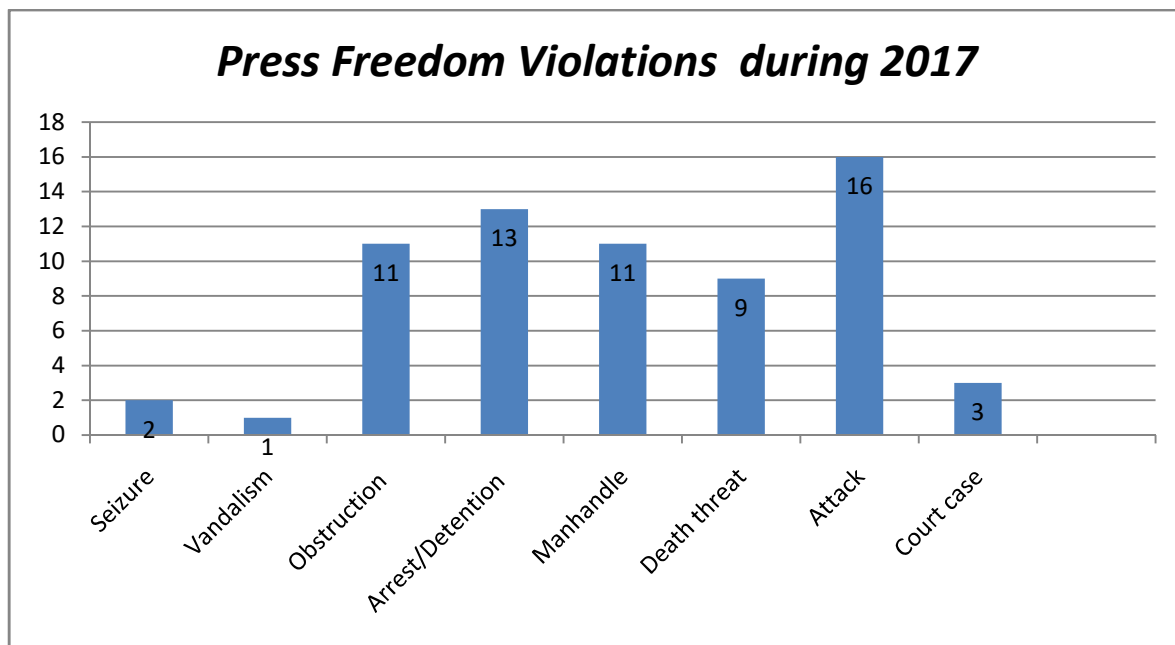


Nepali Media facing Alarming Hostile Atmosphere

Freedom Forum recorded a total of 66 press freedom violations during this passing year 2017, which is a sharp rise compared to the previous year, 2016. Only 25 incidents were recorded in 2016.

A total of 230 media persons were affected directly with 66 incidents of violations across the country. As this year witnessed three-tiers of elections- local, and provincial and federal parliaments, the political activities grew alarmingly where the atmosphere for press freedom got less priority. Despite the country making paradigm shift with the exercise of franchise, the election campaigning and activities failed to show due respect to freedom of expression and press freedom, thereby witnessing huge surge in the number of press freedom violation.

Although 2017 is also regarded as the law making year, there were no significant laws and policies that created better atmosphere to respect FoE and press freedom. Bringing of two important acts replacing the half-century plus old Muliki Ain (Civil Code) was a positive step, but lack of FoE-friendly provisions and lackadaisical efforts from State side to bring reforms on other media related policies is another area drawing attention.



