



Free Expression

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A NEWSLETTER OF FREEDOM FORUM

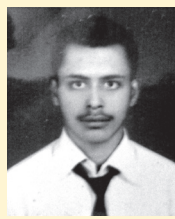
Media under chilling effects of political unrest

Annual Media Report 2015

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 Jaleshornath 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.

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 dear 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.



Slain Journalist Rohan Chaudhari

Rohan Chaudhari, 19, from Bajrahi village of Jaleshor municipality, Mohottari, a district in the southern plains was killed with police firing while he was reporting live to the Jaleshornath 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 J and reporter to the FM for 13 months.

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.

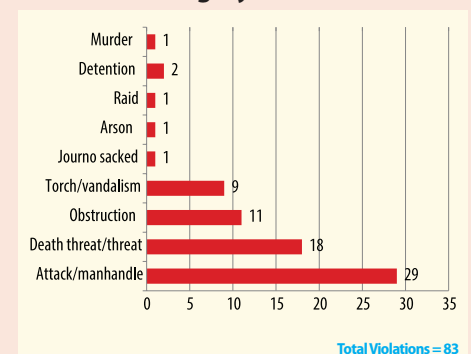
Journalists in the capital itself faced highest number of intimidations, mostly by political cadres. The province no 2 with capital city Kathmandu witnessed 29 of violations in the year. Security agency, especially police persons controlling protest/riot failed to segregate journalists and respect their 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,

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Violation during a year-2015



Message from Chairperson



In the third week of December, Nepal marked the Open Nepal week, which focused on the theme of open government. The Open Government Partnership (OGP), with its mission of securing concrete commitments from governments to increase accountability and responsiveness to citizens' needs, can be an important platform in Nepal for realizing the elevated level of interaction needed between civil society and government in order to build the trust for sustainable peace and pursuing a common agenda for change.

As the country embarks on a journey to institutionalize a new political set up marked with a transition to a federal structure from a unitary state, in many ways, the context in Nepal is conducive for it to join the global initiative of OGP. Nepal has just introduced a new constitution after more than a decade of civil unrest and governance breakdown. With this, the government is systematically putting structures in place for its own form of federal democratic governance. It is worth mentioning here that after participating in the OGP Global Summit held in Mexico last October, Chief Secretary of Nepal Government, Dr Som Lal Subedi, had said, "OGP offers innovation to find new forms of civic participation in democratic governance. It will be useful for us while developing structures and mechanisms of governance at sub-national level." He added that the sharing of best practices in promoting citizens participation in national and sub-national level through technological innovations would work in Nepal's context while implementing the new constitution.

The presence of civil society organisations already experienced in advocating for openness, securing government buy-in, and improving technical capacity with an emerging community of techies engaging with public policy issues provides a good foundation for the partnership between government and civil society that OGP requires. Similarly, the constitutionally-guaranteed Right to Information (RTI) enabled with constitutional, legal and institutional provisions, growing campaigns for information requests, and capacity strengthening of the demand and supply sides, including building the capacity of journalists, have established RTI as a popular tool for exercising citizenship. Furthermore, there is already an Open Data movement in the country, spurred by government and donors' releases of aid data and CSO-led initiatives such as Open Nepal of which Freedom Forum is one of the founding constituents.

At the same time, there's also much to be done in improving Nepal's lower ranking on many social and economic indicators, addressing high-level of social inequalities and corruption, and building mutual trust between government and citizens. These provide further rationale for Nepal to join OGP and benefit from the access to the network of reformers and opportunities for peer learning the platform offers.

The recognition of civic space in governance is the key theme of open government partnership which accords high value in addressing growing pursuit of good governance mostly in developing countries like Nepal. The need for devising mass sensitization for CSOs and government and making systematic efforts to push the OGP agenda in Nepal was underscored during the international platforms.

Freedom Forum which also attended the OGP Global Summit and regional meetings representing civil society organizations of Nepal has spearheaded the agenda advancing dialogue among the stakeholders including CSOs and government agencies. It has already initiated campaign and also provided support to the government side to take ahead the agenda for broader transparency and accountability regime in Nepal.

Nepal already meets the required eligibility criteria on fiscal transparency, access to information, asset disclosure and citizen engagement. Joining OGP would not just be an opportunity to streamline and raise ambition levels of transparency and accountability initiatives already taking place in Nepal but also provide an important signal of the government's willingness to be a listening and responsive government, a government which is committed to providing opportunities for citizen engagement in public affairs, and building the trust between the state and its citizens that is so essential to ensuring the sustainability of its democratic reforms.

Taranath Dahal
Freedom Forum

Preparing base for open government in Nepal

The Government of Nepal on 23 December 2015 formed a four-member committee to prepare a study report with recommendation in regard to Nepal's membership and participation in the Open Government Partnership (OGP) – a high-profile international initiative on governance reforms. The committee formed at the prime ministerial level decision comprises Chief Information Commissioner at the National Information Commission Krishna Hari Baskota as a coordinator, Secretary of Office of Prime Minister and Council of Ministers (Governance Reforms) Shreedhar Sapkota, Freedom Forum Chairperson Taranath Dahal and a Joint Secretary of OPMCM Narayan Dawadi as members.

