



# SCRIBES NEWS

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Editorial Advisers

S N Sinha

K Sreenivas Reddy

Devendra Chintan

L S Herdenia

Editor

Suresh Kumar Alapati  
scribesnews.editor@gmail.com

scribesnews@gmail.com

## Paean to bold journalism

**T**o speak truth to power one needs courage. That is what the two journalists thousands of kilometres apart have in abundance which won them the Nobel for peace. Rightfully, the citation said they were recognized for "their courageous fight for freedom of expression, which is a precondition for democracy and lasting peace."

It is doubtful if the two journalists, Maria Ressa of the Philippines and Dmitri A. Muratov of Russia, being celebrated now for their tireless efforts to hold the powerful to account, do know each other personally or have anything in common. But there is one thing that is common in their homelands. Both countries are being ruled by strongman politicians.

In today's world where several countries are reeling under the oppressive rightwing order this recognition sings paean to bold journalism and more than underlines the need to fight for the exceptionally important right to free speech.

This was only the third time in the 120-year history of the highest prize that journalists were honoured for contributions to the cause of peace. In 1907 Ernesto Moneta, a newspaper editor and leader of the Italian peace movement, won the peace award. And in 1935 Carl von Ossietzky, a German journalist and opponent of Nazism, who was imprisoned by Hitler, won the prize.

This year selection is significant for India because the largest democracy in the world is also under the rule of a strongman politician where media has been facing increasingly hostile conditions and where reportage critical of the powers that be invites slapping of Sedition Act. This is all the more significant for us because many major media houses shamelessly dance to the tune of the regime by propagating pseudo nationalism and religious majoritarianism. Responding to the honour, Ms. Ressa said she hoped the award was a "recognition of how difficult it is to be a journalist today." Mr. Muratov said, "fight against the media is not a fight against the media, it is a fight against the people." What Mr. Muratov said is painfully becoming the daily experience of the people of India in increasing numbers making it imperative for the media in the country to defend the people by defending themselves. 

Free Frank Fearless





*You don't change the course  
of history by turning the  
faces of portraits to the wall*

— *Jawaharlal Nehru*

*Space donated by a well wisher*

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# Inside

**Cartoons  
of the  
month**  
Page 16-17



Mullahs, please stay off TV news debates. You are not helping!

Page 20

**He Missed his  
500 Rupees  
Payment by  
Death!**  
Page 4



Journalists take to streets!

Page 6



Torchbearers of Freedom of Expression

Page 10



These investigations are a face without a heart

Page 14



Media in Modern Times

Page 18



Aryan Khan versus Lakhimpur Kheri: Guess what made the news?

Page 26



**THE LAST  
PAGE  
30**

**F**irst the police considered him to be one of the activists of Bharatiya Janata Party. Later, in the early hours of next day his father identified the body lying in the morgue. Daybreak broke the news of the death of Raman Kashyap. The name of that little known rural journalist in a district of Uttar Pradesh bordering Nepal who worked for a TV Channel based at Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh became known across the country.

But, even ten days after the violent incident at Tikoniya village of Lakhimpur Kheri District in which eight people died including the four agitating farmers mowed down by a car, allegedly driven by Ashish Mishra, son of Ajay Mishra Teni, Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, how Raman Kashyap died is still unclear.

At 33 Raman Kashyap was too young to die. He left behind his wife Aradhana and two children, a 11 year old daughter and a two and half year old boy too young to comprehend the tragedy that befallen the family.

Raman, one of the three sons to his parents, hailed from Nighasen village approximately 25 kilometres away from Tikoniya where farmers planned to gherao the Union Minister Ajay Mishra. The Minister earned the wrath of the farmers for threatening them with dire consequences if they continued with their protest against the farm laws.

"People here know my history. If I get down from my car they will not be able to flee even. If I show my true power they will have to leave the district, not just the village," he is said to be made these taunting remarks. Popularly called 'Maharaja', Ajay Mishra faced trial in a 2003 murder case. He was

# He Missed his 500 Rupees Payment by Death!



*Raman Kashyap*



*Farmers gather in Tikonia to protest against Lakhimpur Kheri incident on October 4*

acquitted by the trial court for want of adequate evidence and an appeal filed by the State Government is pending in the Allahabad High Court.

On the morning of the fateful day Raman travelled to Tikoniya to cover the programme of the Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Mourya, where Ajay Mishra was expected to arrive. His body returned home next day. Ram Dulare Kashyap, father of Raman Kashyap says his son was also mowed along with the four farmers by the same car. But concerted efforts are on to change the narrative and portray that Raman was beaten to death by the enraged farmers, allege the family. Pawan Kashyap, younger brother of Raman alleged that some news channels were indulging in politics and pressuris-

ing them to say farmers killed him. Cause of death in the case of the other three persons was also not clear, though initially it was said that they were killed by the farmers immediately after their co-protesters were run over.

The Yogi Adityanath Government has instituted a judicial inquiry into the incident. Raman, according to his father, was teaching at a private school and alongside took up reporting as the former felt he needed to contribute to society and journalism was a better way for that. Raman was a tehsil level reporter for Sadhana Plus channel. Tehsil reporters are contributors who are paid for their journalism only when their stories are aired. Brij Mohan Singh, the channel head of Sadhana Plus told the digital

news portal ThePrint that Raman had been working for their channel for a year. Raman mainly focussed on crime and politics, he said and added that they planned to promote him as district reporter. Sadhana Plus channel paid to its contributors Rs. 500 for a story aired and Rs. 300 for a phone in and usually two or three stories are taken in a month. Had he escaped alive, the visual story of four farmers being mowed down from behind by a car would have paid Rs. 500 for Raman Kashyap, the news contributor. Ajay Mishra, the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs who was at the centre of this whole issue leading to the violence is undisturbed and has since been attending his official programmes. ❏

— Surayya



*TUWJ leaders and members protesting at Mahatma Gandhi statue at Secunderabad*

# Journalists take to streets!

**T**

hundreds of journalists across the country observed 'Protest day' on 2nd October, the 152nd birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, Father of the Nation, against the indifferent attitude of the central and State governments in solving the problems of journalist fraternity. This is the second consecutive year that the Indian Journalists Union (IJU) gave call to journalists in the country to observe protest day on Gandhi Jayanthi to highlight the demands of scribes including providing solatium to the families of Journalists died due to Covid-19. The National Executive Committee of IJU which

met online on 12th September gave a call to this agitational programme.

As part of the protest, working journalists in various states came onto streets and held dharmas, demonstrations and took out rallies in capital cities, district head quarters and even in sub district towns. In most of the places journalists organized peaceful demonstrations at Mahatma Gandhi statues and presented memorandums symbolically.

IJU Secretary General Balwinder Singh Jammu led the demonstration in Chandigarh while IJU Vice-President Ambati Anjaneyulu led the dharna in Vijayawada



IJU Vice President A. Anjaneyulu leading the demonstration of APUWJ at Vijayawada

and in Hyderabad Secretary Y. Narender Reddy, TUWJ General Secretary K.Virahath Ali, IJU NEC members K.Satyanarayana and MA Majid participated in the Satyagraha. NEC member from Andhra Pradesh D.Somasundar participated in a demonstration at Tadepalligudem and his counterpart in Telangana D. Krushna Reddy led the dharna at Hanamkonda.

**Uttar Pradesh**

In response to the call given by IJU Uttar Pradesh Shramajeevi Patrakar Union held demonstrations and rallies in several cities and towns in the state including the capital city Lucknow and Mathura, Kanpur, Fathepur, Raibarely, Shahajanpur, Hardoi, Bareli and Pilibhit.

Union president Dr. Rajesh Trivedi, General Secretary Ramesh Shankar Pandey led the agitation in state capital Lucknow. They have participated in Satyagraha at Parivarthan Chowk. In a memorandum addressed to the Prime Minister Narendra Modi they have urged to recognize journalists as frontline warriors in the fight against covid and provide insurance coverage of Rs. 50 Lakhs to all journalists.

They have also demanded the

## Fulfill the Promises, Please!

Responding to the IJU call journalists across the State owing allegiance to Andhra Pradesh Union of Working Journalists (APUWJ) observed National Protest Day on 2nd October.

In Andhra Pradesh journalists have been facing a peculiar situation. The Government has failed to issue new accreditations for almost two years. Even after the process started majority of the journalists are yet to be issued cards.

The Government has gone back on promise of the Chief Minister to give Rs. 5 lakhs solatium each to the families of journalists who succumbed to covid. Health insurance scheme has not been renewed. Same is the case with accident insurance scheme.

To draw attention to these issues besides the problems IJU has been highlighting the district units, affiliate press clubs of APUWJ has observed Protest day on a big way on October 2nd. Media persons including photo journalists, Editors of small and medium newspapers have joined the program.

An estimated two thousand jour-

nalists participated in the Protest Day Programms at 83 centers in all 13 districts of Andhra Pradesh. Hundreds of journalists conducted rallies, and staged dharnas in front of the statues of the father of the nation and symbolically submitted representations to Gandhiji statues.

Ambati Anjaneyulu, Vice President, IJU and Chandu Janardhan, General Secretary, APUWJ led the protest at Vijayawada, the State headquarters. Speaking on the occasion Anajaneyulu has demanded the State Government to honour the assurance given by the Chief Minister to provide financial aid to the families of journalists who died due to covid.

I.V. Subbarao, President, APUWJ addressed the dharna staged at Ongole. He warned the State government that the Union would intensify the agitation if the problems are not addressed.

D. Somasundar, NEC Member joined protest at Tadepalligudem, in West Godavari district, Nalli Dharma Rao, Special Invitee to the NEC participated at Srikakulam.

— D. Somasundar





## ■ TUWJ warning to media managements

# Stop Harassing Scribes

**T**elangana State Union of Working Journalists (TUWJ) demanded media managements to immediately stop harassing staff reporters and mofussil correspondents for advertisements. The extended Executive Committee meeting of TUWJ held at Hyderabad on 10 October expressed serious concern over the suicide of a reporter working in Vartha telugu daily. Praveen Kumar Goud, a correspondent based at Narsapur in Medak district resorted to the extreme step on 4 October. In suicide note he alleged that 'Vartha' management was harassing him for not reaching advertisement target. The TUWJ in a resolution demanded the State Government to initiate an inquiry into the case and take stringent action against the culprits.

