 31 manhandle, newspapers burn 9, including other press freedom violation incidents largely from youth wings of political parties, security personnel and sectarian interest groups. The trend of burning newspapers and torching press vehicles, and death threats to journalists to show resentment and vengeance have emerged as serious problem before press freedom during the period.

More than 10 incidents of obstruction were recorded and 4 journalists had to flee from

their workplace due to the effect of their writing. The total number of journalists affected directly from the anti-press incidents during the period is 215, according to the Desk Report.

Dozen of journalists were attacked, issued death threats, their offices ransacked, working stations closed, publications halted, their vehicles set ablaze and distribution and transmission were obstructed. The major incidents recorded during the period are brutal physical attack on woman journalist Tika Bishta in Rukum, attacks on the Kantipur Publication in Kathmandu and Sama Printers printing The Himalayan Times and Annapurna Post in Lalitpur, assault and subsequent displacement of journalists Lavdev Dhungana and Kumar Ojha in Panchthar, death threat to Kantipur Publications Chairperson Kailash Sirohiya, Director Rameswor Thapa and its Editors, ban on circulation of newspapers (Republica, Nagarik and Annapurna Post) in Pokhara, among others.

Burning copies and setting ablaze the press vehicles of The Kathmandu Post, Kantipur, Nagarik, Republica, The Himalayan Times, Annapurna, Nepal Weekly, Aaujor Daily, and other newspapers from bandh enforcers, agitators and hooligans in various parts of the country was also deemed the serious obstruction to the functioning of free press thereby people's right to know. Mainly journalists working in central, eastern and far-western region and southern plains of Nepal had faced series of threats, obstructions, attacks, arson and displacements.

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Message from the Chairperson

The Right to Information (RTI) is a unique human right. It is a tool in the hands of everyday people. Information provides people with the knowledge to demand political, economic and social rights from their governments—from the right to food to the right to be free from tortures. The world has accepted the RTI laws as an effective tool to improve democracy, ensure transparency and accountability, check corruption and help ensure other rights but it has a sorry picture in our country.

One of the major problems concerning the effective implementation of RTI is the lack of coordinating body. The Act doesn't state which ministry is responsible for the implementation of the Act. There is no unit established by the executive branch for its implementation. There are no clear responsibilities allotted within executive branch.

Similarly, ministers, concerned public and non-governmental entities and political parties that come under the purview of RTI are reluctant and most are unaware of their responsibilities regarding implementing people's right to know. Government officials still behave as if information generated in their offices is their private property not public.

The National Information Commission (NIC) has a significant role to implement, promote and monitor the RTI laws, but no substantial progress has been visible towards that. It is a very disappointing situation that people are still not aware that information held by public bodies could be received on demand. No government mechanism is looking into the enforcement and monitoring of the RTI implementation. There is a need of active and cooperative role of the NIC towards promoting information culture in Nepal.

The efforts are meager and have no substantial impact as anticipated regarding the protection, promotion and practice of RTI laws.

The number of appeal filed in the NIC shows the appeal mechanism has not been used widely by the public. So far only 12 appeals demanding information have been submitted to the NIC. According to the Act, it is the primary responsibility of the public bodies to appoint Information Officers (IOs) immediately after the Act came into force. However this primary obligation has not been fully fulfilled.

There is no proper record management system in place in Nepal frequently causing problems for the supply side to provide information in line with the RTI Act. No archives are maintained and no systems are in place. The documents in most of the offices are packed in sacks. No concrete program and policies have been proposed and no investment or human resources allocated for it.

Routine disclosure is a key element of the RTI regime, as many people will find it difficult or uncomfortable to file request for information with a public body. But it is not found widely prevailing in practice in Nepal.

The Act has made it compulsory for the offices concerned to arrange periodic training for information officers and to enhance their capacity to disseminate information in a systematic manner. But this is yet to be done. In addition, the training on RTI should also be provided to all civil servants to strengthen supply side. The provision of promoting openness of public agencies could be materialized only when requester could get information on time and format and public agencies could promote proactive disclosure to respect citizen's access to information.

The big problem is that people are not aware about the RTI Act and its essence and significance. No massive awareness campaigns are conducted to educate people about their right to access to information. Citizens are still confused as to which agencies provide what types of information. Given the size of Nepal the small number of information requests made so far is indicative of the lack of awareness amongst people about this law and the rights available under it and indifference on the part of the demand side.



Taranath Dahal
Chairperson

World Press Freedom Day marked globally

In a global conference hosted to mark the UNESCO World Press Freedom Day in Australia, Brisbane, Freedom Forum's Chairperson Taranath Dahal came across an opportunity to take part as a panelist on the theme of "Freedom of Information as a Tool for Empowerment, Enabling Protection and Achievement of Other Rights".