It is a part of the government's ground works to be the part of the multilateral global movement of OGP in realizing the objectives of effective governance. The committee was entrusted to undertake study and submit the report with recommended actions to the government to this effect within 15 days. In doing so, the committee can engage secretaries from Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Minister for Information and Communications and Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs as per the need, the letter reads. The secretariat of the committee will be set up at the office of National Information Commission (NIC).

The Committee is holding consultations with CSOs working in the areas of transparency, accountability and innovation as well as and government representatives in connection with the preparation of the report with recommendations. Following the submission of the report, the government will officially respond to OGP's letter requesting Nepal to be the part of global initiative.

Meanwhile, Freedom Forum on 16 December 2015 organized a daylong OGP sensitization workshop followed by a half-day strategic meeting in the capital. The event was a part of the Open Nepal Week 2015 where representatives from civil society, academia, and media discussed issues concerning a more open, participatory and evidence-based approach to development and governance.

OGP Asia-Pacific Civil Society Coordinator Ms Shreya Basu delivered her two presentations on OGP & its Importance and Achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through Accountability and Transparency on the occasion. The presentations were followed by group works on political mapping in the context of Nepal (identifying champions and reformers within the government; who we can engage in open government agenda?; what policy changed they want to bring?; what are the policy practices of current government?; what are the initiatives that are already taking place in Nepal?); the open government policy priorities of the organizations the participants are working and the challenges they foresee in getting the Government of Nepal endorsed the OGP. 🇳🇵

Violations up in southern plains

As some political parties kept on agitation in different districts of the southern plains of the country, press freedom violations remained rife. The media persons faced the threats from agitating party cadres with the pressure sometime to write and sometime not to write on any issue, while the security persons were also quite hostile to them, thereby jeopardizing journalists' right to free reporting.

Press vehicle torched

The cadres of the agitating Madhesi Front torched a vehicle belonging to the Kantipur national daily in Birgunj, a city in the central southern plains of Nepal, on 27 December.

According to a reporter for the Kantipur daily from Birgunj city, Bhushan Yadav, the Front cadres set on fire the press vehicle (Ba 13 Cha 495) while it was returning to Chitwan city after circulating newspapers in Birgunj. The arson took place early in the morning.

As per the news reported by Yadav, the cadres blocked the road, stopped the vehicle, took the staffs out from it and set the vehicle on fire by sprinkling petrol. The cadres said to the Kantipur staffs, "Why the newspaper published news against Tarai/Madhes?"

Threat

In Sarlahi, a district in the central southern plains of Nepal, the security persons threatened Bishwonath Thakur and Om Prakash Thakur of attack while they were taking photos on police vandalizing vehicles used by the protestors at Malangawa, on December 21.

Bishwonath, is the station manager of a local Radio Madhes, while Om Prakash, reporter for the Kantipur daily from the district.

Attack with torch

On November 20, Irfan Ali, reporter for the News 24 television from Birgunj, a city in the southern plains of the country, was attacked by the cadres of the agitating United Democratic Madhesi Front (UDMF).

"I was visualizing the torch rally organized by the UDMF on the evening. All of a sudden, some people moved to me saying 'I was a journalist and not making good news'. One of them hurled a torch on me which burnt my shirt and injured on shoulder. However, I escaped the serious injury."

CDO threatens scribes, regrets later

On December 30, Chief District Officer of Panchthar, Purushottam Ghimire, threatened Jintendra Bhandari, district reporter for the National News Agency (RSS), and Lekhanath Khatiwada, publisher of local Mechi Post daily, over the news on irregularities on revenue collections.

Newspaper circulation blocked

In Saptari, a district in the southern plains of the country, circulation of the national newspapers as Kantpur, Kathmandu Post, Nagarik and Annapurna dailies was obstructed by the agitating Madhesi Morcha, on December 16. A huge number of the copies of newspaper were seized from local stationery at Rajibiraj city, the district headquarters.

Similarly the people in Udayapur, a district in the inner Terai (southern plains) of Nepal, for over three months till third week of December, remained deprived of national newspapers due to the prolonged agitation in the southern plains.

The supply of the national newspapers, published from the capital city, Kathmandu, was quite disrupted and almost irregular.

Manhandles

In Parsa, editor of a local Utthan weekly, Sudarshan Raj Pandey, was manhandled by some people, saying, 'You're the journalist writing whatever you like about the agitation'. It was informed to Freedom Forum by reporter for the Nagarik daily from Birgunj city, Ritesh Tripathi.

Similarly, On November 22, police persons manhandled journalists- Om Prakash Shah with Bilochan weekly, Shatish Datt with Mithila weekly, Ashutosh Prasad Singh with C FM, and Parish Karna with Chandra FM -while they were reporting about the agitation of various political parties in Saptari, a district in the central southern plains of Nepal.