Union leaders who participated in the discussion alleged that managements of several newspapers and news channels were resorting to this practice of harassing reporters for getting advertise-

ments by hook or crook. The Executive Committee of TUWJ urged the Department of Labor to probe the issue and save journalists from harassment by media managements. The meeting has decided to write letters to all media managements demanding to stop the practice.

The meeting was chaired by the Nagunuri Shekhar, President. K. Sreenivas Reddy, President, Indian Journalists Union, Devulapalli Amar, former President, Y. Narender Reddy, Secretary, K. Satyanarayana and D. Krushna Reddy, NEC members participated. TUWJ General Secretary K. Virahath Ali presenting activity report explained how the Union was helping journalists who were in distress due to Covid pandemic.

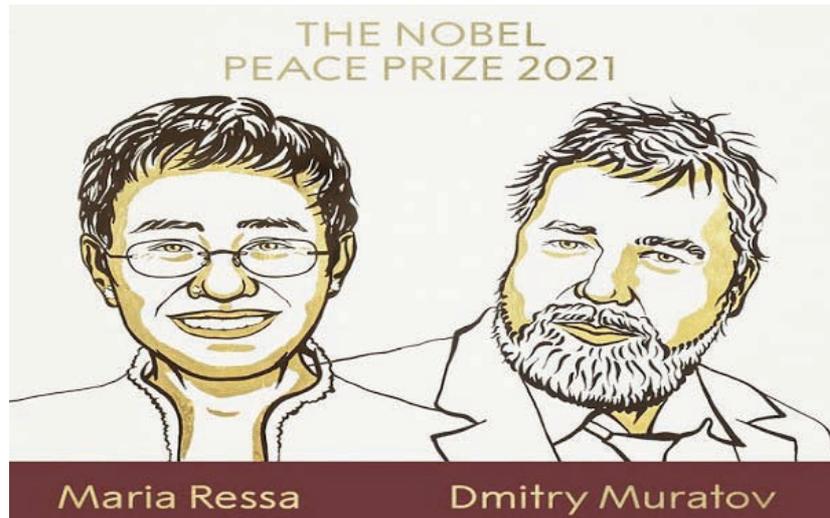
Addressing the meeting K. Sreenivas Reddy criticized the indifferent attitude of the State Government in providing help to journalists who are in distress due to corona. Despite several requests the Government is not implementing

Journalists Health Scheme (JHS) properly. D. Amar, former President, IJU and Adviser to Andhra Pradesh Government on National Media and Interstate Affairs proposed national level discussion on the harassment of reporters by media managements to get advertisements. In the guise of Covid-19 media managements have resorted to mass retrenchments and salary cuts.

The TUWJ Executive Committee has also decided to write letters to all media managements requesting them to form gender committees in their editorial offices to deter harassment of women journalists. The meeting also demanded the Government to implement JHS in true spirit to enable journalists to avail cashless medical treatment in all the Government and private super specialty hospitals.

TUWJ office bearers and senior leaders K. Ramnarayana, T. Karunakar, Vishnudas Srikanth, Ailu Ramesh, P. Sailu, Gender committee Convenor Vaka Manjula also spoke. ❑

# Torchbearers of Freedom of Expression



# I

n awarding the Nobel Peace Prize for 2021 to two embattled journalists, Maria Ressa from the Philippines and Dmitri A. Muratov of Russia, the Nobel committee has made a clear-cut statement on the state of freedom of expression in an era that has seen the rise and rise of authoritarian "populists" in several countries. It made it amply clear in its announcement that while Ms. Ressa and Mr. Muratov were receiving the prize for their courageous fight for freedom of expression in their respective countries, "they are representatives of all journalists who stand for this ideal in a world in which democracy and freedom of the press face increasingly adverse conditions."



**Srinivasan Ramani**

*Deputy National Editor  
The Hindu*

### Investigative journalism

Ms Ressa, aged 58, has had a long career in journalism which includes stints as the bureau chief of CNN in Manila and Jakarta, having made her mark as the network's lead investigative reporter in Asia. In 2012, she co-founded Rappler, a digital media company focused on investigative journalism that began as a

Facebook page called MovePH before becoming a complete website. Rappler made its mark focusing specifically on Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte's controversial anti-drug campaign, featuring the deaths of thousands of suspected drug dealers and addicts in a series of articles called the "Impunity series" in 2016. The campaign has been widely discredited for targeting the poor in extrajudicial deaths and for the impunity afforded to law enforcement agencies in doing so.

Later, it focused on how social media and internet were being "weaponised" to spread fake news, troll and harass political opponents and to manipulate public discourse, chiefly by President Duterte's campaign, in another series called the "Propaganda series". This series of articles shed light on organised disinformation using the internet in the Philippines. As the Cambridge Analytica-Facebook scandal, or the Donald Trump presidency's use of social media to weaponise disinformation, or organised disinformation on the internet by covert agencies from Russia, or the barrage of fake news using

messenger services in India have shown, the era of the "infodemic" is well and truly upon the world. The Nobel Committee's recognition of Ms. Ressa's work is an acknowledgement of the severity of this problem.

Beyond work on the drug campaign and disinformation, Rappler also exposed government corruption and shed light on the financial holdings of political leaders and their possible conflicts of interest. Rappler also became a member of the Poynter Institute's International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN). Rappler's investigative work also earned it the government's ire. In 2017, President Duterte called the outlet by name and falsely stated that it was a "foreign-owned" firm in his state-of-the-union address. The country's Securities and Exchange Commission looked into the company's ownership structure and revoked its licence even as Ms. Ressa herself was charged with tax evasion in December 2018. She denied the charges and the case was in suspension.

Later, the country's National Bureau of Investigation filed a "cyber libel" case against Ms. Ressa and a writer for the website and found them guilty with a prison sentence up to six years, but were allowed to post bail pending an appeal. The case, regarded as a blow to press freedom in the Philippines, pertained to an article by a researcher with Rappler, Reynaldo Santos Jr. citing an intelligence report that spoke of a business executive being linked to drug smuggling and trafficking. That the case was made against Ms. Ressa, who was not involved in day-to-day editorial operations at Rappler, raised questions if the Bureau was specifically targeting her even as the media fraternity claimed that the case had a chilling effect on investigative journalism in the country.

Ms. Ressa welcomed the news of the award saying, "This is not about us [Rappler]. This is about you. Because freedom of the press is the foundation of every single right you have as a Filipino citizen".

### Critical towards power

Dmitry Muratov, aged 59 and the co-

winner of the Prize, is the editor of the Novaya Gazeta newspaper in Russia. The Committee mentions that Mr. Muratov "has for decades defended freedom of speech in Russia under increasingly challenging conditions". Mr. Muratov began his career as a correspondent for the Volzhsky Komsomolets newspaper and later edited news articles at Komsomolskaya Pravda before he and scores of colleagues from the paper left to start their own publication, Novaya Gazeta, with an aim to run "an honest, independent, and rich" source of news for Russian citizens. In 1993, former Soviet Union president Mikhail Gorbachev donated a portion of his Nobel Peace Prize money to the newly set-up newspaper, helping it buy computers for operations. Remarkably, nearly 30 years after being helped to set up by the architect of the 'glasnost' (open-



ness and transparency) reforms in the erstwhile Soviet Union, the paper's editor has won the same prize.

Mr. Muratov has been the editor-in-chief for more than two decades and the Committee recognises that Novaya Gazeta is "the most independent newspaper in Russia, today, with a fundamentally critical attitude towards power" and that the "newspaper's fact-based journalism and professional integrity have made it an important source of information on censurable aspects of Russian society rarely mentioned by other media." The newspaper also uniquely elects its editors since 2009 who go on to serve two-year terms.

The newspaper, the Committee records, "has published critical articles on subjects ranging from corruption, police violence, unlawful arrests, elec-

toral fraud and "troll factories" to the use of Russian military forces both within and outside Russia" and is best known for its investigative stories on the war in Chechnya and the wealthy oligarchs in post-Soviet Russia. The publication has suffered for its boldness; six of its journalists have been killed. The most well-known among them was Anna Politkovskaja, who wrote several telling pieces on the conduct of the war in Chechnya. It is still not known who ordered contract killers to take the life of Ms. Politkovskaja, who was shot dead outside her apartment in 2006.

Other hard-hitting stories carried by the newspaper included those on the repression of homosexuals in Chechnya in 2017. The newspaper has been credited with pioneering investigative reporting against the Russian elite with other online publications taking cue from it despite threats to the free press in the country. Mr. Muratov, in his reaction to the award, claimed that he expected it to be given to Russian political dissident and opposition leader Alexei A. Navalny, who survived a poison attack last year and is currently in jail. Even as the Russian government praised the Committee's awarding the Peace prize to Mr. Muratov, several leading Russian-language news outlets have been recently subject to a crackdown, being termed "foreign agents" and investigative journalists have been forced into exile.

Russia ranks 150 among 180 countries in the latest World Press Freedom Index, released annually by the Reporters sans Frontiers (Philippines is ranked a lowly 138 and India slipped to 142 in the rankings too).

The Committee strongly argued the case for the Prize, by saying that "freedom of expression and freedom of information help to ensure an informed public. These rights are crucial prerequisites for democracy and protect against war and conflict. The award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Maria Ressa and Dmitry Muratov is intended to underscore the importance of protecting and defending these fundamental rights."

— Courtesy  
The Hindu

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*What the new operatives in the media today are doing is to help those who have no respect for democracy or constitutional values. They hitch their professional wagons to the aggressive agenda of supremacist politics and ride rough shod over the rights of the consumers as well as the subjects of their "news"*

T

he success of any collective human endeavour is a function of how well the parties involved respect the commonly agreed rules of the game. If some decide to defy the framework, things fall apart, and chaos sets in.

Such rules in a democracy are laid out in the Constitution and the laws enacted after much deliberation to ensure the greater good of the largest numbers of citizens.

Over the last decade, the world is witnessing the emergence of groups who believe in supremacist ideologies that have little use for the egalitarian, secular ideals held dear in democracies. The irony is, their ascendance is made possible by the very democracy they have such contempt for.

Once in power, these entities no longer respect the rules of the game laid out by the Constitutions or the laws that are promulgated as the basis for governance till then.

In a series of cases in India, we have seen how the freedom of speech and expression, and the right to life and liberty - the constitutionally guaranteed rights - have been systematically eroded to establish the rule of the majority. All are not equal before the law.