Total Violations: 66; No of affected journalists: 230

Some Points

- Kathmandu district alone witnessed the highest number of violation- 22.
- Categorically mentioning, there were 16 incidents of attack, 9 threats and death threats combined, 11 manhandles and 13 arrest/detention and 11 obstruction along with two incidents of seizure and one of vandalism at the media house.
- As in the past, numerous incidents saw the involvement of police persons, government employees.
- Province No 1 which lies in the eastern part of the country witnessed two incidents of press freedom violation which is the lowest compared to Province No 3 which witnessed 34 incidents of violation. Province No 5 and 6 had 3 incidents each along with 6 in Province No 4 and 8 violations in Province No 7.
- Internet penetration has reached to 62.89%¹ where it was 52.7% last year. Although there is a significant growth of internet penetration propelling the flow of information, the accessibility is waiting due attention to bring on board the marginalized people to bridge the digital divide.
- Many journalists were detained without sufficient ground of their anti-law activities.
- The families of the journalists who became conflict victims are desperately waiting for justice. No noticeable efforts have been made from State side to this regard.
- As internet is becoming increasingly pervasive in Nepal, it has also become an easy medium (especially through Facebook) to harass journalists. Out of 66 incidents, 5 cases of threat were recorded during the year.

A local Padam Bhandari issued death threat and spoke foul on reporters at Dadeldhura based Radio Amargadhi 97.4 MHz on August 30. Immediately after the news story 'Locals bound to risky travel' was published on www.radioamargadhi.org, Bhandari reached the radio's office, issued death threat and spoke foul on the reporters. He even wrote abusive words on his Facebook status addressing all the journalists in the district.

- **Women presence in print media sees slow growth**

Giving continuity to the new dimension of its regular monitoring of Press Freedom, FF scanned news of major Nepali print media, studied it. The study found gradual improvement in the women's presence. During the initial phase of the monitoring, women's presence was meager which saw gradual rise.

The newspaper having less than 3 female bylines in three months in the initial months of the year has raised up to 7 female byline in the recent three months. However, the main news pages of Nepali print media are still dominated by news on

¹ As per the data published by Nepal Telecommunications Authority

politics and governmental affairs by 56.9% being followed by social and legal news (23.2%). Among total 4,317 news stories monitored from nine main national dailies, only 2,538 news contained named (known) bylines; among which only 9.22% were females.

Similarly, out of 9,024 news sources (as mentioned in the contents monitored) 82.5% were male whereas, only 9.59% were female sources.



Policy Watch

FF reviewed four major laws to see whether these laws have ensured constitutional rights to freedom of expression and press freedom. One of the important media directive namely Online Media Operation Directive (OMOD) was promulgated on March 20, 2017. Though new directive was said to incorporate the suggestion from various quarters, it had no any fundamental difference from the earlier version which was intended to shrink FoE online.

The Criminal Code and Civil Code also incorporated some provision which could give ground for vague interpretation, inconsistency with the international and constitutional standards.

Electronic Transaction Act 2008 is always of grave concern since its introduction, as its Section 47 is hostile to FoE online.

Lack of efforts for transforming State owned Radio Nepal and Nepal Television into the public service broadcasting and reform in Press Council are of equal concern.

Observation and Forecast

- The more the political movements, campaigns, programs and publicities, the more the incidents of press freedom violation.
- Address to impunity is a long pending issue.
- The officials in the public agencies saw dearth of respect to press freedom. It is similar in case of local political cadres.
- The media related policies are in need of reform to meet the changed media dimension.
- Sheer lack of attention to scrap hostile laws and policies as Electronic Transaction Act is likely to cost a lot to Nepali media.
- With the paradigm shift of the system and changed political set up after the conduct of the historic elections, constant observation on the activities of political parties is imperative.
- The political parties need to instruct their cadres on democratic values that protect and promote the press freedom.
- Digital safety and internet literacy are other sectors to focus for improved and decent FoE practice.
- Chances of threat to RTI activists and FoE online are likely to grow more as the political orientation is growing alarmingly pervasive thereby becoming hostile to them.
- With the local and provincial governments in place, constant watch from CSO on the government activities whether they adhere to FoE and journalists' rights to free reporting is imperative.

Which Province, how many violations?

