

Nepal Media Guidelines

The Nepal Media Guidelines is a Caledonia Media publication in collaboration with the Nepal Press Institute and the British Embassy Kathmandu.

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Charles Fletcher MBE



British Embassy



Nepal Press Institute



Caledonia Media

FOREWARD

I am delighted that the British Embassy has been able to support the publication of these Guidelines and the work which went into producing them.

The Guidelines are the result of a series of workshops organised by the Nepal Press Institute and facilitated by the UK's Caledonia Media which brought together a wide range of Nepalese journalists working in the print and electronic media.

Together they explored the challenges of reporting in today's Nepal. From their discussions they have distilled what they believe to be the most important ethical guidelines.

As Nepal prepares for the all-important Constituent Assembly which will map out a new future for the country – in effect a new contract between the citizens and their government – it is vital that the people have access to clear, accurate and impartial reporting and to channels through which their voices can be heard.

There can be no place for political bias in what the journalist produces for his reader, listener or viewer. The reporter's subjective opinions should be clearly labelled as such. Balanced reporting should always be the aim, allowing the recipient to make their own minds up about the great issues of the day.

I hope these Guidelines will be widely read by all Nepalese journalists and that they will find them a valuable practical guide.

Dr Andrew Hall OBE
British Ambassador
Kathmandu

Media Guidelines: An Introduction

Following the historic change in April 2006, Nepal has embarked on a sustained path to democracy that gives full guarantees to human rights, media freedom and free flow of information. The Interim Constitution adopted on January 15, 2007 by a full –house of Parliament, helps protect the inviolability of these rights and the right to access to information of the people.

The freedom of information has played important role in influencing the fast growing network of FM radio stations and newspapers all over the country. The growth has also opened up challenging opportunities to many young media professionals to work in a media business that involves information gathering, processing and dissemination for public interest.

Journalists are well aware of the significance of freedom of the press, but little effort has been made so far on ensuring their full commitment to the equally other important component, that is, use of this freedom with responsibility.

It is normally expected that information media use the weapon of freedom with high responsibility without jeopardising the public trust reposed on them as the disseminators of true and factual information in an impartial and unbiased manner.

While professional training is a must for any fresh entrant to the media profession, editors and reporters have very little access to practical guidelines that emphasise professional standards and ethics in their everyday job situation. The journalists working in routine job assignments are always constrained with time and do not afford to consult standard texts of journalism when they need guidance.

This long felt need by Nepalese journalists appears to have been very aptly responded with the publication “Nepal Media Guidelines” with the cooperation of Caledonia Media.

The publication of the Guidelines will serve as an instant and useful guide to journalists working with the Nepal media, both

print and electronic. Having an English language version as part of the book will be useful for English-speaking journalists working in the country.

The preparation of the Guidelines is the outcome of a series of workshops held with Nepalese journalists during the month of October and November 2006. NPI is indeed grateful to the efforts of British media expert Charles Fletcher MBE for heading the media support programme and overseeing the publication of Nepal Media Guidelines. We would also like to thank the former director of NPI, Bishnu Sharma, for contributing a Chapter on the Media Codes in Nepal, Kashi Raj Dahal for translation of the English text into Nepali and Tirtha Koirala for revision of the document.

To conclude, I would like to express our gratitude to the British Embassy Kathmandu for its support in the implementation of this very important project.

Gokul Pokhrel
Chairman
Nepal Press Institute

PREFACE

The Nepal Media Guidelines are the most democratic set of journalistic standards I have had the privilege to work on.

With the deliberations of 100 journalists, producers, editors and owners, these Guidelines have the additional depth of input from three regional editors. They worked directly on the project ensuring it retained its original values and the distinction that they would be written “by you, for you”.

The Guidelines are not prescriptive, but they do set the standard we can aim to meet and a challenge to help develop democracy through a professional media.

Charles Fletcher MBE
General Director
Caledonia Media

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Chapter One

THE MEDIA CODES IN NEPAL

The development of newspapers in Nepal started in 1901(1958B.S.) during the autocratic Rana rule at the initiative of the Government. The Gorkhapatra publication came into being by a decree which specified the limits of what is fit to print and what is not.

This was the first code issued for the Gorkhapatra weekly which contained four points prohibited for publication.

The points specified that news should not be published regarding the women of the Palaces, the King and the Prime Minister, the Military and ammunitions, the income and expenditure of the government, description of the difficult route leading to Tibet and our boundary and gold ores or mines.

Explicitly this decree started a tradition of prohibiting journalists from questioning or opposing Government policies.

Despite the fact that Nepali Journalism has entered into an era of strenuous professional development, the influenced journalism has still continued in Gorkhapatra which has been made clear by the events and way of presentation of February 1, 2005 and thereafter.

The era of private newspapers commenced after the historic change of 1951. In 1957, a "Press Commission" was set up by the government to review press and publication policies and to make recommendations for the development of healthy and professional journalism.

The "Commission 1957 (2014 B.S.)" submitted its report to the Government in 1958 (B.S. 2015). The Press Commission Report-1958 formulated an 18-point Code of Conduct for journalists.

It is clear from various sources of historical evidence that the Code contained restrictive as well as prescriptive provisions for

journalists; but in essence it purported to exercise control over the private Press and oblige them to follow state directives. Although some journalists were involved in the formulation of this Code, the Code in principle aimed at restricting the growth of free media.

In 1976 (2033 B.S), at the initiative of the Nepal Journalist Association, a 22-point Code of Conduct was formulated in order to enhance professional dignity and the image of a Free Press.

Compared with other codes, this Code appeared rather progressive as journalists themselves were involved in its formulation. Importantly, this Code did not have the binding clause of extolling the virtues of Monarchy and the repressive Panchayat system.

