

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/nepal-proposed-new-constitution-fuels-22-05-2012,42657.html>

Asia - Nepal

More violence

## Proposed new constitution fuels tension, threats and attacks on media

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Reporters Without Borders is disturbed by the many acts of violence against the media in the past two weeks in Nepal. Attacks on journalists and threats to their work have been fuelled by mounting tension in the run-up to the adoption of a new constitution, scheduled for 27 May.

"The government should not forget the media amid all the controversy," Reporters Without Borders said. "The new constitution must guarantee fundamental freedoms, including freedom of information. Only constitutionally protected media will be able to question and criticize the government and make it accountable to the public.

"The safety of journalists and news media in the course of their work will continue to be sacrificed in the absence of a concrete commitment by the authorities. Responding to physical attacks on journalists and ending impunity for those responsible for this violence should be priorities for the government. We note this week's promise by Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai to provide better protection for journalists and we hope that concrete measures quickly follow."

In response to a nationwide call by the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN), many ethnic and religious groups have staged protests this month in a bid to get their demands reflected in the new constitution, and protesters have repeatedly harassed, threatened and attacked journalists. Newspaper distribution has been disrupted in the regions with the most tension, especially in the west.

### Journalists attacked during demonstrations

**Hari Sharma** of the *Annapurna Post* newspaper and *Image Channel Television* was attacked in the central district of Nawalparasi on 19 May by supporters of the United Tharu Struggle Committee, a group formed by members of the Tharu ethnic community, after he covered a demonstration they had organized. They burned his motorcycle and broke his right hand.

Demonstrators attacked three journalists – **Sharad Chandra Bhandary** of the news agency *Rashtriya Samachar Samiti (RSS)* and two reporters with the daily *Sourya*, **Ram Sharan Bajagain** and **Bheem Gautam** – on 11 May in Kathmandu, robbing Bajagain and Gautam of their press cards.

**Homraj Ranabhat** of the daily *Gorkhapatra* was physically attacked by representatives of a group formed by members of the Tharu community in the west of the country on 8 May. Members of the same movement attacked **Milan Parajuli** and **Prem Bahadur Kshetry** of *Vijay FM*, taking their press cards and the keys to their motorcycle.

Around 50 other journalists have been attacked in the past two weeks. They include:

On 21 May

- **Ashok Dulal** of *Aarthik Abhiyan*
- **Nawaraj Shrestha** of *News 24 Television*
- **Prakash Adhikari**, of *Sagarmatha Television*, in Makawanpur district
- **Radheshyam Khatiwada**, secretary of the Federation of Nepali Journalists in Chitawan

district

- **Rajan Upadhyay**, of *Barahi FM*, in Kaski

On 20 May

- **Biku Tamang**, a freelancer affiliated to the *Federation of Sports Journalists*, in Lalitpur
- **Bijay Chamling** of *Rajdhani Daily*, in Chabahi
- **Dinesh Gautam** of *Citizen FM*, in Kathmandu
- **Dipendra Karki** of *Karobar Daily*, in Lalitpur
- **Prakash Kattel** of *Road Map Weekly*
- **Radheshyam Dahal** of *Sagarmatha Television*
- **Rajan Parajuli** of *Antenna Foundation Nepal*, in Kathmandu
- **Rajesh Rai** of *Gorkhapatra Daily*
- **Shakti Karki** of *Road Map Weekly*
- **Shambhu Kumar Prasai** of *Gorkhapatra Daily*
- **Upendra Sharma** of *Muktipatra Weekly*
- **Y.P. Ghimire**, a *Himalaya TV* cameraman, in Lalitpur

On 19 May

- **Ram Rijhan Yadav**, a journalist and media adviser to the prime minister, in Anamnagar, Kathmandu

On 17 May

- **Dilli Acharya**, the president of the Rajdhani section of the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), in Kalanki, Kathmandu
- **Prakash Chandra Bhattarai**, a journalist with the newspaper *Lokvani daily* and adviser to the FNJ's Tanahu section, in Tanahu
- **Prem Prasad Poudel**, a journalist with the newspaper *Lokvani daily* and president of the FNJ's Tanahu section, in Tanahu

On 10 May

- **Govinda Chaulagain** of the *Society of Cooperative Journalists*
- **Purna Bhakta Duwal** of the *Society of Cooperative Journalists*
- **Rajesh Khanal** of the *Kathmandu Post*, in Bhaktapur, Kathmandu
- **Tapendra Karki** of the newspaper *Rajdhani*, in Bhaktapur, Kathmandu