Mainstream television and the print

media have repeatedly distorted or misinterpreted information to mislead the news consumers on a mass scale. From trivial bits like the tracking microchip in the new two thousand rupee note to the more recent one that claimed the Chief Justice of India visited the victims of the Lakhimpur Kheri victims, some instances of misinformation got a feeble apology while the others just dropped out of public memory.

The daily onslaught of false information and spin has rendered the journalists who have an old-fashioned attachment to facts as objects of ridicule, as "losers", in this cesspool of new media ecology.

What the new operatives in the media today are doing is to help those who have no respect for democracy or constitutional values. They hitch their professional wagons to the aggressive agenda of supremacist politics and ride rough shod over the rights of the consumers as well as the subjects of their "news".

In a recent debate on Republic TV, Arnab Goswami asserted that he has his own intelligence from his "sources" about what the Pakistani ISI agents meddling in Afghanistan ordered for their dinner, and that they were staying on the fifth floor of the Serena Hotel in Kabul. He also claimed



**Padmaja Shaw**

*The writer is a retired professor of journalism from Osmania University, Hyderabad*



to know their room numbers ([https://twitter.com/shen\\_shiwei/status/1439628282400579584?lang=en](https://twitter.com/shen_shiwei/status/1439628282400579584?lang=en)). It turned out that the hotel has just two floors. There was an immediate response on social media calling him out for this, and much ridicule from the global media persons.

There is a daily witch-hunt of dissenting voices on channels like the Republic and Times Now against all kinds of targets, from rights activists to public intellectuals. Facts don't appear to be a hindrance to the predetermined spin that is put out daily to buffer the fortunes of the ruling dispensation.

But any reports about his own businesses, even when factual, appear to anger Arnab Goswami intensely. (<https://bestmediainfo.com/2021/02/arnab-goswami-threatens-bestmediainfo-sends-legal-notice-to-stop-publication-of-a-report-on-brands-pulling-out-ads-from-republic/>). He threatens legal action to prevent adverse reports about his channels/businesses, about leaks of his WhatsApp chats with the then BARC chief being published widely on social media, even as he launches a witch-hunt against Rhea Chakravarty using her leaked WhatsApp chats. Clearly, he believes in his own untrammelled right to exercise his free speech even for

spreading falsehoods, but believes the others do not deserve the same rights to report facts.

The reason for invoking his name to discuss the state of the right to free speech in India is that this is the only case of a media person in recent times when the Supreme Court stepped in to grant interim bail with alacrity and with brilliant arguments by none other than Justices DY Chandrachud and Indira Banerjee. Arnab's counsel Harish Salve tried his best to convince the court that the case against Arnab was in retaliation to his "journalism".

The judgement, underscoring the need for a fair trial, reads, "... it is the duty of courts across the spectrum - the district judiciary, the High Courts and the Supreme Court - to ensure that the criminal law does not become a weapon for the selective harassment of citizens." And adds, "Our courts must ensure that they continue to remain the first line of defence against the deprivation of the liberty of citizens. Deprivation of liberty even for a single day is one day too many." Contrast this with the case of Siddique Kappan and his associates who were arrested on 5 October, 2020, when they were heading to Hathras to cover the rape case and have spent more than a year without bail in UP jails for reporting

that they did not yet do, for a visit they were not allowed to make.

The personal liberty and the freedom to practice one's profession, and the right to fair and speedy justice are reserved for some influential people and not for all. Anyone who has a genuine interest in finding facts is seen as a threat to the status quo.

Speaking to media after winning the Nobel for peace this year, Maria Ressa, the Philippine journalist, said that the social media have been weaponised in majoritarian regimes to attack real journalists and to erode the importance of facts in a shared reality. She said, "Once you weaken facts, it creates an environment when journalists are attacked for telling truth to power. ... Without facts, you cannot have truth, without truth, you can't have trust. If you don't have any of these you cannot have a functioning democracy ..."

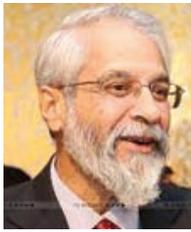
In new India, all rights to freedom of speech and liberty are reserved for the media operatives close to the ruling dispensation. The others will pay a heavy price for their courage. It does not bode well for the future of our democracy, if the commonly agreed rules of the game, the Constitutional principle of equality before law and right to life, liberty and free speech, are discarded so easily. ❌

# These investigations are a face without a heart



asping for breath - that is how our investigating agencies leave our citizens and now the press. Two recent cases clearly demonstrate that our investigating agencies are a face without a heart.

On September 10, 2021, officers of the Income-Tax Department visited the premises of NewsClick and Newslaundry. According to the Editors Guild of India, NewsClick and Newslaundry are news websites. The visit by the officers was styled as a survey and this was confirmed by the Department to a private news channel. A survey by officers of the IT-Department is governed by Section 133A of the Income-Tax Act.



**Justice  
Madan B. Lokur**

*The author is a retired  
judge of the Supreme  
Court of India*

## Entry that is limited, specific

Section 133A authorises an income-tax authority to enter premises where a business or profession is carried on. The purpose of entry is limited and specific - to inspect books of account or documents, check or verify the cash, stock or other valuable article or thing which may be found in the premises and furnish such information that the authority may require. A survey is not a fishing expedition. A survey can be carried out only during the time the premises are open for conduct of business or profession.

A statement released by Newslaundry indicates that the officers came to its premises at about 12:15 p.m. and left the next day at 12:40 a.m. Similarly, a statement released by NewsClick suggests that the officers came at about noon and left around midnight. The first question: are the premises of these news websites usually open for business at midnight with the same staff? If not, the officers violated the law in continuing the survey till the witching hour, without any compunction.

Some side issues also arise. For example, what do the officers do for lunch, dinner

and snacks when a survey takes place for 12 hours? Do they carry their tiffin boxes and water bottles? What about the people in the premises - can they go out for a bite or are they expected to remain hungry? Can they even inform their family that they have been locked up for several hours and cannot come home?

Section 133A authorises the officers to inspect the books of account, place identification marks on them, and on other documents, and even make copies. They may impound the books of account or other documents inspected by them, for reasons to be recorded in writing. They are also entitled to make an inventory of the cash, stock or other valuable articles verified by the officers. Finally, they are authorised to record the statement of any person in the surveyed premises, though not on oath.

## Court's view

The Orissa High Court has taken the view that the primary objective of a survey is to inspect and if impounding is necessary, specific reasons (not general reasons) must be recorded; the reasons must be recorded at the time of impounding and not even a day later, otherwise the impounding would be bad in law.

Section 133A contains a specific prohibition that the officers "shall, on no account, remove or cause to be removed from the place... any cash, stock or other valuable article or thing". How much more prohibitory can it get?

## Also read | Delhi HC notice to I-T Department on plea by Newslaundry

The legal Lakshman rekha having been delineated, what is it that transpired during the survey on September 10, 2021? The version of the I-T Department is not in the public domain, so it is not known, and perhaps

might never be known.

### The two cases

In its statement, Newslaundry informs us that its CEO was not allowed to use his phone to contact his lawyer. In fact, he was asked to hand over his phone to the officers. He was asked to comply with on-the-spot directions without taking legal advice. Even a criminal is entitled to contact his or her lawyer and family. Second question: Under what authority of law was the CEO asked to hand over his phone and refrain from contacting his lawyer? Books of account may be impounded, but prohibiting use of a mobile phone, even temporarily?

The personal mobile phone, laptop and office machines (presumably desktops) were taken control of and the data on them or in them was downloaded. Ordinarily, a search warrant is required for this. Apart from anything else, this is a classic case of invasion of the fundamental right of privacy. The CEO was not given a copy of the downloaded data, which is his property and he is entitled to it as of right. On the contrary, he was asked to delete his personal data from his mobile phone within one hour so that they could take it away (which they did). Third question: Why should he delete his personal data?

The I-T Department has accepted before the Delhi High Court that it has "seized" material (including perhaps his mobile phone and laptop) and it is in safe custody. Under which law is not explained. Fourth question: Are officers of the I-T Department entitled to violate the law with impunity and without any accountability?

The sequence of events clearly suggests that the staff of Newslaundry was subjected to some sort of a house arrest or office arrest, cut off from the world for 12 hours and denied their constitutionally guaranteed fundamental rights. Is this permissible?

The fate suffered by NewsClick is no better. NewsClick issued a statement to the effect that 30 employees and support staff were 'locked up' (so to speak) for the duration of the survey, that is for 12 hours and their phones seized. If any family member had faced an emergency



during those 12 hours, bad luck. To make matters worse, they were prevented from accessing their computers and indeed from working. Why? And under which law? It seems quite clear that the employees and staff underwent office arrest, something akin to house arrest. Fifth question: are the fundamental rights of speech, freedom of the press and privacy suspended during a survey of books of account by the I-T Department? Surely, our fundamental rights are not that meaningless.