The 21-point code of conduct issued by the Press Advisory Council in 1968 (B.S 2025), the 22-point code of conduct for "Printing and Publication" issued by the Press Council in 1982 (B.S 2039) and the 11-point code of conduct for the "Printing and Publications" issued by the Press Council in 1983 (B.S 2040) all had provisions to compel journalists to support the then autocratic regime. It said nothing of matters aimed at promoting the participation of journalists in the professional development of a free media.

Although the codes referred to the professional development of the press, the very provisions were applied to suppress journalists who sought to develop professionalism in the media.

In fact, all these codes were developed "not for the development of journalism by the journalists themselves" but the government aimed at consolidating the grip of then political system.

In 1985 (2042 B.S), the Nepal Journalist Association took the initiative to formulate a separate code of conduct challenging the codes issued by the Government and in the backdrop of rising awareness among the Nepalese people, the importance of press freedom, freedom of expression, and human rights.

A meeting of fourteen prominent journalists of the capital in 1985 formulated a ten-point code in order to make them self-disciplined

and dignified.

This should be regarded as the first attempt by the journalists to prescribe self-discipline through a code of conduct prepared by them. The code has references to freedom of thought and freedom of expression as: "We hereby resolve to make ourselves more responsible and accountable by submitting to this code on the basis of free will."

In April 1990 (B.S.2046) the autocratic Panchayat system was brought to an end and subsequently, the multi-party democracy was installed. Accordingly, new media policies and laws were promulgated.

The Press Council Nepal issued a 10-point code of conduct in order to firmly consolidate democratic values and principles and to make the Press more secured and dignified and in order to fulfill the professional norms of free and independent media.

Despite the establishment of multi-party democracy, the code issued by the Press Council appeared more stringent at a time when the Press yet remained to be professionally developed, and therefore, the code was not endorsed by the wider participation of media community. Rather, the media opposed it.

In conformity with the Press Council Act 1991, a new 10-point Code of Conduct was issued in 1992 (2049 B.S.) replacing the former one. Despite the fact that the draft code was put into wider consultation with media practitioner in various regions, it was criticized for not having been adequately discussed among the media community. Hence, a new 14-point code was adopted with the initiation of the Nepal Journalists Association in 1993 (B.S 2050) at a widely attended journalists' convention.

Self-discipline is a matter that emanates from our own practices. Nobody should force it. It requires a congenial environment. The Nepali Press has developed through a series of struggles.

Consequently, a seven-point code including complaints procedures was formulated through a joint consultation between the Press Council and the Nepalese Journalist Association in 1998 (B.S 2055) to make it more practicable.

The contents of the code was further revised in 2003(B.S 2060) in consultation with the Federation of Nepali Journalists with the objective of making the industry of mass communication more responsible and professional and to strengthen the practice of press freedom by preventing its misuse.

The Code issued by the Press Council with the consensus of the Federation of Nepali Journalists was used as a tool to suppress media freedom during the emergency after February 1, 2005. Thus, the Code of Conduct was made an instrument of repression on the newspapers and enabled punitive action against the journalists rather than making the journalists professionally responsible to society.

In retrospect, it is clear that with the exception of some instances when the journalists took the initiative in formulating codes by themselves in 1966, 1985 and 1993, in most cases, the journalists did not have the opportunity to formulate codes that were designed to make them professionally responsible.

This set of Guidelines has been prepared by Nepali journalists and is the first effort of its kind made by the journalists themselves.

The document is the product of active participation of around 100 journalists from Butwal, Pokhara and Kathmandu.

The NPI will put the document into discussion among local journalists in various districts nationwide and it will be subsequently updated with the support of Caledonia Media.

Chapter Two

EDITORIAL VALUES & INTEGRITY

Journalists demand a Free Media, one that is **editorially independent** and has strong values and principles.

Journalists and editors must have the right to produce, publish and broadcast stories of their professional choice, without interference or intervention.

Central to securing and maintaining such a free media is **responsibility** in content and management.

To help ensure the development of a responsible free media, journalists must always seek to **report responsibly, accurately, truthfully and honestly**.

The Editorial Values and Integrity of the Nepal Media are rooted in key foundations:

- Responsibility
- Accuracy
- Truth
- Honesty
- Impartiality
- Fairness
- Good Taste

Through the adoption and application of these Guidelines, journalists in Nepal will be using a form of **self-regulation** of their work and making an important contribution to the national democratic development and growth.

Proprietors must act responsibly.

There is a practice in Nepal that allows companies or individuals to buy advertising space which they then use to contradict a news story. Although freedom of speech and expression are

fundamental values in a democracy, great care must be taken to ensure that the comments in an advertisement meet the same ethical standards as our words and pictures in editorial.

If an advertisement is misleading, harmful or offensive, it should be changed or dropped. There are simple guidelines for advertising:

- Advertisements should not mislead
- Advertisements should not cause serious or widespread offence
- Advertisements should not cause harm
- Advertisements should be socially responsible
- Advertisements should have regards for the principles of fair competitions

To help realise such a free media, employers must also show responsibility for staff and contributors by ensuring they are **appropriately recompensed and have the resources** to do their work effectively. This will help improve standards further and lessen the temptation of bribery and corruption.

Journalists must never accept bribes or be involved in any act of corruption.

Everyone has a role to play in helping our media to operate and deliver to the highest editorial and ethical standards. It is not ethical for journalists to accept, or in some instances, offer bribes.

A responsible media has set values and standards that must be complied or the basic aim to be trusted will never be realised. Editorial values and integrity cannot be compromised.

Journalists must seek the truth; and give a clear and comprehensive account of issues and events.