More than 300 participants attending the Conference in Brisbane (Queensland, Australia), had urged national governments to enact legislation guaranteeing the right of access for all to information held by public bodies at all levels, local, national and international.

During a keynote address at the opening of the event on 2 May, the Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, stressed UNESCO's role as a champion of freedom of expression and the right to know, which are "indispensable for the attainment of all human rights and fundamental for strengthening democracy".

While presenting a brief paper on the theme, Chairperson Dahal emphasized the importance of freedom of information towards promoting and protecting interest of an individual and of the society. The paper's focus was to shed light on the importance of freedom of information for people's empowerment and protection of other rights.

RTI Regional Summit

Chairperson Dahal presented a country paper of Nepal entitled "Right to Information in Nepal" in a regional workshop organized jointly by the Indian Institute of Public Administration and the World Bank-funded Governance Partnership Facility in New Delhi, India.

The workshop on 'Towards more Open and Transparent Governance in South Asia' saw participants from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Bhutan and Maldives mingle with the international media and RTI experts. The World Bank funded Governance Partnership Facility in the South Asia region is intended to support the promotion, establishment and strengthening of transparency regimes in countries of this region.

Sharing of best practices and ensuring coordination between the "demand" and "supply" of good governance are viewed as critical success factors to enhanced transparent regimes. The workshop was successful so as to research and assess the status of the RTI in the various countries represented at the workshop conducted by practitioners with input from workshop delegates, presentations, panel discussions and working sessions during the workshop – including perspectives from international experts, Identification of specific priorities and roles of various stakeholders, development of action plans to be carried out in the various countries, agreement on a common national "resolution" that can be used for advancing RTI efforts in each country and across the region, and dialogue with supporters and donors and sharing of respective governance agendas.



Journalists thrashed

Janak Nepali, a reporter for Naulo Jana Uvar Weekly, was beaten up by an unidentified gang in Dang district, located in the mid-western part of Nepal on November 26, Thursday. They also looted his mobile set. Nepali was beaten up in front of his college gate in the early morning. The reason behind the attack is yet to be known.

In yet another incident, Shiva Prasad Nepal Chief District Officer (CDO) of Tanahu District in the western part of Nepal, abused journalist Samundra Paudel. Paudel was in CDO office to cover the news of abusing locals by CDO Nepal in a program occurred in Ganapate, a VDC of Tanahu. CDO Nepal also tagged journalists as a 'status less' group.

Similarly, a journalist had been thrashed by a security person in Dang. Lok Raj Sadhak, chief reporter and manager of Rapti News Weekly was thrashed by an armed policeman. According to Sadhak, the tipsy policeman thrashed him uttering verbal abuses without any reason while he was walking on the way.

Cadres of Unified Communist Party of Nepal -Maoist (UCPN-Maoist) thrashed employee of National TV Ram Thapa in the premises of TV office in Kathmandu on May 4.

A group of belligerent Maoist cadres who were there to shut shops entered at TV premises all of sudden and severely beaten up Thapa. Thapa sustained injury in his head and blue scares are marked throughout his body. He has received four stitches in his head and he is being treated at Garace hospital in the capital.

Journos receive death threat

Keshav Raj Poudel, assistant editor of Chautari weekly, published from Kavre, said that he had received death threat in connection with an article authored by him on December 13.

Raju Majhi, head teacher of Bindhabasini Lower Secondary School in Mandan, threatened him over the phone, "I will kill you within seven days and set fire in house". Majhi also scolded him using expletives.

Tarun Dal Cadres Assault Reporter

Local correspondent of Nepal Television Min Kumar Dahal was thrashed by Nepali Congress aligned Neapl Tarun Dal cadres on January 4, Monday in Kamalamai municipality-6, Loktantrik Chowk of Sindhuli district in the southern plain of Nepal leaving him injured.

Dahal was beaten up while he was covering the NC-announced Sindhuli bandh, which was called against the attack on NC cadres by Young Communist League (YCL) activists.

Journalists hit hard by Maoists' 'Bandh'

During three-day general strike called by Unified Communist Party of Nepal-- Maoist (UCPN--Maoist), journalists in Nepal had continuously faced incidents of attacks, threats and harassments for covering news story and photographs even despite commitments from Maoist leaders to respect freedom of press and of expression.

Navesh Chitrakar, Lens man of The Himalayan Times, a national daily, was injured during a clash at Gaushala in the capital on December 20, the first day of strike. He sustained head injury and was admitted in Medicare Hospital in Chabahil. Press vehicles also faced the fury of police and demonstrators despite Maoist commitment to refrain from such activities.

The bandh enforcers also misbehaved with Rewati Sapkota, reporter for Annapurna Post. Narayan Neupane, a reporter for Rastriya Samachar Samiti (RSS) was also injured during a clash at New Baneshwor. He also sustained head injury and received treatment in local Everest hospital. He was hit while taking photographs of clashes between protestors and police in New Baneshwor.