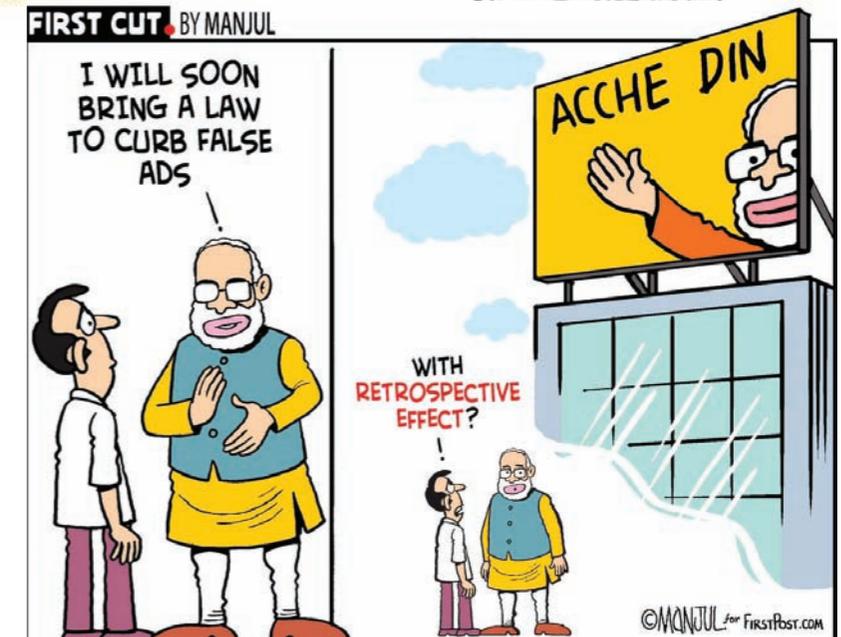
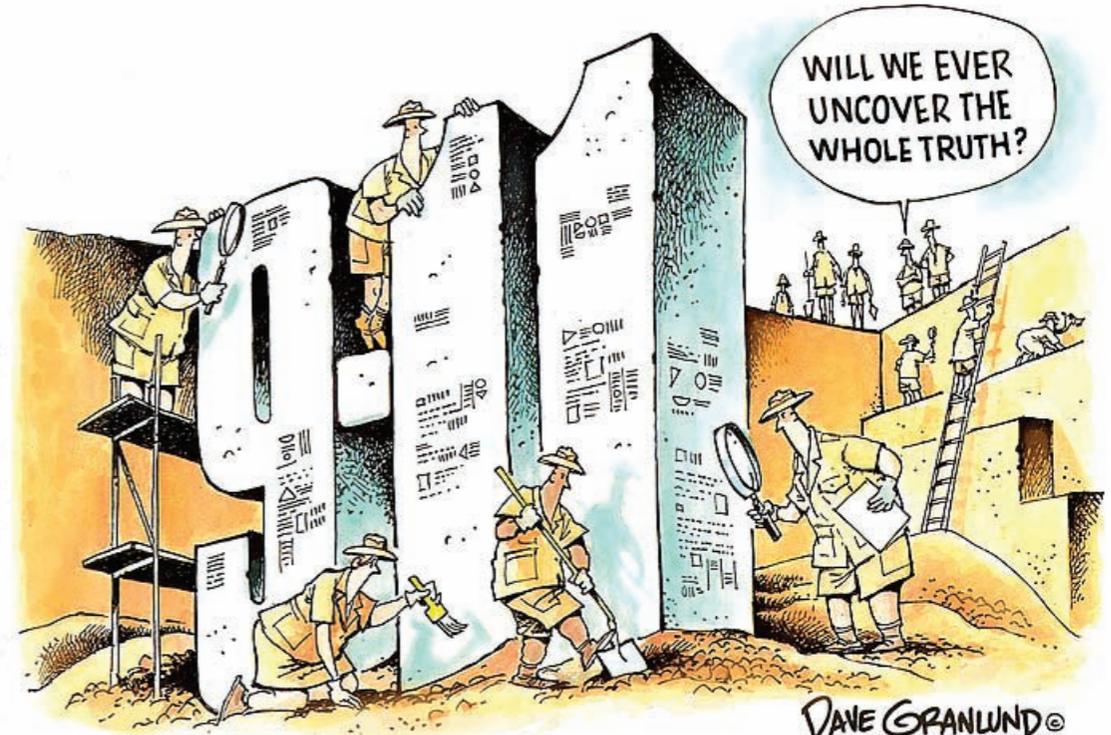
The phone of the Editor-in-Chief was also impounded containing private, personal and confidential data. It appears that the fundamental right to privacy is stillborn in respect of some people, particularly journalists. He may have received information from a source that he does not desire to disclose. In law, he cannot be compelled to disclose the source, being privileged information, but a well-planned survey can achieve that purpose. Journalists beware or don't care - the choice is yours. Loose papers were taken away from the surveyed premises. It appears that no list was prepared of these papers and no copy of the loose papers supplied to the employees concerned. E-mail dumps were taken of the Editor-in-Chief and the Editor. Sixth question: was the survey a façade for some other purpose? Nobody will know until the next 'raid'.

### More the norm now

So many questions arise from these two surveys and they provide obvious answers, but nobody cares. The issue is not what Newslaundry and NewsClick have done or not done, in terms of adhering to and complying with the law. The issue is whether there is a rule of law prevailing and how easy it is for the authorities to harass citizens if they want to. The other issue is that government officers can get away with just about any abuse of their powers, including unlawful house or office arrest, and this is becoming the norm rather than the exception. There is no longer any respect for the citizen's rights, including journalists; only a single-minded assertion of unaccountable authority. One last question. Are the authorities accountable for their actions at any point, or should journalists resign themselves to defenselessly watch the erosion of their rights? Harassed journalists and vulnerable targets may seek the path of least resistance. After all, they have families to feed. They did not set out to be test cases for democratic resilience. Constitutional officers, on the other hand, have a duty to not look away. Have officers forgotten that citizens of India, journalists included, deserve humane treatment under the law or is it that they do not have a heart?

Courtesy *The Hindu*

# Cartoons of the month



# Media in Modern Times

*We need to differentiate the media houses from the media persons. Media houses day in and day out are indulging in profiteering, are shunning social concerns, go in favour of corporate and/or political powers; some of those are being owned by these powers themselves*

P



**Dr. Pyare Lal Garg**

*The writer is a former Registrar, Baba Farid University of Health Sciences, Faridkot*

Presently media is a significant part of each and every one's daily life. It has gained the power to make or mar the society. Main purpose of Media is for information, education, knowledge, entertainment, marketing and advancement. However, today media controls the mind and body, constructs and moulds opinion, generates need and manufactures consent and shapes our lives. As such media is nothing but a mirror of modern society. Whosoever controls the media controls the mind. Materials represented through media are decided by influential groups and the powers; political, economic, social and business. Power, knowledge and communication through media intersect each other. Informative and investigative media is the 'power and the watchdog' of the society; moulds the information and the mind by way of headlines, sub heads, introduction, conclusion, page, place, column and timing of the story.

Accordingly, media being the fourth pillar of democracy needs to be more active, accurate and prompt. Media whether print, electronic or social is expected to expose the deficiencies of the Government by way of

informative and investigative journalism. Dwell upon public grievances, injustices and injuries heaped on the common man and the systems, caused by the powers that be. We have seen Radia Tapes exposure, Wiki leaks, Panama Papers and now the PANDORA Papers, the shining star of the investigative journalism in India. Journalists and media houses standing by the Government or the powers of the times put democracy at stake.

These days because of the newer challenges of cut throat competition, technological and information explosion, new developments in sciences - physical, biological and social-fast growing social media like facebook, whatsapp, instagram, twitter etc., fake news and one sided stories have emerged in a big way. Another serious blow is the dawn of the media siding with the Government and impregnated with unscientific temper. The same has been seen during corona pandemic, farmers' agitation against laws related to agriculture and farm produce; more recently in the crushing of the protesting farmers in Lakhimpur Kheri alleged to be pre-planned, wherein, in some channels the burning vehicles have



been continuously shown without even informing that four farmers have been crushed to death. Fake news has been used as a tool to carry out hateful propaganda. We need to differentiate the media houses from the media persons. Media houses day in and day out are indulging in profiteering, are shunning social concerns, go in favour of corporate and/or political powers; some of those are being owned by these powers themselves. A new phenomenon of media especially electronic and social is to project news and stories with misleading headlines, thumbnails, and repetition in such a manner so as to create an impression in the minds of the viewer/reader, as desired by the Government, media houses or TRP. Thus guilty can be projected as innocent and the innocent as villains. Bogy of khalistan, naxalite, ISI agents in the long drawn widespread farmers' agitation is a glaring example of fake, manufactured, selected and projected news.

Media persons are also becoming objects of human misery, poor working conditions, poor salaries, poor terms and conditions of service, fear of pink slip, lack of old age security, danger to life during information gathering or after the same is published or aired, danger even to family members, long and uncertain hours of working, and timeline stress. Journalists covering political big wigs,

communal violence, smugglers, underworld, various kinds of mafias involved in financial crimes, are always exposed to the risk of life and liberty. Many have been killed. Studies establish that journalists face emotional, physical and psychological risks in India, about three out of five receive threats or pressure at some point of time. 29 percent responded to have received threats once in a year, 19 percent several times a month; around 46 percent received threats on social media like Twitter or Facebook; 17 percent were threatened via apps like WhatsApp/Messenger; 76 percent journalists said that either no safety protocol existed in their organisations or that they were not trained for safety issues, as reported in the survey conducted by Vision Foundation in association with the National Union of Journalists (India) that involved 823 media persons, 21 percent being female. Percentage of journalists murdered worldwide as per beat is Culture:15, Business: 11, War: 4, Human Rights: 22, Crime: 33, Politics: 56, Corruption: 56.

The job of journalists is more demanding on knowledge, information, quickness, variety, emergency and risk. It is pertinent to mention here that the job of a journalist is really difficult and more risky as compared to even a doctor. Doctors deal with individuals; journalists deal with society. As such there is a dire

need that they are granted the same facilities as are provided to an elected representative. Because of low payments, uncertain future, risk to life, lack of old age security, they fall prey to the yellow journalism, fake news, graft and even exploitative tactics. The same can be avoided by way of the unity, cooperation and mutual support. Such a phenomenon can be strengthened if they join together in a strong organization. We see that unity and organized struggle coupled with dutifulness is the key to success in the area of getting themselves treated at par with the elected representatives of the equal level i.e. Block, Sub-Division, District, State and Central level.

Last but not the least one must admit that media depends on advertisements for its sustenance; major contributor towards this is the Government and the big business. As such these two identities have direct influence on the kind and quality of reporting. If the news or any matter is not to their liking they use the knife of cutting down the advertisement and as such subjugate the media and compel them to sack the journalists that prove irritant. Many examples are available in the recent past. However, independent and no profit no loss based media with subscription funds provided by the readers, is a new option being tried out in India.





# Mullahs, please stay off TV news debates. You are not helping!

*The past seven years have perfected the dark arts of the TV news channels on how to corner one community of Indians, using a 'mullah' as a proxy for the entire community, to heap abuse and more on them, without any fear of challenge by the 'mullah'*



**Shaukat H. Mohammed**

*The writer is a senior journalist based at Hyderabad*

**T**he tamasha on TV has gone on long enough, over 7 years to be precise. But in the interest of public harmony and peace, it needs to end now.

I am alluding, of course, to the practice of almost all TV news channels of inviting semi-literate mullahs on TV to debate matters that have little or nothing to do with religious affairs. The mullah may be highly qualified in his religious practices, but this expertise is narrow, and can at best be used to clarify matters of faith, and certainly not historical disputes that have somehow become enmeshed in the socio-cultural discourse in the country. One must thank the right-wing groups for mixing the historical with the religious to derive electoral benefits for right-wing parties, but that debate is not for now.

