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Ostrich Mentality!

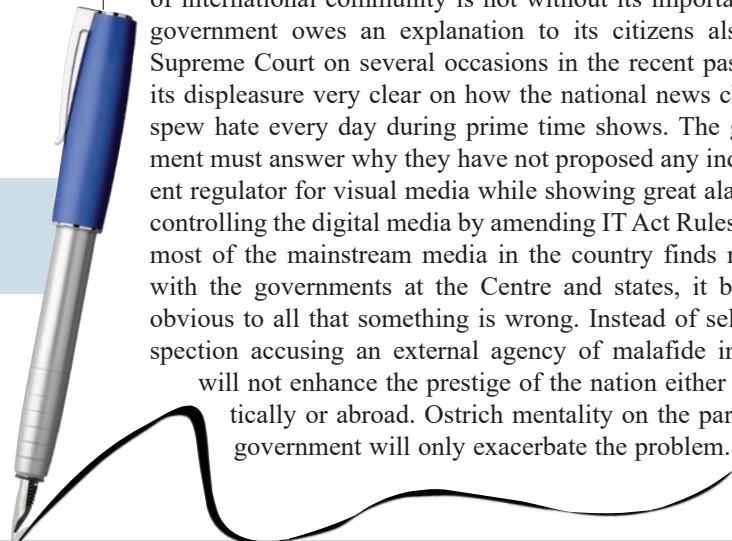
This time the decline is sharp. And the rhetoric from the powers that be to rubbish the yearly appraisal is also correspondingly more caustic. The Minister for Foreign Affairs called the exercise 'mind games' and said, "I thought we had the most uncontrollable press and somebody is getting something fundamentally wrong". The response betrays an urge to control the press, and as a natural consequence, an intolerance for the few adamant news outlets. For a change the Solicitor General also stepped in. Responding to the observation of a Supreme Court Judge sitting on the Bench the law officer said, "that depends on who is giving the rating. I can have my own forum and give India the first rating".

This is not the first time that the government denounced the ranking given to India by the French non-profit organisation Reporters without Borders (RSF) in its annual World Press Freedom Index. While India stood at 150 among the 180 countries evaluated in 2022 the ranking in 2023 slumped to 161.

We can understand the anger of the government at the country's press freedom under their watch being ranked behind countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan and Somalia; but they would do well to introspect a little. While the perception of international community is not without its importance the government owes an explanation to its citizens also. The Supreme Court on several occasions in the recent past made its displeasure very clear on how the national news channels spew hate every day during prime time shows. The government must answer why they have not proposed any independent regulator for visual media while showing great alacrity in controlling the digital media by amending IT Act Rules. When most of the mainstream media in the country finds no fault with the governments at the Centre and states, it becomes obvious to all that something is wrong. Instead of self introspection accusing an external agency of malafide intention

will not enhance the prestige of the nation either domestically or abroad. Ostrich mentality on the part of the government will only exacerbate the problem.

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Inside



Confederation Demands New Wage Board for Media Employees

PAGE 4



UNI Goes Bankrupt

PAGE 6



TV News Channels Cross the Styx

PAGE 8



BuzzFeed News, Which Dragged Media Into the Digital Age, Shuts Down

PAGE 10



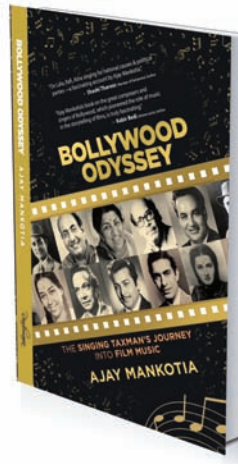
The Mahakumbh of Photojournalism

PAGE 15-17



Tucker Carlson Makes a Big Bet on his Own Power

PAGE 23



All about 'Bollywood Odyssey,' a New Book that Deconstructs Bollywood Music

PAGE 26



What you Should Watch Instead of 'The Kerala Story' to Understand the State

PAGE 28



THE LAST PAGE

30



Bhagavat Singh Mann, Chief Minister, Punjab being received at the Confederation meeting

Confederation Demands New Wage Board for Media Employees

T



Bindu Singh

The writer is Secretary General of Chandigarh Unit of Punjab and Chandigarh Journalists Union and Member IJU NEC.

The Confederation of Newspapers and News Agency Employees Organizations has demanded the government to immediately set up a new wage board for the wage revision of media employees in view of the galloping inflation and increased cost of living in nearly one and half decades since the Majithia recommendations were notified. The meeting of the Confederation, the apex body of the six media organizations was held in Chandigarh on 22-23 April 2023. The meeting has also decided to launch countrywide agitation for retaining and strengthening of Working Journalists Act by bringing the employees of other media persons into its ambit.

Indian Journalists Union President K. Sreenivas Reddy chaired the two day meeting which was hosted by the Tribune Employee's Union. Three Chief Ministers graced the occasion with their attendance. IJU Secretary General Balwinder Singh

Jammu also participated in the deliberations. Sreenivas Reddy spoke at length on the treatment given to wage board recommendations by the managements. He stressed the need of fighting for a new wage board as well as implementation of its recommendations.

