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Nepal: Police raid newsroom after chief editor arrested

Kathmandu police raided the Jana Aastha Weekly newsroom after editor-in-chief Kishor Shrestha was arrested over a privacy complaint on August 14. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and its affiliate, the Federation of Nepali Journalists (FNJ), condemn the government's overreach in bypassing Nepal's Press Council and call on the authorities to adhere to due process when investigating complaints.



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Nepal's Privacy Act, 2018. The photograph pictured lawmaker Amarkant Chaudhary with the complainant and was reportedly sourced from her public Facebook page. Police subsequently raided Shrestha's home and the Jana Aastha office, seizing communication devices, CPUs and computers as evidence.

Shrestha was reportedly released on bail, with the investigation ongoing, after the Supreme Court ruled the investigation no longer warranted continued custody. Supreme Court justices also ordered news content complaints be managed through Nepal's Press Council, which has an existing protocol to address grievances while ensuring press freedom is upheld. In a statement, the Press Council advised it would continue to monitor the complaint but expressed concern at the conduct of the authorities.

The FNJ also demanded the release of Shrestha, staging a demonstration outside the Kathmandu District Police Range on August 13. Protesters argued that Shrestha's arrest and subsequent police raids strongly opposed the constitutional provisions of press freedom, undermining Article 19 (2) of Nepal's Right to Communication Act, which states that no media outlet or its means of digital communication can be shut down or seized due to the content it publishes.

Kishor Shrestha is known for his investigative journalism, with Jana Aastha having a reputation for independent and critical reporting. He serves as vice president of the World Press Council and was Press Council Nepal's former chairperson. In a statement on his release, the journalist said he was not allowed to meet with his lawyer during his detention.

The FNJ said: ***"The FNJ deplores the government's abuse of state mechanisms to bypass the Press Council and arrest senior journalist Kishor Shrestha. The police raids on his home and Jana Aastha offices are an attack on democratic values and global norms of a free press. We demand that the state immediately release journalist Shrestha, return all seized communication materials and uphold constitutional guarantees that protect confidential news sources and editorial materials."***

The IFJ said: ***"The IFJ condemns the arbitrary arrest of Kishor Shrestha and raid on Jana Aastha, which contravenes Nepal's press freedom and freedom of information obligations. This intervention by authorities suppresses journalists' ability to report freely and gravely undermines source protection and confidentiality. The IFJ calls for all media complaints to be managed through the appropriate and existing regulatory frameworks."***

For further information contact IFJ Asia - Pacific on ifj@ifj-asia.org

The IFJ represents more than 600,000 journalists in 140 countries

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