It is vital that the media report accurately, truthfully, honestly, impartially, fairly and with good taste. It has a responsibility to do all of these things to its best ability; and as a major employer, to invest time, effort and energy into helping ensure that the industry has access to appropriate training courses and workshops to encourage personal and professional development nationwide.

Chapter Three

ACCURACY & IMPARTIALITY

Journalists must strive to ensure that they are at all times reporting truthfully, accurately and honestly. Whilst it is central to the make-up of a journalist to be first and fastest with breaking news stories, it is more important that he is also correct with the facts. It is better to be second and correct rather than first and wrong.

Journalists must be accurate, truthful and honest.

Accuracy is the very basis of the authority of the newspaper or radio or television station. Your listener, viewer and reader will have more trust in you if you can demonstrate accurate reporting, rather than speculative guessing.

Report the **truth**, as it is genuinely available at the time. There are occasions when something you report in good faith may later turn out to be incorrect. That could be because somebody lied to you, but insisted they were telling the truth.

Correct the mistake at the earliest opportunity; challenge the person who misled you to tell the truth.

Honesty is critical in our reporting. If we deliberately mislead people, then we are dishonest to them, our colleagues and our employers. If people are to trust our work, they must know they can trust us.

In Hungary, the prime minister admitted lying to the nation, and then promptly said this was a demonstration of his honesty; that he was honest enough to admit his lies. His remarks sparked the worst street violence in Budapest in a generation.

In Nepal, we know only too well of the power of words and pictures and that they could be used to encourage public reaction. It is our duty to ensure that we do not do anything to encourage or incite violence or unrest.

Where it is possible for us to **report direct** from the scene of a story, we should, rather than rely on second-hand information that may be distorted.

We should also seek to have more than one **source** for a story, not least when there is a breaking news event where the initial stages can be confusing.

Journalists must be impartial at all times.

We need to be **impartial** in our reporting. A general reporting job calls for straight facts and figures, not speculation or your own opinion.

By impartial reporting, we mean we must not favour one set of values or opinions over another; we must be even-handed and **fair** in our work.

We need to show that we are being fair as part of the process of developing and retaining public trust across the media.

Journalists must show balance in their reports.

As part of our fairness and impartiality, we need to remember to be balanced in our reporting.

Our reporting must value the need to present the facts from more than one point of view; although that does not mean we must always seek an opposite opinion for every comment or policy.

To be balanced, we must offer access to opposing views; sometimes, views will be shared and we should report that.

It is our reporting **overall** that should be balanced.

Journalists must not align themselves to any political party; or to be active within it; or to campaign on its behalf.

If a media operation is seen to be more inclined or favourable towards one particular party, or politician or business interest, then the readers, viewers and listeners will identify the two as “partners”.

Chapter Three Accuracy & Impartiality

In the United Kingdom, the broadcast media is distinguished by operating impartially. The publicly-owned BBC and the commercial stations must not be partial in their reporting or programming.

Newspapers however, freely show who they support politically. The Times newspaper along with its sister publications The Sun and The News of the World have a preference for the currently governing Labour Party. The Daily and Sunday Telegraph newspapers are traditionally loyal to the Conservative Party.

Importantly, all newspapers retain the right and freedom to criticise even those they support.

The Nepal Media Guidelines do not distinguish between print and broadcast journalism and emphasise instead that **all** media outlets should be impartial.

There is a general practice that although many journalists change careers to seek election as a politician, it is better that as a journalist, they do not belong to a party; be active for any party; or campaign for any party.

In the UK, there is a long-held view that the relationship between a journalist and a politician be similar to that of a dog and a tree.

Chapter Four

REPORTING CONFLICT

The Nepal Media Guidelines were created during the key months of the talks in the continuing Peace Process.

Journalists across the country were familiar with general reporting restrictions, having worked in a media that had been heavily censored – and censored.

To report issues of conflict raise additional difficulties: journalists want to tell the truth, to report what has happened or is happening; but that has to be done responsibly.

It is vital that **journalists must not encourage or incite conflict or violence.**

It is a primary function of the media to gather and report the news. When we are reporting conflict, we have an additional responsibility: to be sensitive in our language, our pictures and presentation.

Conflict produces victims and it is the duty of journalists to take great care when reporting painful events.

Our use of pictures and language must not be gratuitous and we must always be able to justify the context of broadcasting or publishing graphic images.

There must always be sensitivity exercised in deciding what images to publish or broadcast, not least because they may incite further action. Equal thought must be given to the broadcasting of violent sounds. Newspapers must be sensitive and avoid the unnecessary use of close-up pictures of violent incidents.

There also needs to be care taken as to the time of day that graphic images are broadcast. It is important to consider when children may be most likely to be watching, and we should the images appropriately.

All of which is neither to sanitise news nor to disguise the reality of dreadful incidents. Instead, it is taking a human approach to handling horrific stories.

Showing a large amount of graphic images can desensitise the viewer or reader to the point where they don't see the pictures – and move on to the next story.

Television news reporters and producers must seriously consider the amount of violent images they include in their reports; and editors must ensure that reports from scenes of carnage should be “labelled” ahead of broadcast.

A simple form of words immediately before the report is transmitted can help the viewer to decide to watch or look away: “You may find some of the pictures in this report disturbing...”

The tone of our reporting, in broadcasting or writing, is important; as is our response to programme scheduling at times of conflict. Equally, we must exercise responsibility when reporting on acts of terror.

If the evening news has been leading on the tragedy of an airliner crashing after a terrorist attack, it would be insensitive and inappropriate to then broadcast a movie about a plane crash.

It is the responsibility of the duty editor to alert schedulers to major news stories.