While addressing the meeting of the confederation the Chief Ministers Bhagwant Singh Mann of Punjab, Manohar Lal Khattar of Haryana, and Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu of Himachal Pradesh supported all the demands of media employees. There was a broad consensus among all the media union leaders that pressure should be mounted on the Union government for introducing an act for media protection and for amending the Information Technology Act to ensure sparing of media persons from harassment by mischievous elements. There was a strong feeling against the move of abrogating the Working Journalists Act by

subsuming it with other labor codes.

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann in his address emphasized the importance of print media. He said that despite the tough competition posed by electronic, web and social media the credibility that is enjoyed by print medium was head and shoulders above all. He appealed to journalists to focus on important social and economic issues rather than pursuing petty matters.

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhwinder Singh Sukhu felt that there was an urgent need for bringing social security scheme for journalists to ensure independence of the fourth pillar of democracy. He highlighted the steps taken by his government for welfare of public including journalists. He assured that some budgetary provisions would be made by his government to provide economic assistance to media employees. Himachal's Social Security and Health Minister Col Dhani Ram Shandilya called for strong, free and fair media to help and guide even the policymakers.

Addressing the concluding session of the Confederation Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar announced an increase in the monthly pension of retired journalists from Rupees ten thousand to eleven thousand. He underlined the need for the development of language newspapers to help achieve the goals of democracy.

Tribune Employee's Union President Anil Kumar Gupta and General Secretary Ruchira M Khanna declared that their union would be next to none in continuing the struggle of the media persons all over the country. M S Yadav, General Secretary of the Confederation announced that for deciding the future course of action a



Leaders of the Confederation at the end of the two-day meeting at Chandigarh

meeting will be held in Delhi next month. Among those who addressed the meeting were the IFWJ Vice President Hemant Tiwari, Secretary General Parmanand Pandey, UNI Workers Union President M L Joshi, National Union of Journalists President Ras Bihari and General Secretary Pradeep Tiwari, Indian Express Workers Union President C S Naidu and Delhi Union of Working Journalists President A S Negi. The meeting was attended by nearly 500 representatives of newspapers and news agency employees from all over India including those of Bangalore Newspaper Employee's Union and the All-India Newspaper Employees Federation. All leaders pledged to continue their struggle till the demands of the media employees are fulfilled. The following resolutions have been passed by the meeting.

Demand to make Working Journalists Act all-encompassing

The Confederation passed a resolution to amend the working journalists act to include all kinds of media and to constitute a media commission to go into the issue. In another resolution the Confederation demanded for comprehensive act for the protection of media persons in

view of the growing intolerance even for a fair and sincere description of the facts as they are.

The Confederation noted with concern that even after the lapse of more than a decade the Majithia Award has not been implemented by an overwhelmingly large number of media organizations and passed a resolution demanding for its implementation by all media organizations. In a separate resolution the Confederation has demanded for a new wage board for media employees. The Confederation has demanded for the constitution of a neutral body like Media Council, which should replace the existing Press Council. The Media Council must consist of the representatives of a cross-section of society, but the lion's share should be of media persons.

The Confederation has demanded for the retention of Working Journalists Act and to expand it to include all media. The meeting ended with the resolve to strengthen the Confederation by bringing all media organisations to one forum so that the united struggle could be launched for the welfare of the media persons and also to have a free, fair and objective media for a strong and dynamic democracy. ❑



UNI Goes Bankrupt

I



**Sheikh Manzoor
Ahmed**

Author was diplomatic correspondent for UNI for more than 12 years.

He also served as Editor of UNI Urdu service till 2009

India's leading News Agency United News of India (UNI) has become insolvent. The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) has started insolvency procedure and is expected to appoint a receiver who with the assistance of a legal team, will make registry of its assets and liabilities.

This premier news agency with branches across the country and abroad was gasping for breath for about one and half decades.

It was UNI employees union that filed suit in the NCLT for declaring the agency bankrupt as the management was not in a position to pay salaries and other dues to employees for more than six years. The suit sought payment of dues including salaries of employees and provident fund arrears of former staff members. Non-payment of full salary to the staff and gratuity to retired members started from 2010.

Now the news agency is facing an insolvency case by its own employees union. The suit demands UNI pay dues worth Rs 103 crore to its workers, including salaries of current staff and wages, gratuity and provident fund arrears of for-

mer employees. The non-payment of full salaries has been a problem ever since shareholders started unsubscribing, one by one, in 2006. The problems of the news agency took a turn in 2008 when some directors in a hush hush manner entered into a deal with Zee media house to enable it to take over the management of UNI. This resulted in massive protests by the UNI workers as well as some Board members. Finally the matter went to court

and Zee Media House opted out of this deal. The court, however, asked the UNI management to pay a whopping amount of over Rs 30 crores, which was paid for purchase of its shares.

In the beginning some members of the Board started taking interest in the affairs of UNI and appointed General Managers of their choice. But this hardly

helped the agency to restore its past glory. This period witnessed sharp decline in news content as focus of the management was mainly on legal battles and not to improve news content. There was also sharp division among board members. During this period many important subscribers left UNI resulting into shrinking of its revenue.

