

Nepal: Release journalist Kanak Mani Dixit immediately

(Bangkok/Kathmandu, 25 April 2016) - The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is deeply concerned by the arrest of Kanak Mani Dixit –journalist, human rights activist, and founder/editor of Himalmedia¹ – on 22 April. He was taken into custody from his office in Patan Dhoka, Kathmandu. The Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) stated Kanak Mani Dixit was arrested on alleged corruption charges related to his position as the Chairman of Sajha Yatayat, a state run transportation company.

Kanak Mani Dixit and other Nepali civil society leaders believe this is part of a vendetta against him for criticising the appointment of Lokman Singh Karki, the head the CIAA, three years ago. The high-level Rayamajhi Commission, which investigated state atrocities committed during Jan Andolan II (or people's movement), accused Lokman Singh Karki of being involved as Chief Secretary in the crackdown on pro-democracy activists.

Kanak Mani Dixit's arrest raises serious concerns about freedom of expression and political dissent in Nepal. A notice was served by the CIAA to Kanak Mani Dixit, and a few others, in November 2015, citing that they were 'under investigation for amassing disproportionate wealth'. Kanak Mani Dixit submitted his response to the CIAA in January 2016.

Additionally, according to a statement of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (Himalmedia Chapter)², Kanak Mani Dixit was asked to present himself to the CIAA. On 20 April 2016, he replied that the CIAA did not have jurisdiction to issue such an order, and that it went against the spirit of a Supreme Court decision in November 2015 that questioned the basis on which the accusations of financial irregularities were made against him.

In addition to his arrest on 22 April, the CIAA said in a statement on the same day that details submitted by him did not match their findings. They added that Kanak Mani Dixit was arrested for his non-cooperation with the CIAA investigations.

"Kanak Mani Dixit's arrest is a worrying development and a setback for freedom of expression in Nepal", says Evelyn Balais-Serrano, Executive Director of FORUM-ASIA. "The manner and timing of his arrest seems to indicate this is a case of personal vendetta and intimidation tactics."

FORUM-ASIA calls upon the Government of Nepal to issue a clear, transparent and unequivocal statement on his arrest, arrange for his immediate release, and ensure he receives all due process rights as enshrined in the Constitution of Nepal and international human rights standards.

¹Himalmedia publishes several popular journals and magazines including Nepali Times, Himal Khabarpatrika (in Nepali language), and Himalkhabar.com.

²www.nepalitimes.com/blogs/thebrief/2016/04/22/ciaas-vengeful-act/

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About FORUM-ASIA:

FORUM-ASIA is a regional human rights group with 58 member organisations in 19 countries across Asia. FORUM-ASIA has offices in Bangkok, Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. FORUM-ASIA addresses key areas of human rights violations in the region, including freedoms of expression, assembly and association, human rights defenders, and democratization.

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