



Free Expression

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A NEWSLETTER OF FREEDOM FORUM

Annual Media Report 2014

Gradual Shift of FoE Challenges Journalists reporting on corruption prone to more threats

More than 60 journalists from across the country were affected through the incidents of press freedom violation; while freedom of expression (FoE) challenges see gradual shift from the press freedom to right to information this year (2014). Freedom Forum recorded a total of 27 incidents of press freedom violations this year, which is a decline as compared to the previous year. The intimidations came especially from the political party cadres, security bodies, traders, and government employees. The violations recorded are of different types, including attack, threat, death threat, newspaper burning, manhandle, verbal abuse and displacement.

Though the number of incidents indicates slight improvement as compared to the previous year, the challenges to entire FoE are a lot. There were 59 incidents of press freedom violations in 2013.

Into the policy reform, the recent decision of the government which is a remarkable achievement in media sector is that the state-owned media- Nepal Television and Radio Nepal- are being transformed into public service broadcasting (PSB), which indeed is a longtime advocacy of Freedom Forum. FF had also prepared a model law on PSB and made aware the state on PSB's importance.

Similarly, another notable achievement is- the efforts being made to set up an independent national mechanism at the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to monitor the FoE issues and rights of the journalists.

Nonpayment, low payment, untimely payment to working journalists is a longtime problem which is also one of the hindrances to professional security of journalists.

Access to information thru RTI difficult

Despite growing regime of RTI in the country, the cases of people's access to information in different parts of the country are reported very difficult and even the threats are mounting

on the information requesters. The citizens requesting information in the public agencies in Nepalgunj, Birgunj and Jhapa cities are threatened and even detained without any reason thereby suppressing their rights to information and FoE. Laxman Prasad Sharaf from Parsa district was detained for a day while seeking information at an agriculture office. Similarly, Maiphujur Kabadiya, a resident of Nepalgunj was threatened of life for requesting information at a local market committee. Similar is the case of Thakur Rasaili from Jhapa district.

Internet/social media users upped

On the other hand, the number of the internet users and media outlets, especially the news portals, has unprecedentedly increased, so that number of people with the access to information is growing. Similarly, with the spread of internet, the users of social media have increased sharply. It has made citizens easier to express and disseminate news and information and create debate on the public issues. Although there is no record of exact number of news portals operated in Nepal, it can be guessed at around

400. The Press Council Nepal however has recorded 121 news portals. Similarly, the internet penetration has reached over 31 percent of the population thereby augmenting people's access to information.

Freedom of expression (FoE)

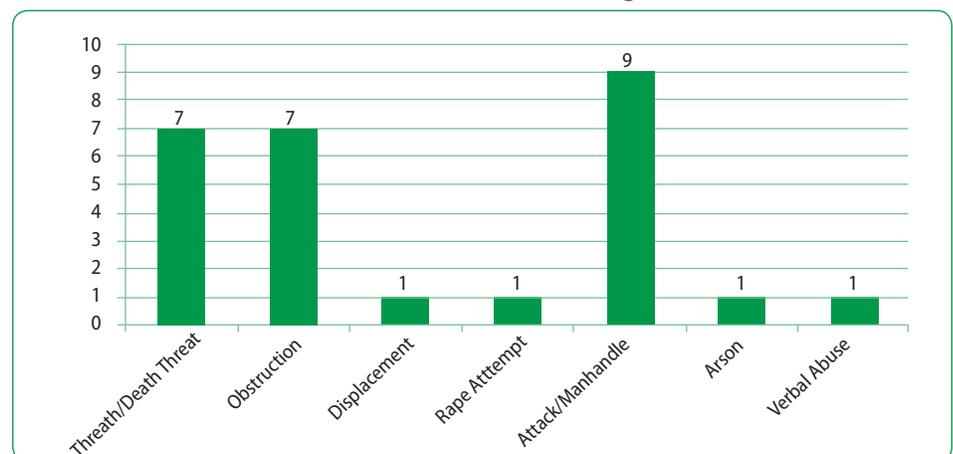
The government, related ministry and concerned public bodies, despite saying that they fully respect FoE and press freedom, cases of violation on their parts are common. Recently, a popular comedy and satirical television programme 'Tito Satya' broadcast in the state-owned television was banned which grossly violated the rights of freedom of expression. To this, the producer and comedian Dipak Raj Giri said, "The artists like us are not enjoying the full-fledged democracy but a 'semi-democracy'".

Policy front/impunity

a) The Bill on Contempt of Court was rolled back to the public from the Legislature-Parliament after the media fraternity and civil society grew concerned that the Bill if passed as it was would jeopardize freedom of expression.

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Press Freedom Violation during 2014



Total Violation = 27, Affected Journalists = 60 +

Message from Chairperson



Freedom Forum heartily welcomes the government's recent decision to give consent to the Ministry of Information and Communications to begin homework on merging Nepal Television and Radio Nepal under a single public service broadcasting (PSB) model. It is the agenda the FF has advocated for long to reach media to every citizen irrespective of community and geography. With this, the Ministry has started the fundamental procedure for merging both state owned NTV and Radio Nepal.

