

Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ)

'Peace and Democracy for Full Media Freedom'

International Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression Mission to Nepal

- March 2006

Press Statement

21 March 2006

'Detention of Journalists Must Stop' say members of the International Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression Mission to Nepal

The International Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression Mission to Nepal whilst welcoming the release of Jaya Prakash Gupta, editor of Sandhyakalin Upatyaka, expressed its deep concern about the continuing detention of journalists and the use of the Public Security Act to detain journalists for varying periods of time.

The release of Mr. Gupta came soon after Mission members visited him when he was produced at the Special Court on Monday, 20 March. Filling the rear benches, Mission members observed the court proceedings, where the police were attempting to extend Mr. Gupta's police remand. Gupta was arrested on 3 March after his newspaper published a story of a bomb blast in a location where the King was residing. Two days after Gupta's detention, police restricted the selling of Sandhyakalin Upatyaka. Although Gupta had provided a clarification to the Press Council, his detention continued.

The Mission members also met Shyam Shrestha, editor of Mulyankan monthly magazine, who is being held in Armed Police Barrack No.2, Maharajgunj. Mr. Shrestha was arrested at his home in the early hours of 9 January 2005, along with human rights activists and senior leaders of the seven-party alliance, one day prior to the alliance's protest demonstration. His detention order under the Public Security Act - handed to him after he was arrested at his home - is for a period of 90 days. Speaking to the Mission team, Mr. Shrestha expressed his frustration at not being allowed to carry out his profession -that of informing the public.

The Mission members also visited Tej Narayan Sapkota in Nakkhu Jail. Mr. Sapkota, editor of Yojana Saptahik, has been in custody since 24 November 2003, and had 'disappeared' until May 2004 until his family filed a habeas corpus petition in the Supreme Court.

There are currently three journalists known to be under detention: Tej Narayan Sapkota and Shyam Shrestha in Kathmandu and Deepak Bishwakarma in Butwal.

Bhawana Prasain, a woman journalist of the monthly Majdur Aawaj who was arrested on 9 February, was recently released on 15 March 15. However, there are grave concerns about her treatment in custody.

The International Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression Mission to Nepal calls for the immediate release of all detained journalists and calls upon the government to desist from using the Public Security Act and other anti-terrorist legislation to incarcerate and prevent journalists from carrying out their professional duties.

The five members of the International Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression Mission to Nepal that met with the detained journalists included the International Federation of Journalists, International Freedom of Expression Exchange, International Press Institute, Reporters sans Frontières and the South Asia Press Commission.

Background to the Visit of the International Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression Mission to Nepal

In response to continued violations of press freedom and freedom of expression in Nepal, twelve international organizations are undertaking a joint mission to Nepal from 20 to 25 March 2006. The visit is a direct continuation of this previous International Mission in July 2005.

The members of the Mission are meeting with a broad cross-section of the national media community to discuss the press freedom and freedom of expression situation. They are also meeting with key institutions and decision-maker amongst the national authorities, security forces and other parties to stress respect for press freedom and freedom of expression.

In addition, the Mission will visit three districts in Nepal - Pokhara, Surkhet and Birtamod - and will meet with local civil and army authorities and representatives from the local media in these areas. The members of the Mission will also participate in a national conference on press freedom in Nepal to be held in Kathmandu on 24 March.

The Mission will hold a press conference at the end of the visit on 25 March.

The international organisations participating on the mission include:

- ARTICLE 19
- Free Voice
- International Federation of Journalists
- International Freedom of Expression Exchange - IFEX
- International Media Support
- International News Safety Institute
- International Press Institute
- Reporters sans Frontières
- South Asia Press Commission
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation - UNESCO
- World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters - AMARC
- World Press Freedom Committee

Three other international organisations, which participated in the July 2005 mission, are supporting the return mission in March 2006. These organisations include:

- Committee to Protect Journalists
- Press Institute of India
- World Association of Newspapers

The mission is organised in Nepal by the Federation of Nepalese Journalists in collaboration with a group of twenty-eight Nepalese organisations, institutes and networks. International coordination for the mission is being provided by International Media Support.

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