During the bandh, Maoist cadres also stopped the motorbike of Kavre Post Editor Bishnu Chaulagain and thrashed him in Banepa in Kavrepalanchowk district on December 20. Four local dailies in Dadeldhura couldn't be published Monday due to the banda called by the Maoists. Hill Times, Himkhandha, Dadeldhura Post and Amargadi Post couldn't bring out their Monday editions in lack of paper due to the Maoist called Kailali banda from Saturday. The Unified CPN-Maoist cadres on December 22 attacked a vehicle carrying The Himalayan Times and Annapurna Post dailies at Prayagpokhari, Lalitpur. The van was returning to Kathmandu after circulating the dailies in Kavre district. Contrary to the commitment made earlier to let the vehicles belonging to media houses run smoothly, the irate Maoist cadres vandalized the vehicle for "defying" the three-day bandh called by their party. Van driver Pradeep Lama was injured in the attack. The bonnet and windscreen of the van were damaged. The vandals targeted the van though market representative Prithvi Bahadur Thapa had shown his ID card.

Two journalists- Ramesh Pokharel and Surya Prasad Bhushal- were attacked and left injured by an unidentified group in Arghakhanchi located in the western part of Nepal on Monday night December 21. Journalist duo whom were on the way to the office of Radio Deurali for their respective duties were attacked by the group at Shantibagaincha in Sandhikharka. They have received normal injuries, according to Republica, a National Daily. The scribe duo said the attackers also gave them death threats.

Similarly, UCPN (Maoist) cadres physically assaulted Editor of Janaadarsha Weekly Liladhar Bhatta in Dadeldhura in the far-western region of Nepal on December 21, Monday. He was manhandled for defying the bandh call. Bhatta was admitted to District hospital Baitadi. In yet another incident, cadres of Unified CPN (Maoist) beat up Kavi Raj Karki, a photo journalist in Mugu-the hilly district located in the mid-western part of Nepal on December 21, Monday.

Media Workers under Threat

An unidentified group had issued threat to chairman of Kantipur publication and to the editors of 'Kantipur Publication'.

As published, they received the threat over the coverage on the killing of media entrepreneur Jamim Shah. Shah was killed in broad daylight on Sunday afternoon by unidentified gunmen here in Lazimpat, Kathmandu.

Chairman and Managing Director of Kantipur Publications Kailash Sirohiya received an email on Friday while editors of the The Kathmandu Post and Kantipur, Akhilesh Upadhyay and Sudheer Sharma respectively received threats over telephone on Feb 11, and 12.

"Stop immediately the kind of news coverage you have been giving to Jamim's killing, or else you will face serious consequences within 15 days," said a caller to Sharma, according to the news published in Saturday's edition of 'The Kathmandu Post'. Upadhyay was asked to "shut up or we will make you shut up".

An unidentified group issued threat to journalist Durga BC, a Banke-based journalist, for not covering the news on February 16. They threatened him of taking action wherever they meet him. A notice pasted at the wall of his home accused journalist BC of defaming their organization by disseminating fake news. However, the name and the organization is not stated in the notice. After the incident, Journalist BC has fled to Nepalganj to safeguard his life.

In yet another incident, an underground outfit has threatened a journalist Sanjay Sah, sub-editor of Jana Pratibimba daily, in southern Parsa district, Birgunj on February 17. Barood Singh, chief of Janatantrik Tarai Mukti Morcha threatened him of life saying that

Scribes misbehaved

Nepal Army personnel misbehaved with journalists while visiting Indian Army chief Deepak Kapoor paid a visit to Jomsom on January 20, Wednesday.

Journalists were there to cover the news of General Kapoor's visit to the Nepal Army's high-altitude training center.

"Army obstructed us from taking photos stating that the order from 'high command'", said local journalist Chandreshwor Bastakoti. The chief executive officer of Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) Ganesh Rai has verbally abused Republica journalist Bimal Gautam who reached the KMC on 20 April in course of collecting information about a corruption case involving Rai.

When Gautam inquired him about a corruption case in which Rai was allegedly involved, Rai started vomiting vulgar words. "Why did you come here? Who allowed you to come here and disturb me?" he asked. Rai then asked Gautam to immediately leave his place or else he would force him out from there. He also threatened severe consequences if Gautam and other journalists associated with Nagarik and Republica reached there.

Earlier, Rai had called Nagarik scribe Arjun Subedi over telephone and asked him not to publish a news related to him a week ago.

Hindu fundamentalists attack press

Activists of the Hindu Yuwa Sangha (HYS), a newly established Hindu fundamentalist outfit, burned hundred copies of newspapers 'Kantipur' and 'Annapurna Post' along with local 'Pratik' daily in southern Parsa District, Birgunj on 18 April. They burnt the newspapers claiming that the newspapers had not adequately covered their issues.