On 9 May in the town of Dhangadi (in the western district of Kailali)

- **Devraj Joshi** of *Swarnim Nepal*
- **Nawaraj Khanal** of *Mountain Television*
- **Ranga Timalisina** of the *Dhangadhi Post*

On various dates

- **Akkal Kunwar** of *Sagarmatha Television*, in Kathmandu
- **Ankit Adhikari** of the *Kathmadu Post*, in Kathmandu
- **Basu Satyal** of *Avenues Television*
- **Ganashekhar Sharma**, a media union adviser, in Chitawan district
- **Govinda Ghimire**
- **Hari Upreti Bhuwan**
- **Karna Chanda** of *Triveni FM* in Doti district
- **Milan Parajuli**
- **Mohan Shahi** of the newspaper *Kantipur*, in Doti district
- **Prakash Bam** of *Triveni FM* in Doti district
- **Prakash Gyawali**
- **Pranab Kharel** of the *Kathmadu Post*, in Kathmandu
- **Punya Dhamala** of *Sagarmatha Television*
- **Radheshyam Dahal**
- **Rajendra Acharya**
- **Rajendra Pokhrel** of *Nepal News*
- **Rajesh Chamling** of *Sagarmatha Television*
- **Raksha Regmi**
- **Rohit Bhandari** of *Mountain Television*
- **Saral Gurung** of *Sagarmatha Television*

- **Satish Subedi** of *Sagarmatha Television*
- **Shaligram Nepal**, the president of *Press Chautari*, in Chitawan district
- **Shambu Prasai** of *Sagarmatha Television*
- **Shishir Simkhada** of *Radio Nepal*, in Chitawan district
- **Tek Chanda** of *Triveni FM* in Doti district

### Threats and harassment

*Radio Kantipur FM's* studio in the central district Lalitpur was surrounded on 20 May by demonstrators demanding favourable coverage of their community.

**Dharminda Saha** of *Samachar*, a daily based in the western city of Dhangadhi, received a phone call on 13 May in which he was told to stop covering the current demonstrations.

In a note to the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ) on 13 May, the Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN) accused the media of opposing a federal system and threatened to boycott media that covered the proposal negatively.

NEFIN general secretary Ang Kaji Sherpa also warned that he would disperse media demonstrations and would "finish off" journalists if they dared to stage a counter-offensive. "We have heard that the Federation of Nepali Journalists is organising a protest rally against our strike," he said. "If it happens then we would not spare the journalists."

The chairman of NEFIN, Raj Kumar Lekhi, meanwhile contradicted the organization's general secretary. He reportedly asked demonstrators to stop attacking the media and insisted on NEFIN's respect for the press.

The FNJ and other journalists' unions and media associations such as the Revolutionary Journalists Association (RJA), the Nepal Press Union and Press Chautari have condemned the threats and attacks. After lodging a complaint with the interior ministry, they organized a demonstration on 20 May against violence against journalists.

The government, which has begun negotiations with ethnic and religious groups, has condemned the attacks on the media and has urged protesters to calm down.

### Attacks on media property

Demonstrators attacked a vehicle owned by the daily *Rajdhani* as it was being used to deliver newspapers in Butawal, in the western district of Rupandehi, on 11 May. They also attacked the journalist **Dinesh Pande** when he tried to protect the vehicle.

A vehicle owned by the daily *Nagarik* was damaged by Muslim protesters in Inaruwa Chowk, in the eastern district of Sunsari on 10 May.

The vehicles of other media including *Kantipur Publications*, *Kantipur Television*, *Karobar Daily*, *Kantipur TV*, *Himalaya TV*, *Avenues TV*, *Nepal 1 TV*, *Citizen FM*, *Gorkhapatra Daily*, *Lumbini Television*, *News 24 Television*, *Annapurna Post*, *Radio Lumbini* and *Mechi Kali* have been attacked in recent days in various parts of the country including the capital.

In Kathmandu, demonstrators set fire to 60 copies of the *Kantipur* and *Kathmandu Post* newspapers and to the motorcycles of *Himalaya TV* cameraman **Y.P. Ghimire** and *Nagarik* reporter **Govinda Pariyar**.

Nepal is ranked 106th out of 179 countries in the 2011-2012 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index.

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