The UNI came into existence in 1959



when eight leading newspapers launched it to break the monopoly of the Press Trust of India. Within a few years it started gaining the confidence of its subscribers that enabled the management to expand its operations. During the Emergency Prime Minister Indira Gandhi merged four news agencies - UNI, PTI, Hindustan Samachar and Samachar Bharati - into a single press service called Samachar. When Janata Party came to power all four agencies were allowed to work as independent units and in 1978 they started distributing and dispatching news separately. The 1980s and 90s was a golden period for the UNI as the news agency expanded its network and posted correspondents in Washington, Gulf, London, Colombo and other important cities in foreign countries.

With the entry of electronic media UNI started losing its sheen. Moreover, no effort was made to improve its contents and focus on news areas like business, entertainment, sports and other specialized areas which started getting more space in newspapers. Some of the important subscribers started quitting UNI and financial problems started.

Prasar Bharati, which used to be the main subscriber of UNI stopped service from 2020. It was followed by the National Council for Promotion of Urdu Council (NCPUL) and the agency lost revenue worth Rs. 8 crore. And the decline continued.

Now the news agency is facing an insolvency case by its employees union. The suit demands UNI pay dues worth Rs 103 crore to its workers, including salaries of current staff and wages, gratuity and provident fund arrears of former employees.



The non-payment of full salaries has been a problem ever since shareholders started unsubscribing, one by one, in 2006.

Unlike its main competitor the Press Trust of India (PTI) the UNI hadn't made it compulsory for its shareholders to be subscribers, a decision that most of the agency's stakeholders now seem to regret. Of UNI's paid-up capital, the largest shareholder is the ABP group, which owns 19 percent. Aweek Sarkar, owns 11 percent in his personal capacity. Statesman owns 12 and the New Indian Express 8 percent.

There are 340 employees in the news agency, 100 of whom have been recently hired on fixed contracts. The permanent staff allege that the new contract workers are paid on time while payment of their salaries are neither timely nor in full. They claim to have been receiving only Rs 15,000 every month, on no fixed date, for the last five years, irrespective of the promised salary.

The demand notice for the insolvency case was filed by the employees union on April 28. It cited an independent audit report for 2020-2021 stating that Rs 97 crore of UNI's debt of Rs 103 crore was what it owed employees in unpaid and deferred dues. The debt, the union alleged, was a result of "poor management" and "complete neglect and apathy of the shareholders", and the non-payment of dues was "in violation of the basic dignity of the

permanent employees who have given their sweat, blood, and tears to the corporate debtor company and have worked diligently and suffered silently for past 60 months".

The first signs of decay were seen after the notification of the Manisana Singh wage board recommendations in 2000, which paved the way for substantial increase in salaries at media outlets. To cut losses emanating from Manisana, and later Majithia, several news organisations discontinued their subscriptions. In April, UNI also lost the monthly subsidy of Rs 17 lakh from the National Council for Promotion of Urdu Language - an autonomous body under the Dept of Human Resource Development that was formed with an aim to promote and propagate Urdu language. The subsidy was financial aid for Urdu newspapers with small and medium circulations to get the UNI Urdu service at 50 percent of the cost. In April, the council informed UNI that it was widening the subsidy scheme to include other news agencies, and no subsidy will be provided until a final decision is made. The cancellation of the subsidy resulted in several Urdu newspapers pulling their subscriptions from the Urdu Service, which has been the first and only that was launched in 1992. The monthly revenue has come down to merely Rs. 3.5 crore and it has become extremely difficult to meet the requirements of the agency. ❏

TV News Channels Cross the Styx



Prime Minister Narendra Modi invoked the film Kerala Story in his campaign for Karnataka elections



Shaukat H. Mohammed

The writer is a senior journalist based at Hyderabad

The Styx River is the mythical waterbody that formed the boundary between the world of the living and the world of the dead - Hades. "When someone died, the psyche (spirit) of the deceased had to cross the river Styx, carried on a boat by the ferryman Charon, in order to enter the afterlife," according to the Melbourne, Australia-based Hellenic Museum, a museum dedicated to preserving and showing Greek art, culture and history.

Why is the River Styx finding mention here? It is because the Indian TV news media, and large segments of the print media, have crossed the Styx to enter the netherworld, where the

only reason for existence is to spread toxic hate among viewers.

This month's instalment of hate was kicked off by the person holding the highest office in the land, who peddled a film called 'The Kerala Story' with the shrillness of a carnival barker. The leader, dressed in a snug orange vest, and waving his arms with the enthusiasm of a younger Zubin Mehta, shilled a tired conspiracy theory as the truth, and called upon the people at a rally in the elections to the Karnataka Legislative Assembly, to watch the film, and then, presumably, vote for his party in the Karnataka election.

The TV news channels jumped in with both feet, using the leader's carnival barking as the start off point, to rubbish an entire community as conspirators out to convert Hindu and

Christian women in Kerala to Islam and then transporting them to the hellholes of Syria and Afghanistan to serve as "sex slaves" or "suicide bombers".

The script of 'The Kerala Story' could well have been written by worthies sitting in the party's New Delhi office, given the sheer hamfistedness of the script. The worthies at the party office should have taken time off from their fulltime brownnosing had they watched and learnt how propaganda films are made from the work of Leni Riefenstahl, a German filmmaker during the Hitler years in Germany, so that their propaganda proposition slips quietly under the radar of viewers.

Films like 'The Kerala Story' and 'Kashmir Files' are made with only one agenda in mind: to spread communal hatred against the minority community, while enriching the producer and director of the said films.

