

GOVERNANCE

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What's at Stake with Nepal's Social Media Bill 2081? Examining Risks and Ambiguities

WEEKLY

Photo By The Kathmandu Post

The Social Media Bill 2081, recently introduced in Nepal's National Assembly, has sparked a heated debate. While the government supports the bill, arguing that it's necessary to regulate social media, promote responsible behavior, and ensure good governance, many opposition groups, media organizations, and rights activists fear it could limit freedom of speech and suppress dissent.

One of the main concerns is the heavy penalties outlined in the bill. It proposes fines up to NRs. 10 million and long prison sentences for those found guilty of spreading false information or content harmful to national interests. Other provisions, such as fines for running accounts without authorization and jail time for using fake or anonymous accounts, have also raised alarms about the potential for limiting free expression.

Critics point to vague terms like "wrong intent" and "content against national interests," which could give authorities wide power to interpret and enforce the law. This could lead to unfair enforcement, where people, including journalists, may be censored or punished for expressing opinions, especially if they are critical of the government. The bill also requires people to disclose their identity, which could prevent anonymous social media use. Critics say this could discourage whistleblowers, limit free discussion, and violate citizens' privacy rights. There are concerns that it could be used to silence journalists and curtail press freedom.

As the lawmaking process moves forward, experts argue that it's essential to assess who will be affected and how, ensuring that punishments are fair and proportionate to the offenses. Criminalizing behavior without understanding its full impact could have unintended consequences.

Despite the criticisms, the bill does include provisions designed to improve online safety, such as penalties for defamation, harassment, and child exploitation. Social media companies will also have to register in Nepal and renew their licenses every two years. Moving ahead, the future of the bill will now depend on finding the right balance between maintaining security and protecting free speech, while upholding constitutional rights.

Read more: [The Kathmandu Post](#)

Governance issues of the week

- 1 Nepal risks being placed on the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) gray list due to inadequate measures against money laundering and terrorist financing. Following Nepal's mutual evaluation in June 2022, the Asia/Pacific Group on Money Laundering (APG) issued 11 key recommendations, but implementation has been weak. A gray listing could harm foreign investment, increase transaction costs, and damage Nepal's economic reputation.
Read More: [The Annapurna Express](#)
- 2 The winter session of the House of Representatives began on January 31, 2025, marking the continuation of parliamentary affairs after a four-month break since the monsoon session. The session will focus on addressing and discussing recently issued government ordinances. Similarly, the meetings of parliamentary committees have also resumed, ensuring the continuation of legislative work and oversight activities.
Read More: [My Republica](#)
- 3 The Ministry of Finance has instructed authorities to halt work on certain projects under the grant cooperation between USAID and the Nepal government, following a 90-day suspension order from the U.S government. It includes four co-financed projects in health, agriculture, education, and inclusion. However, activities funded by the Nepal government will continue as planned, ensuring that work requiring national financing remains unaffected by the temporary suspension.
Read more: [Ukaalo](#)
- 4 The Ministry of Health has presented the Health Insurance Reform Action Plan to the Prime Minister. Based on the Health Insurance Reform Suggestion Task Force report, the plan proposes increasing insurance coverage from NPR 100,000 to NPR 500,000 and outlines measures to achieve this goal. If approved by the Council of Ministers, the Ministry plans will initiate an amendment to the Health Insurance Act to implement the proposed reforms.
Read More: [myRepublica](#)
- 5 The Ministry of Home Affairs has proposed a bill amendment in parliament, allowing children of Nepali mothers to obtain citizenship without requiring the father's name. If requested, the father's section in the citizenship certificate will remain blank. Also, children with either parent holding citizenship-by-birth can acquire descent-based citizenship. This reform is expected to benefit around 1.68 million children with single mothers and 100,000 living with single fathers.
Read More: [Naya Patrika](#)
- 6 In 2024, a total of 66,835 Nepalis left for permanent residence abroad, which is a slight decrease from 70,915 in 2023. Meanwhile, 100,827 individuals moved abroad for temporary residence, an increase from 91,349 the previous year. Similarly, 856,422 left for work abroad, 119,409 for education, 18,713 for medical treatment, 5,847 for UN Peacekeeping Missions, and 26,809 traveled for sporting events, reflecting varied migration trends across different sectors.
Read More: [Online Khabar](#)

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