The journalists were making news and photographing a person killed by police firing

CDO Ghimire, in a threatening voice, said to reporter Bhandari, "We now need to manage the intention of the journalists. We're closely watching reporters. Come to the CDO office immediately."

Later, CDO regretted by distorting his stand that he actually was saying that he was to manage the intention of his subordinates.

Kushal Babu Basnet, editor of a local Hamro Khabar weekly, informed that it had been over three months the national dailies had not reached Udayapur. Although there were some, the circulation of national newspapers was too late in the district, he added.

Shortage of printing paper and ink: Editor Basnet also said the local media houses, especially print media, witnessed tough time to publish the newspapers regularly.

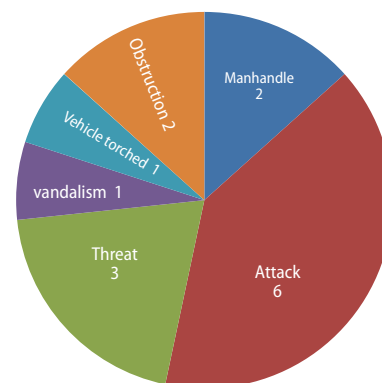
Although the publication of the local newspapers has not stopped, it is quite irregular, he said, adding, it is because of the lack of printing papers and ink. The disruption in the supply of the printing papers and ink caused severe crunch of the materials needed to publish the newspapers.

during the protest. But a group of police persons manhandled them and abused verbally.

"Who are you to make news? Don't visualize the clash," reporter Prakash Khatiwada told FF quoting the security persons as speaking against journalists on duty.

On 23 November, they vandalized a motorcycle used by Parish Karna, added reporter Khatiwada.

Press freedom violations from Nov to Dec 2015



Police harasses online news scribes

On November 4, the Central Investigation Bureau of Nepal Police took under control two journalists from their media house-yeskathmandu.com- for three hours over the news reporting on the misuse of fuel provided freely to VIPs.

A group led by Deputy Superintendent of Police reached the news portal's office at Thapagaon, Kathmandu, and took journalists Manoj Khatiwada and Parbati Thapa under control.

Talking to FF, journalist Khatiwada said, "We were held for three hours from the office over the news 'black-marketing of fuel provided to VIP', and released without any conditions and reason by the Nepal Police's CIB."

Instead of showing reservation on content if they had, taking the journalists under control by the police is a sheer misuse of power by the new government. The police harassed journalists, which is a move to control media. Control of media is against democracy. 📢

Reporter Jha serious with police attack

On December 24, police persons attacked Abadhesh Jha, reporter to the Kantipur daily from Biratnagar, a southern city in the eastern part of Nepal.

Reporter Jha said, "Police persons attacked me while I was visualizing their atrocities on protestors. Although I was in the press jacket, they kicked me again and again, and even on the sensitive part which made me nearly unconscious. Later I was rescued by fellow journalists and taken to a local Golden Hospital. I was discharged after two days and have been taking rest, taking medicine."

Reporter Gole injured in assault

In the night of December 15, an unknown gang assaulted Raj Kumar Gole, reporter for the Nayapatrika daily, from Kavrepalanchowk.

Reporter Gole said, "It was dark I was returning home after reporting at about 8:00pm. All of a sudden, an unknown gang asked me whether I was Mr Gole, and assaulted me."

He had to have eight stitches on left hand in the hospital after the assault. He further said he was attacked because of his investigative reporting.

Police beats reporter

Dilip Singh, a reporter for Nayapatrika daily, from Siraha, a district in the southern plains of Nepal, was beaten by a police person while reporting, on December 10.

A police from local Lahan area attacked reporter Singh with fist while visualizing a distribution of cooking gas to the people. According to the Nawapatrika daily, police inspector Pachuram Chaudhari beat the reporter reasoning he could not visualize the gas distribution.

With the severe shortage of fuel supply in the country, distribution of cooking gas had to be monitored by the security persons in different places. ■

Attack on FM Station

In the night of November 25, an unknown gang of four persons attacked Parasi FM of Nawalparasi, a district in the central southern plains of the country.

Station Manager at Parasi FM, Megharaj Gautam, said, "It was nearly 10:00pm as watchman said. The unknown persons came to the FM station, burnt a motorcycle, and sprinkled petrol to set the FM station building on fire. However, as the petrol was scattered hurriedly, it remained on the floor only, which prevented any big fire damage."

In a question whether there was any threat to FM and its journalists earlier, Station Manager Gautam said there was not any direct threat, but the agitating political parties used to complain of not giving major space to their protest in the news. "Just before the attack, as the gatekeeper said, he was alone after FM office was closed. An unknown phone call was made saying the news on blockade need to be corrected as it was not 'blockade'," added Mr Gautam.

The security office and administration office in the district inspected the situation next morning. The FM remained closed for some days, as the entire FM people remained panicked to operate it immediately.