'Kashmir Files' grossed over Rs 300 crore worldwide when it was released in theatres last year, enabling its director, Vivek Agnihotri, who till then was infamous for making films aimed at titillation, to buy a condo in Mumbai at a cost of over Rs 18 crore.

I have an idea that the producer of 'The Kerala Story', Vipul Amrutlal Shah, will be guffawing all the way to the bank, pockets bulging with the loot generated by his film, the cost to the social fabric of the land be damned.

While the carnival barking and the haste with which some state governments rushed to offer tax breaks to 'The Kerala Story' in their jurisdictions to encourage more people to watch the movies, the Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Anurag Thakur, took it upon himself to invite women TV



Atiq Ahmed and his brother Ashraf just before they were killed at Prayagraj

news anchors on his secret slush-fund payroll to watch the film with him, and then pose for pictures with them, with himself posing as a wannabe Hrithik Roshan.

The 'Kerala Story', like the 'Kashmir Files', has turned into a meal ticket, providing a five-course meal night after night, for the TV news channels to peddle a dangerous mix of communal hate with zero news value. Another meal ticket, at least for some TV news channels, is the on-air assassination of a former Lok Sabha member and former member of the UP Legislative Assembly and mafia don, Atiq Ahmed, and his brother, Ashraf. The three young alleged assassins broke through the elaborate police security ring around Atiq and Ashraf, and shot them in the head on 15 April.

The channels gave up all pretence of being a neutral observer of the assassination, with their anchors

almost jumping for joy with ghoulish glee at the murderous turn of events in Prayagraj. A month later, some of the channels are still going on about Atiq's surviving family members, principally his widow, Shaista Parveen. Ms. Parveen is now presented as a mafia don, who had stepped into her murdered husband's shoes, and was reportedly taking charge of his vast alleged criminal enterprise.

Ms. Parveen has been on the run since Atiq's assassination, but the TV channels have been going bang on about how she is misusing the burqa, the black coverall worn by devout Muslim women, to escape the long arm of the law. It seems anything goes to show her in the darkest possible light, while they bat for the incompetence and complicity of the UP Police. Truly, Indian media has crossed the River Styx.



BuzzFeed News, Which Dragged Media Into the Digital Age, Shuts Down

A quirky upstart that became a Pulitzer Prize-winning operation fell prey to the punishing economics of digital publishing.



Benjamin Mullin

The writer is a media reporter for The Times, covering the major companies behind news and entertainment

Katie Robertson

The writer is a media reporter. She previously worked as an editor and reporter at Bloomberg and News Corporation Australia

In a move that brings to a close a pioneering era of online journalism, BuzzFeed is shutting down its namesake news division. After beginning as a quirky digital upstart and rising to a Pulitzer Prize-winning operation, it ultimately fell prey to the punishing economics of digital publishing that has laid low many of its peers.

It's a sobering end for a publication once seen as a serious challenger to legacy media outlets that had been slow to adapt to the internet. It was also the final chapter of a venture capital-fueled digital period that left

an indelible mark on how journalism is produced and consumed.

When BuzzFeed News was founded in 2011, in the run-up to the next year's presidential election, it explored stories both slight and serious through listicles and click-bait-style headlines designed to go viral on social media. That mirrored the practice of its parent company, an internet laboratory of sorts that Jonah Peretti started in 2006.

The news operation soon drew attention for its ambitious, sharp reporting, however, and went on to open overseas bureaus and invest in investigative journalism. A number of alumni work for the more established news organizations it sought to disrupt, including The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal and Bloomberg News, and those newsrooms have embraced many of the practices that BuzzFeed pioneered in search of readers online.

But for all its accomplishments, the news division failed to make money, unable to square the reliance on digital advertising and the whims of social media traffic with the considerable costs of employing journalists around the world.

Ben Smith, the founding editor of BuzzFeed News, who left in 2020 to be a media columnist at The Times, said in an interview that he was



BuzzFeed Inc.'s listing day at Nasdaq on 06 December 2021 in New York

"really sad" about the closing.

"I'm proud of the work that BuzzFeed News did, but I think this moment is part of the end of a whole era of media," said Mr. Smith, who now runs the media outlet Semafor. "It's the end of the marriage between social media and news."

The closing of the news division is part of a broader round of job cuts at BuzzFeed, Mr. Peretti, the company's chief executive, said in an email to employees. The shutdown of the news division will affect about 60 of BuzzFeed's roughly 1,200 employees, some of whom will be offered jobs at other parts of the company. The company will also cut 120 people across its business, content, tech and administrative teams.

The decision is the latest in a series of financial setbacks faced by digital media companies. Once the focus of enormous optimism and investment from industry titans including the Walt Disney Company and Comcast, new-media firms like

BuzzFeed, Vox Media and Vice have failed to live up to their formerly lofty valuations.

Vox laid off 7 percent of its staff in January, blaming the uncertain economic climate. Vice, which has struggled financially for years, is desperately seeking a buyer. Insider announced that it was laying off 10 percent of its staff in the United States, a move the company attributed to broader economic headwinds.