Journalists must talk through the big stories to help ensure they achieve the best tone and content.

It is important to seek the guidance of duty editors on how stories are to be treated and packaged.

In times of conflict, it is likely that some people may be taken hostage.

Journalists must not endanger the victims of hostage-taking.

It is not for a journalist to play with people's lives. Speculation about the condition of the hostage or the conditions of where he

is being held may not be helpful either to him, his family or to those seeking his release.

No story is worth losing your life for – so don't do anything to that could cost someone else theirs.

It is important that we remember at all times that anything we broadcast or publish can be seen, heard or read by people worldwide; and that includes the persons perpetrating the crime of hostage-taking.

It is irresponsible to conduct a live on-air interview with perpetrator or persons claiming to speak on their behalf. Record it and make an editorial judgement about what to broadcast, if anything.

Equal scrutiny must be given to any materials offered on behalf of the perpetrators for broadcast or publication.

Journalists must not do anything that harms society or sovereignty.

When reporting conflict, we need to be very clear and careful about the language we use.

It is sometimes difficult to get a clear and accurate picture of “the other side” in a conflict. In such cases, the media has a responsibility to deliver the wider context of the story as well as the immediate incident.

Journalists should not normally report bomb scares and hoaxes.

Newsrooms can routinely get calls from people claiming they have planted a bomb somewhere. Generally, known groups use a codeword to identify they are being serious and that is the signal to the journalist to pass the information to the authorities immediately.

But, we would not generally report bomb hoaxes as that would be giving a platform to all manner of crazy people who get a thrill at the prospect of scaring others; and getting publicity for themselves and/or their group.

However, if such a bomb hoax has resulted in the closure of an airport and caused considerable chaos, it is likely that it would be

Chapter Four Reporting Conflict

reported in the wider context of its impact, rather than focusing on the caller.

Journalists must be aware of the impact of their stories.

This applies critically at times of conflict, but across the wider spectrum of reportage. The root of the job of the journalist in a free media is to be responsible: therefore, consider and seek advice on story treatment.

There is no point in producing a powerfully charged package if it is likely to have a detrimental impact on society after the broadcast.

Chapter Five

REPORTING CRIME

Journalists need to be careful when they are reporting crime; just as with reporting violence, there is a danger that we can give an impression that crime and violence is rampant.

Journalists must not do anything to encourage crime.

If the only crime stories we report are of rape, murder and other serious crimes, then the reader, listener or viewer will get the impression that it is all around them all the time.

There is a very real danger that by focusing on the serious criminal stories, we ignore petty and other crimes; and unreported, they may grow.

Journalists must be clear, factual, offer context – and remain detached.

In our context of reporting crime, we need to be very clear about claims that may direct us to believe there is a fall in crime rates. But what is the range of time under discussion? What is the comparative figure?

Don't publish the picture of the accused until and unless the crime is proven.

This is a general rule and should be applied in that context. There will be occasions when it may be appropriate to consider using pictures, for example if the person accused is a major public figure. But there would still need to be a very good reason for publishing; to be able to prove that it is in the public interest to do so; and that it can be done without prejudicing the case.

Journalists must be aware of cultural, religious and social values; and that their reporting could cause further harm to victims.

In Pokhara, a man killed one of the two children of his lover. It was a brutal and appalling murder, yet the mother herself was victimised because she was guilty of having an affair.

Journalists must not do anything to encourage the victimisation of anyone.

This is not to say we shouldn't report the original story; but perhaps greater care should have been taken to protect the identity of the mother and her two children.

Journalists must be aware of the libel laws.

At the very least, journalists must know and understand libel. If they don't, they could cost themselves and their proprietors a lot of money.

Journalists must also be aware of Contempt of Court and if you don't know – then it is your duty and responsibility to learn. Tell your editor you need help to learn and understand the law as it applies to the media. Better still; know it before you set foot in a newsroom.

Avoid using concealed recorders and hidden cameras.

In general, we should avoid these means of securing information. However, there are cases to be made for their use in witnessing a criminal activity; and subsequently using that material in the public interest.

It should always be discussed with the duty editor beforehand.

Avoid undercover reporting.

This type of reporting dressing in disguise, assuming a false name, can have its merits if it is in the public interest and there is no alternative way open to journalists to gain such information.

As with the use of concealed recorders, it should always be discussed with the duty editor beforehand.

Do not report suicide.

In general, there is little to be gained from reporting the death of someone by suicide. There will be enough distress for the victim's family and friends without it being reported in the media.

However, there may be a strong case to make for reporting the suicide of a public figure. It is probably in the public interest to learn about the death of such a personality; and if it is an international figure, it will in any case most likely be reported worldwide.

Chapter Six

REPORTING ELECTIONS & POLITICS

This chapter looks ahead to the formation of the Constitutional Assembly; the role of the media in reporting its creation; and how to report politics responsibly and impartially as parties begin the journey towards the democratic election.

The chapter will additionally be useful as a reference point on how to report elections and politics generally.

Journalists must not allow themselves to be bullied or abused by politicians or any other person whatever their authority.

It is the responsibility of the journalist to question, challenge and probe the politician. As the journalist must be enabled and encouraged to do his job of reporting and analysing, it is also the responsibility of the politician to focus on the job he has been elected to do: help manage the country.

It is a sovereign abuse of power if the politician attempts to block journalists from doing their job effectively. If we work on the premise that the journalist and the media generally are reporting responsibly, then they must be allowed to get on with the job.

The journalist is asking questions on behalf of the reader, listener and viewer; he is their watchdog.

Journalists will regularly challenge politicians during interviews and hold them accountable for their actions. The media is also accountable to its readers, listeners and viewers.

