

addition to adherence to an internationally accepted code of conduct issued by the Press Council; full compliance with the *Working Journalists Act, 1994* and be transparent in investment in the media company and its development, companies now needed to express full commitment to the nation, nationalism and to the royal family.

The policy also envisages the setting up of a welfare fund for journalists using ten per cent of the money the Government would spend on advertising every year as well as the discounts obtained from advertising. This 'slush' fund is to be used for enhancing 'professional standards of journalists, emergency support and activities related to the overall development' of the communication sector. These seemingly straightforward goals have a different meaning in the absence of criteria to determine how the spending decisions are to be made.

The policy is an indirect way to control content because by supporting only pro-royalist papers, the government would be affecting the finances of its opponents, leaving them with the option to either yield in terms of content or face economic hardship. The criteria for qualifying for government advertisements includes the 'positive involvement' shown towards helping build up the morale of the security forces who are actively engaged in the fight against 'terrorism' for establishing peace, and the 'circulation' of newspapers and 'popularity' of the broadcast media. The minister of information and communications chairs the central coordination committee to monitor the work of district and central committees that would actually be distributing the advertisements.

The Government's 'one door' advertisement policy has had an adverse impact on the media sector since it has limited public expenditure on advertising and imposed a virtual economic blockade on independent media. The impact of this policy has also been felt on private advertisers who are coerced by the administration to stop giving advertisements to pro-democracy newspapers and radio stations.



A demonstrator struggled with police as they had to physically drag him away during a protest in Kathmandu, Nepal on April 20, 2006. During the violent pro-democracy rally, Nepalese police opened fire on tens of thousands of protestors who defied a curfew to march toward the capital, killing at least three and wounding dozens more. Photo courtesy of INS photo service.

Yet in the face of immense repression, the journalists of Nepal continue to lead the pro-democracy movement in the country. With their slogan of 'No press freedom without democracy' the FNJ continues its struggle for press freedom and democracy.



Sign: Editor in Chief: In. Local administrators and army personnel routinely summon journalists in order to intimidate them. Editors, publishers and correspondents outside the Kathmandu valley are so intimidated that their capacity to write fair news regarding the activities of local security and administrative affairs is severely hampered. Cartoon by Durga Baral (Batsyayana), courtesy of Kantipur Publications.

New Media Council

The government proposed to set up a Media Council to increase control over all media forms, including broadcasting and online journalism. This new media council is likely to have more power to curb press freedom. It is also likely to be filled with members who owe their allegiance to the king, rather than to principles of press freedom.

Broadcasting Authority

The Government is also set to introduce the *Broadcasting Authority Ordinance* to control the broadcasting sector. The Ordinance will make FM stations impossible to run with a hike of up to 20 per cent in licence fees. The intention behind the Ordinance was to make the FM stations financially weak, thereby stopping their operation. It is very likely that this authority will go beyond the role of facilitating or managing air waves as per the principles of free radio and free TV, and could be catastrophic for broadcast media in Nepal.

Efforts to destabilise the Federation of Nepalese Journalists

The Government has been trying to destabilise the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ), the representative body of Nepalese journalists. The efforts of the FNJ to help journalists throughout the country through the Journalist Welfare Fund, Conflict Victims Fund, and the Journalist Relief Fund were disrupted. Because of this, the financial support offered by the FNJ to journalists, working under the tremendous threat of bombs and explosives, was seriously restricted.

The setting up of the pro-royalist National Federation of Journalists, with active support from the Government is yet another attempt to create divisions amongst journalists. Many journalists in the state-owned media (National News Agency and Radio Nepal) have lost their jobs for refusing to join the newly floated organisation.

Promotion of pro-government media using public funds

The government has been misusing public funds to support pro-government media. Government media are being used as propaganda tools. The government has been providing public funds to those media in favour of the government where as independent media are deprived of any assistance or advertisements.

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■ Report by Federation of Nepalese Journalists:
www.fnjnepal.org