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“ They not only burnt our newspaper named Sanskar Khabar daily, but also gave pressure not to make news about the activities of other political parties and the Constituent Assembly members who have signed for new constitution. ”

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FM radio stops news bulletin owing to pressure from agitating parties

A FM radio named Sanskar FM of Bara, a district in the southern plains of the country, stopped airing bulletins on local news in view of the tremendous pressure from the agitating political parties.

Marketing Chief at the FM, Bholanath Poudel shared the woes that the FM station had received many letters from the United Democratic Madhesi Forum, an alliance of political parties waging agitation in the southern plains of the country.

Mr Poudel further said they not only burnt our newspaper named Sanskar Khabar daily, but gave pressure not to make news about the activities of other political parties and the Constituent Assembly members who have signed for new constitution.

The political pressure egregious violated press freedom, and journalists' right to free reporting. The agitating political parties actually need to make aware its cadres not to violate journalists' right to free reporting while waging agitation. The growing pressure on media to halt news airing is quite against democratic values. It obstructed free flow of information and citizen's right to information.

Attack at work place

Similarly, on 21 November, a contractor attacked a reporter in Nepalgunj, a city in the southern plains of the mid west of Nepal over the news he wrote on irregularity on construction of a bridge.

"I had written a news story as 'payment to contractor before completion of bridge construction' in the Nagarik daily three months back. But, the contractor Ganesh Shahi called me in the evening, came to the office, spoke foul on me and manhandled. As there were other friends in the office (regional office), the attack was averted," said Arjun Oli, reporter to the Nagarik daily from Nepalgunj city.

Threat over news on black marketing

In another incident, on November 16, News Chief at a local Radio Marsyangdi, Yuvraj Shrestha, from Lamjung was issued death threat over a news story on black marketing of petrol.

"The radio aired a news story about black marketing of petrol from an Oil Store owned by Shree Kant Ghimire in the morning. In the evening, Ghimire came to my room and threatened of attack asking why I had aired the news," said News Chief Shrestha informing Freedom Forum. 📢

MADHES MEDIA FACING TWO-SIDE INTIMIDATIONS



Participants at a program at Hariwan of Sarlahi district on December 21, 2015

Media, especially in the border districts of the southern plains of Nepal were hit hard during the agitations being waged by some disgruntled political parties and groups for more than three months objecting to the constitution the Constituent Assembly promulgated on September 20. Security challenges were growing. The continuous strike badly affected journalists' right to free reporting. Intimidation from both sides continued to media. Amid this, Freedom Forum and FNJ Sarlahi Chapter jointly organized a program with the journalists from the most suffered district- eight districts which fall in province no 2 as per the new constitutional set up, so that the problems of the journalists could be heard and the future plans for better media freedom mulled.

The program named 'Journalists' Safety in Madhes' was organized at Hariwan of Sarlahi district on December 21 gathering 40 journalists from federal Province No 2, new set up provisioned by the new constitution. The province no 2 lying in the southern plains of the country are – Sarlahi, Parsa, Bara, Rautahat, Mahottari, Dhanusha, Siraha, and Saptari.

The program concluded that the media persons were at the receiving end of the political agitations. Both the cadres and leaders the agitating political parties and State side (especially the security persons) were hostile to media. The journalists were forced to write or not write the news. So, the participants pointed out the need to reaching such dialogue at the remote and the inner (local level) towns of the

districts, reporting jointly by the journalists from hilly, and Tarai origin to narrow down differences, by the journalists from Highway and from southern belt of the Highway. The national media houses need to be broad to view the problems of Tarai/Madhes journalists.

The key findings of the program were,

1. Journalists/media houses are facing double pressure- in between State/security and protestors. Both intimidate for reporting or not reporting any program/protest
2. They are divided whether to write advocating or not/supporting or not Tarai protests. It has created division on free reporting, and even jeopardized professionalism
3. Very little space and sometime even distortion of content by the national media to the protest news posing additional risk to reporters
4. Failure to write about humanitarian crisis, as they were not able to do justice to the people when they're in desperate need
5. Journalists are living under psychological fear
6. Reporters suffer threat when they miss/omit names of any political leaders
7. Many district reporters are bound to stay jobless due to agitation
8. Reporters for national media facing more risk
9. Many national newspapers blocked from entering Tarai district for nearly four months
10. Lack of printing papers, ink to publish papers

11. Difficulty to continue publication of local newspapers in districts

Assessing the views and grievances of the journalists from the eight districts which belong to the proposed Province No 2 by the new constitution, Freedom Forum came up with the conclusion:

1. Dialogue among government, political parties and media was essential in Tarai/ Madhes, especially at Malangawa, Janakpur, Siraha bazaar, Gaur, Rajbiraj, Inaruwa, Biratnagar, Rupaini, Lahan, Parasi, Bhairahawa, Taulihawa, Gulariya and Nepalgunj.
2. A scheme of joint reporting was needed. Such joint reporting could be done by the reporters from north and south of the East-West Highway, by the reporters from the hilly and Madhesi communities. Such joint reporting could help not only to narrow down the differences between Pahadi-Madhesi communities' views on issues of public importance, but also bring near the reporters from two regions together in profession.
3. In-depth investigation on the death/ murder of Rohan Chaudhari, a journalist from Mahottari district was essential. Interestingly, Rohan's death is silenced everywhere- no media has brought news on him; neither any media association raised voice on it, nor the State side admitted of crime (if killed by security persons)
4. Facilitation was essential to reach the national newspapers to many cities and towns in the southern plains of the country.
5. Kathmandu editors need revisiting editorial policy. The journalists in southern plains have complained that the national media have not given sufficient space to the news they reported for.