The transformation of the State-owned media is to ensure media pluralism, diversity and quality journalism, thereby fulfilling state's greater obligation of promoting constitutionally guaranteed freedom of expression and access to information. The need of PSB is reinforced to create informed citizenry – a building block for deepening democracy – through dissemination of factual, impartial and objective information on the issues pertaining to civic concern and public importance. To educate and entertain members of general public and to promote social cohesion and national identity considering multi-lingual, multicultural and multiethnic fabrics of society are the key ethos of PSB.

Nepal is currently passing through a vital phase of framing the new constitution. Nepal's legislative framework as well as the social, financial and administrative bases should be well prepared for the establishment of PSB. Various recommendations made time to time have univocally underscored the urgency of converting existing State media to the PSB model. In this connection, the chance of PSB seems viable in Nepal. The issue of PSB has become more relevant also because the demand for inclusion and diversity is rife.

Technical coverage should reach out to every people irrespective of geography. Serious work out is necessary in content, funding, structure and policy for effective PSB. History, image, working style, employees' psychology, willingness and geographical diversity are also vital.

These broadcasters should be funded directly from the State budget in accordance with a budget approved by parliament. They should be accountable to the people through the parliament, as well as through direct means. Main spirit of democracy is to make people informed and educated. Information, education and promotion of national cohesion with unbiased content and independent authority are other essentials for PSB, which essentially strengthens democracy and creates informed citizenry.

In order to ensure the PSB, it is necessary to formulate specific laws, to explore appropriate content in line with PSB and to create mechanism of accountability. The government should form an independent entity to operate PSB (the body may supervise other broadcasting entity as well). To that end, the government can form National Public Broadcasting Authority and operate PSB entity through this mechanism. The new law should address the concern for the national culture, language and identity and guarantee to keep Public Service Broadcasters aloof from vested political and commercial interests. The state should come up with clear transitional plan and program to invest and develop infrastructure and update technology to ensure its reach among entire population.

Accountability to people, willingness/creativity to serve public interest as public communicator, management of educator and dialogue facilitator, increment in on-house production reflecting pluralism and diversity in the country should be in place to manage the transition to go for PSB. The collaboration with the trade union, management, political and policy groups, experts and advocates is imperative to translate the much-awaited policy to practice.

We hope it would be another milestone-setting step towards strengthening Nepal's freedom of expression and right to information if it was cautiously handled. Happy New Year 2015!

Taranath Dahal
Freedom Forum

Ninth IGF Meeting in Istanbul

The ninth annual meeting of the internet governance forum (IGF) was held in Istanbul, Turkey, from September 2- 5. The IGF is a multi-stakeholder, democratic and transparent forum which facilitates discussions on public policy issues related to key elements of internet governance as the internet's sustainability, robustness, security, stability and development.

The ninth meeting with the theme of "Connecting Continents for Enhanced Multi-Stakeholder Internet Governance" was held at the Lütfi Kırdar International Convention and Exhibition Center of Istanbul, Turkey.

Ministers from different countries, including UN Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs, Thomas Gass, addressed the opening session of the IGF.

More than 3,500 people representing different governments, civil society organizations, internet rights advocacy groups, legal practitioners, security experts, human rights defenders, and technologists among others gathered and discussed on the themes and sub themes of the meeting as policies enabling internet access, content creation, dissemination and use, internet as engine for growth and development, IGF and future of the internet ecosystem, enhancement of digital trust, internet and human right, critical internet resources and other emerging issues.

On the occasion, various speakers expressed worry over not having atmosphere conducive on internet freedom, but growing mass surveillance, monitoring and filtering of internet contents in the developed countries, including the host nation.



Turkey was criticized for banning social media as twitter and YouTube reasoning cybercrime, but had lifted some days back the meeting.

Indonesia had hosted the 8th IGF meeting, and now, Brazil is to hold the 10th IGF meeting next year.

The establishment of the IGF was formally announced by the United Nations Secretary-General in July 2006. It was first convened in October–November 2006 and has held an annual meeting since then.

Each year, the United Nations convenes the Forum bringing together various stakeholders to discuss current and emerging internet governance issues, and the related opportunities and challenges. Freedom Forum participated in the meeting, shared Nepal's fledgling use of internet. ■

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- b) The meeting of the Council of Ministers recently decided to transform the state-owned media- Radio Nepal, and Nepal Television- PSB model.
- c) The efforts are on to set up an independent national mechanism at the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to monitor the FoE issues and rights of the journalists.
- d) Though late, the five persons involved in the gruesome killing of journalist Dekendra Thapa have been imprisoned, but for very short time. Four more are still absconding. Process of justice delivery is slow.

Some notable incidents

- a) In April, a security person made a rape attempt on a woman journalist in an eastern hilly district.
- b) On June 1, police arrested a businessman Mohammad Abdul Rahman from Saptari, a district in the southern plain of Nepal, over his comment on facebook post of a news story. On the previous month, a government officer was also arrested on similar case, reasoning 'cyber crime.'
- c) Ramesh Rawal reporter with the Karaobar daily from Kalikot, a remote hilly district in the far-western region, was displaced for writing news on financial irregularities in the districts' development activities. Rawal arrived in the capital city, Kathmandu, on July 21, after mounting pressures from the district administration office and the office of the district development committee. He returned home after three months.
- d) Kali Bahadur Malla, a journalist working in Kalikot was attacked on the second week of October by a local hotelier over his reporting on liquor sale and distribution in the district headquarters.
- e) Ban on an episode of Tito Satya, a popular weekly comedy and satirical television program to be telecast on December 4.
- f) On December 25, engineers at an irrigation project in Biratnagar, a city in the eastern plains of Nepal, brutally attacked Brahmadev Yadav, guest editor with the Birat weekly, over the news he published on the financial irregularities and corruption thriving in the project. Engineers at Sunsari-Morang Irrigation Project Kedar Tiwari, Prem Chandra Jha and Tara Poudel thrashed editor Yadav asking why he published the news on financial irregularities of the project.
- g) Two other journalists -Narayan Adhikari a correspondent for the National News Agency (RSS) from Chitwan and a woman journalist Rejina Rodan from Jhapa- were attacked and left injured. Rodan, is an editor at local Janaandolan weekly.

