

Impunity Reigns in Nepali Media

(Media monitoring from January 16-February 15, 2012)

Information

A total of 11 incidents of press freedom violation occurred during the period from January 16 to February 15, 2012.

Journalist Rupa Sharma 'Neha' associated with the *Metro FM* was issued death threat in the capital on February 8, 2012 over an article she published in a fortnightly magazine, *Himal*.

Essential technical gadgets including computer hard disks were stolen from *Radio Janaawaj FM* at Banke, a district in the southern plain of the Midwestern region of Nepal on February 7, 2012 thereby disrupting the FM radio service. According to the sources, former station manager Kamal BK Nirmohi was behind the loot as he was warning of disruption in the FM after he was ousted on the charge of financial irregularities five days back. Meanwhile, two armed persons looted a digital camera, mobile phone, purse and office bag of Poshnath Adhikari, reporter with the *Kantipur* daily from Dhading, a hilly district adjoining the capital city on January 19, 2012.

Bal Krishna Dhungel, a Constituent Assembly member of the ruling UCPN-Maoist, convicted by the Supreme Court over a murder case, publicly threatened journalists Manoj Ghimire associated with the *Kantipur daily* and Pravin Gyawali, cameraperson at the same media over making news about him on January 29, 2012.

Earlier on January 25, students affiliated to various political cadres organizing *banda*, general strike, threatened of burning newspapers if they published news against the strike they organized in Palpa, district in the hilly region of the western part of Nepal.

Also, a cadre of the Nepali Congress, Murali Kumal, threatened executive editor of the *Lamjung Khabar daily*, Navin Raj Kuikel, expressing dissatisfaction over the editorial published in the newspaper on 24 January 2012.

Similarly, the party cadres had manhandled cameraperson Anjan Kumar Himali affiliated to the *Janaapekshya weekly* while taking picture of their program the same day.

An unknown person threatened of action on Surya Tamang, news editor at *Rupakot Community Radio* of Khatang, a hilly district in the eastern part of the country on January 23, 2012.

In course of the general strike, the students agitating against the price hike of petroleum products burnt the copies of the *Nagarik daily* in Palpa, a hilly district in the western part of the country on January 25. They burnt the *Nagarik* accusing it of writing editorial against the general strike.

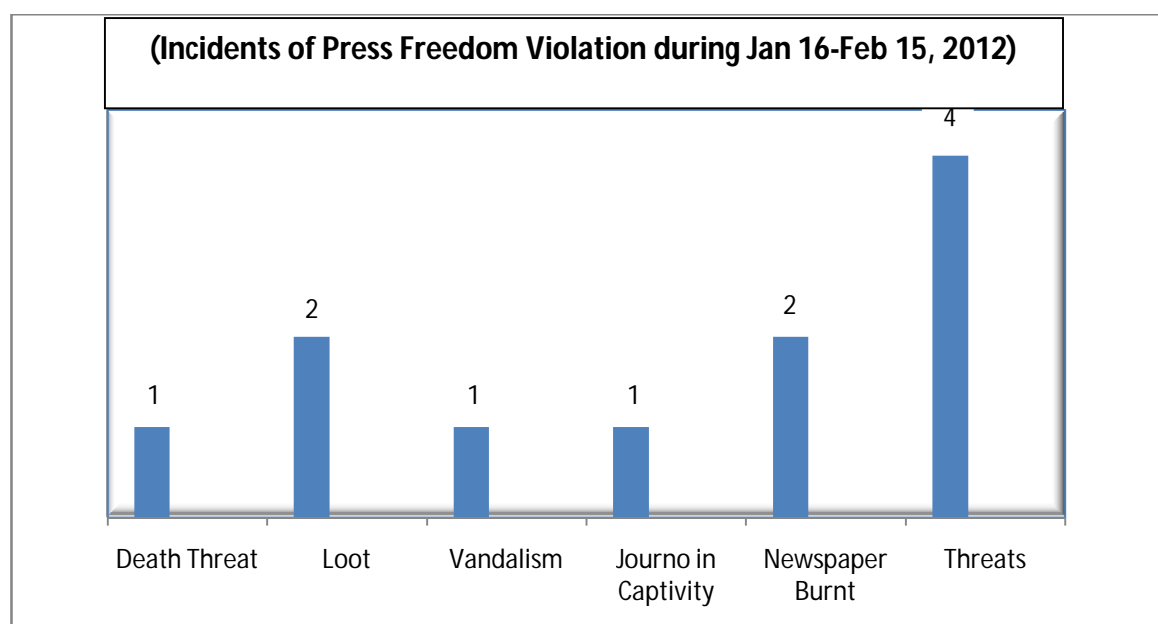
Similarly, on January 22, 2012, various sister organizations of different Madhes-based political parties burnt the *Kantipur* daily in various parts of the country including the capital city, Kathmandu, reasoning

that it published an article that tarnished the image of Madhes- the southern plain- and undervalued the sentiment of the Madhesi people. They decried the article by Saurav.

The security persons prevented journalists from covering news and took them under control for four hours in Dhankuta, eastern hilly district, on January 29, 2012. The Prime Minister was addressing the program. The journalists were also with black armbands as a peaceful protest against the recent classification of information by the government.

The landless squatters settled in various parts of the Kathmandu valley vandalized a press vehicle belonging to the *Nepal Samacharpatra daily* in course of demonstration in the capital city on January 17, 2012. Even the driver was mistreated by the vandals.

In January, the government classified the information which sparked furor among media persons, rights activists and civil society. However due to tremendous press from the various quarter, the government withdrew the information classification.



Analysis

There was no significant change in the press freedom violation this month as it witnessed only one incident less than the last one. There were 12 incidents of press freedom violation last month.

Disruption of FM radio following loot is quite appalling how the failure in the management or personal cause deprive people of their right to information. It is a wrong trend that the management in the media/information sector itself fails to know the sensitivity and significance of information. The FM radio has necessarily the crucial role to educate grassroots people on different issues and promote freedom of expression at local level. But the manifestation of internal rift among the public erodes public trust on media.

The threat to journalist by a person already convicted of murder by the Supreme Court is a serious threat to media freedom. He is walking scot-free because of political protection by the ruling Maoist party. It shows the rule of law is ridiculed in Nepal thereby promoting impunity.

Similarly, the sister wings of the political parties are growing hostile to media and journalists which indicates that our political parties are indifferent to press freedom.

Government's latest move – the classification of information- was censured not only by the journalists but by the people from every quarter because it came against the spirit of the Right to Information Act (RTI) Act-2007 and against the Interim Constitution. It was a severe blow to people's right to information. In the name of protecting information, the government was trying to conceal hundreds of information of public importance. Once the information of public importance was concealed, the government (bureaucracy and political parties) was likely to be autocratic. As a result, the transparency and good governance elude and corruption thrives.

However, bowing down before the public pressure, the government withdrew its decision of information classification. It denotes that the awareness in the public is growing day by day. It must be taken positively.

Conclusion

Scanned the analysis, the government may adopt any autocratic measures to suppress people's right to information. Therefore, the role of public, civil society and media is growing to keep constant watch on government.

With the rule of law ridiculed and incidents of press freedom violation going unabated in the country, the impunity may grow further which would jeopardize journalists' and people's rights in the days to come. The self-censorship is likely to grow more. This situation may indirectly keep people aloof from receiving factual and objective information and ideas, which does not help media's role to keep vigilance on the wrong doings by public agencies.

Greater level of awareness and campaigning from civil society and media sectors need to be continued as a key to control suppressive steps of the political parties and government.