Freedom Forum's Chairpersons Mr Taranath Dahal and General Secretary Dharmendra Jha facilitated the program. 🙏



Nepal's 2015 Open Budget Survey Report Launched

Government provides with minimum budget information



National launch of Nepal's 2015 Open Budget Survey Report

In a bid to create public discourse on public finance management sector reforms in the country, Freedom Forum launched Nepal's 2015 Open Budget Survey (OBS) findings and recommendations amid a gathering of concerned actors and stakeholders in the capital on November 25.

The organization brought together 47 participants including government officials, CSO representatives, media and donor communities and IBP colleague to allow opportunity for discussion on the issues of budget transparency, people's participation in the budgetary process and effectiveness of budget oversight institutions.

The survey report reveals that the Government of Nepal provided the public with minimum budget information limiting chance for citizen engagement in the budget process. Nepal's score in the OBS has dropped to 24 out of 100 in 2015 from 44 in 2012 which shows country's dwindling budget transparency situation.

Shedding light on the opportunity of greater budget transparency in Nepal, Forum Chairperson and OBS Researcher for Nepal Taranath Dahal said that the budget reflects the quality of democracy, good governance, development and prosperity of any country. "The discourse on budget transparency has not yet come to the mainstream. It is still very weak and scanty", he said, adding, "No matter what approaches and practices Nepal has adopted to increase people's participation in the budget citizen's access to budget information and thereby opportunities to engage in budget processes is limited". Budget therefore has been a concern of a handful of people when citizen engagement to the decision making process around resources is not materialized in practice.

Budget Formulation Division Chief at Ministry of Finance Baikuntah Aryal expressed concern over the abrupt fall of Nepal's budget transparency score despite our efforts to address problems seen in budget sector. "With the new initiative of sharing information through website in place, the general public can raise question to hold the government to account. But it does not necessarily mean that updates to website would ensure access of entire people to the information. "We have taken into account the recommendation of Freedom Forum for producing and making public the Pre-Budget Statement", he said, adding the law has stipulated that the pre-budget discussion should be held before 15 days of the budget presentation in the parliament. However, efforts are being made to send the budget to the parliament at least two months before budget speech so that there is adequate discussion on national budget among the parliamentarians. He suggested making finance committee of the parliament proactive in dealing with budget related issues from the legislature.

Som Bahadur Thapa, Secretary, Public Accounts Committee, Legislature-Parliament said that in absence of perspective plan the matters whether that be budget or plan or development or parliament will not work in a way to give results. "Nepal does not lag behind any country in the South Asia regarding transparency issue", he said. Principally it is valid to demand separate budget specialized unit at the parliament but the question is – where is the resource?

Bharat Bahadur Thapa, Chairperson of Transparency International (TI)'s Nepal Chapter suggested holding such discussion in the

course of draft stage. "How would we expect improvements when there was no discussion on OAG's audit report in the Public Accounts Committee? he questioned. "Let us move ahead with concrete commitment and actions to increase the current score of 24 to 50 in next survey. There are rooms for improvements in all the stages of budget and such recommendations should be taken positively to bring reforms in coming days, he noted.

Similarly, Manoj Kumar Giri, representative of parliamentary secretariat and Finance Committee, shared "The Parliament's Finance Committee has started holding interactions in all five development regions including two districts in each to facilitate the holding of pre-budget discussion at people's level".

Joint Secretary at National Planning Commission Gopinath Mainali said "The government should be ready to listen to the citizens' criticism if it is truly committed to reform system". The national budget is not the complete budget; there is a local bodies' budget. "A huge chunk of budget is flown to the local bodies which is big in size in comparison to national budget. So, the civil society organizations like Freedom Forum should devise their actions to look at money flowing to local level as part of for improving transparency and accountability of public money handling", he noted.

Baburam Gautam, Spokesperson of Office of Auditor General said the budget brought out by the government is more or less 50% of the real budget as many donor agencies flow their money out of the national channel and want it to spend directly under their purview. "If that part was included in this OBS, it could be more reliable and comprehensive", he added. He shared that the OAG has come up with reform initiatives go engage CSOs in performance audit process.

Representatives of donor communities and CSOs working on public finance management reforms also spoke on the occasion.

OBS Manager Elena Mondo made a presentation on 2015 OBS Results, Trends and Way Forward besides the methodological part. "The OBS assesses three pillars of the budget accountability system – transparency, participation and oversight. Some 109 indicators out of total 140 of the Open Budget Index were used to measure the transparency while 16 and 15 indicators were related to assess the opportunities for public participation and strengths of the legislatures and auditors". The survey involves 18 month rigorous research

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INEQUALITY: A BURNING GLOBAL ISSUE

The world faces an inequality crisis that is spiralling out of control. Across the world we are seeing the gap between the richest and the rest reach extremes not seen in a century.