BuzzFeed was part of a rising crop of media companies that capitalized on the growing dominance of tech platforms to deliver audiences to their stories, betting that profits would follow. BuzzFeed News peppered its headlines and boldface copy with phrases that would stop thumbs midscroll and was attuned to online conversations that many news organizations chose to ignore. Some of its traditional media competitors ultimately emulated BuzzFeed's obsession with its readers' habits,

with editors glued to online dashboards created by companies like Chartbeat and Parse.ly to measure audience behavior.

But it was the tech titans, including Meta, Alphabet and ByteDance, that reaped most of the value from the huge audiences their platforms attracted, and the profits that those huge audiences suggested never materialized for BuzzFeed News. Digital advertising - a mainstay for digital publishing companies - is increasingly following young consumers to tech platforms like Instagram and TikTok.

Rafat Ali, the founder and chief executive of the digital media company Skift, said the demise of BuzzFeed News was a stark reminder that news organizations risked becoming obsolete if they didn't focus on developing multiple ways to make money.

"The age of disposable media is here," Mr. Ali said. "When you build your business on a trend - in this

case, social sharing - and that trend comes to an end, so does your business."

In his memo, Mr. Peretti said he had "made the decision to overinvest" in BuzzFeed's news division because he loved the work it produced but acknowledged that he had been slow to accept that social media platforms would not provide the financial support needed to make BuzzFeed News profitable.

"I've learned from these mistakes, and the team moving forward has learned from them as well," Mr. Peretti wrote. "We know that the changes and improvements we are making today are necessary steps to building a better future."

BuzzFeed will continue to publish news on HuffPost, another digital media pioneer, which BuzzFeed bought in 2020. Mr. Peretti said in his memo that HuffPost was profitable and less dependent on social platforms. He added that the company was moving forward "only with parts of the business that have demonstrated their ability to add to the company's bottom line."

The financial pressures on the news division had been apparent for years. In Mr. Smith's coming book about the digital media era, "Traffic," he writes that there had long been confusion "about what BuzzFeed News was for." That became an issue during a contentious unionization drive at the company in 2019.

"I've come to regret encouraging Jonah to see our news division as a worthy enterprise that shouldn't solely be evaluated as a business," Mr. Smith writes. "Jonah resented what seemed like ingratitude from people whose work he so valued that he was approaching \$100 million in losses."

In better times, BuzzFeed News

was a beacon for up-and-coming political and investigative journalists. The site won a Pulitzer Prize in 2021 for international reporting for stories that used satellite imagery to report on the Chinese government's detention of Muslims.

While it won plaudits for its investigative work, becoming a finalist for a Pulitzer Prize in 2017 for an exposé into a corporate dispute-settlement process, it was also criticized for ignoring some of the norms followed by some of its more traditional competitors.

In 2017, BuzzFeed published a dossier full of unverified information about Donald J. Trump, who had



just been elected president. The company's decision to publish the dossier was met with opprobrium by some media critics, who said it was irresponsible to make the information public without extensive vetting. BuzzFeed and Mr. Smith, the editor at the time, defended the decision, saying the public had a right to information that was circulating at the highest levels of power in Washington.

That same year, BuzzFeed News was sued by a Russian executive named in the dossier, who said the news organization had defamed him when it published its story. BuzzFeed won the lawsuit, and Mr. Smith said in an essay for *The Atlantic* that he would make the same decision to publish again.

Newsroom employees had been

told not to go into the office. Mr. Peretti held an all-hands video meeting after the announcement, with some members of management joining from a New York meeting room unfortunately named "Operation Doomsday," according to a BuzzFeed staff member who was on the call and spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal matters.

Mr. Peretti told the workers that he had failed them, the staff member said. "It is clearly a massive failure on my part, and I am deeply sorry for it," Mr. Peretti said in the meeting, according to the person.

Mr. Peretti was asked if he would resign, and he said he was staying on at the company.

"I own this decision," he said, according to the person in the meeting. "Nothing that is happening today is about the work of this team."

Karolina Waclawiak, the editor in chief of BuzzFeed News, told employees in an email that the newsroom had been making progress toward being profitable this year "only to be told - four months in - that we were out of time."

A spokesperson for BuzzFeed said the company was planning to keep all of the stories published by the news division archived on its website in perpetuity.

BuzzFeed News signed off on Thursday in the somewhat irreverent fashion it became known for over the last decade.

"BuzzFeed News is logging off with a reminder that Blippi pooped on his friend," read an Apple News push alert from BuzzFeed, alluding to a story by the outlet about an actor who plays a character from a prominent children's show. ❏

— *New York Times*

Photo of the Year



Iryna Kalinina, 32, an injured pregnant woman, is carried from a maternity hospital that was damaged during a Russian airstrike in Mariupol, Ukraine, on March 9, 2022. Associated Press photographer Evgeniy Maloletka won the World Press Photo of the Year award for this harrowing image. The woman died of her injuries after giving birth to her lifeless baby.

A

ssociated Press photographer Evgeniy Maloletka won the World Press Photo of the Year award for his harrowing image of emergency workers carrying a pregnant woman through the shattered grounds of a maternity hospital in the Ukrainian city of Mariupol, in the chaotic aftermath of a Russian attack.

The Ukrainian photographer's

March 9, 2022, image of the fatally wounded woman, her left hand on her bloodied lower left abdomen, drove home the horror of Russia's brutal onslaught in the eastern port city early in the war.