In addition to these, journalists in different parts are found to have flouted code of conduct which therefore has invited threats.

Analysis

- a) The main reason behind the decline in press freedom violations this year is a relatively stable and peaceful political situation than the previous year. However, a new trend of journalists at local levels being target- is growing. The case of the displacement of Ramesh Rawal and attacks on Kali Bahadur Malla and Brahma Dev Yadav show that the journalists reporting on corruption are the targets.
- b) With the growing RTI regime across the country, the citizens seeking information are being target of public agencies. It is a suppression of people's RTI and FoE. The challenges on FoE are seeing gradual shift from press freedom violation to RTI.
- c) The decision to adopt PSB model is an appreciative deed, as the PSB model better hears the voices of the people from diverse communities from across the country. PSB's motto is every citizen's easy access to information. However, for this rigorous preparations are essential.
- d) It is good to have more number of media and spread of internet which further ensure people's access to information.
- e) Similarly, protracted litigation process/ hearing and delayed justice can not make the victims realize justice. The lengthy process of hearing also lets space for the victims to escape punishment.
- f) Time has come to monitor the safety threat of the information seekers across the country as they are not only advocating for people's access of information but exercising FoE.
- g) The efforts to set up an independent national mechanism at the NHRC to monitor the FoE issues and rights of the journalists are a positive initiative which would help boost FoE. FF has constantly supporting the NHRC for the establishment of the national mechanism which would help ensure free and fair reporting and safe environment for FoE practitioners.

Projection

Nepal is still in transition. As the political debates are intense on constitution writing but with the parties at loggerheads, the disagreements on constitution contents can ensue in protests and demonstrations of people from different castes and cultures leading to intimidations to the journalists and media houses. Security threats on information seekers are likely to grow in the days ahead as the awareness on RTI is alarmingly upped among the youths.

In conclusion, the media, this year, saw improvement, but only in terms of decline in press freedom violations. However, the challenges are a lot on broader practice of FoE. RTI campaigners' security has been an unavoidable concern, and efforts are needed to create conducive atmosphere for the journalists to be professionally secure. In nutshell, to better the entire media landscape of the country, prompt implementation of government's positive decisions as on PSB and of national mechanism at NHRC, political commitment, awareness on media literacy, strict adherence to the journalists' code of conduct and vibrant role of civil society are always essential. ■

Imprisonment to Dekendra's Killers

On December 3, 2014, District Judge in Dailekh, Dilli Ratna Shrestha, delivered the final verdict on the case of the murder of journalist Dekendra Thapa.

In the verdict, five murder accused who were remanded in custody- Lachhiram Raj Gharti, Hari Lal Punmagar, Jaya Bahadur Sahi, Bir Bahadur KC and Nirak Gharti Magar- are slapped with imprisonment, but for few years.

Bir Bahadur KC is slapped with one year of jail term while Lachhiram Ghartimagar with one and half year of jail term, and Nirak Ghartimagar, Hari Lal Pun and Jay Bahadur Shahi with two years' of jail term each.

Reasoning that Lachhiram and Bir Bahadur have completed the jail term when counted their remand period, the Court ordered the district jail to release them immediately.

The three- Nirak, Hari Lal and Jaya Bahadur's jail term is also completing soon as per the imprisonment they are handed.

Four are still absconding. In case of the fugitives, the murder case will be pending. The fugitive are, Bam Bahadur Khadka (Mukti), Bam Bahadur Khadka (Arun), Keshav Khadka and Bhaktiram Lamichhane.

Although it was a welcome verdict, it was slack in the name of transitional period and Truth and Reconciliation Act. The verdict has advocated the release of the murderers than punishing them. With this, neither the fear psychology among the journalists can be reduced nor the impunity be checked. The imprisonment period to the murder accused is very short, which came against the expectation. The murders must be meted out justice in a way it would help discourage further violations. was the reporter with the Radio Nepal from Dailekh, a far-western region of Nepal when he was abducted. He was killed by the UCPN-Maoist (then CPN-Maoist) cadres on August 10, 2004. ■

Journalists Reporting Corruption on Target

Whether it is a development project or the social sector, or in party organization, there are thriving cases of financial irregularities. Most of the time, the anomalies and corruption cases are kept secret by the concerned officials to escape the media. However, sooner or later, the misconducts can not remain mystery to the journalists. But the cost of such reporting on corruption and malfeasance is heavy: reporters become target. The following incidents are some testaments:

Malla injured seriously in attack

Kali Bahadur Malla, a journalist working in Kalikot, a remote mid western district, was attacked on the second week of October by local hotel owners over his reporting against liquor sale and distribution in the district headquarters. Hotelier woman named Tika Sahi called Malla in her hotel and attacked with homemade weapons. She took help of a relative to attack Malla together, it is reported.