Struggles for a better world are all threatened by the inequality crisis. Workers across the world are seeing their wages and conditions eroded as inequality increases. The rights of women are systematically worse in situations of greater economic inequality. The vast majority of the world's richest people are men; those in the most precarious and poorly paid work are women. Young people are facing a crisis of unemployment. Other groups such as migrants, ethnic minorities, LGBTQI people, people with disability and indigenous people continue to be pushed to the margins, suffering systematic discrimination. The struggle to realise the human rights of the majority are continually undercut in the face of such disparities of wealth and power.

Extreme inequality is also frequently linked to rising restrictions on civic space and democratic rights as political and economic elites collude to protect their interests. The right to peaceful protest and the ability of citizens to challenge the prevailing economic discourse is being curtailed almost everywhere, for elites know that extreme inequality and participatory democracy cannot co-exist for long.

Even the future of our planet is dependent on ending this great divide, with the carbon consumption of the 1% as much as 175 times that of the poorest.

Our current economic system is not working at many levels. Dominated by an over-confidence in the benefits of the market, it helps only a small elite, and is failing the majority, and failing the planet. There is widespread agreement that we are living through an inequality crisis. On this the IMF, the Pope and many other influential voices are agreed. The time has come to do something about it. The current system did not come about by accident. It is the result of deliberate policy choices. It

is the result of our leaders listening to the 1% instead of to the majority. This has to change.

This is all happening at the time when the international community has agreed a new set of Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030), and has come together to discuss financing development and crucially the Climate Change Accord in Paris where every country agreed to work together to combat climate change.

We know that existing commitments, and much more beyond that must be done, will not be realised without a fight. That is why today we are coming together as the beginnings of a global alliance to fight inequality.

We will work together with others to tackle the root causes of inequality, whether they be economic, political, social or cultural. We will press governments to meet their obligations to ensure people can enjoy their rights to health, education and other essential public services through tackling tax dodging and ensuring progressive tax and spend policies. We will support workers' rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining, and narrow the gap between rich and poor. We will fight for the redistribution of women's unequal share of unpaid care work, and the tackling of violence against women brought on by state repression and rising fundamentalism. We will advocate for universal social protection floors. We will fight for land reform. We will work together to challenge the disproportionate power and practices of the corporate sector that is undermining so many struggles, contributing to human rights violations and increasing inequality across the globe. We will work together with others to secure climate justice. We will take on the power of corporations, including fossil fuel companies who are undermining efforts which respond to science and protect people and planet. We will together champion international

cooperation so every country plays its part and we avoid a race to the bottom.

The current face of failed globalization is rising inequality, conflict, corruption and oppression. The world needs fundamental change through a new economic model that puts the interests of people first. We need change on a scale never seen before. People across the world must be at the heart of demanding and driving this change. Only such a people powered movement can build a breakthrough that unites governments, trade unions, civil society and companies who share a commitment to the common good.

We choose to imagine a better world than this, where everyone's human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled. We believe humanity has the talent, technology, and brilliance to build that better world, where the interests of the majority are put first. And we believe the time has come to fight for it together.

THE JOINT INEQUALITY ALLIANCE STATEMENT

Adriano Campolina, Chief Executive, ActionAid
John Nduna, General Secretary, ACT Alliance
Salil Shetty, Secretary General, Amnesty International
Lydia Alpízar Durán, Executive Director, Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)
Bernd Nilles, Secretary General, CIDSE
Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah, General Secretary, CIVICUS
Mads Christensen, Acting Executive Director, Greenpeace
Sharan Burrow, General Secretary, International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)
Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director, Oxfam
Source: <http://www.actionaid.org/2016/01/civil-society-leaders-issue-statement-step-fight-inequality>
Civil society leaders issue statement to step up the fight on inequality

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process that includes completing survey by country experts, IBP review, external review, government review and IBP final check.

OBS Researcher for Nepal Krishna Sapkota presented key findings and recommendations of the country based on the OBS country summary report.

Meanwhile, a three-member delegation comprising OBS Manager Mondo and Freedom Forum Researchers for OBS Dahal and Sapkota visited the office of Ministry of Finance, Public Accounts Committee, Finance Committee and Auditor General and held one-to-one

meetings with the respective senior officials. In a meeting with Budget Formulation Division Chief and Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Finance Aryal, matters related to the findings and recommendations of 2015 Nepal's country summary report were discussed. He pledged to produce and publish Nepal's Pre Budget Statement (PBS) from next year, understand the issues and practices of Citizen Budget and bring to effect and increase comprehensive information in rest of the key budget documents. "I am confident that Nepal's budget openness score next round will go up with these initiatives in place", he told the delegates. He

also shared the reforms agenda and initiatives mulled by Finance Ministry such as producing and publishing PBS three months before the budget is presented to the parliament to allow maximum people's participation and legislators' inputs in the budgetary process. "The political bickering has dampened our efforts this year but we will do something new next fiscal year to this effect", he added. Aryal suggested the delegation to give narrative details in the Open Budget Survey report and presentations. 📌