The 32-year-old woman, Iryna Kalinina, died of her injuries a half-hour after giving birth to the lifeless body of her

baby, named Miron.

"For me, it is a moment that all the time I want to forget, but I cannot. The story will always stay with me," Maloletka said in an interview before the announcement.

"Evgeniy Maloletka captured one of the most defining images of the Russia-Ukraine war amid incredibly challenging circumstances. Without his unflinching courage, little would be known of one of Russia's most brutal attacks. We are enormously proud of him," AP senior vice-president and executive editor Julie Pace said.

AP director of photography J. David Ake added: "It's not often that a single image becomes seared into the world's collective memory. Evgeniy Maloletka lived up to the highest standards of photojournalism by capturing the 'decisive moment,' while upholding the tradition of AP journalists worldwide to shine a light on what would have otherwise remained unseen."

Maloletka, AP video journalist Mystyslav Chernov and AP producer Vasilisa Stepanenko, who are also Ukrainian, arrived in Mariupol just as Russia's full-scale invasion, which began on Feb. 24, 2022, sparked Europe's biggest conflict since World War II. They stayed for more than two weeks, chronicling the Russian military pounding the city and hitting hospitals and other civilian infrastructure. An AP investigation found that as many as 600 people may have been killed when a Mariupol theatre being used as a bomb shelter was hit on March 16 last year.

The three were the only international journalists left in the city when they finally managed a risky escape.

World Press Photo Foundation

executive director Joumana El Zein Khoury told the AP that jury members decided quickly Maloletka's image should win the prestigious prize.

She said it was "apparent from the beginning that it needed to win. All the jury members said it really from the beginning of the judging. And why? Because it really shows how war and especially in this case, the Ukrainian war, affects not only one generation, but multiple generations."

Maloletka said the team believed it was important to remain in Mariupol, despite the danger, "to collect the people's voices and collect their emotions and to show them all around the world."

A series of photos by Maloletka from besieged Mariupol won the European regional World Press Photo Stories award that was announced in March. Maloletka's images from Mariupol also have been honoured with awards including the Knight International Journalism Award, the Visa d'or News Award and the Prix Bayeux Calvados-Normandie.

"I think it is really important that specifically a Ukrainian won the contest showing the atrocities against civilians by Russian forces in Ukraine," he said. "It is important that all the pictures we were doing in Mariupol became evidence of a war crime against Ukrainians."

In the three other global categories announced Thursday, two-time World Press Photo winner Mads Nissen of Denmark won Photo Story of the Year for his series for Politiken and Panos Pictures, titled "The Price of Peace in Afghanistan," about daily life in Afghanistan in 2022.

Anush Babajanyan of Armenia won the Long-Term Project award for "Battered Waters" for VII Photo and National Geographic Society, and Egyptian photographer Mohamed Mahdy won the Open Format award for "Here, The Doors Don't Know Me."

"The four global winners represent the best photos and stories from the most important and urgent topics of 2022," Brent Lewis, global jury chair, and New York Times photo editor said in a statement. "They also help to continue the tradition of what it is possible to do with photography, and how photography helps us to see the universality of the human condition."

The four global winners were selected from more than 60,000 entries submitted by 3,752 entrants from 127 countries.

Regional winners announced earlier included Maya Levin for her image for AP of Israeli police beating mourners carrying the coffin of Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, who was fatally shot while covering an Israeli military raid in the West Bank.

Following international pressure, Israeli defence forces admitted it was likely that one of their soldiers shot the prominent correspondent. The IDF denied that the shooting was intentional and declared the case closed.

Pulitzer Prize-winning AP photographer Emilio Morenatti, who lost a leg while reporting in Afghanistan, was awarded an honourable mention for a series of images of people in Ukraine who have undergone amputations as a result of the Russian invasion.



— Courtesy: CTV News



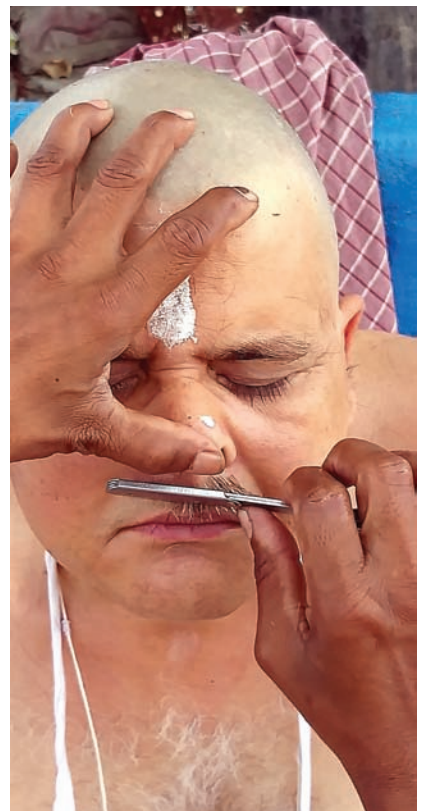
The Mahakumbh of Photojournalism

T

SN Sinha
*President,
Working News
Cameramen's
Association*

he Mahakumbh of Photojournalism is the largest public photo exhibition of collective work of pan-India photojournalist members of All India Working News Cameramen's Association (WNCA) held in New Delhi in April 2023 in association with India International Center art gallery, New Delhi. In this time of technology driven world which helped all of us to shoot pictures without any hassles the work of photojournalists becomes more challenging. Although they take pictures of news events, the lifeblood of the media they contribute to, these photographs, capturing fleeting moments are moments in life. To shoot a candid picture outside the realm of a photojournalistic assignment is a temptation no photographer can resist, and the urge to press the shutter at the "decisive moment", as the master photographer Henri Cartier Bresson called it, is nothing but a reflex action.