I take objection to 'mullahs', who are barely literate in matters of secular life, being given access to the air waves by mendacious TV news channel anchors, to blivi-

ate on matters they have little idea about.

The past seven years have perfected the dark arts of the TV news channels on how to corner one community of Indians, using a 'mullah' as a proxy for the entire community, to heap abuse and more on them, without any fear of challenge by the 'mullah'.

Here's how this cunning programming works. The TV channel books a little-known mullah to stand by to be interviewed on a subject that has some marginal bearing to their faith. To wit, in recent weeks, when a thuggish gang of carpetbaggers calling themselves the "Taliban" rapidly took over the levers of power in Afghanistan from the government supported by the Western powers. The TV news channels began salivating at the prospect of spewing venom against the community to further the fault lines already existing in society. The channels were helped by the unhelpful comments by Muslim MPs and leaders of Muslim social organisations like the All India Muslim Personal Law Board. The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan was likened to our own freedom movement by Shafiqur Rahman Barq,



***The TV channels rounded second-rung mullahs to come on TV to have the stuffing kicked out of them on air. You can recognise the mullah from a mile away. His luxurious beard without moustache, a skull cap or Turkish hat, and gaudy overcoat, give him away***

the Lok Sabha member for Sambhal in Uttar Pradesh. Sajjad Nomani, a spokesman for the AIMPLB, sent his warmest wishes to the Taliban cutthroats.

The TV channels rounded second-rung mullahs to come on TV to have the stuffing kicked out of them on air. You can recognise the mullah from a mile away. His luxurious beard without moustache, a skull cap or Turkish hat, and gaudy overcoat, give him away.

The first tier mullahs, who thankfully saw through the pernicious game of the TV news channels, have stopped entertaining the TV channels, but the second-tier mullahs have stepped in to fill the breach. I understand that these gentlemen are paid Rs. 5,000/- to face pitiless abuse, not only from the anchor, but also from his or her guests, during the one-hour debate each evening. The mullah tries without success to tie events happening in the real-world to things mentioned in his religion's texts, and this is exactly what the anchor wants. He uses this to run down the entire community, its religious beliefs and its ability to integrate with local communities.

Another foolish tack taken by the 'mullah'

is to try the oldest trick in the book: whataboutery. Whataboutery is the one trap which the mullah tries to spring, unmindful of the fact that the TV anchor and the other guests are waiting to spring the trap, and pummel him with questions about the community in India, which has no bearing on what is happening in Afghanistan. The narrative is shaped in such a way that the foolish pronouncements of the mullah are taken to be the beliefs of the majority of the community. This perception is reinforced night after evening, driving millions of Indians to believe that the Muslims in their midst, who are as much Indian as they are, are backward looking monsters who want to impose 'shariat' on India.

So, mullahs in the interest of peace and quiet in our communities, kindly desist from appearing on national TV debates, even it means losing whatever modest income such appearances give you, by giving you a platform to air your views that are not compatible with the aspirational India of 2021. You will be doing the community and the country a favour.



# IJU calls for nationwide protests

*NEC has passed a resolution severely condemning the undemocratic and unilateral attitude of Justice C.K Prasad, Chairman, Press Council of India in constituting the 14th Council.*

# T



**Y. Narender Reddy**

*Secretary, IJU*

The Indian Journalists Union (IJU) severely condemned the indifferent attitude of central and state governments in resolving the problems of journalist fraternity in the country. The National Executive Committee (NEC) of IJU which met online on 12 September 2021 has decided to organize an agitation programme on 2nd October protesting growing attacks on journalists and media freedom. The NEC has expressed serious concern over the attitude of the Union Government and some state governments which are foisting false cases on journalists, writers and civil rights workers. The NEC decided to bring the plight of working journalists during the pandemic period into focus and seek help from central and state governments.

K Sreenivas Reddy, President, IJU chaired the meeting. Y. Narender Reddy, Secretary formally welcomed the members. The meeting paid homage to journalists who died due to covid and IJU founder President Santhosh Kumar and former Secretary K. Amarnath who passed away since last NEC meeting.

Com. Sreenivas Reddy in his address said many journalists died due to corona in the second spell. Many more journalists were affected. Though many state governments announced financial assistance to the families of deceased journalists some Governments are oblivious to the plight of journalists. He condemned the extra judicial surveillance on journalists and human

rights activists. He recalled the demand made by the IJU for a high level enquiry into Pegasus affair either by a Joint parliamentary committee or any other agency monitored by the Supreme Court. Sreenivas Reddy expressed concern over rulings by some courts which are detrimental to the freedom of speech. He expressed dismay over the Judgment of Madras High Court in which it directed State Government to constitute Press Council of Tamilnadu with sweeping powers. He said it is not only against the first Press Commission's recommendations but also in tangent with democratic spirit. He demanded the Union Government to continue implementation of the Working Journalists Act until the new labour code comes into effect.

Balwinder Singh Jammu, Secretary General in his report said that in the face of rampant spread of Covid-19 in some states including Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Punjab IJU member unions have taken up agitations on the problems faced by journalists and organized meetings and seminars. He said that the IJU will soon make entry into states where it has no representation until now. He requested Sreenivas Reddy, SN Sinha and D. Somasundar to strive for bringing back the unions in the North Eastern States into IJU fold. In Delhi also there is a need for union activities, he said.

M.A. Majid, former member, PCI

offered help in forming an affiliate union in Maharashtra by strengthening the hands of Virahath Ali, General Secretary, Telangana State Union of Working Journalists who has been having a go at that.

S N Sinha, former President, IJU suggested holding physical meeting of the NEC as positivity rate of Covid is decreasing across the country. He also urged the leadership to take steps to hold plenary early next year.

Com. Tsewang Rigzin, General Secretary, Ladakh Journalists Union said that they were trying to expand into Kargil area. Com. Ramesh Shankar Pandey, General Secretary, Uttar Pradesh Working Journalists Union informed that UP Government paid Rs.10 lakhs each to families of journalists who died due to corona.

NEC member from Jharkhand Com. Bijay Singh offered to host next physical meeting of NEC. Com. Pramod Kumar Jha, Convenor, Jharkhand Working Journalists Union explained their efforts in strengthening the union.

Com. Uma Shankar Praveen, General Secretary, Journalists Union of Uttarakhand informed the NEC that the state government paid an ex gratia of Rs.5 lakhs each to the families of 18 journalists, died due to Covid-19. This was a major demand of their Union. He said they have opposed the renaming of the "superannuation pension scheme for working journalists" as crisis ridden superannuation pension scheme for journalists, fearing that the term "crisis ridden" may give scope for manipulation.

Presenting report of Andhra Pradesh, D. Somasundar, NEC member said despite severe corona spread in the state APUWJ has taken up lot of activity. About 130 journalists died in the state due to Covid. After a prolonged struggle of APUWJ the state government conceded to pay a solatium of Rs. 5 lakhs each to the families of journalists succumbed to the virus. This was an assurance given by none other than the Chief Minister himself to K. Sreenivas Reddy and D. Amar, former President and National Media Adviser to the CM. Even after



*K. Sreenivas Reddy, IJU, President participating from Hyderabad office*

issuing a GO in this regard the Government has backed out of its promise. Somsundar said that the Government has been so indifferent they were unable to issue new accreditations since two years. Against the over 21,000 accreditations issued by the previous Government now only 7000 journalists are accredited. Journalists Health Scheme and Accident Insurance Scheme are not renewed. In this backdrop APUWJ has observed call attention day in 120 centers across the state on August 17th, foundation day of APUWJ.

Com. Ambati Anjaneyulu, Vice-President said under the guidance and able leadership of Com. K. Sreenivas Reddy APUWJ is striving for mitigation of problems of working journalists in the state.

Com. V.B. Rajan, Secretary, IJU from Kerala said the Department of Information and Broadcasting appointed a 12 member committee to review and revise the criterion for selecting journalists eligible for Central Welfare Scheme. At present different criteria are followed in different states. There must be common criteria and accredited and non accredited journalists must be treated equally. Welfare scheme must be beneficial to all journalists working in different categories of media. The Committee should seriously consider these aspects,

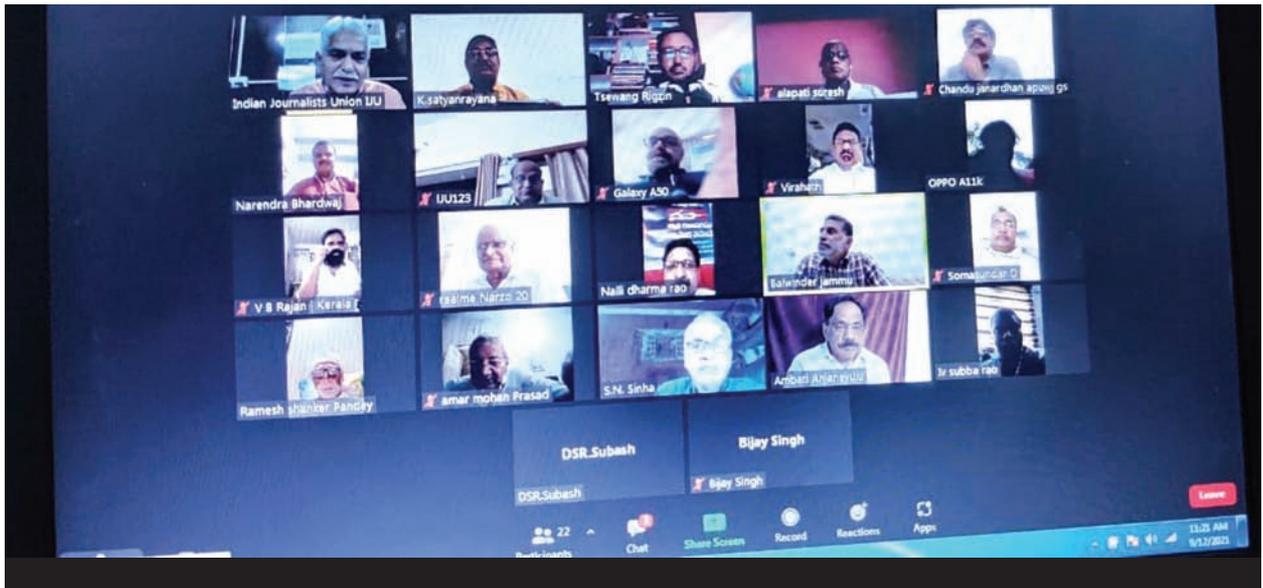
he said.