Freedom Forum's Updated Information

Type and 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, Head of the office, coordinates overall organizational and project affairs (Development and Implementation)		
	Narayan Ghimire: Media Monitoring Officer, who coordinates media focused initiatives		
	Aruna Adhikari: Finance Officer, looks after accounting and administrative affairs and performs responsibilities as the Information Officer.		
	Nodnath Trital : Program Officer, coordinates a project on Right to Information and RTI Campaign		
	Manju Ojha: Media Monitoring Assistant		
	Trishna Dhakal: Admin Assistant / Receptionist		
	Kumar Chaulagain: Program Assistant		
	Basanti Thapa: Office Assistant		
	Project Staffs: Freedom Forum hires short term project staffs based on project need		
Ongoing Project Information	Project Name	Supporting Agency	Date of Signing the Contract
	Building a foundation for reforming legal mechanism, policy and practice on internet freedom in Nepal	IFEX	December 2015
	Developing Case Study on Data Use by Parliamentarians and Journalists	Development Initiative	January 2015
Services Offered/ Activities Carried Out	Research, capacity development and policy advocacy including media monitoring, trainings on RTI and journalism, meetings, workshops, seminars and other campaigns to promote issues of democracy, RTI, FoE, 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 of 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/Current Activities	Please follow the link: http://freedomforum.org.np/content/category/activities/		
Information Officer	Aruna Adhikari		
Financial Information	Freedom Forum received grants amounting NPR 327809.30 from different donors from 2015 November to December 2015		
Official Website	www.freedomforum.org.np		
Publications of Freedom Forum	Freedom Forum has over 50 Publications (Printed) Please Follow the Link: http://freedomforum.org.np/content/publications.html		
Annual Report	http://freedomforum.org.np/content/publications/reports/annual-reports/		
Mechanism for Information Dissemination	Websites: www.freedomforum.org.np ; www.nepalpressfreedom.org , www.nepalelectionchannel.org Newsletter: Free Expression		

Information Request Response Trend

Freedom Forum has been regularly campaigning of requesting information with various public agencies using RTI. During the celebration of National Information Day on 20 August, FF including Chairperson Taranath Dahal, and staffs registered a total of 340 information request applications in different public agencies. The information applications were dispatched to the concerned offices through post office. The public agencies were District Development Committees (75), District Public Health Offices (75) and Municipalities (190).

Through the applications, the public agencies were requested to provide detailed income and expenditure of RTI orientations held at DDC and municipalities in last fiscal year. Other information sought with the public agencies were, the process of selection of resource persons, materials used for orientation and all copies of approved bills and financial documents related to the orientation. The District Health Offices were demanded

the information about the yearly work plan and budget of awareness activities to control tobacco. The public agencies must respond to RTI application within 15 days of receiving the request in line with RTI Act 2007 and RTI Regulation 2008. But in the first request, among the 340 public agencies, only 10% public agencies responded to the information requesters within the time.

After that, RTI requesters Mr. Dahal and Nodanath Trital filled complaint letters to the chiefs of the offices demanding the same information which was denied from Information Officers through post offices. Interestingly, the responses from public agencies increased from 10.88 to 23.53 percent. The provision on RTI Act and Regulation says, if the office chief receives complaint letter about Information Officer denying information to requester, s/he must decide whether the information should be provided or not and inform to the information seekers accordingly.

After a week, 70 percent appeals were registered at the National Information Commission against the office chiefs and information officers who flaunted the RTI Act. The NIC then decided and ordered to the public agencies to provide information within a week.

Consequently, FF is gradually receiving responses from the offices through post offices. With the NIC order, FF got 35.88% responses. In five months, 70.29% responses were received. But, 29.71% of public agencies are not responding yet. This is a fact of survey to find out the trend of implementation of RTI Act and Regulation at district/local level in Nepal. The purpose of the RTI campaigning is to make public agencies accountable and transparent towards public and make them sincere to implement RTI law at local level. The information received from public agencies using RTI Act is yet to be analyzed and disseminated. 📌

RTI Response Practice in FY 2072/73

S.N.	No. of Public Agency	Total No. of Applications	Response on Application	No. of Complaints	Response on Complaint	No. of Appeal	Response after Appeal	Total Info	Yet to Respond
1	District Development Committees	75	15	60	11	52	28	54	21
2	District Health Offices	75	7	68	11	58	33	51	24
3	Municipalities	190	15	175	58	129	61	134	56
	Total	340	37	303	80	239	122	239	101
	Percentage		10.88	89.12	23.53	70.29	35.88	70.29	29.71

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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.