It is the duty of the proprietors and editors to give journalists the support they require to report elections and politics fairly and without fear of reproach if a story is in opposition to their own beliefs.

The owner of a national daily newspaper in Switzerland was incensed when the editor carried an opinion column criticising the election of Jacques Chirac as the new president of neighbouring France.

The owner demanded a retraction in the next issue; the editor refused; but did offer the owner the opportunity to write his own opinion piece as a signed and personal view about President Chirac. It didn't alter the newspaper's opinion, but it demonstrated the strength of responsible editing, and the opportunity to offer a platform for a variety of opinions to be discussed.

Political impartiality is critical across the media. It is vital in any democracy that the media does as good a job as possible to report freely, fairly and to **explain the facts for the electorate.**

Once the facts are in the public domain, it is then reasonable to assume that the electorate will make its own valued judgement and vote accordingly.

Journalists must not show political bias; nor allow himself or his outlet to be used as part of a campaign. A journalist must not act as a publicity agent for any political party.

All parties will seek to influence editorial opinion, particularly at election time.

In the United Kingdom, newspapers traditionally announce their preferred party or candidate for the job of prime minister. They then seek to encourage their readers **why** they have made this decision; and in turn why the reader should vote accordingly.

This is part of a freedom of expression by a responsible media. The British newspapers generally give fair coverage to other parties' – even if they do not agree with their policies.

Television and radio stations are forbidden from taking such a political stand and must give equal representation on-air to all of the major parties.

There are strict rules in place in Britain about the use of pictures and sound from the Houses of Parliament in Westminster and other parliaments and assemblies across the UK. Material from

these houses must only be used in news and current affairs programming to help illustrate a story. At no time can any of the material be used in light entertainment, satire or drama.

In the United States, political parties buy airtime for commercials on television and radio to promote their policies and encourage the electorate to vote in a particular way.

During the 2006 campaign for the mid term elections in the US, there were numerous instances of negative campaigning, where one candidate or party simply rubbished his or their opponent. The overall campaign was described as “the dirtiest ever”.

In the UK, parties cannot buy time on air – but depending on the size of the party and the number of candidates it is fielding, free airtime is given for what is known as a “Party Political Broadcast”.

These short programmes, generally of around three-five minutes in duration, are produced and paid for by the parties concerned. They are clearly “ring-fenced” from the station’s general programming by announcements.

The parties have a responsibility for the content and must not say anything that is libellous; that may incite violence or hatred; or that harms and offends.

An Opinion Poll is not an election result.

There are growing opportunities for citizens to offer their opinions. TV and radio stations and newspapers actively encourage their viewers, listeners and readers to “vote” either online or by using their mobile phones.

It’s important we remember that when we report the findings of such polls or a fully commissioned opinion poll by another company, that we state it is a sample of opinion by people who chose to participate.

The BBC policy on opinion polls is that it does not lead a news bulletin or programme simply with the results of a voting intention poll.

When we decide to report the findings of any such polls in Nepal, we need to be clear in reporting also the number of people

questioned; where and when the polling took place; and also the margin of error.

Journalists must not get involved in politics.

It is the job of the journalist to report and the politician’s to run the country. It is inappropriate for journalists to be actively involved in politics whilst they are working in the media. To do so would be to have a conflict of interest and make it possible to be compromised.

As we have already said, there is a general practice that although many journalists change careers to seek election as a politician, it is better that as a journalist, they do not belong to a party; be active for any party; or campaign for any party.

Journalists must never accept any inducement from a politician or candidate.

It is unethical to encourage or accept bribes of whatever kind. If you are offered any such bribes, you must report it to your duty editor or owner. Corruption is a criminal offence.

When we are reporting election campaigns, we need to make sure we do everything we can to be accurate and correct.

Describe candidates carefully. Be clear what party they represent.

Present points of view fairly.

Check letters, emails and texts thoroughly. If you are planning to repeat or to publish correspondence from a reader, viewer or listener you must check the content for potential libel. You will be held responsible if you repeat a libel.

Check advertisements. Similarly, if a company or an individual is placing an ad, it must comply with the law.

Don’t question a candidate’s state of mind. A British MP was often referred to as being “barmy” or crazy. If he had decided to sue, the journalist would have had to prove the MP was in fact, clinically insane.

Do not use emotive words when you are describing a candidate. You may have formed an opinion about someone's character; but you may have to prove your comment to be true if he takes you to court.

Do not believe everything you are told. Politicians have mastered the art of telling tales. It is your job to question directly, thoroughly and to hold politicians to account.

And something else – **don't exaggerate.**

Chapter Seven

REPORTING VIOLENCE

We live in a violent world. Many of us have witnessed violence at first hand. Most of us have seen it reported in the media.

As responsible journalists and broadcasters, we must exercise caution over the amount of violent images and sounds we are prepared to print or play.

There is no desire to sanitise news coverage, and to keep the true horrors of violent action away from the people. We have a duty, however, to consider who may be watching or listening at any stage, and shape our news bulletins appropriately for that audience.

Journalists must not broadcast or publish pictures that could provoke, entice or encourage violence.

We must always exercise sound editorial judgement when we are deciding what pictures to show – and what not to.

Violent pictures can disturb people to various degrees. Children and older people are key categories to care for. Whatever pictures we do use must always be justified in the context of the report.

Violent images can also lead to imitation, innocently or otherwise, that may cause great harm.

A responsible media respects human dignity.

It is not justifiable for us to broadcast or print close-up images of victims of violence.

There are other images that can be used instead to illustrate our stories. Wide shots from the scene of the violence may be more appropriate to use, particularly at times of the broadcast day when children and older people may be viewing.

