

Nepali Journalists and Media amidst Challenges

Dharmendra Jha
President, Federation of Nepali Journalists
Central Office, Tilganga, Kathmandu

The role of journalists is always necessary in the transition period and during the political volatility of the country. Journalists are fighting for occupational security of the journalists incorporating freedom of expression and press freedom. It has been equally tough for the leadership of Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) to settle lots of issues and challenges that lie on its path and maintain balance between the past estimation and future plans.

It is quite natural for journalists from diverse class and beliefs to have interest and faith on FNJ, which is the responsibility and challenge for the Federation to maintain this situation. Considering this scenario, FNJ is committed to ensure professional rights of the journalists.

We the Nepali Journalists continued our efforts to assess the attacks on journalists and attempts to subjugate press and freedom of expression on different grounds. We have been continuing our struggle against violation of press freedom and freedom of expression. The Federation has been forced to spend much of its valuable time on giving continuity to its struggle, which has helped to build its identity at the national and international level.

FNJ believes in press freedom, professional security and understands that these are possible only when there is total democracy. It is a challenge to the FNJ to defend press freedom, professional development, rights of the journalists and occupational security.

Free Press is considered the pillar of federal democracy but the same press freedom is targeted every year. Talking about Nepal, intimidations, threats, and beatings to journalists from identified and unidentified group has become a regular phenomenon. This year we lost three media entrepreneurs including Jamim Shah, Arun Singhaniya and Devi Prasad Dhital who was shot dead by unidentified group few months back. The media monitoring team of FNJ has registered some six hundred cases of press violations since 2008 January till now. Likewise, one hundred and three cases of press violations have been registered sine January 2010 till October 23rd. The state has always remained indifferent to the various cases of press violation,

which clearly shows how responsible the government is towards press freedom. The attacks and murders of media entrepreneurs indicate that the criminal outfits have started targeting investors involved in media field. The government which holds the responsibility to safeguard the lives of general public must do something to make its presence felt. The state has not arrested and punished a single culprit accused in the act of violation of press freedom. Of late, there has been no involvement of the state in the cases of press violation which is a positive sign, but FNJ believes that failure of the state to arrest and punish the culprits only encourages those elements to discourage the journalists and media sector. Government's positive attitude and prompt action in punishing the people involved in violation of press freedom and freedom of expression will definitely make the media fraternity a better place to work.

The journalists and the media institutions became the victims of various attacks. Attacking media houses, vandalizing vehicles, torching newspapers, smashing media equipments and stopping newspaper publications are some of the incidents worth to be noted. In the past few years, professional journalism in Mid Madhesh and eastern hills had faced serious crisis due to impunity, insecurity and self censorship. The women journalists were targeted most in the eastern Terai region. It was, however, not yet known why it was so. Under such a situation, the press right is not possible unless the citizen's rights were first secured. Hence, the press had always supported civil movements. Press movement, which was directly associated with the civil movement, focused on ensuring professionalism and commercial security.

FNJ has been demanding end to the culture of impunity. For this, the unity among journalists, and solidarity among journalists is one weapon with which battle against any forces that tries to attack press freedom, professional and individual security of the journalist's and people's rights are attacked. Of late, there has been a trend of arrests of journalists under the Electric Device Act 2003. Three journalists have been arrested under the act they are being trialed under the court of law. Journalist fraternity and the media houses seem to be affected by the use of this act simply because of the fact that there lies a possibility where the act can be misused. Therefore, we have urged the state to be careful and alert while using this act.

Today, journalists are victim of impunity. Due to government's negligence towards occupational security, Nepali press has not been able to prosper and

have rather adopted self censorship. The hardship that journalists and newspapers undergo at the periphery represents Nepali media industry in general. Nepali Journalists and media sector can boast of having Working Journalists Act and Right to Information Act which is supposed to work in their favor. But unfortunately though these acts have come out, it has not been implemented properly by the state and the media houses concerned. The implementation of these acts is again another challenge for Nepali media and journalists

Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) believes in freedom of expression, occupation and physical security of a journalist, human rights and rule of law. It has been expanding its prospect to protect the achievements of historic People's movement 2005-2006.

FNJ firmly believes that there should be total press freedom in the new constitution. Nepali media is aware of the violation of press freedom and freedom of expression by the state and non state actors. Therefore, FNJ has taken the act of writing the new constitution as the major challenge on people's behalf that mentions press freedom in the preamble of the new constitution as unalterable. So far, FNJ has become successful in including press freedom as an unalterable clause in the draft of the preamble.

We the journalists and media persons in Nepal believe that Press Council Nepal has an important role to play in the up gradation Nepali media as a whole. FNJ has been demanding since very long that Press Council Nepal should be given a Constitutional status which would enhance its importance and would also give it more space and role. Nepal Press Council of is a statutory body set up by Government of Nepal to promote the standards of a free press in a democratic society and to advise the government on matters relating to the development of healthy and credible journalism in the country. The code of conduct developed by the Press Council Nepal is to monitor the standards of Nepalese media and deal with complaints against newspapers. The Council established Code of Conduct Monitoring Unit so as to make media monitoring more effective. Press Council Nepal Act provides for hearing and settlement of complaints against abuse of press freedom by media practitioners from any person or a party aggrieved. Most of the complaints deal with the violation of the code of conduct prescribed by the Council for journalists. Lately, there has been a steady increase in the number of complaints lodged by private parties. The code of conduct developed by the Press Council Nepal has direct relations with the up

gradation of the professionalism of journalists in Nepal. The more vigilant and strict the Council becomes, it directly helps the Nepali journalists to perform in a better manner. There are still many more things that FNJ and Press Council Nepal need to do for the betterment and up gradation of the Nepali media. Issues such as implementation of Working Journalist Act, Right to Information Act, physical and personal security of the journalists are few sectors where Press Council Nepal and Federation of Nepali Journalists can work together for the betterment of Nepali media and journalists as a whole.

Thank You

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