The women argued that journalist Malla requested local administration to ban liquor sales through news reporting. Malla was injured seriously in the attack.

It is the incident reflecting insecurity to journalists who report on social maladies. Meanwhile, the district police was learnt to have arrested the attackers and sought action.



Editor thrashed over news reporting on corruption

On December 25, engineers at an irrigation project in Biratnagar, a city in the eastern plains of Nepal, brutally attacked Brahmadev Yadav,



guest editor with the Birat weekly, over the news he published on the financial irregularities and corruption thriving in the project.

Sunsari-Morang Irrigation Project Manager Madhukar Prasad Rajbhandari called editor Yadav in the Project Office where three engineers spoke foul and attacked editor Yadav reasoning he had published the news about the project in his newspaper a month ago. Yadav said, "Engineers Kedar Tiwari, Prem Chandra Jha and Tara Poudel thrashed me asking why I published the news on financial irregularities of the Project. They also took me to a guest house nearby and locked me up for three hours in a room. They seized my phone and threw away. An employee in the guest house secretly released me and I fled."

He further said he had reached his friends all in blood over his face. He got injuries on his face. Two engineers Tara Poudel and Prem Chandra Jha were arrested on the very day while Kedar Tiwari was on the run.

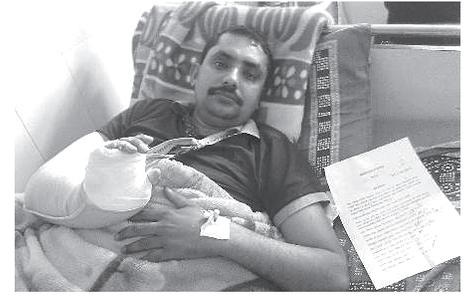
Meanwhile, Chief District Officer was learnt to have told editor Yadav to compromise with the attackers.

Attack on reporter Adhikari

On 21 November 2014, Narayan Adhikari, a correspondent for the National News Agency (RSS) of Nepal from Chitwan district, was attacked by an unidentified person with a sharp weapon.

An individual who was following reporter Adhikari on a motorbike assaulted him at around 7:00 pm while he was returning home from his office. Adhikari suffered a fracture to his right wrist and had to undergo treatment at the Bharatpur Hospital, in Chitwan.

The Superintendent of Police at the District Police Office, Sahakul Thapa, said, "No exact cause behind the attack on journalist Adhikari was identified yet. However, our efforts were on to find the truth and mete out action on the culprits. Some persons were arrested in suspicion based on information about the motorcycles' number plates, but still there was not ample proof. We're in need of additional evidence that leads to an effective and thorough investigation." Fellow journalists, including Basanta Parajuli and Bimal Khatiwada, said the attack may have been intended to injure the hand Adhikari uses to write stories. They added that it was



unquestionably because of his reporting though the culprits are yet to be ascertained. Adhikari was discharged from the hospital on 24 November.

Woman journalist attacked: A woman journalist Rejina Rodan from Jhapa, an easternmost district of the country, was attacked and injured seriously on October 19 in the evening.

Rodan, an editor at local Janaandolan weekly, despite showing journalist's identity card, was attacked and left injured by the hooligans. The incident, however, was yet to be ascertained whether it was linked to press freedom. Police have arrested three of the attackers. ■

Police against Scribe

A police person manhandled a news editor, Shyam Sundar Yadav, and seized his camera while taking a photograph on police atrocity on a person at Saptari, a district in the southern plain of Nepal on October 8.

The news editor with the News Today daily, Yadav, was not only manhandled but also spoken foul while photographing. It was an incident of the obstruction of news collection which is against press freedom and against journalist's right to free reporting.

In another incident, a police person manhandled two reporters affiliated to the local dailies in Saptari, a district in the southern plain of Nepal, on 13 September.

Police person Dil Kumar Limbu manhandled Ganga Saha and Anand Mohan Sharma while they were photographing a disputed house at Portaha Ward No 2 of the district.

Saha is associated with the local Green Madhes and Sharma with the Rajbiraj Today dailies.

Sharma said, "The police person misbehaved with them saying they could not photograph and write story on the disputed house."

These incidents show that the police persons are still hostile to media persons and are not aware of right to information and freedom of expression. ■

Political Protestors Torch Newspapers

Copies of Nepali vernacular dailies- Kantipur, Nagarik and Annapurna Post- were torched by the demonstrators at Pidari Chowk of Dhanusha, a district in the southern plain of Nepal on September 1.

The agitators set ablaze the newspapers during a banda (general shutdown) called by the agitating all-party struggle committee in protest of Minister for Physical Planning and Works over the development activities.

They accused the newspapers of not covering their activities, stated the news portals of the Kathmandu Post and Republica dailies.

The struggle committee comprised 18 political parties, including the ruling Nepali Congress and the CPN UML, and UCPN (Maoist) and Madhes-centric ones who had been demanding immediate implementation of the Janakpur Development Project.

Burning newspapers grossly violated the freedom of expression and press freedom as it obstructed the free flow of information.

The political parties though reiterate that they respect freedom of expression and press freedom, their cadres are untamed. They show unreceptive behaviours to media. Therefore, the political leaderships are in need of make their cadres aware on the importance freedom of expression.