Bindu Singh, NEC member from Punjab said all the district units in their state are very active. She informed that the Punjab Union has been organizing meetings and seminars in support of the farmer's agitation.

IJU Secretary Com. Shivendra Narayan Singh from Bihar while presenting his state report said journalists in the State were in distress. They are not getting salaries and managements have resorted to heavy retrenchments. The state government sanctioned Rs. 4 lakhs each to families of journalists died due to covid. Another senior leader Com. Amar Mohan Prasad explained the plight of journalists working for UNI.

D. Krushna Reddy, NEC member from Telangana said that in Telangana journalists were not allowed into various department offices in the Secretariat. Though the government issued health cards to journalists, corporate hospitals are not extending cashless insurance facility to them as the Government is not paying bills to the hospitals. After a long struggle the Government announced Rs. 2 lakhs solatium to families of journalists who died due to corona, he informed. He said that the Union was demanding to increase this amount to Rs.5 Lakhs.

Com. M.P.Mathimaharaja, President, Puducherry Journalists Union informed



the NEC that the state government was giving Rs.50,000 aid to journalists effected by covid and paying Rs.10 lakhs each to the families of deceased journalists. DSR Subash, Secretary, IJU from Tamilnadu presented his state report. Tamilnadu Government was paying Rs. 5 Lakhs each to the families of journalists who died due to covid. Subash offered to hold National Council/ Plenary of IJU in Tamilnadu with the help of Puducherry unit.

Com. Bhaskar Reddy, President, Karnataka State Journalists Union informed that their Union was preparing to organize a Mega Health Camp for journalists on October 1st. He said that the KSJU would take up membership drive next month.

### **IJU challenges the decision of PCI Chairman**

NEC has passed a resolution severely condemning the undemocratic and unilateral attitude of Justice C.K Prasad, Chairman, Press Council of India in constituting the 14<sup>th</sup> Council. The NEC meeting has extensively discussed the issue. Participating in the discussion K. Sreenivas Reddy, S.N. Sinha, Balwinder Singh Jammu and M.A. Majid informed the meeting that the Chairman was hell bent on keeping the national unions

away from 14th council. Though the Council meeting has recommended positively on the claims of national unions the Chairman vetoed it.

According to the PCI Act the decision of the Council is final but the Chairman has not respected the majority decision even though all members unanimously passed a resolution favoring national unions. The NEC was informed that IJU has challenged the unilateral decisions of Justice CK Prasad in the court and the efforts to take the issue to a logical end would continue. The meeting approved the actions of the President and Secretary General on the issue of PCI including filing the case in the Delhi High Court.

### **Support to the farmers bandh**

The NEC meeting extended its support and solidarity to the September 27 'Bharat Bandh' call given by farmers' organizations to bolster their fight against the three farm laws.

In a resolution passed in the meeting the NEC urged all member state unions to follow suit in support of the just cause. IJU holds the opinion that the demands of the farmers are very genuine and the union government should make amends by immediately quashing the three farm laws, the resolution said.

### **Barbarous attacks of Taliban**

NEC condemned the barbarous attacks of Taliban forces in Afghanistan on civilians and particularly on journalists and media houses covering protests of Afghan women demanding their rights. The Taliban have assaulted the news presenters and were forcing them at gun point to present Pro-Taliban news. Four reporters covering a women's rights demonstration in Kabul were detained by Taliban forces and were subjected to violence, the resolution said.

IJU expressed serious concern over the growing threat of attacks on news channels and journalists in Afghanistan by Taliban seeking to minimize news bulletins and remove critical talk shows and entertainment shows.

Prem Nath Bhargava, Treasurer, IJU, I. V. Subba Rao, President, Chandu Janardhan, General Secretary of APUWJ, K Virahath Ali, General Secretary, TUWJ, Siya Ram Pandey, President, Narendra Bharadwaj, Secretary, Uttar Pradesh Working Journalists Union, Rinchen Angmao, President, Ladakh Journalists Union and NEC members K Satyanarayana (Telangana), B. Jayashri (West Bengal), Special Invitees to NEC K Ramnarayana, Nalli Dharma Rao also participated in the meeting. ❏

# 'Samvad' times in Punjab

Bindu Singh

**T**he pandemic has had its toll on both journalists and media houses. Apart from the loss of life claimed by covid, the effects of the pandemic included job cuts and wage reduction. Not that the media houses have been doing good; but they pounced upon this opportunity to impose unjust retrenchments and wage cuts for those retained. And those on the line of duty did a tremendous job in the field but they were not recognised as frontline warriors in the fight against corona. During these hard times, the Punjab and Chandigarh Journalists Union (PCJU) has been striving continuously for the welfare of working journalists.

As soon as corona curbs were relaxed by the administration the PCJU organized a series of seminars. The first such 'Samvad', was organised at Chandigarh on the theme, 'The role of media in the present scenario'. Hartosh Bal, Political Editor, Caravan magazine, Devinder Sharma, agri economist, Ramesh Inder Singh, former Chief Secretary of Punjab and Balwinder Jammu, President, PCJU spoke on the occasion.

Hartosh Bal in his address said problem was with corporates that have taken over the media houses. Journalists are failing in their duty due to the policies of intimidation pursued by the Government

and also the pressures from the managements, corporates in most cases. "How can journalists ask relevant questions on the Government policies in this kind of a scenario", he quipped.

The second Samvad in the series was organised at Ludhiana. This time the theme was "Challenges before media in present times"

The speakers on the occasion were Dr. Piyare Lal Garg, former Registrar, Baba Farid Medical University and well known scholar Prof. Jagmohan Singh



*Dr. Piyare Lal Garg addressing a seminar at Chandigarh*

and Balwinder Singh Jammu, President, PCJU. Jai Singh Chhibber, President, Chandigarh Unit of the Union had also participated.

Dr. Piyara Lal Garg, former Registrar, Baba Farid University said that debate and dissent was being snubbed in the country and that was a big challenge to the media. And it discourages young journalists who want to take up investigative journalism, he said. Professor Jagmohan Singh said that journalists should be able to distinguish

between authentic and fake information.

Balwinder Jammu in his address said the work of a journalist is a tough job but an important one. Collecting information and disseminating it is in the utmost public interest as it empowers the public in a democracy. Hence it is the sacred duty of the journalist to publish or broadcast truth, only truth.

On October 2, the day Mahatma Gandhi was born, the third 'Samvad' was organized at Chandigarh on the subject, 'Corona - The role of Journalists and the Government'. Ruchika M Khanna, Secretary General of Tribune Employees Union, Dr. Piyara Lal Garg, Prof. Khushal Singh, Balwinder Jammu President, PCJU, Jai Singh Chhibber, President and Bindu Singh General Secretary of Chandigarh Unit of PCJU participated.

Ruchika M Khanna in her address insisted on the importance of journalists maintaining their professional integrity at any cost.

Balwinder Jammu spoke on the hardships faced by journalist fraternity during Corona. While applauding the activities taken up by the Chandigarh unit of the Union, Balwinder said units in other districts should also organise such interactive sessions.

Bindu Singh lamented that journalists were working in the interest of public during corona period but the governments did not recognise them as frontline warriors, depriving them and their families of the State support system and associated benefits. ❏

# Aryan Khan versus Lakhimpur Kheri: Guess what made the news?

*A comparison of how some of our major news channels covered the two incidents is a testament to everything that's wrong with TV news today*

## Diksha Munjal



It's been a heavy news weekend. On Saturday evening, the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) raided a "rave party" on a cruise liner off the coast of Mumbai.

Quite predictably, major news channels jumped on the story proclaiming that a "drug cartel" had been busted. What the NCB actually recovered was 13 grams of cocaine, 21 grams of charas, 22 pills of MDMA and 5 grams of MD - all categorised as "intermediate quantities". The NCB arrested eight persons, including actor Shah Rukh Khan's son Aryan Khan, and all hell broke loose in many of our "national" TV news channels.

Meanwhile, at around 4 pm on Sunday, bloody images of violence, and injured protestors came out of Lakhimpur Kheri in Uttar Pradesh - it emerged soon that four farmers were killed after a convoy of three cars, one of which belonged to BJP leader and union minister of state Ajay Mishra Teni's son, Ashish Mishra, had hit the protesting farmers. Violence escalated and visuals showed arson and vehicles on fire.

So far, the death toll has reached eight people, including a journalist and Bharatiya Janata Party workers.

A comparison of how some of our major news channels covered the two incidents is a

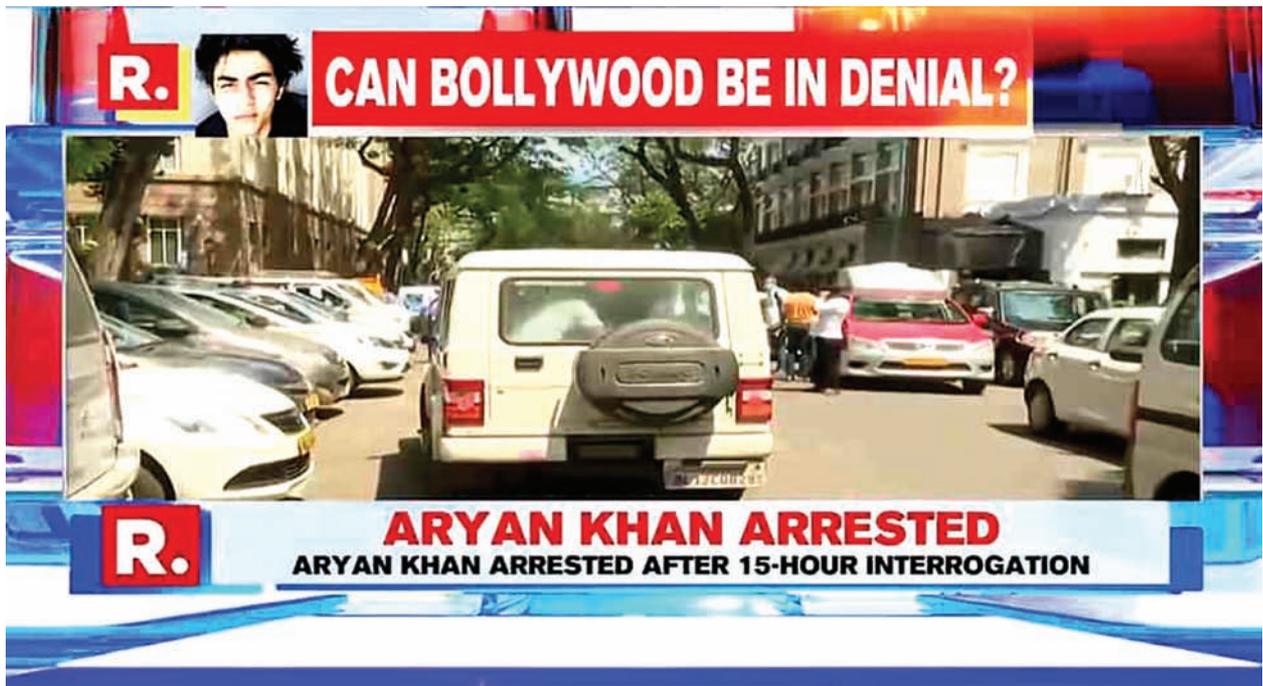
testament to everything that's wrong with TV news today - while anchors jumped to declare Aryan Khan guilty, they tiptoed around the daylight murderous violence at Lakhimpur Kheri. Needless to say, 13 grams of cocaine and Aryan Khan overpowered coverage of death and destruction in Uttar Pradesh.