We must be careful about how we report violence in Nepal and in other countries and territories as well. We should not treat violence in other lands any differently from violence at home.

Equally, we must not minimise scenes of violence to the extent that it then makes it hard to understand the precise nature of the story. It is a difficult balance to strike, but there are some clear guidelines to follow.

Scenes of violence must only be shown in context and never broadcast gratuitously.

Never broadcast images of people being killed or tortured.

Our coverage must never suggest there is a growing trend towards violence in our society, unless that is the case.

Our language when reporting violence must be dispassionate and neutral.

Journalists must treat the dead with respect and only show the victims if there is a compelling reason to do so.

Close-up images of victims of violence must never be shown.

Journalists must not use violent material simply because they have access to it.

Do not use the same graphic image or images repeatedly to illustrate a story.

Journalists must treat human life equally at home and abroad.

There is a criticism that to edit out any images of extreme violence is to sanitise the news and try to keep people in the dark about a given situation. In fact it is more about reporting responsibly and making the effort to give context to our work.

It is irresponsible journalism to broadcast or publish images without giving careful thought to what we show.

There are varying standards worldwide about the amount of violence that is acceptable. In the Middle East, Al Jazeera Television says it is more likely than not to show graphic images from scenes of violence.

In the UK and further afield, there is an accepted guideline for broadcasters who are about to transmit images particularly, but also sound, from scenes of violence: "Some of the images (or sounds) in this following report may disturb you..."

The broadcaster is labelling the report and warning the viewer and listener that they could get upset by what they see and hear. Whilst we must always exercise a responsibility about what we decide to show, we can also invite viewers and listeners to play a role in deciding for themselves what they are prepared to see and hear.

Do not intrude on private grief.

By the very nature of violence, people can get hurt. We must exercise care and consideration in dealing with families of victims and never attempt to exploit them simply to get a picture or a quote.

Sometimes, families will want to discuss the event, but it is not our job to attempt to sensationalise the story and forgetting their grief.

There is a concern that by broadcasting too many images of a violent nature the viewer can become immune to horrific stories. Careful consideration is our guide to what we can or cannot show; and how much of it.

We have a further responsibility, outside of news coverage, to be aware of the amount of violence we permit in our television schedule and to be certain that this material is justified. More on that can be found in Chapter Eight, Harm and Offence.

Chapter Eight

HARM & OFFENCE**J**ournalists must never victimise people or treat them in ways that could cause them harm or offence.

A responsible media is required to exercise care and attention to the way people are portrayed; and the kind of programming that is acceptable throughout the broadcast day.

As the media develops, so too does the audience, and they have certain expectations of us. We must take them into consideration when we are preparing news in particular, and programming in general.

Journalists must not broadcast material that could cause harm to children or vulnerable people.

Where there are scenes of a violent or sexual nature, we must take care to label the material and alert the viewer and listener.

Journalists must not do anything to encourage or promote discrimination on the grounds of age, culture, gender, politics, race or religion.

In Kathmandu, we had the tragic death by suicide of an actress who took her own life after nude pictures of her were published. She was desperately upset by the story and couldn't face continuing in public life.

In Britain, an entertainer killed herself after stories emerged accusing her of being a serial shoplifter (stealing items from stores). In fact, she was ill and the family and local shopkeeper were dealing with the problem privately, until the media stepped in.

The media can do great harm and cause offence if it is irresponsible and discriminates or encourages and promotes the discrimination of any given group of people.

In our developing democracy, we must encourage and reflect the growth of a civil society.

We need also to take on board how our country and the world around us are changing. It is part of the role of a responsible media to question traditional practices that are fundamentally against human rights and human dignity, such as untouchability and caste discrimination.

Media should adopt and adhere to the principle of “the watershed”.

Some programmes are not acceptable to be seen by children at any time because of their violent or sexual nature. A responsible media takes heed of the public interest whenever it considers transmitting material with such content.

The broadcaster must be conscious of the expectations of the audience and its demands to be given choice.

It is unacceptable to broadcast graphic material when children are most likely to be watching. It may be acceptable to introduce scenes of nudity, violence or strong language gradually into the evening when children are less likely to be watching.

This principle is called “the watershed” and is a mechanism based on good practice. In the UK, television broadcasters consider the watershed to be at 2100 for terrestrial stations and 2000 for cable or satellite.

It means that from this time of the day, they can gradually introduce scenes more suited to a mature audience. But it does not mean that they must do so.

They must also alert the viewer of the content of the following programme, giving them the opportunity to make a considered decision about whether to watch, change channels or switch off.

Whilst the viewer must exercise common sense, there is no place in our professional broadcasting for gratuitous bad language, sex or violence.

We need to exercise care and attention to the kind of programming we are producing and/or transmitting. We must equally understand

that our culture is evolving and tastes change. It is our responsibility as a media to recognise and understand those changes and where necessary, modify our output.

Media has a responsibility to ensure that people are neither humiliated nor degraded in the name of entertainment.

There are clear guidelines again to help ensure that we do not encourage people to do anything that will diminish their standing in the family or community for the sake of creating an entertainment programme.

Where there is comic or satirical reference to be made to an event of great national or cultural sadness, it is the responsibility of the media to ensure that what is said and transmitted or published does not cause widespread harm or offence.

Journalists must not victimise victims.

Journalists must respect plurality.

Journalists must not exploit people.

Journalists must not obstruct social integration.

Journalists must not promote obscenity.

When we are considering programming across the schedule, we must take into account “the pull-through audience”. That is, what is the content of the preceding programme? Who is most likely to have been watching that; and will the next programme be suitable for that audience.

Common sense and caution must be exercised – and sensible warnings given to viewers about upcoming content.