Death threats: On the night of November 22, editor, and publisher of a local Sakshi Post daily, respectively- Santosh Yadav and Bijay Yadav were issued death threats over a news report the daily published in Siraha, a district in the southern plain of Nepal.

Editor Yadav, said a person named Devnath Yadav, calling himself Ram Shankar Yadav, threatened him and publisher Bijay of taking their lives over the news they reported on microbus carrying overload of passengers in the district. The news was published some two weeks back in the Sakshi daily.

The man belonged to the Sagarmatha Magic Microbus Entrepreneurs' Association.

Meanwhile, the police arrested Devnath Yadav and initiated action.

It was also learnt later that a political party leader questioned editor Yadav of why he complained against microbus entrepreneur in the police.

Shantosh had also got death threat through facebook over a news report a year back as well. ■

New Arrival: Research Report

Freedom Forum is delighted to introduce this case study report as the outcome document of many months of rigorous qualitative research on open aid and budget data, undertaken during one and a half year. The 'Exploring the emerging impacts of open aid data

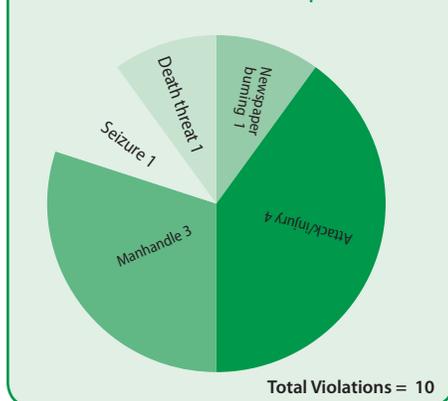


and open budget data in Nepal' study has gathered a baseline of the aid and budget data landscape in Nepal, presented an understanding of interaction of key stakeholders working in the open data ecosystem, documented the governance context of Nepal, and discussed the particular challenges and incentives faced by aid and budget data users and potential data users. In addition, the report presents recommendations for intelligent action in future.

The outcome of this research, the first of its kind in Nepal from thematic perspectives, has added new knowledge and dimensions to openness initiatives taking place in Nepal by presenting a convergence model to best utilize the strengths of open data and Right to Information for the public good. This issue has become central to least developed and post conflict countries like Nepal, where greater transparency of data and better access to information on public resources can play a significant role in reducing poverty.

The funding for this work has been provided through the World Wide Web Foundation 'Exploring the Emerging Impacts of Open Data in Developing Countries' research project, supported by grant 107075 from Canada's International Development Research Centre (web.idrc.ca). Find out more at www.opendataresearch.org/emergingimpacts. ■

Press Freedom Violation from Sept to Dec 2014



Breaking Asymmetry on Access to Information

In the last four months, Freedom Forum conducted 12 more trainings on RTI as a tool to promote municipal governance in different twelve municipalities under the project, Local Governance Action Research Project (Phase II).

The main objectives of trainings were to enhance governance of municipality through improved access to information of the concerned municipalities and to reduce information asymmetry regarding fiscal information among different section of society.

The participants were made aware how the flow of all kinds of information could be improved at municipalities, how demand side of RTI be enhanced, how improved record management and in house flow of information

be ensured. Similarly, they were oriented towards timely update and improved status of proactive disclosure of information, conducive environment needed for citizens' engagement in the development process through better disclosure of fiscal and program related information, involvement of political parties and their cadres in promoting access to information at municipality, and the reduction of asymmetry among political parties regarding the access to fiscal information.

To note some observations, a participant representing CPN UML at Waling said he has decided to ask his cadres to use RTI to solve any problem rather than making telephone calls;

executive officer of Waling municipality said no official documents would be kept secret and proactively disclosed soon. Addressing RTI request of one of the participants, he said that citizen charter would be erected within a week; some political parties at both the municipalities found to be presenting themselves as supply side. They claimed that municipality has never prevented citizens from getting information.

The FF was suggested to take issues of RTI to ward level.

The training facilitators were Tarantah Dahal, Dharmendra Jha, Haribinod Adhikari, Bipul Pokhrel, Anirudra Neupane and local Facilitators. ■

| Category | Ramgram | Kapilbastu | Waling | Putalibajar | Kalaiya | Bharatpur | Gulariya | Nepalgunj | Amargadhi | Tansen | Butwal | Siddharthanagar | Total |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|-------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------------|------------|
| Political Parties | 15 | 16 | 8 | 9 | 18 | 5 | 18 | 14 | 6 | 8 | 8 | 15 | 140 |
| Civil Society | 9 | 17 | 24 | 13 | 12 | 15 | 12 | 17 | 6 | 25 | 12 | 10 | 172 |
| Officials | 6 | 6 | 8 | 8 | 15 | 15 | 15 | 11 | 16 | 11 | 5 | 10 | 126 |
| Total | 30 | 39 | 40 | 30 | 45 | 35 | 45 | 42 | 28 | 44 | 25 | 35 | 438 |

RTI Activism Results in Success Stories

Safety of RTI Campaigners Urgent to Protect FoE

Information of public importance carries much significance. The effective seeking, receiving and imparting of such information obviously serve public interest and contribute to public welfare through transparent and accountable governance, which are pillars of functioning democracy. Till very recent years in Nepal, media persons were in the front to deal with information, for they significantly involve in imparting information. But, with the introduction of the RTI Act 2007 and gradual practicing of this law, the RTI campaigners are in the limelight to seek, receive and impart information. The awareness brought by the RTI law that one can seek the information of any kind (of public importance) has spread to various parts of the country thereby exposing the malfeasance ranging from general misconduct to huge financial irregularities in public agencies. But, the more the RTI law is gaining pace, the more difficult time the RTI campaigners are likely to face. It is because the public agencies are by nature secretive and tend to avoid information to the public. The hostile behaviour of the public agencies is therefore throwing challenges and safety threats to the RTI campaigners in the country.