Series of Threat to Journalists

A man claiming to be an activist of Madhesi Virus Killers threatened to kill Bijaya Kumar Chaudhary in Mahottari district, a southern plain district of Nepal, on March 3, Wednesday. Chaudhary is chairman of Jaleshwornath FM.

The man called Chaudhary at around 1 p.m. and threatened to kill him within seven hours. According to a report from Mahottari, the man said Chaudhary was the third among the country's 14 blacklisted media entrepreneurs. A family source said Chaudhary has received four threats till Wednesday evening.

Earlier, criminals have threatened journalist of Naya Patrika daily Manoj Ghartimagar for publishing the interview of the only police officer arrested in the Jamim incident. The Himalayan Times daily and Annapurna Post daily was also received similar threats call from the criminals.

Ban/ Censorship on Movies; Freedom of Expression Fenced in

Russian Cultural Centre in Kathmandu, run by the Russian government, refuse to screen a documentary on gay rights even though the auditorium at the centre had been booked in advance by Nepal's pioneering gay rights organisation Blue Diamond Society (BDS).

Russian Culture Centre officials told BDS the show would have to be halted since "sexual and gender minorities issues are against Russian law and religion".

In yet another incident, the semi-fictional film 'Das Dhunga' had been put on hold by the censor board of Nepal. The film is based on the story behind the tragic accident that resulted in the death of the than Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist) leaders Madan Bhandari and Jeevaraj Aashrit.

The film by Manoj Pandit is based on an investigation by a government investigative officer played by Anup Baral, a renowned artist, who supposedly exposes the culprits behind the accident. "The film has been well researched and nothing critical has been left to imagination," said Pandit, "I am unable to understand why the film is being held up by the board".

Censor Board President Mahendra Guragain stated that parts of the script didn't match with the film. Hence they asked the filmmakers to review and revise the script and bring the film in for screening.

Obstructions on News Coverage

With the beginning of School Leaving Certificate (SLC) examinations in Nepal, the news story about anti press incidents during the exams in various parts of the country had increased. Among those involved in misbehaving with and manhandling journalists on reporting allegedly were students, teachers, superintendents, guardians and even security personnel.

Journalists were obstructed to enter into SLC exam center in Mahottari, a southern plain district of Nepal on March 28. Exam center superintendent Mahabir Das demonstrated indecent treatment to journalist Suvash Karna, a reporter for Nepal One TV in Rajarshi Janak exam-center.

Similarly, Journalist Geeta Adhikari was beaten up while she was taking photos of cheating by students in Bangalamukhi Secondary School exam center in Gulariya of Bardiya which lies in the mid-western part of Nepal.

Journalist Thrashed

Students affiliated to Nepal Student Union (NSU) thrashed journalist Somnath Bastola while he was in Janata Multiple Campus, Itahari to cover the news on February 9.

Journalist Bastola was there for reporting of unsolved dispute of Free Student Union election that held some 10 months ago. Two NSU cadres were involved to beat him.

In yet another incident, students at Pannadevi Kanya Campus thrashed journalists as they did not get chance of cheating. Deependra Chaudhari, a local journalist, was beaten up by students while he was covering the news of cheating in the exam center.

Chief District Officer (CDO) of Kailali, a far-western district of Nepal, Gehanath Bhandari obstructed journalists while they reached District Prison Office for news coverage on January 19, Tuesday.

Reporters were there to cover the news of agitation by detained police personnel. CDO Bhandari directed journalist not to enter into the Prison Office.

After the incident journalists staged sit-in to protest the event in front of Prison Office. They put their equipments including camera, recorder, diary, and pen in front of the gate and staged protest. The sit-in program was lasted for one hour.

CA Member beats journo

Constituent Assembly (CA) member Baban Singh threatened Rautahat-based journalist Rajendra Kshetri of life on 13 March.

Following a news published in a local newspaper CA member Singh threatened him of killing him over the phone. A news report of capturing his motorbike by police personnel was published on local Crime Express daily recently.

Auditor General's Move Unsupportive with regard to RTI

Freedom Forum is largely concerned and alarmed over Attorney General Bharat Bahadur Karki's indecent manner of abusing employees working in the Division of Registration and Writ for reportedly providing information to journalists, which is the sheer violation of whistleblower protection provision envisaged by the Right to Information (RTI) Act of Nepal.

Attorney General Karki scolded the employees on May 20 and 21 for providing the copies of written reply of Chief Justice Ram Prasad Shrestha in response to a writ petition registered demanding the non-implementation of the recommendation made for appointing the office-bearers by the Constitutional Council.

Karki had also reportedly threatened the employees not to provide such information

and take actions if such incidents continued in the coming days.

