

A Special Two Week (May 8-24, 2012) Report on Nepali Media

Nepali Media sees unprecedented Attacks

As the deadline to promulgate constitution (May 27) was approaching fast, political discussion and party decisions on contentious issues of 'restructuring of state' created furor in Nepal. Various parts of the country saw spate of protests and struggles including *banda* (general shutdown) by different ethnic groups. The people in the far west became united and began struggles for their region undivided while the *Tharu* community in the southern plain protested this. Similar other struggles continued for the ethnic rights, seeking identity in the provinces to be carved out in the federal set up.

Amidst the chaos triggered by the protests and bandas, Nepali media received flurry of attacks, threats, vandalism, intimidation and different forms of harassments from the demonstrators and *banda* enforcers of various ethnic groups in different parts of the country.

First of its kind in Nepal, the media faced the attacks and threats in a way it never came across even during the royal regime's tough time to media. In the name of demanding rights by groups, they grossly violated the rights of others. Importantly, the media had to bear the brunt. The free movement of media persons and press vehicles was strictly obstructed and journalist's right to free reporting was blatantly disrespected during shutdowns.

During the two weeks (8-22 May 2012), Freedom Forum has recorded a total of 80 incidents of press freedom violation across the country.

In the three day nationwide *banda* (20-22) organized by the Indigenous Nationalities' Joint Struggle Committee spearheaded by Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NRFIN), the journalists faced most difficult time even in the capital city. During the three days alone, a total of 56 incidents of press freedom violation occurred in the country.

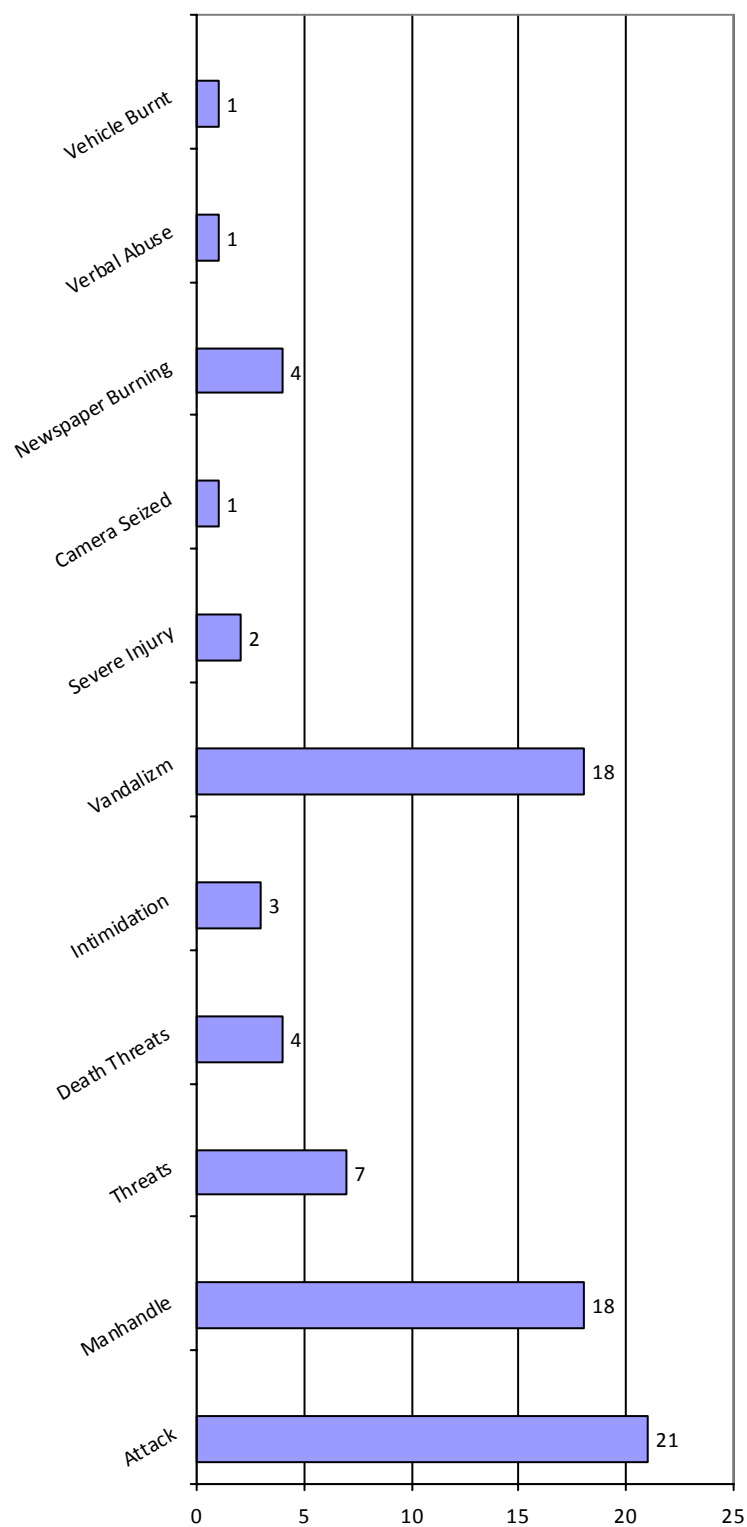
Two journalists were severely injured in the attacks by *banda* enforcers. On May 21, a photo journalist with the *Abhiyan* daily, Ashok Dulal was attacked mercilessly by the strikers in the capital. He received serious injury to his eye. He had to be admitted in the B and B hospital for treatment.