Freedom Forum (FF), which trained many youths from across the country on use of RTI in relation to the transparency and good governance, observed hostile atmosphere to the RTI requesters and campaigners in different parts of the country, of late.

The information requesters were not only denied information but also attacked and made detained by the public agencies. To such mockery of the fundamental rights, FF intervened the situation and prevented further atrocity on the FoE exercisers. FF's activism not only upheld the morale of the RTI campaigners but also made aware the unreceptive public agencies on the importance of the RTI. Here are the stories which mention both the hassles on the practice of the RTI and the success after the efforts:

Story One: On December 15, Freedom Forum's delegation led by its General Secretary, Dharmendra Jha, from the central level called on Chief District Officer at Banke, Mr Bed Prasad Lekhak, and drew his attention about the indifference to the constant requests for the information with a local vegetable market committee. The information was sought by Maiphujur Kabadiya, a resident of Nepalgunj-10, but threat of life came in response.

On December 2, Maiphujur, in line with Clause 3 of Right to Information (RTI) Act, had sought the following information with Ranitalau Retailer Vegetables Market Management Committee as:

- Auditing reports since its establishment of market,
- Holding of annual general meetings and its minute,
- Names of the office bearers in the committee, the representatives in the committee from the municipality, agriculture service centre, and district agriculture office



Information-seeker Kabadiya at vegetable market

In view of the growing complaints of the locals against the vegetable market committee, Maiphujur had sought the information.

Maiphujur Kabadiya on December 5 had, said, "Chairman of the market management committee, Babu Kabadiya, threatened me of life just because I requested for the information to know how transparent the committee was. Chairman Babu who is sticking to the post without holding the annual general meeting of the committee and without maintaining transparent financial records said he could falsely implicate information seeker Maiphujur in any case and ruin his life."

Since then FF continued regular monitoring of the incident maintaining contacts with Maiphujur, CDO Lekhak, market committee chairman, Babu Kabadiya, and local RTI campaigners of Nepalgunj. Importantly, after the pressure against market management committee chairman was built in the local and central level for the rights (of freedom of expression, of life, of information) of the information seeker, Chairman Kabadiya had made commitment with FF that he would provide the necessary information, but still denied.

Against the background, the delegation led by Mr Jha met CDO Lekhak.

Adhering to the RTI Act for citizen's access to information, CDO Lekhak immediately called Babu Kabadiya, chairman of the market committee and asked him to postpone the scheduled December 16 election of the market committee and first provide the information Maiphujur sought. The CDO has also sought justification with Babu Kabadiya why he did not provide information on time and not held the election for long.

Similarly, CDO Lekhak invited information requester Mr Mamfujur before the delegation and assured him of full security.

It is indeed an achievement that the constant vigil and activism of FF for the RTI regime in the country have been resulting in the stores of success in different parts of the country.

Rakesh Mishra, a program coordinator at Information Rights Centre of Banke, assisted FF in monitoring of the incidence.

Story Two: On December 5, Laxman Prasad Sharaf reached the District Agriculture Office, Birgunj, with an information request letter, but Chief at the Office, Dinesh Prasad Yadav, flatly rejected the request, saying there was no information officer at the Office. Mr Sharaf had requested for the following information:

- The amount of budget allocated in the district through the Office for the fiscal year of 2014/015
- Budget headings
- VDC-wise activity list
- Budget spent on different headings
- People given responsibility to spend the budget
- Activities done for the public people

But, going against citizen's right to receive information, Office Chief Yadav verbally abused information requester Sharaf, called a police person and got him detained for a day.

Sharaf on December 8, had said, "The Office Chief not only denied the registration of information request letter but also called a police and got me detained for a day. While taking me under control, head constable named Harindra Prasad Yadav beat me and threatened me of physical action." He further said he was released after the news spread about his illegal detention.

Chief District Officer, Hemnath Dawadi, also admitted with the FF that he had to order the police to release Sharaf and he assured Sharaf of physical security. He also urged the Agriculture Office to provide the information sought.

CDO Dawadi was urged to provide security to the information seeker and help make public agencies transparent and accountable to the public. Ultimately, the Agricultural Office received the information request letter and committed to provide the information.

Even a delegation from FF central office took stock of the situation, reaching the field. Santosh Pande and Parbez Ansari from Youth Concern Campaign of Bara district assisted FF in monitoring the incidents. FF's activism has not only boosted the morale of the RTI campaigners in the local level but also imparted the message that struggle for information is gradually dismantling the bossy and non-transparent practices in the administration and governance. Here, the cooperation from CDOs from Banke and Parsa districts is quite laudable, for they have helped constructively to empower citizen's right to information by boosting the morale of the RTI campaigners. Similar important assistance was made by the local RTI coordinators of Banke and Bara districts. ■

Freedom Forum in International Forum

■ Freedom Forum Executive Director Mr Krishna Sapkota attended Regional Technical Workshop on Climate Change Financing organized by UNDP in collaboration with UKAid, Swedish Government and International Budget Partnership (IBP) at Bangkok, Thailand on November 5-7, 2014.