Chapter Nine **PRIVACY**

Journalists must not invade the privacy of other people.

The media is getting greater access to all sectors of society and this is likely to extend further still. The media sector itself is growing and there are more calls on us to have stories that not only match, but better our rivals.

But when does reporting become intrusion?

Journalists must respect privacy and human rights including those of children.

A public figure is, by definition, someone whose work is done in the public arena. But these people – politicians, celebrities, journalists – also have the same rights as the rest of society to have a private life.

Journalists must respect an individuals’ right to privacy.

Journalists must avoid character assassination.

There are cases to be made at times for revealing information about a person and a person’s behaviour when it is in the public interest. Private behaviour and standards can only be brought into the public domain when there is an overriding public interest.

As a media, we must learn to identify and understand the difference between the freedom of expression by any one person and a legitimate expectation of privacy.

If reporting the private lifestyle or opinion of a public person is going to cause that person great distress, should we publish? Can we prove public interest is overwhelming in the need for this knowledge?

Consider this: because a major newspaper or a broadcaster makes claims about a public person, do we then have to report

it? Because it is in the public domain may lead to mass coverage by colleagues on other stations, online and in newspapers.

We still have to justify such reporting; and usually only when we can clearly show legitimate public interest in the story itself; or the reporting of the story is causing wider concern about that individual and his ability to properly do his job.

But what is “public interest”?

The BBC Editorial Guidelines states that while there is no single definition, it includes: exposing or detecting crime; exposing significant anti-social behaviour; exposing corruption or injustice; disclosing significant incompetence or negligence; protecting people’s health and safety; preventing people being misled by some statement or action of an individual or organisation; or disclosing information that allows people to make a significantly more informed decision about matters of public importance.

Additionally, there is the legitimate interest of the public in freedom of expression.

Journalists must have the right to Freedom of Information.

In accordance with our determination to function and operate as a responsible free media, journalists also insist on having the right to access Freedom of Information.

It is in the public interest for journalists to report bad behaviour by a person who is in the public eye. The expectation of privacy is diminished by someone’s actions if they are misleading, dishonest or anti-social.

If a person is in a public place, there is an expectation their actions in that place can be reported. If the same person is at home or in a private place away from the public gaze, there is a demand of theirs that unless what they are doing could cause harm and offence to others, it is their own business what they get up to.

Journalists must allow Freedom of Expression.

If a journalist is about to reveal information about a person that is likely to upset or damage that person in the public eye, then that

person must be given the opportunity to explain himself to the public.

Equally, if a reader writes to the editor with views that are critical of the paper or takes an opposing view to that expressed by the paper, then as long as the letter is not offensive, it should be considered for publication.

Variety in viewpoints can enrich our reading and society generally.

Journalists must not threaten or intimidate people.

Intimidation is a bully tactic and cannot be used by professional journalists. It is within the rights of the media to challenge people and to attempt to hold them to account for their actions, but it is not acceptable to threaten or to intimidate.

As a responsible media, we need to decide and understand what degree of privacy goes with a public figure. Long-lens cameras can capture a myriad of pictures.

Was there an invasion of the privacy of the actor Tom Cruise and his new wife, Katie Holmes when they married in a castle in Italy? Long lenses captured images of the bride and her mother; the paparazzi got shots of the actor being driven into the castle. Was this legitimate public interest?

Perhaps it was just entertainment and may even have been encouraged by the secretive way the couple staged the event.

Chapter Ten

SOURCES

Journalists must protect their sources as far as is possible.

News comes from many sources. Sometimes it is a straight happening or event that triggers our work. Sometimes we have private tip-offs from our sources in many walks of life.

When a journalist has a legitimate source of information that demands we do not disclose their identity, it is our responsibility to protect that person even as far as court procedure.

Journalists must check and verify their sources.

It is a part of our professional scepticism that we question, probe and challenge. As part of that work, we are required to check and double-check potential stories that are brought to our attention.

If we have developed a relationship of trust with a particular source that needs to have anonymity in order to help us gather news information, we need to be clear that we are not being used or abused in order to further that person's bias or agenda.

When a major story is leaked to a journalist, it must be discussed honestly with the duty editor.

Care and attention must be taken not to rush into print or broadcast; the journalist and the organisation must be convinced that the information is true and correct.

Protecting sources can come with danger: the threat of prosecution, potentially leading to imprisonment. There is the potential of threats and acts of violence against the journalist, his family and the organisation. There will also be the possibility of recriminations from people in authority that could threaten the continuation of the organisation doing the reporting.

Journalists must reject attempts to censor their work.

As our media develops into a stronger, more responsible profession, it is important that we reject any attempts to censor our work. If we have something to report that we can prove to be in the genuine public interest, then it should be reported.

It is a part of our declaration to be accountable.

Journalists must not reveal the details of off the record briefings.

Another part of our work is to get guidance on stories and events from people that are either directly involved or have intimate knowledge of the subject. On occasion, we have off the record briefings and discussions with a range of people, including those in authority.

Relying on off the record briefings alone is not appropriate.

If you have agreed to treat information in such a session as off the record, then it must remain so, although you can use it to help you gain a better understanding of the story; and in turn, better inform the reader, viewer or listener.

When we are attempting to report clearly and concisely, we should also remember that journalists often give a voice to the voiceless, helping people who do not usually get access to media.

Media must clearly separate advertising from news.

Advertising can often be a source for a news story, but it is important to separate advertising from editorial. They are two very distinct parts of the media and advertising features must be clearly labelled.

Chapter Eleven

RELIGION

Journalists must never discriminate on religious grounds.