Thus, sometimes masterpieces are created through the eloquent camera



Pic: Sinha

Pic: Neeraj



Pic: Renuka Puri



Pic: Rajesh Bedi



without realization at the time of the event.

The Big Picture - 2023, the sixth edition of all India exhibitions from WNCA members showcasing the work of 66 photojournalists in more than 251 photographs depicting a wide range of news coverage of politics, covid, natural disasters, social issues, wild life, landscape, fashion and sports offers a comprehensive look at the India's journey through the eyes of the men behind the camera. Our photo-journalists worked tirelessly risking their lives covering covid pandemic and documenting some of the most disturbing human situations with sensitivity. While journalism is considered the first draft of history, photo-journalism is the visual documentation of history.

The exhibition was inaugurated by a well known young health professional Dr Aashish Chaudhry, Managing Director of Aakash Healthcare. The exhibition was visited by a number of



young students, well known personalities, artists, filmmakers and picture lovers. A well attended discussion cum seminar on 'Explore Legal Rights of Photojournalists including the Copyright Act' was organized with two experts of the field Shwetasree Majumder, founder, Fidus Law

Chambers and Dhiranjan Malvey, media law expert and senior journalist. We can't imagine a newspaper, magazine, billboard or online article without an image. Not only do pictures help to enhance a story, they also tell a story of their own. When thoughtfully incorporated into the news, photos add

Pic: Ajay Aggarwal

context and comprehensibility. In the world of media, photos can make or break a story, thus positioning photo-journalism itself as a vital craft in itself.

The All India Working News Cameramen's Association is the largest body of print, electronic and new media working journalists representing national and international media organizations. WNCA was founded and registered in 1978, with headquarters in New Delhi. Our membership is spread over 14 states. The associations of photo-journalists working in regional language newspapers and electronic news media organizations in these states are also affiliated to WNCA. thus, making it the most representative and strong professional body of visual-journalists in India.

As the famous French photojournalist Mare Riboud rightly said - Photography cannot change the world, but it can show the world, especially when it changes.



Pic: Kishore

Press Freedom Index, India..

From 150 to 161



he violence against journalists, the politically partisan media and the concentration of media ownership all demonstrate that press freedom is in crisis in "the world's largest democracy", ruled since 2014 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the embodiment of the Hindu nationalist right.

Media landscape

The Indian media landscape is like India itself - huge and densely populated - and has more than 100,000 newspapers (including 36,000 weeklies) and 380 TV news channels. But the abundance of media outlets conceals tendencies toward the concentration of ownership, with only a handful of sprawling media companies at the national level, including the Times Group, HT Media Ltd, The Hindu Group and Network18. Four dailies share three quarters of the readership in Hindi, the country's leading language. The concentration is even more marked at the regional level for local language publications such as Kolkata's Bengali-language Anandabazar Patrika, the Mumbai-based daily Lokmat, published in Marathi, and Malayala Manorama, distributed in southern India. This concentration of ownership in the print media can also be observed in the TV sector with major TV networks such as NDTV. The state-owned All India Radio (AIR) network owns all news radio stations.

Political context

Originally a product of the anti-colonial movement, the Indian press used to be seen as fairly progressive but things changed radically in the mid-2010s, when

| INDEX 2023 | | INDEX 2022 | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 161 / 180 | | 150 / 180 | |
| Score : 36.62 | | Score : 41 | |
| POLITICAL INDICATOR | 169 33.65 | POLITICAL INDICATOR | 145 40.76 |
| ECONOMIC INDICATOR | 155 34.15 | ECONOMIC INDICATOR | 149 30.36 |
| LEGISLATIVE INDICATOR | 144 42.92 | LEGISLATIVE INDICATOR | 120 57.02 |
| SOCIAL INDICATOR | 143 45.27 | SOCIAL INDICATOR | 127 56.25 |
| SECURITY INDICATOR | 172 27.12 | SECURITY INDICATOR | 163 20.61 |

Narendra Modi became prime minister and engineered a spectacular rapprochement between his party, the BJP, and the big families dominating the media. The prime example is undoubtedly the Reliance Industries group led by Mukesh Ambani, now a personal friend of Modi's,

who owns more than 70 media outlets that are followed by at least 800 million Indians. Similarly, the takeover of the NDTV channel at the end of 2022 by tycoon Gautam Adani, who is also very close to Narendra Modi, signalled the end of pluralism in the mainstream media. Very early on, Modi took a critical stance vis-à-vis journalists, seeing them as "intermediaries" polluting the direct relationship between himself and his supporters. Indian journalists who are too critical of the government are subjected to all-out harassment and attack campaigns by Modi devotees known as bhakts.