■ Narayan Ghimire from Freedom Forum participated in the 9th Internet Governance Forum meeting held in Istanbul, Turkey from 2 to 5 September 2014.

Self Disclosure Updates

| | | | |
|--|--|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Type, Nature of Organization | NGO working for Democracy, Right to Information, Freedom of Expression, Fiscal Transparency and Open Data | | |
| 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 | Krishna Sapkota: Executive Director, Management head of the organization, coordinates overall organizational and project Affairs (Development and Implementation) | | |
| | Anirudra Neupane: Program Manager, Manages program affairs and Performs responsibilities as the Information Officer. | | |
| | Narayan Ghimire: Media Monitoring Officer | | |
| | Aruna Adhikari: Finance Officer, Looks after accounting and administrative affairs | | |
| | Nodnath Trital : Program Officer, Coordinates a project on Right to Information and RTI Campaign | | |
| | Dan Bahadur Karki: Program Assistant, Manju Ojha: Media Monitoring Assistant, Trishna Dhakal: Admin Assistant / Receptionist, Basanti Thapa: Office Assistant | | |
| | Project Staffs: Freedom Forum Hires Short Term Project Staffs based on Need of projects | | |
| Ongoing Projects | Project Name | Supporting Agency | Date of Signing Contract |
| | Local Governance Action Research Project (Phase II) | The Asia Foundation | 25 March 2014 |
| | Open Budget Survey 2014 | IBP | 5 April 2014 |
| | Improve Implementation of RTI in Nepal to Promote Good Governance | Governance Facility Program | July 2014 |
| Activities Done | Research, Media Monitoring, Advocacy, Trainings, Meetings, Workshops, Seminars and other Campaigns to promote issues of Democracy, Right to Information, Freedom of Expression, Fiscal Transparency, Human Rights, Local Governance. It also provides legal aids to journalists, media and Information Seekers | | |
| Responsible Authority | Chairperson: Taranath Dahal, Executive Director: Krishna Sapkota | | |
| Decision Making Process | General Assembly : Making policies, rules and regulations of organization Executive committee: Formulation and Action Plans as per constitution of organization, rules and regulation Management team: Running projects and daily operational affairs and reporting timely to the Executive Committee. | | |
| Past and Current Activities | Available at: 1. http://freedomforum.org.np/content/activities/completed-activities.html 2. http://freedomforum.org.np/content/activities/current-activities.html | | |
| Information officer | Krishna Sapkota : Executive Director, Anirudra Neupane: Information Officer | | |
| Financial Information | Freedom Forum received grants amounting NPR 10810484.86 from different donors in F/Y 2013/14. For details- http://freedomforum.org.np/content/publications/reports/financial-reports.html | | |
| Official Website | www.freedomforum.org.np | | |
| Publications | Over 50 Publications (Printed). Follow the Link:, http://freedomforum.org.np/content/publications.html | | |
| Activities Carried Out Last Year | The Annual report of F/Y 2013/14 depicts the information in this regard. Please, follow the link below: http://freedomforum.org.np/content/publications/reports/annual-reports.html | | |
| Mechanism for Information Dissemination | Websites: www.freedomforum.org.np ; www.nepalpressfreedom.org , www.nepalelectionchannel.org Newsletter: Free Expression | | |

RTI for Better Journalism

Freedom Forum organized three-day trainings on advanced RTI-based investigative journalism in Dhulikhel, Kavrepalanchowk, on 12-14, November and in Nawalparasi, on 24-26, November. The focus of the training was how RTI could be used as a tool for investigative journalism. It was for sharpening journalists' investigative skills to explore serious issues of governance and development of the country.

A total of 42 mid-career journalists were provided the training.

The objectives of the trainings were- to enhance capacity of journalists for RTI based investigative reporting, to develop the ideas and tools to use RTI during investigative reporting, among others.

The training made the participants clearly aware on relations between RTI and investigative reporting. It also helped them whet the skills to write RTI applications for public agencies and RTI complaint letters to office chief and National Information Office, so that they could enhance their capacity to tweak stories that could expose administrative malfeasance and financial irregularities and misconduct.



The facilitators in the trainings were Mr. Hasta Gurung, Director of Center for Investigation Journalism and Mr. Taranath Dahal, Chairperson of Freedom Forum.

One of the trainers Mr Gurung said the trainings focused how journalists could apply a systematic approach to develop in-depth stories that could influence policy-makers and decision-takers to act for public goods.

During the training, each participant exchanged experiences and the impact of news story to the society.

Following the training, Muktinath Dhital from Arghakhanchi district observed, "I'm 10

years late to have such an important training. If I had been trained with this a decade back, my journalist would not only exceed other but brought significant change in my society."

The capacity building training is a part of the Governance Facility-funded 'Support to Accountable National Institutions through RTI in Nepal (SANCHAR)' project.

RTI TV, Redio Programs Under the same SANCHAR project, FF has been broadcasting a program named Suchanako Hak (RTI) on television and radio on a weekly basis.