The "drug bust" had Big Media deploy huge teams of reporters and resources at every location - the NCB office, Shah Rukh Khan's residence Mannat and so on - to report on a loop. However, Lakhimpur Kheri was presumably too far off for channels to send their army of reporters to. There were virtually no ground reports or inputs coming in from the scene of death.

On multiple channels, not only was there a huge delay in breaking the news from Lakhimpur Kheri, but there was next to no ground reportage despite the network of stingers that most TV news channels have. There weren't even agency reports from say an ANI or a PTI, which is usually quick to hit the spot.

## Farmers < Aryan Khan

Times Now held two debate shows on The Newshour, one about the NCB raid and the other about the clashes in Lakhimpur. The anchor, Swati Joshi, opened the 12-minute



long Lakhimpur debate by saying that "massive clashes had broken out between protesting farmers and the police," in which "the farmers resorted to violence and arson as the police tried to control the situation."

The news of eight casualties as a result of the incident did not find a mention in the opening monologue, but the anchor said: "Farmer netas claim that a few protesting farmers have been killed in the clashes." This when news of four farmers having died had already broken on Twitter - a platform that often feeds many of Times Now's primetime debates.

The anchor was soon pulled up for her remarks, by a representative of the farmer group Samyukt Kisan Morcha who pointed out that the clashes were not between "protesting farmers and the police" but the "BJP goons and its leader Ajay Mishra's son had run over farmers with their cars."

The other debate about the NCB raid, which was 25-minutes long, was titled: "NCB arrests SRK's son Aryan in drugs case; will Bollywood nexus be

out?" If it isn't clear by the title already, the Sushant Singh Rajput case was regurgitated for good measure.

While there was no ground report from Lakhimpur, Times Now reporters were present outside the NCB headquarters in Mumbai, following vehicles that ferried the "culprits" and were breaking "exclusive" developments every other hour - from the quantity of drugs recovered to accessing Aryan Khan's arrest memo and predicting his jail term.

#### Total blackout

Throughout Sunday, Arnab Goswami's Republic World managed to completely black out the Lakhimpur Kheri incident, with not a single report, update or debate on it.

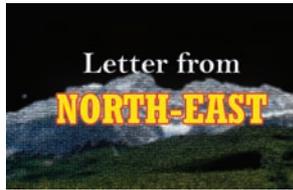
For the NCB drug case, however, it gave minute-to-minute updates from the ground, even sending a reporter to stand outside Shah Rukh Khan's Mumbai residence, Mannat. The reporter ironically showed how fans had lined up outside his house. "We also saw two cars coming out of Mannat and in one of those cars, we were told, Gauri Khan was there,"

said one reporter, adding that she was initially supposed to head to the NCB office but she did not go there, because "probably she and Shah Rukh Khan are roping in and meeting a lot of lawyers." What would we do without such insights?

Republic World finally reported on the Lakhimpur case this morning. The news peg was mostly focused on the detention of politicians Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Akhilesh Yadav, with the anchor saying that the "UP government has made it very clear that it will not allow politicians to take mileage out of the unfortunate incident."

All questions, of course, were reserved for opposition party leaders travelling to Lakhimpur - this was a case of "political tourism", thundered an anchor. The channel also focused on how more farmers and political leaders travelling to the site would become a security threat, commending the Uttar Pradesh police for taking "total control of the situation" in Lakhimpur district. ❏

Courtesy  
News Laundry



# Let's talk about Self-reform and Financial Transparency in Media



**Nava Thakuria**

*The writer is a Guwahati based journalist and the country representative to Press Emblem Campaign, Geneva*

Along with the journalists across the country, the scribes in northeast India also start discussing if, at all, the proprietors of mainstream newspapers and satellite news channels can be compelled to make their annual balance-sheets public. Moreover, will it be possible to ask the professional journalists to go for self-declarations about their assets so that they can question the financial integrity of individuals in other professions including the politicians in the largest democracy on Earth.

The debate was prompted with the Union Information & Broadcasting ministry (I&B) taking initiative to review the existing guidelines for welfare schemes meant for Indian working journalists. The ministry, in other way, wants to have recommendations for the required changes on the backdrop of changing media scenario. It believes that redefining professional guidelines for journalists, who are duly engaged with both traditional and modern/digital media outlets, has become necessary.

The review committee is expected to maintain the parity between the accredited (recognized) and non-recognized scribes as the acknowledgement rules may vary from one State to another. For any reason, an accredited journalist should not be considered as an elite, because the status could be altered abruptly with a change of professional portfolios in the media houses.

Headed by renowned journalist Ashok Kumar Tandon, the committee comprises senior scribes namely Sachidanand Murthy, Shekhar Aiyar, Amitabh Sinha,

Shishir Kumar Sinha, Ravinder Kumar, Hitesh Shankar, Smriti K Ramachandran, Amit Kumar, Vasudha Venugopal along with Kanchan Prasad from Press Information Bureau as its members.

According to the government run Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI), the country with one billion plus population has over 1,15,000 registered publications with more than 17,500 in the newspaper category. Those are published in different languages including English, Hindi, Urdu, Sanskrit, Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Malayalam, Kannada, Gujarati, Punjabi, Odia, Assamese, etc. It has over 1,600 satellite television channels where more than 400 are news related outlets. At the same time, over 300 million Indians use social media in different categories. Lately many professional Indian journalists have abandoned the mainstream media (many of them were sacked by the managements) and joined the digital platforms to exercise the freedom of expression guaranteed by the Constitution.

Prior to it, the north-eastern scribes debated over the concern expressed by Madras High Court in a recent directive to Tamil Nadu Government to constitute a Press Council so that the menace of fake news/journalists could be legally addressed. The court ordered the State Government to form 'Press Council of Tamil Nadu' within a specific period to eliminate bogus journalists from the media fraternity.

The court observed that it becomes a common sight these days to find posh cars

with 'Press' stickers on the front windshield being driven by unscrupulous fraudsters masquerading as working journalists. There have been quite a number of instances of such fraudsters being booked by the police. Politicians, land sharks, smugglers and even murderers have been seen to be hand in glove with these journalists. The State directorate of Information and Public Relations is aware of this, but the officials turn a blind eye, to avoid any wrath in the hands of those fake journalists. This needs to be stopped to ensure that journalism remains clean and strong. In view of the above position, necessary directions have to be issued to clean up the media in the interest of public, added the court in its order.

The court even asked the government to avoid allotting any house or grant directly to any applicant journalist

unless it is routed through the council to be constituted, which after due diligence can issue such benefits. It shall prohibit conduct of state conferences or meetings by journalist's associations without permission or approval from the council, which shall get details on the source of income and other relevant details before giving permission to them.

The common people aggrieved by the fake news or motivated and agenda-based news can send their complaints on fake journalists to the welfare board, which shall inquire and initiate criminal action against such scribes as they are simply a menace and threat to society. The council is proposed to have the power to direct the carrier of offending news items for a rejoinder or an apology urgently. An active forum of journalists recently opined that the media persons across the country should introspect over

the situation focusing on the Madras High Court observations. Journalists' Forum Assam (JFA), in a recent statement, also urged that the mainstream media houses to reveal their financial balance-sheets describing how much money they spent annually for the benefits of their employees including the working journalists.

At the same time, the forum pointed out that the so-called glamorous and highly paid editor-journalists should think of disclosing their assets (along with liabilities) to establish their integrity first as an exemplary manner, as they often demand transparencies from employees in other sectors. After all, an urgent necessity arises with an aim to reduce the erosion in goodwill among the valued readers, listeners and viewers before it's too late.



## IJU stunned at Madras High Court Judgement

The Indian Journalists Union (IJU) expressed dismay at an order by the Madras High Court in which a Division bench made sweeping comments on journalists and their associations/unions and issued imprudent directions to the State Government. In a statement issued on 30th August IJU President K. Sreenivas Reddy and Secretary General Balwinder Singh Jammu said, one can understand the anxiety of the hon'ble judges to curb the menace of fake news and fake journalists but the prescribed cure shouldn't kill the patient. The order gives the public a scary impression that the country is teeming with card wielding fake journalists and that many journalist unions are also fake and they pose biggest threat to press

freedom and free speech. The Bench issued an order to the State Government to constitute Press Council of Tamilnadu giving it sweeping powers to regulate the whole gamut of journalists/unions and their identity and activities. The IJU leaders said Press Council of India was constituted on the recommendations of the first Press Commission and accreditation rules also came into being as a result of that.

The main function of the Council is to regulate print media and electronic and digital media are yet to be brought under its ambit. All other activities of journalists including their forming of unions/associations and press clubs are governed by various laws of the land like

Trade Union Act and Societies Act. Like any walk of life in the society the profession of journalism also has its black sheep. But they are neither out of proportion nor unmendable to defy the existing statutes, the IJU leaders said. Stating that the bench went to the extent of prescribing minimum circulation to news papers and magazines, the IJU leaders said the order instead of buttressing the right to free speech, in effect, curbs the freedom of expression and the freedom of association. They urged the Government of Tamilnadu to immediately seek remedial measures to nullify the ill conceived order of the Madras High Court and added that journalists and unions in Tamilnadu should also take initiative in this regard.

