

Media under chilling effects of political unrest

Freedom Forum is bound to paint a bleak picture of Nepali media in 2015. Entire Nepali media remained affected during this year where a total of 83 press freedom violations including a killing of young radio journalist Rohan Chaudhari of Jaleshwornath FM, Mahottari district, were recorded. Begun with the tumultuous political situation, and hit hard with 25 April devastating earthquake, the Nepali media/journalists remained at the receiving end of the political agitation especially in the southern plains coupled with rowdy demonstration and the obstruction on southern border.



Slain Journo Rohan Chaudhari

Rohan Chaudhari, 17, from Bajrahi village of Jaleshwor municipality, Mohottari, a district in the southern plains was killed with police firing while he was reporting live to the Jaleshwornath FM from a local Mahendra Chowk on September 9. Shot on chest by the security command while taming protest, Chaudhari died on the spot, according to Station Manager of FM, 90.4, Bijay Chaudhari. "Sadly and astonishingly, the incident was ignored by many including media," worried Station Manager Bijay. Rohan had been working a RJ and reporter to the FM for 13 months.

As in the past, political cadres and security persons remained in the forefront to intimidate journalists and limit their reporting strengths. Comparatively, political parties' cadres dominated the press freedom violations.

The tough time Nepali media faced this year can be observed in three phases- **i) tumultuous time around January 22:** which was the tentative date political parties had announced as the deadline to promulgate a new constitution. As the opposition parties and other disgruntled ones waged protests as a pressure tactic for consensus-based

constitution, the media bore the brunt. During the protest programs, the political cadres and leaders publicly threatened reporters. On Jan 20 alone, a total of 12 incidents of press freedom violation were recorded; **ii) disaster time with April 25 and May 12 earthquakes-** the media suffered a huge financial loss and a deepening psychological effect impacting future of media. The loss of personal properties, death and injuries of near and dears ones and fear of displacement dogged the media persons. Many media stopped publication and broadcasting for some days/weeks. Sport journalists with the Gorkhapatra daily, Suman Bhomjan, died in the April 25 earthquake in the capital city. **iii) agitation by some political parties and groups in the southern plains continuous till date-** the reporters in the southern plains are attacked, threatened of life, and of action, manhandled, obstructed by both State and agitating sides. The agitating political parties and groups are continuously threatening reporters reasoning the news on protests was given little space in their media; while the security persons are randomly assaulting journalists in the protests. The obstruction on the supply of essential goods in southern border points resulting in reducing of pages by newspapers and in remaining out of regular job by many reporters.

Some points

In total, FF recorded 83 incidents of press freedom violations where Province No 2 and 3 witnessed highest number of violations- 26 and 29 respectively. Province no had the murder of young journalist Rohan Chaudhari. Attack and manhandle were common (29 out of total). Interestingly, Province No 6 and 7 witnessed only one violation each.

Nepal got much awaited new constitution from the Constituent Assembly on September 20, which has created a broader FoE-friendly democratic context to bring reforms on media sector.

Urgency of media was felt widely during disaster; the role of Radio Nepal was lauded much, for many media failed to continue news due to fear, damage during Earthquakes.

Threat was more to reporters writing on financial irregularities, smuggling and administrative malfeasance.

Journalists in the capital itself faced highest number of intimidations, mostly by political cadres. The province no 2 with capital city Kathmandu witnessed 29 of violations in the year.

Security agency, especially police persons controlling protest/riot failed to segregate journalists and respect their rights.

Political parties, especially the UCPN (Maoist) and regional parties in the southern plains are yet to internalize the importance of press freedom and journalists' right to free reporting.

Due to protests, many national media, especially Kathmandu-published newspapers were obstructed to reach towns and cities in southern plains for nearly four months.

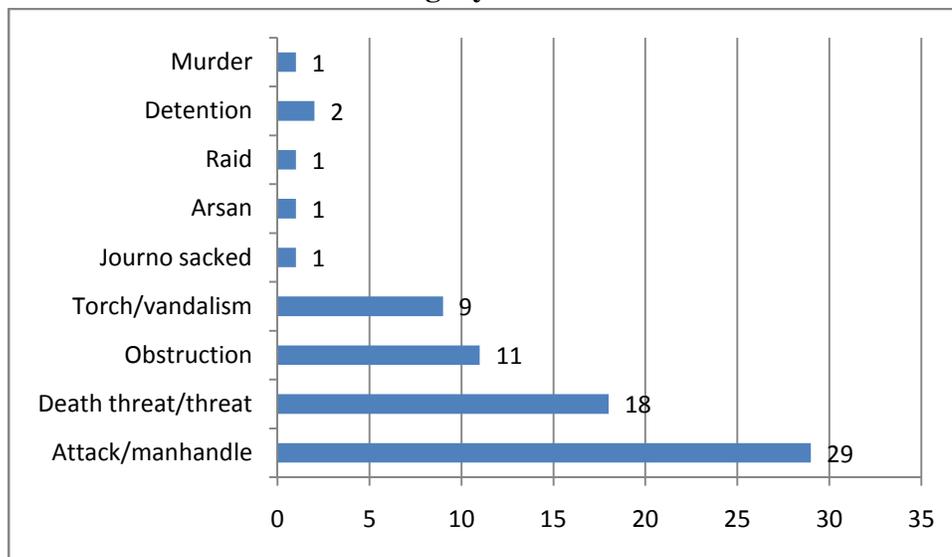
Political parties, groups, and people from the southern plains felt belittled by the national media with littler coverage of their protests.

Some FM radios in Madhes were found used to glorify protests

With continuous strikes, mobility of journalists and supply of newspapers was badly affected, even within the capital city. Many reporters in Tarai were forced to stay idle.

Police have not taken actions against those found threatening media/journalists
Pressure from both State and agitating parties mounted on media thereby blocking news, disrupting work atmosphere.

Press Freedom Violation during a year-2015



Internet/New media

It is good to have increase in internet penetration- 44.11 percent of the total population in Nepal, that is more than 11 million Nepalis have the internet access. It is indeed a laudable aspect that helps ensure quick and easy information to people from the across the country.

Similarly, the draft of the broadband policy is another achievement that creates infrastructure to expand internet service.

With the increase in internet, the number of blogs and online news portal has obviously increased thereby promoting people's participation on the debate on public issues. Although there is not exact data how many blogs and news portal area there in Nepal, estimated number of news portal can be placed 500. Meanwhile, the Press Council Nepal has recorded a total of 250 news portals.

Conclusively,

As the State side including political parties remained in the forefront to violate press freedom and intimidate journalists, it shows the lack of political culture and tolerance to respect media. Political parties/leaders are in need of teaching their cadres how to respect press freedom, a fundamental element to make democracy functional.

Similarly, the security persons seemed unaware how to segregate journalists from the protestors. Proper orientation is essential for them to tame mob by keeping reporters safe.

Political parties and groups especially the agitating ones too need to respect others' rights while struggling for certain groups' rights. Their move to blame, target, and divide media is quite detrimental to democracy. The misuse of media by taking them under control must end by them.

Press freedom violations in seven provinces