The program is focused on status of the implementation of RTI, role of NIC, and accountability and transparency issues. Similarly, the program in both media has covered the RTI activities conducted in different districts.

The RTI radio program is aired on Radio Nepal for 15 minutes from 7:40am on Friday while RTI TV program broadcast on Himalaya Television for half an hour from 7:30pm the same day.

There are a total 28 episodes in the program. Of which, 11 episodes of radio program and eight episodes of TV program have been broadcast so far. ■

60 Journalists Killed Globally in 2014

Syria world's deadliest country for journalists; international journalists were killed at a higher rate in 2014 than in recent years.

CPJ special report by Shazdeh Omari

Reflecting in part the increasingly volatile nature of conflict zones in which Westerners are often deliberately targeted, nearly one quarter of the journalists killed this year were members of the international press, about double the proportion CPJ has documented in recent years. Over time, according to CPJ research, about nine out of every 10 journalists killed are local people covering local stories.

In total, at least 60 journalists were killed globally in 2014 in relation to their work, compared with 70 who died in 2013. CPJ is investigating the deaths in 2014 of at least 18 more journalists to determine whether they were work-related.

The danger of working as an international correspondent gained renewed attention in April this year as Anja Niedringhaus, a German photographer for The Associated Press, was shot dead by a police officer in Afghanistan while covering elections. In August, U.S. freelance journalist James Foley was executed by members of militant group Islamic State, which published an online video of the murder. Foley had been kidnapped in Syria in November 2012, but his whereabouts were unknown. Two weeks after his murder, Islamic State published another video showing the beheading of U.S.-Israeli freelance journalist Steven Sotloff, who had been abducted in August 2013.

Despite increased risks to Western journalists working in conflict zones, the overwhelming majority of journalists under threat for their work continue to be local. For example, of the approximately 20 journalists CPJ estimates to be currently missing in Syria—

An unusually high proportion of journalists killed in relation to their work in 2014 were international journalists, as correspondents crossed borders to cover conflict and dangerous situations in the Middle East, Ukraine, and Afghanistan, the Committee to Protect Journalists found in its annual analysis.

many of whom are believed to be held by Islamic State—most are local.

In total, the Syrian conflict led to the deaths of at least 17 journalists in 2014, bringing to 79 the overall number of journalists killed in the country since the conflict began in 2011. The growing death toll led Syria to replace the Philippines as the second deadliest place for journalists since CPJ began documenting journalist killings in 1992.



(During a demonstration in Pakistan, journalists hold photos of Anja Niedringhaus, an AP photographer who was killed in Afghanistan in April. (Reuters/Faisal Mahmood))

In Iraq, at least five journalists were killed this year, three of whom were covering clashes between the Iraqi government and its allies against the Islamic State-led insurgency. One of them, Khalid Ali Hamada, a cameraman for Al-Ahad TV, was killed in June 2014 while covering clashes in Diyala province between Iraqi security forces and Islamic State gunmen, according to news reports.

At least four journalists and three media workers were killed while covering the 50 days of conflict in July and August in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, in which more than 2,100 Palestinians, most of them civilians, and 73 Israelis were killed. On July 9, a driver for the local agency Media 24 was killed when his car, marked "Press," was hit by an Israeli strike.

The deaths of at least five journalists and two media workers in Ukraine this year were the first journalism-related killings CPJ has confirmed in Ukraine since 2001. All but one of those killed were international journalists. CPJ documented frequent press freedom violations

in the country in 2014, including attacks, the detention and abduction of journalists, and blocked broadcasts.

In Pakistan, which ranks among the most dangerous places for the press over time, three journalists were killed for their work, a decline from previous years. Yet violence against journalists continued: In April, Geo News senior anchor Hamid Mir was shot six times as he was leaving Karachi's main airport, but survived. In March, gunmen shot at the car of TV anchor Raza Rumi, who escaped serious injury. His driver was killed.

At least three journalists were killed in Paraguay in 2014, the first time since 2007 that CPJ confirmed a media-related death in the country. Two of the journalists were radio hosts. In the northern city of Concepción in June, Edgar Pantaleón Fernández Fleitas was shot dead after hosting a radio program in which he accused local judges, lawyers, and officials in the Attorney General's office of corruption.

Some journalists were caught on the frontlines of reporting on the outbreak of the deadly Ebola virus. In Guinea, the bodies of a radio journalist and two media workers were found dumped in a sewer in the village of Womé, where they had traveled to cover a delegation's public health awareness campaign.

Turkey saw its first media-related killing in many years. On October 14, Kadir Bağdu was on his bicycle delivering issues of the pro-Kurdish daily Azadiya Welat in the city of Adana when he was shot by two men on a motorcycle.

In Burma, the military said in October it had shot and killed a Burmese freelance reporter while holding him in custody in southeastern Mon state. The killing was the first journalism-related death CPJ has documented in Burma since 2007. Press freedom conditions in the country deteriorated in 2014, with at least 10 journalists imprisoned on anti-state charges. Shazdeh Omari is CPJ's news editor.

(Source: <https://www.cpj.org/reports/2014/12/international-journalists-killed-at-high-rate-in-2014-middle-east-deadliest-region-for-press.php>) ■

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. The organization is also working on the issues of public finance management, budget transparency, open data and aid governance, political and parliamentary accountability and electoral reform based on its on-hand experience and learning.

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