It is very regrettable act to suppress and discourage employees for imparting information of public importance to journalists since such move poses serious threat to the protection of whistleblower.

"It is quite surprising and condemnable that the Auditor General, who is the head of important constitutional body to enforce and implement the laws, to take such move; it has underestimated the provision of protecting whistleblowers on the ground of good faith", said Freedom Forum Chairperson Taranath Dahal. The constitutional body should be responsible to be supportive to enforce laws rather than curtailing its scope.

RTI/ Legal Watch

Government Ignores Making Public Probe Commission Report; RTI Provisions Breached

Ramji Dahal, a journalist for the Himalmedia, had used the RTI to receive details of the expenses, invoices, vouchers and a copy of the report of a probe commission formed to investigate into the incident of murder of journalist JP Joshi in Kailali. He filed an application at the Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers in line with the RTI Act, Clause 7(a) on January 26, 2010.

In response to his request, the Home Ministry on January 27 provided him with limited information on the total amount released to and expended by the probe commission stating that the report was not there in the Ministry. It is found that of the total amount Rs. 30, 96, 601 released for this, Rs. 29, 53,513.57 has been spent but its details invoices and vouchers were not provided as demanded.

"I did not get complete information from the authority concerned and I appealed to the Home Ministry citing dissatisfaction on the information

given to me", said journalist Dahal. He had registered an appeal in the name of Secretary at the Home Ministry on February 2, 2010 as per the RTI Act, Clause 9(2).

Later journalist Dahal registered appeal in the National Information Commission (NIC) on March 7, 2010 demanding the NIC provide information in the way and format it was demanded. But the Commission has not taken any actions to this effect as it is the body for the protection, promotion and practice of RTI in Nepal. It is noteworthy to mention here that the government has not so far made public any reports prepared in connection with investigating into such cases of public importance, contributing to increase the state of impunity in the country.

Freedom Forum had facilitated journalist Dahal in the process. Mr. Dahal is the current Secretary of Federation of Nepali Journalist (FNJ)-an umbrella organization of journalists.



Jamim Shah

Freedom Forum Family expresses heartfelt condolence on the untimely demise of media entrepreneurs Jamim Shah and Arun Singhaniya, who were shot dead in two separate incidents.

Shah, Chairperson of the Space Time Network Pvt. Ltd. and Channel Nepal, was brutally shot dead in broad daylight at Kathmandu on February 7 while he was on the way to home. As a media mogul, Mr. Shah contributed to Nepali media sector since a long time and his consistent contribution to this sector will be remembered for long.

Similarly, Publisher of Janakpur Today Arun Kumar Singhaniya, 50, was gunned down by an unidentified armed group in Janakpur-the Southern plain of Nepal on February 30. He was shot dead after three weeks of the murder of Shah.

The Forum wishes for the eternal peace of the departed soul and extends heartfelt condolence to the grief-stricken families. The murders of two media entrepreneurs have been the irreparable loss for entire Nepali media sector.



Arun Singhaniya

Obituary

- Freedom Forum Family

Maoists' Plan to Launch Media against Free and Professional Press

Unified Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (UCPN-M) has planned to launch its own television channel and a national broadsheet daily, according to national dailies of Nepal.

Maoist leader Dr Baburam Bhattarai presented a concept paper in this regard during a training session at party headquarters, Paris Danda, Kathmandu on April 18. Maoists have already formed two committees - editorial led by Dr Bhattarai and managerial by Dinanath Sharma -- to study if launching a television channel would also be viable.

Dr Bhattarai also proposed to uplink the Maoist FM radio Mirmire to satellite.

Quoting a participant of the training session, the news reports have stated that the party had classified the Maoist publications into three categories -- central, regional and local. "While the central publications will be directly monitored by the party's top body, the regional and local publications will be handled by the corresponding committees," the news further mentioned.

Participant of the training said the party took the decision as various publication houses have been found collecting advertisements in the name of the party and the party expects the new move would discourage the trend.

The meeting has categorized Janadisha daily, Janadesh weekly, Red Star fortnightly and Samsleshan monthly as central publications under the direct monitoring of the party.

"Perhaps the tabloid-sized Janadisha daily will be converted into a broadsheet daily and Janadisha weekly into a magazine," he said. The party took the move to manage its media and make the dissemination of information and views effective.

Speaking at the training session, Maoist chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal directed the revolutionary journalists to ask people to hit the streets for the promulgation of the people's constitution.

"The decision reveals that Maoists are not satisfied with current professional development of Nepali independent media, and eager to uphold sponsored media as their mouth-piece and suppress other media," says Taranath Dahal, chairperson of Freedom Forum.

"Guided information will obstruct free flow of opinion and expression," Dahal adds, "The free and professional media which is deemed pre-requisite for democracy will not sustain if other parties also follow this trend."