Internet/New media

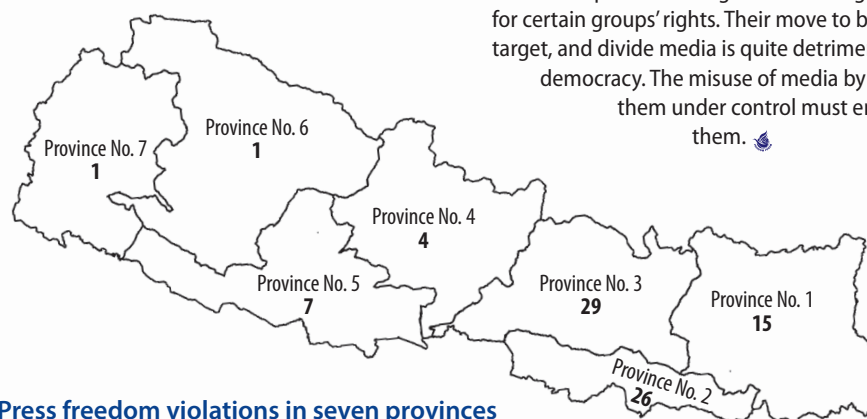
It is good to have increase in internet penetration- 44.11 percent of the total population in Nepal, that is more than 11 million Nepalis have the internet access. It is indeed a laudable aspect that helps ensure quick and easy information to people from the across the country. Similarly, the draft of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

Jail terms, restriction of Internet to silence press

71 Journalist killed in 2015

ANNUAL REPORT: Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)

Eritrea and North Korea are the first and second most censored countries worldwide, according to a list compiled by the Committee to Protect Journalists of the 10 countries where the press is most restricted. The list is based on research into the use of tactics ranging from imprisonment and repressive laws to harassment of journalists and restrictions on Internet access. It is Africa's worst jailer of journalists, with at least 23 behind bars—none of whom has been tried in court or even charged with a crime. Eritrea scrapped plans in 2011 to provide mobile Internet for its citizens, limiting the possibility of access to independent information.

In North Korea, 9.7 percent of the population has cell phones, a number that excludes access to phones smuggled in from China. In place of the global Internet, to which only a select few powerful individuals have access, some schools and other institutions have access to a tightly controlled intranet.

Seven of the 10 most censored countries—Eritrea, Ethiopia, Azerbaijan, Vietnam, Iran, China, and Myanmar—are also among the top 10 worst jailers of journalists worldwide, according to CPJ's annual prison census.

More than half of the journalists imprisoned globally are charged with anti-state crimes, including in China, the world's worst jailer and the eighth most censored country. Of the 44 journalists imprisoned—the largest figure for China since CPJ began its annual census in 1990–29 were held on anti-state charges.

In Ethiopia—number four on CPJ's most censored list—the threat of imprisonment has contributed to a steep increase in the number of journalist exiles. Amid a broad crackdown on bloggers and independent publications in 2014, more than 30 journalists were forced to flee, CPJ research shows.



Protesters calling for greater democracy and justice gather in Addis Ababa in May 2014 after security forces shot at students. Ethiopian authorities are cracking down on the press ahead of elections in 2015. (Reuters/Tiksa Negeri)

In Cuba (10th most censored), the Internet is available to only a small portion of the population, despite outside investment to bring the country online.

In Azerbaijan (fifth most censored), where there is little independent traditional media, criminal defamation laws have been extended to social media and carry a six-month prison sentence. Iran, the seventh most censored country, has one of the toughest Internet censorship regimes worldwide, with millions of websites blocked; it is also the second worst jailer of journalists, with 30 behind bars. Authorities there are suspected of setting up fake versions of popular sites and search engines as part of surveillance techniques.

Government harassment is a tactic used in at least five of the most censored countries, including Azerbaijan, where offices have been raided, advertisers threatened, and retaliatory charges such as drug possession levied against journalists. In Vietnam, many bloggers are put under

surveillance in an attempt to prevent them from attending and reporting on news events. In Iran, journalists' relatives have been summoned by authorities and told that they could lose their jobs and pensions because of the journalists' work.

Country /No of Journalists killed Deadliest Countries in 2015

1. Syria: 14	12. Democratic Republic of the Congo: 1
2. France: 9	13. Libya: 1
3. Brazil: 6	14. Kenya: 1
4. Iraq: 5	15. Colombia: 1
5. Yemen: 5	16. India: 1
6. South Sudan: 5	17. Guatemala: 1
7. Bangladesh: 5	18. Ghana: 1
8. Mexico: 4	19. Poland: 1
9. Turkey: 3	20. Pakistan: 1
10. Somalia: 3	
11. USA: 2	

(Source: <https://www.cpj.org/2015/04/10-most-censored-countries.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.

Editors: Krishna Sapkota, Narayan Ghimire

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Freedom Forum

P.O. Box: 24292
Block No. 22, Adarsha Marg
Thapathali, Kathmandu, Nepal
Telephone: 977-1-4102022, 4102030
Fax: 977-1-4226099
Email: monitoring@freedomforum.org.np
info@freedomforum.org.np
Web: www.freedomforum.org.np
www.nepalpressfreedom.org