# ACCEPTING JOURNALIST AS A JOURNALIST

# I

s the profession of journalism facing a threat to its survival in the country? The question assumes significance because journalists have, of late, been frequently becoming a subject for news, which is the last thing they want to be. They are facing attacks from not only anti-social elements but also different governments and their agencies, including the police, political groups and so-called bhaktas. Free media or freedom to journalists to operate is, of course, unthinkable under authoritarian regimes. We have been witnessing this in Afghanistan since the Taliban took control, who beat up or kill journalists for reporting the brewing resentment of the Afghan people and also closed many media organizations. There, it is the government that decides not just what people should wear but also what they should think.

We are fortunate, of course, to be living in a democratic country, but recent events in Lakhimpur Kheri strike a different note. Eight persons, including a journalist and four farmers, were killed in a unfortunate incident in this border district of UP when a fleet of vehicles, led by Ashish Mishra, son of a Union Minister, ran over the farmers protesting against the three "black farm laws". Five of them were killed when the vehicles ran over the protesters. The farmers have been protesting against these laws for the past ten months and were threatened by Union Minister of State for Home Ajay Mishra, who is the local Member of Parliament also. On receiving the news of the killing of the four farmers, the MoS and his supporters accused the protesting farmers of having killed four BJP supporters in retaliation. They included the name of Raman Kashyap, a local journalist of a news channel, too, among these BJP supporters. The local police also filed two FIRs -- one on the death of four farmers in which Union Minister and his son were named as accused and the other on the death of four supporters of the Union Minister.

When the local journalist Raman Kashyap failed to return home and a hue and cry was raised by his family members, it was found that he too had been killed in the incident. His family said that he had gone to cover the protest and accused Ashish, son of the Union Minister and his aides of having murdered him. They also alleged that they were being pressurized to blame the farmers instead. They also accused some TV journalists of

"trying to cross-question us and make us say that the farmers had beaten him to death." Raman Kashyap's brother Pawan, however, refused to obey and told the media: "That did not happen. As my father and I have told everybody, my brother was crushed by a vehicle in the fleet of the Union Minister's son and also shot at by somebody in those vehicles."

The way some journalists there tried to presurize the Raman Kashyap's family to shift the blame onto farmers for his death shows the deplorable state to which some sections of the country's media have sunk today and how they have divorced journalism in an attempt to become the mouthpiece of the ruling party. It is vitally imperative for the media to report the facts of the case and not try to be a party or investigating officer to create different versions of the incident. The journalist organizations like the Indian Journalists Union (IJU) or the Editors' Guild of India (EGI) have rightly demanded an independent inquiry to establish the cause of the journalist's death. As the EGI said in their statement, in what is clearly a terror attack meant to spread fear amongst the farmers, the killing of Kashyap raises many questions."

The murder of Raman Kashyap raised many questions not because there were different versions of the report but because of the question of how and why a journalist was not mentioned as a journalist but described as a supporter of the killers. As rightly observed by the Supreme Court, it is difficult to have a free and fair inquiry by the local police or CBI because of the influence of the Union Minister and the ruling establishment.

## Nobel Statement

The Nobel Peace Prize to journalists Maria Ressa from the Philippines and Dmitri A. Muratov of Russia is an acknowledgement of the challenges of, and threats to, journalism today. The Nobel committee, in awarding the Nobel Peace Prize 2021 has made a clear statement on the state of the freedom of expression in an era that has seen the rise and rise of authoritarian populists in several countries. The Committee says that they are representatives of all the journalists who stand for this ideal in a world where democracy and freedom of the press face increasingly adverse conditions. Let's keep this spirit of freedom of the Press by standing firmly as the fourth pillar of democracy to fight for the voiceless people. 

## THE LAST PAGE



By  
**S N SINHA**

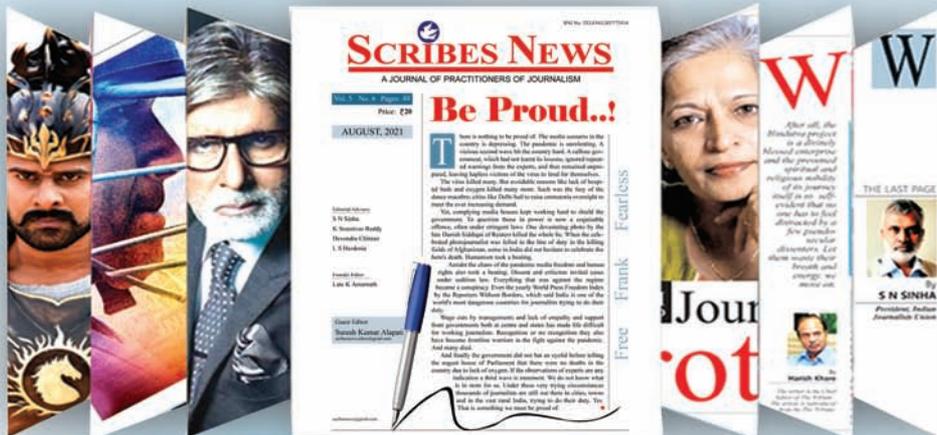
*The writer is a senior journalist based in Delhi and former President, Indian Journalists Union*



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Heralding a new dawn of Women's Welfare, Self Reliance and Empowerment...  
Jagananna Government is marching towards making every woman a Lakhpathi...

**Second year in a row...**

# “YSR AASARA”

To bring joy to the lives of about **78.76** lakh women from **7.97** lakh devastated Self Help Groups across the State, Jagananna Government is depositing financial assistance of **Rs. 25,517 Crores** in **4** installments. Sri Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, Hon'ble Chief Minister to launch the distribution of second tranche of YSR Aasara assistance of nearly **Rs. 6,440 Crores** in Ongole, Prakasam district, Today..

Amount to be deposited in festive atmosphere across the State from October 7th to October 18th except in YSR District, where Election code (MCC) is in vogue...

In addition to **Rs. 6,440 Crores** being provided today, the total financial assistance provided by Jagananna Government so far under "YSR Aasara" is **Rs. 12,759 Crores...**

**1 Previous Government..**

- Under the previous Government, Self Help Group women were promised a waiver of loans by the Government and were asked not to repay loans... However, as the previous Government went back on its word and failed to fulfill the promise made, the debts of these SHG women which stood at **Rs. 14,204 Crores** in 2014 have mounted to **Rs. 25,517 Crores** by 11th April 2019 (election date) as per SLBC final list.
- As a result, **18.36%** of SHGs turned into Non Performing Assets (NPAs) and most SHGs became defunct...
- Due to non payment of loans, credit rating of SHGs has been downgraded to "C" & "D" from grade "A"...
- The previous Government has not only reneged on the promise of a loan waiver but also scrapped the **Zero Interest Scheme** from October 2016, thus pushing SHGs into deep trouble.
- As a result, the SHG women were forced to pay about **Rs. 3,036 Crores** of interest to the banks including penal interest.

**2 Promises made by Jagananna during Padayatra...**

Moved by the plight of the women who were stuck in deep debt trap, Jagananna has promised during his 'Padayatra', to repay the total bank loan outstanding as on election date (11.04.2019) in **4 installments** directly in to SHG bank accounts... And the same was included in the **Election Manifesto**...

**3 Abiding by the promises made...**

Unlike previous Governments who regard Manifesto as a bunch of scrap papers to be thrown into dustbin after elections, for Jagananna Government, Manifesto is as sacred as **The Bhagavad Gita, Bible and Quran**... Our Jagananna Government has prepared a Welfare Calender in advance and has fulfilled **95%** of the promises made in Manifesto...

**4 Steps taken by Jagananna Government for women's welfare soon after coming to power...**

- Under 'YSR Aasara' scheme, nearly **Rs. 12,759 Crores** were deposited in to the bank accounts of SHGs including the first tranche of **Rs. 6,319 Crores** and second tranche of **Rs. 6,440 Crores** being given from Today.
- Jagananna Government has revived the Zero Interest Scheme scrapped by the previous Government in 2016... **Rs. 2,362 Crores** have been deposited in two years in to the bank accounts of **9.41 Lakh SHGs** belonging to **98 Lakh women** under **YSR Sunna Vaddi Scheme**...
- The Self Help Groups which were defunct during the previous Government have once again become active as Jagananna Government is paying the interest directly to the women groups who are repaying the loans in time. Hence, the Non-performing assets (NPAs) have also come down drastically from **18.36%** to **0.73%**
- SHGs that were downgraded to "C" & "D" in previous Government have bounced back to **Grade 'A'** with the active support of Jagananna Government.

**5 Women Empowerment, Self Reliance...**

Jagananna Government is lending a helping hand to those women who are interested in utilising Aasara assistance for creating livelihood opportunities to stand on their own... In order to provide a sustainable income and brighten their lives, Jagananna Government is hand holding the same women for four years by providing technical, banking, marketing assistance and training facilities. To facilitate this and ensure that beneficiaries run their business without any risk, Jagananna Government has entered into agreements with reputed MNCs such as **P&G, ITC, RELIANCE, HUL, AMUL, ALLANA, MAHENDRA & KHEYTI, TANGER** and with Banks to help them to excel as Entrepreneurs.

**6**

A total of **3,05,754** women have benefitted till date by setting up retail shops, rearing of cows, buffaloes, sheep and goat are receiving an additional income of **Rs. 7,000** to **Rs. 10,000** per month. Jagananna Government has made this possible by tying up these beneficiaries with Corporate Entities and Banks. The tie up with **AMUL** has increased competition in the market, thus enabling dairy farmers to receive an additional income ranging from **Rs. 5** to **Rs. 15** per litre of milk.

**YSR Cheyutha**    **YSR Aasara**    **YSR Sunna Vaddi**

**YSR AASARA - A BOON TO SHG WOMEN**

Sri Botcha Satyanarayana  
Hon'ble Minister for Municipal Administration and Urban Development

Sri Peddireddy Ramachandra Reddy  
Hon'ble Minister for Panchayat Raj and Rural Development

Note: The second tranche of "YSR Aasara" programme will be formally launched by Sri Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, Hon'ble Chief Minister at 11AM on 7th October, 2021 in Ongole, Prakasam District. Do watch this live on all popular news channels...

Issued By: Commissioner, Information & Public Relations Department, Government of Andhra Pradesh