Organizational Activities

गो ३ विश्व प्रेस स्वतन्त्रता दिवस-२०१०
२०१० "सर्वांको स्वतन्त्रता, जान्न पाउने हक"



Freedom Forum Marks WPF Day

Unlike previous years, Freedom Forum marked World Press Freedom Day 2010 on May 3 with a range of activities focusing on right to information, responsible press and freedom of expression. The theme of this year's World press Freedom Day is "Freedom of Information; Right to know".

A radio PSA was produced highlighting the importance of press freedom and people's role to protect and promote free and responsible journalism. The PSA has been aired across the country through 54 independent radio stations.

In a similar vain, the Forum developed hoarding board and placed in different places of 22 districts. The hoarding broad reads: "Press Freedom—Our Commitment; Accurate Information—Our Necessity; Responsible Journalism- Bedrock of Democracy".

Freedom Forum designed and prepared print PSA which were published in the renowned broadsheet dailies of Nepal-Gorkhapatra Daily and Nagarik. The print PSA depicted the importance and relevance of World Press Freedom Day, a chart reflecting the press freedom situation of Nepal during the period from May 3 2009 to April 30, 2010 and message of Irina Bokova, UNESCO general-director on the occasion of WPF Day 2010.

Freedom Forum's Campaign for Responsible Journalism



Towards Fostering Budget Transparency

Freedom Forum conducted an essay writing competition entitled "Government's Budget and My Future" with an idea to engage school students in thinking about how transparent and accountable public budgeting affects their future and the future development of the country and to raise the profile of these issues in our country Nepal.

The essay writing competition was held in five English medium schools of the capital, including GEMS, Budhanilakantha, Don Bosco, Nobel Academy and Little Angels on February. The contest was open to students studying in the highest grade (9-12) in the participating schools who are generally in the age range of 15-18 years.

Mrs. Bidushi Pokharel, a 10th grader of GEMS, Dhapakhel, had secured top position while Mrs. Prarthana Bhattacharai of Budhanilakantha School and Seema Chand of Don Bosco School got success to be first runner-up and second runner-up, respectively. The top scorer will be awarded cash prize of US\$ 500 and certificate while a total of 136 participants will also be provided certificate of participation.

The International Budget Partnership (IBP), a global partnership for budget transparency and accountability, supported to conduct this event in five countries in South Asia: Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, including Nepal.

Free and Independent Press...

Journalists were forced either to write favourite reports of these groups' activities or to not publish the news exposing their wrongdoings. It is the responsibility of the state to devise necessary actions to curb press gagging activities and ensure congenial atmosphere where journalists could freely enjoy their rights and discharge their duty to contribute to an informed citizenry thereby develop a critical mass. But the government seemed indifferent to come up with effective measures to protect press; almost no one who involved in anti-press incidents were not even brought to book and taken actions. The murderer of media entrepreneurs were also scot-free from any actions for their crime. Resultantly, It contributed the culture of impunity to grow triggering self-censorship in journalism-which is another big threat to media to play the true role of watchdog.

Despite repeated commitments for press freedom and freedom of expression from the political parties, Nepali media has been tremendously suffered from the indecent manners and obstructions by their youth wings and sister organizations. Specifically, media and media workers faced serious blow from the cadres of UCPN (Maoist) and its sister organizations-which was established as a big party from the Constituent Assembly (CA). The free press did not get respite from the assaults and obstructions by the cadres of present ruling parties, including Nepali Congress, CPN-UML, RPP, Madhesi Janaadikar Forum-Democratic (MJF-D). This situation remained a menace to free and professional press to get involved on in-depth and investigative reporting. Besides this, in some incidents, media were also found not practicing decent journalism which also caused organized and deliberate assaults on media in different parts of the country.

All in all, growing culture of impunity, deteriorating law and order situation, partisan intervention and unprofessional journalism were the major factors contributing to such trend of press freedom violations in Nepal. Mass media without full press freedom are like human beings without oxygen and the strength of free media lies on contributing mass to make their opinion and facilitate civic engagement thereby promoting pluralism and democracy. The number reflects the unrelenting situation of press freedom in Nepal which calls daunting actions from all stakeholders to materialize the guarantee of the functioning of free and professional press. It is the right time to put on our collective efforts for the common cause of press freedom and freedom of expression.

Promoting 'Loktantra' through Radio and Training



Radio Magazine Loktantra-a radio programme produced with the slogan of "**Focusing the Nation on Democratic Values and Norms through Radio**", had substantially contributed to enhance people's understanding and awareness on various dimensions of democracy.

Freedom Forums completed production of 22 episodes of Radio Magazine Loktantra based on the 44 themes identified from the Universal Declaration of Democracy (UDD) on mid- February. The radio programme was aired through 33 independent radios across the country.

