

A Reporter Dies, Thousands Directly Affected Nepali Media in Disaster

As the world is marking the World Press Freedom Day today (May 3, 2015), Nepali media is grief-stricken, mourning over the deaths of thousands of Nepalis with slim hope of finding anyone alive even after the ninth day of the destructive earthquake. It is the day Freedom Forum marked with the production of report on press freedom across the country and other programs. But, this time, the report on 'media in disaster' is unavoidable.

The 7.8 magnitude earthquake of April 25 left people from 14 districts, including the capital city Kathmandu, in tremendous horror, claiming thousands of lives including of a journalist. The disruption of media was rife, thereby keeping public aloof from timely information.

Death/ Injury of Journalists and Relatives

The destructive earthquake killed a sports journalist **Suman Bamjan** affiliated to the Gorkhapatra daily, published from the Kathmandu. His dead body was recovered from a local Mahabouddha area on May 2, eighth day of the quake.

Hundreds of the relatives of the journalists were killed in the disaster that struck especially the hilly and upper hilly areas of 14 districts, including the capital city Kathmandu.

As per the preliminary investigation the Freedom Forum conducted, as many as thousands of journalists from these districts were directly affected while a dozen got injuries. Similarly, thousands of houses belonging to media persons were collapsed during the terrible earthquake.

Disruption of Media House

Media houses as FM radios, daily/weekly newspapers and televisions could not be run smoothly for lack of electricity, equipment damage, psychological fear, lack of printing paper, cable snapping and building collapse.

Newspapers: One of the oldest media house, **Kamana Publications**, received huge damage after the nearby structure collapsed over it. **The Samacharpatra** national daily published by the Publications has not been published since the earthquake.

Even other newspapers (nearly two dozen of dailies, 150 weeklies) in the capital city remained unpublished, and if published, circulation was very low. Though the phone communication remained operational,

TV/Cables: Out of 400 cable operators, most witnessed damages, resulting in inoperative condition. One of the largest cables, Subisu, remained inoperative for four days. It said the damage it amounted nearly Rs. 10 million.

FM Radio: Out of 253 total community radios, as many as 120 FM stations got damages which disrupted the news airing. Some station building collapsed while some had its equipments damaged.

Radios Played Important Role

However, at such disaster, the role of radio, especially state-owned Radio Nepal, remained very effective media to reach information to the public. Still, quake victims are deprived of access to information disseminated through different media as there has been no electricity to recharge communication gadgets such as cellular phone and radio sets. It was really positive and laudable work of Radio Nepal, for most of other media remained either inoperative,

or if any in operation, they failed to reach people conveniently. People did not turn on televisions, and the newspapers were out of their access.

Another laudable aspect of media at this tragedy is that no national and international media/media person was obstructed to reaching to the disaster areas for making reports. It was indeed positive that media persons' free movement to the disaster hit sites brought huge information to the public. Despite this, many disaster-ravaged far-flung areas are still unreported. If the media had the access there, more information could be relayed.

Finally, analyzing Nepali media situation in the last year, there were comparatively few number of press freedom violations before January 22 while it witnessed surge as the capital city itself had significant number of violation (12) on January 20 alone. Later the number declined. In total the number of violation remains around 45 in the year from May 2014 to April 2015.

Freedom Forum will update with two comprehensive reports- of annual press freedom situation and of the media in disaster. Stay with us!