

KATHMANDU: Less than a month after a controversial media magnate was gunned down in daylight in the best-protected area of the capital, a media tycoon of Indian origin was shot dead by unidentified gunmen in Nepal's restive southern plains adjoining the border with India. Arun Singhania, the 50-year-old publisher of the Nepali daily Janakpur Today, published from southern Nepal, died during the Holi revelry in the Terai Monday evening while on his way home, police said Tuesday.

Singhania received three bullets shot from close quarters by unidentified assailants who accosted him on two motorcycles, police said.

Janakpur, southern Nepal's famous temple town renowned for its Janaki temple, remained paralysed Tuesday after the Janakpur Chamber of Commerce and Industry called a shutdown to protest the murder.

The Federation of Nepalese Journalists also condemned the killing and said they would stage a protest rally in the restive town to demand the immediate arrest of the culprits and security for Nepal's beleaguered media that remains under attack even four years after the end of the Maoist insurgency.

Singhania, whose media group also ran an FM radio station as well as an Internet portal, had returned to Janakpur, the main town in Dhanusha district, on Sunday after a month-long sojourn in India where he had been on a pilgrimage.

Reports said his last port of call was New Delhi where he had gone to see his son Rahul, who is studying MBA in the Indian capital.

The attack occurred around 6.30 pm on Monday when Singhania, who had gone out to take part in the Holi festivities celebrated in the Terai Monday, was returning home.

His murder occurs after the killing of Kathmandu's controversial media magnate Jamim Shah, whose execution, police say, was plotted by Indian gangster Babloo Srivastava from within the Bareilly jail in India.

Almost a month after the death of Shah -- a 42-year-old of Kashmiri origin and alleged by Indian intelligence agencies to have been involved in running a fake Indian currency network -- police are yet to arrest his killers.

A year ago, Uma Singh, a woman journalist working for Singhania's FM station, Radio Today, was hacked to death in her own apartment in Janakpur.

Police had said Singh was killed not due to her professional activities but a family dispute over property. Her sister-in-law and nephew were involved in hiring contract killers, police alleged.

The fall of King Gyanendra's army-backed regime in 2006 has seen escalating violence and

crime in the Terai where underground armed groups have been flourishing.