Radio programme covered field-based reports from different 16 districts throughout the country incorporating local peoples' aspiration, understanding, problems and reality on democracy. The initiative was supported by USAID/Chemonics.

Similarly, the Forum undertook a series of activities culminating in trainings on Democracy in four districts of Mid-and-Far western Nepal during December 2009-April 2010, as part of the "Community Stabilization through Training on Democracy" project. These activities were carried out with a view to contributing in a way toward enhancing democratic consciousness and promoting a culture of tolerance and mutual understanding among younger generation leadership of Nepal.

The main objective of the program were to train youths of different politically-affiliated student unions on the understanding of the UDD (Universal Declaration on Democracy), to increase networking among youth of different

political parties through increasing common understanding on democratic norms and to support a peaceful and sustainable political transition in Nepal.

The training, particularly sought to involve politically active youths in a discussion on democratic norms, values and dialogue that could foster a culture of respect, acknowledging and tolerating divergent views, opinions and expressions thus motivating them to create and look for compromises and towards mutual understanding, cooperation and trust.

With the objective of preparing good democracy trainers, a 6-day Training of Trainer (TOT) was held dated 9-14 January 2010 in Kathmandu. The TOT delivered by Professor Dr. Yagya Adhikari, an expert of political science and democracy, and Mr. Bashudev Neupane, a renowned trainer involved altogether 20 participants

As per the target, constituency and district level trainings were held in Dang, Kailali, Banke and Bardia. A total of 23 trainings were conducted-- six in Dang, five in Banke, five in Bardia and seven in Kailali. Superseding our target to train 460 youths from 23 trainings, ten more, that is, 470 youths have been trained.

Youths with diverse ideology sitting together for four days was in itself one of the challenging tasks which was completed without any problem. Networks for peace and democracy have been formed totaling 23 networks but the ways of formation of network were different. Student unions who were reluctant to participate the training appreciated the training emphasizing on the needs of such trainings in future after they participated.

To conclude the project activities, Freedom Forum carried out different activities, including printing UDD booklets and designing training material, Training of Trainers (TOT), trainings at local level

Orientation on Universal Declaration on Democracy (UDD) through effective and entertaining method was the key achievement, according to the participants. A number of trainees admitted that, although they thought that they already knew democracy, the training helped them realize that they were "ignorant" of many things about it before.

Fostering Debate on Federalism, An Approach to Engage People on State Restructuring

At a time when discourse of federalism is at length among political actors and stakeholders, Freedom Forum accomplished comprehensive debate on state restructuring in terms of structure, service, resource sharing and social harmony at VDC and constituency level in Ramechhap and Okhaldhunga districts and a national workshop in the capital.

A programme "Initiating Functional Debate on Federalism at Local Level" was undertaken by Freedom Forum in collaboration with NAVIN and ADDCN with support from SDC, Nepal in order to make local people aware on the issues and process of state restructuring and bring up local voice and experience to the centre.

The discussion program on federalism was carried out in 10 VDCs each of two eastern districts. In order to disseminate the central message of discussion to locals and connect locals' voice and development on constitution making in centre, altogether 14 episodes of radio programmes were produced on the basis VDC and constituency level discussions. Each 30-minute radio programme was aired through Radio Sagarmatha, Kathmandu, Radio Okhaldhunga, Okhaldhunga, Hajurko Radio, Ramechhap and Haleshi FM, Khotang.

During the discussion programmes, more than 30-hour-long visual clips were captured including core discussion, objective situation of the village, story related scene, interview with effective stakeholder and so on. The visual clips were later demonstrated in national conference held in Kathmandu to draw attention of CA members, political parties leaders, civil society representatives, journalists, donor communities and other stakeholders on the issues to be addressed in the new constitution.

Similarly, a comprehensive monograph "Hamro Aawaj" containing voices from horse mouth at grassroots level and from central leaders.

61st Human Rights Day Marked focusing Freedom of Expression

To mark the 61st international human rights day, Freedom Forum, in association with Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), Human Rights Journalists Association and Outline Media, organized an interaction programme on freedom of expression and opinion amid the participation of journalists, legal practitioners and rights activists in the capital on December 10, Thursday

Freedom Forum Chairperson Taranath Dahal commented that Nepal's situation of press freedom and freedom of expression is disappointing and this situation is resulted due to government's failure to implement its commitments on international declarations and conventions on the issues.

He further said if the government remained mum on the implementation of freedom of press and of expression, citizen's right to access to information and press freedom would be curtailed. The entire building of human rights could not be set up and other rights would bear no meaning if peoples' right to express did not get guaranteed, he added. "Citizen's right to criticize the government is another important right which also comes under freedom of expression",

Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) chairperson Dahrmendra Jha said it is merely the farce of the government to express commitment towards free press turning deaf ear to take actions against

the guilty even if journalists are being killed and brutally attacked in broad daylight.