Similarly, on May 22, Deepa Ale, reporter with the *Sagarmatha* Television from Nepalgunj, a city in the southern plain of the Midwest Nepal was attacked cruelly by the *Tharuhat* Joint Struggle Committee leaving her seriously injured in her head and eye. She was admitted in a local hospital for treatment.

New Trend

- In addition to the unprecedented number of press freedom violation, Nepali media faced new kind of threats and attacks this time. Even the responsible persons of ethnic communities turned hostile to media. They made such a virulent criticism against media that did not only hurt media sector but also incited ethnic conflicts in the country. Mall K Sundar, a responsible leader of Newar community publicly warned of burning (finishing off) entire media.
- *"Malla K's remark will provoke attacks and threats on media persons. It is Nazi-like style. The authority must bring him to book because his remark not only attacked media, fourth estate of the state, but will also spur communal hatred and ethnic conflict in Nepal. The three days, 20-22 May remained as 'black days' in Nepali media, "says Freedom Forum Chairman Taranath Dahal.*
- Also, remarkable here is NEFIN general secretary Ang Kaji Sherpa threatened of finishing of all media and journalists in the country reasoning the media did not prioritize the protests of the NEFIN. He issued public threat on media and death threat to some journalists.
- The journalists were threatened to write in favour of protests against the notion of free press.
- In a sheer mockery of rule of law and gross violation of press freedom and freedom of expression, the government and security persons became mute spectators to the attacks on media persons by the banda enforcers. Till date, no person has been arrested and taken action against his/her atrocities on media.
- The role of media was completely ignored by the supporters of *banda*. Rather, they treated journalists as their enemies. Journalists were made the main targets during the banda.
- Most of the cities- Chitwan, Pokhara, Nepagunj, Itahari including the capital city, Kathmandu, became battleground in a sense the journalists faced hard times in course of reporting.
- To everyone stupefaction, no organizations took responsibilities of attacks on media.
- Nepali media is now under tremendous terror and threats which has obviously instilled fear on journalists with self-censorship.
- The attack on media this time was coordinated. The banda enforcers sought journalists and threatened, attacked and manhandled them. It was as if revenge on media.

(Incidents of press freedom violation from May 8-24, 2012)



Conclusion

Analyzed the situation, Nepali media will face more challenges in the days ahead. It shows that if the country adopts ethnicity-based federalism, more chaotic days would prevail in the country. As a result, journalists may become targets of every ethnic group. The press freedom violation will mount with declining democratic values and culture. Instable political situation is to become hostile to media freedom in Nepal.

Day-wise Media Monitoring carried out by Freedom Forum's Media Monitoring Desk.

May 8 (during Banda organized by Tharuhat Joint Struggle Committee)

Manhandle	=	2
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May 9 (day of far west banda)

Intimidation	=	1
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Threat	=	1
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Manhandle	=	2
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Total	=	4
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May 10 (during Nepal Banda organized by Brahmin, Chhhetri, Dashnami,.. ethnicities)

Manhandle	=	3
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Vandalism	=	2
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Total	=	5
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May 11

Manhandle	=	2
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May 12

Death Threat	=	1
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Newspapers Closed	=	More than 6
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(Note: The far western *band* organized by the people in the region demanding the region 'undivided' created lack of paper, ink and others for publishing newspaper.)

May 13 (public threat of boycotting media by NEFIN)

Threat to entire media	=	1
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May 17 (during Nepal banda organized by Brahmin, Chhetri, Dashnami.. ethnicities)

Attack	=	1
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Manhandle	=	1
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Total	=	2
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May 20 (during Nepal banda organized by various ethnicities led by Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities, NEFIN)

Attack	=	15
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Manhandle	=	4
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Threats	=	2
Death Threat	=	2
Intimidation	=	1
Vandalism	=	5
Total	=	29

May 21 (during Nepal banda organized by various ethnicities led by Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities, NEFIN)

Attack	=	1
Death Threats	=	1
Vandalism	=	9
Severe Injury	=	1
Manhandle	=	2
Camera Seized	=	1
Total	=	15

May 22 (during Nepal banda organized by various ethnicities led by Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities, NEFIN)

Newspaper Burning	=	1
Threats	=	2
Intimidation	=	1
Verbal Abuse	=	1
Manhandle	=	1
Attack	=	3
Vandalism	=	1
Severe Injury	=	1
Pres Vehicle Burnt	=	1
Total	=	12

May 23 (Public Threat to entire Nepali media by former legislator and ethnic leader Malla K Sundar)

Threat to entire Nepali media	=	1
Manhandle	=	1
Attack	=	1
Total	=	3

(The manhandle and attack by banda enforcers of Tharuhat Joint Struggle Committee)

May 24 (during Tarai banda being organized by Broader Madhesi Front)

Newspaper Burning	=	3
Vandalism	=	1
Total	=	4

Grand Total	=	80
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End