It is a clear responsibility that journalists must respect different beliefs and views and must not at any time attempt to mock or abuse people because they may have another belief from your own or from what is accepted as mainstream religion.

Journalists must ensure that they responsibly and accurately report and reflect the beliefs and practices of a variety of major faiths.

It is disingenuous and bad practice to deliberately attempt to mislead or misrepresent the beliefs and practices of varied religions and faiths.

Journalists must retain objectivity when reporting religious affairs and should not allow such coverage to be used as a recruitment process.

Chapter Twelve

NEPAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

Journalists demand a Free Media, one that is **editorially independent** and has strong values and principles.

Proprietors must act responsibly.

Journalists must never accept bribes or be involved in any act of corruption.

Journalists must seek the truth; and give a clear and comprehensive account of issues and events.

Journalists must be accurate, truthful and honest.

Journalists must be impartial at all times.

Journalists must show balance in their reports.

Journalists must not align themselves to any political party; or to be active within it; or to campaign on its behalf.

Journalists must not encourage or incite conflict or violence.

Conflict and terror produce victims and it is the duty of journalists to take great care when reporting painful events.

Journalists must not endanger the victims of hostage-taking.

No story is worth losing your life for – so don't do anything to that could cost someone else theirs.

Journalists must not do anything that harms society or sovereignty.

Journalists should not normally report bomb scares and hoaxes.

Journalists must be aware of the impact of their stories.

Journalists must not do anything to encourage crime.

Journalists must be clear, factual, offer context – and remain detached.

Journalists must be aware of cultural, religious and social values; and that their reporting could cause further harm to victims.

Journalists must not do anything to encourage the victimisation of anyone.

Journalists must be aware of the libel laws.

Journalists must also be aware of Contempt of Court.

Avoid using concealed recorders and hidden cameras.

Avoid undercover reporting.

Do not report suicide.

Journalists must not allow themselves to be bullied or abused by politicians or any other person whatever their authority.

Journalists will regularly challenge politicians during interviews and hold them accountable for their actions. The media is also accountable to its readers, listeners and viewers.

Journalists must not show political bias; nor allow himself or his outlet to be used as part of a campaign. A journalist must not act as a publicity agent for any political party.

Political impartiality is critical across the media. It is vital in any democracy that the media does as good a job as possible to report freely, fairly and to explain the facts for the electorate.

An Opinion Poll is not an election result.

Journalists must not get involved in politics.

Journalists must never accept any inducement from a politician or candidate.

Describe candidates carefully. Be clear what party they represent.

Present points of view fairly.

Journalists must not broadcast or publish pictures that could provoke, entice or encourage violence.

A responsible media respects human dignity.

Scenes of violence must only be shown in context and never broadcast gratuitously.

Never broadcast images of people being killed or tortured.

Our coverage must never suggest there is a growing trend towards violence in our society, unless that is the case.

Our language when reporting violence must be dispassionate and neutral.

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Do not intrude on private grief.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Charles Fletcher MBE

Charles is an international broadcaster and journalist. Formerly Scotland Correspondent for Sky News and a journalist with the BBC World Service, he has won a Sony Radio Award and an Andrew Cross Award for broadcasting. He was made a Member of the Order of the British Empire in 2005 for services to democracy through media development. Charles is head of the UK-based Caledonia Media, one of the world's leading media development bodies. He operates a radio and television service in Scotland. He is the author of the Visegrad Guidelines and a series of interactive DVD modules on good practice in Journalism.

MEET THE EDITORS

Butwal

Mohan Chapagain

Mohan Chapagain is station manager at Lumbini FM. He started journalism in 1991 as an executive-editor to the Upchar Weekly in Butwal. He has long experience in print and broadcasting, especially radio journalism. He is also an experienced media trainer.

Kathmandu

Kundan Aryal

Kundan Aryal started his career in 1986 as a print journalist for the weeklies. Aryal, Master's degree holder in Mass Communication and Journalism, worked for current affairs programme in Radio Nepal in 1994-95. He served as Board Member of Nepal's only news agency, Rastriya Samachar Samiti in 1997. Apart from journalism, he has contributed anthologies for academic Journals. He has taught Mass Communication and Journalism in Tribhuvan and Purbanchal University of Nepal. He has authored a book on cartoons in Nepali media and co-authored another on the relationship between press and human rights. He was elected central committee member of Federation of Nepali Journalists for the year 1996-98.

Pokhara

Ganga Dhar parajuli

Ganga Dhar parajuli, Vice–President of Federation of Nepalese Journalists (central committee) the umbrella organization of more than 5,000 Nepalese journalists, has long experience in print and electronic media. Ganga started his career in journalism 14 years ago from Gorakhapatra Corporation, which is the publication of Gorakhapatra and Rising Nepal Dailies. After that he built more experience about media guidelines and ethics of journalism by working in Kantipur Publication, Nepal Television, other National Dailies and weekly newspapers and Magazines. He was the Executive – Editor of Janamat Daily, published in Pokhara. Nowadays he is actively engaged in Radio journalism. He was News-Chief of Machhapuchhre FM until 2006 with the establishment of FM but now he is also one of the directors of Barahi FM which has been established by Pokherali Youth entrepreneurs, businessmen and media professionals. Ganga is showing his continuous effort on press freedom, freedom of expression and democracy. He has good experience on media related organizations like Nepal Press Union, National Union of Journalists Nepal, Media Campaign for community awareness Programme and other social organisations.

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CBA Editorial Guidelines

The Visegrad Guidelines

European Broadcasting Union

Advertising Standards Authority

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NEPAL MEDIA GUIDELINES ONLINE

You can find the Nepal Media Guidelines online at:

<http://www.caledoniamedia.com>

<http://npiktm.org>