He questioned as why the government claiming it to be the champion of press freedom could not make congenial environment where journalists could work in a free and professional way.

Human Rights Journalists Association Chairperson Chhatra Shanker, ARTICLE 19 Nepal chapter representative Tanka Aryal, Outline Media Director Chandra Adhikari drew the attention of the government to be serious on the issue of press freedom since all other human rights are intertwined with freedom of expression.



World Press Freedom Index

Deadliest Countries in 2009

| Country | Number* | Country | Number* |
|-------------|---------|-----------|---------|
| Philippines | 33 | Somalia | 10 |
| Iraq | 4 | Pakistan | 4 |
| Russia | 3 | Mexico | 2 |
| Afghanistan | 2 | Sri Lanka | 2 |
| Nigeria | 1 | Venezuela | 1 |
| Nepal | 1 | Turkey | 1 |
| Azerbaijan | 1 | Indonesia | 1 |
| Colombia | 1 | Israel | 1 |
| Madagascar | 1 | Iran | 1 |
| Kenya | 1 | | |

Source : Committee to Protect Journalist

* it is the no. of journalist killed in the respective countries

Impunity Index: Iraq and Somalia are at the top of the list

Twelve countries where journalists are regularly killed and governments fail to investigate the crimes and seek out perpetrators are being highlighted in CPJ's 2010 Impunity Index. In creating the index, CPJ looked at murders of journalists worldwide from 2000 to 2009.

At the top of the list are two countries entangled in conflict: Iraq with 88 unsolved journalists' murders over the last 10 years; and Somalia in second place because of the reign of terror insurgents have inflicted on the media. Independent Sri Lanka ranks fourth on the index with 10 unsolved murders; many of its experienced journalists have left the

country. Sri Lankan journalists have been attacked for their coverage of civil war, human rights, politics, military affairs and corruption. In Mexico, self-censorship is so common that major events have gone unreported. Russia ranked eighth on the index with three journalists killed in 2009, bringing the country's 10-year total of unsolved murders to 18. However, Colombia and Brazil made significant improvements in reducing deadly violence against journalists and bringing killers to justice. "Our goal in compiling this index is to spur leaders in these nations to action," said CPJ. "Many of these cases are solvable - the perpetrators have been identified but authorities lack the political will to prosecute."

CPJ's findings show that impunity in the media is quite strong in South Asia with Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and India making the list. Worldwide more than 90 percent of victims are local reporters covering crime, corruption and national security. But in Afghanistan most of the journalists killed were international reporters. The index also reports that threats against journalists are significant indicators; four out of 10 journalists murdered received threats before they were killed.

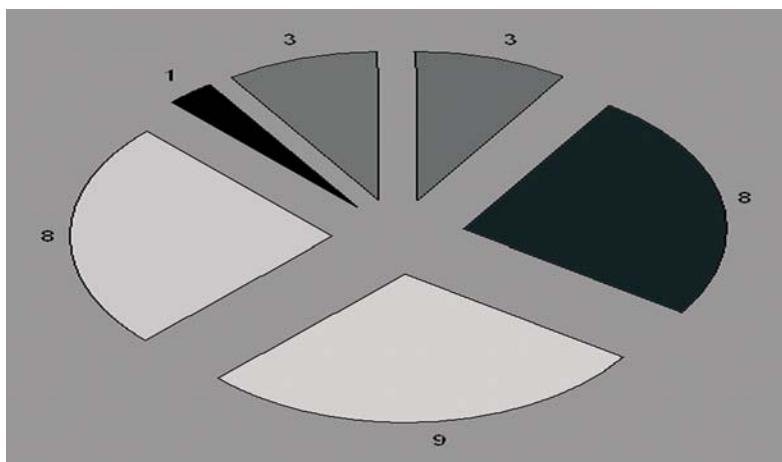
The Philippines's impunity rating shot up from sixth to third place with the murder of 30 journalists and two media support workers in Maguindanao province last November. CPJ has recorded 55 unsolved murders in the Philippines over the last decade.

Solidarity among news media and journalists is key to combating impunity, blogged Ricardo Trotti of the Inter American Press Association (IAPA) during the summit. Lack of training and professionalism and the negligence of some media outlets and journalists have made journalists and media workers more vulnerable. Journalists must unite in order to generate public awareness of the need to safeguard freedom of expression.

(Source: IFEX)

Anti-press incidents in Nepal during May 2010

| | | | |
|--------------------|---|--------------|---|
| Attack | 3 | Manhandle | 8 |
| Threat | 9 | Misbehaviour | 8 |
| Imprisonment | 1 | Burn | 3 |
| Total incidents 32 | | | |



Source : Freedom Forum

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