Legal framework

Indian law is protective in theory but charges of defamation, sedition, contempt of court and endangering national security are increasingly used against journalists critical of the government, who are branded as "anti-national." Under the guise of combatting Covid-19, the government and its supporters have waged a guerrilla war of lawsuits against media outlets whose coverage of the pandemic contradicted official statements. Journalists who try to cover anti-government strikes and protests are often arrested and sometimes detained arbitrarily. These repeated violations undermine media self-regulatory bodies, such as the Press Council of India (PCI) and the Electronic Media Monitoring Centre (EMMC).

Economic context

The Indian press is a colossus with feet of clay. Despite often huge stock

market valuations, media outlets largely depend on advertising contracts with local and regional governments. In the absence of an airtight border between business and editorial policy, media executives often see the latter as just a variable to be adjusted according to business needs. At the national level, the central government has seen that it can exploit this to impose its own narrative, and is now spending more than 1.8 billion rupees (20.4 million



euros) a year on ads in the print and online media alone. Recent years have also seen the rise of "Godi media" (a play on Modi's name and lapdogs) - media outlets such as Times Now and Republic TV that mix populism and pro-BJP propaganda. The old Indian model of a pluralist press is therefore being seriously challenged by a combination of harassment and influence.

Sociocultural context

The enormous diversity of Indian society is barely reflected in the mainstream media. For the most part, only Hindu men from upper castes hold senior positions in jour-

nalism or are media executives - a bias that is reflected in media content. For example, fewer than 15% of the participants in major evening talk shows are women. At the height of the Covid-19 crisis, some TV hosts blamed the Muslim minority for the spread of the virus. The media landscape is nonetheless also rich in alternative examples such as Khabar Lahariya, a media outlet composed solely of female journalists from rural areas and from ethnic or religious minorities.

Safety

With an average of three or four journalists killed in connection with their work every year, India is one of the world's most dangerous countries for the media. Journalists are exposed to all kinds of physical violence including police violence, ambushes by political activists, and deadly reprisals by criminal groups or corrupt local officials. Supporters of

Hindutva, the ideology that spawned the Hindu far right, wage all-out online attacks on any views that conflict with their thinking. Terrifying coordinated campaigns of hatred and calls for murder are conducted on social media, campaigns that are often even more violent when they target women journalists, whose personal data may be posted online as an additional incitement to violence.

The situation is also still very worrisome in Kashmir, where reporters are often harassed by police and paramilitaries, with some being subjected to so-called "provisional" detention for several years.



'32000 Kerala Women in ISIS': Misquotes, Flawed Math, Imaginary Figures behind Filmmaker's Claim



**Shinjee
Majumder &
Archit**

The trailer of a movie titled 'The Kerala Story' was released on April 26. Soon after this, multiple Twitter users shared it urging people to watch the movie. Hindutva activist Kajal Shingla alias Kajal Hindustani (@kajal_jaihind) shared the teaser of the movie saying the film was 'based on real incidents'.

Many users shared the teaser saying/implying that it was the actual story of a woman from Kerala. Some used the hashtag #TrueStory.

Directed by Sudipto Sen and produced by Vipul Amrutlal Shah, 'The Kerala Story' claims to unearth the happenings behind 32,000 women who went missing in the state of Kerala.

Sharing the teaser of the movie, Sen tweeted, "Shalini, Geetanjali, Nimah & Asifa marked my lifeline since last 5yrs. Choking me till I tell their stories. Soon u'll get to see a film which u never imagined, in ur remotest imagination. Thank u ambikaji, @YaduVJkrishnan, @sunshinepicture & Vipul A Shah from bottom of my heart."

In a conversation with ANI published in ThePrint in March 2022, Sen further said, "As per a recent investigation, since 2009 - nearly 32,000 girls from Kerala and Mangalore from Hindu and Christian communities have been converted to Islam and most of them end up landing in Syria, Afghanistan, and other ISIS and Haqqani influential

areas! Despite accepting these facts, the government is hardly contemplating any definitive action plan against such huge international conspiracies led by ISIS-influenced groups."

The character of Fatima, seen in the teaser, is played by actress Adah Sharma. She also shared the viral clip with the hashtag #TrueStory.

Well before Sharma's tweet, #ISIS and 'The Kerala Story' started trending on Twitter. Several news media outlets including OpIndia, Zee News, Film Companion, The Statesman, Outlook, Times of India and others reported on this. Many reports mentioned, "According to a recent investigation, since 2009, nearly 32,000 girls from the Hindu and Christian communities in Kerala and Mangalore have converted to Islam; the majority of them end up in Syria, Afghanistan, and other regions with a high concentration of ISIS and Haqqani influence".

This teaser was tweeted by many verified handles as well. Panchjanya, the national weekly magazine published by the RSS, tweeted the teaser with the caption, "शालिनी से फातिमा बनी लड़की !! नर्स बनने वाली लड़की की आतंकवादी !! फिल्म "The Kerala Story" 32 हजार महिलाओं की कहानी लेकर आ रही है जिसे जबरन मुस्लिम बनाकर ISIS का आतंकवादी बनाया गया !!".

No evidence to back 32,000-claim

Alt News found an interview of Sudipto Sen on YouTube channel 'The Festival of Bharat' where he talks about how he



calculated the figure. From the 45-second mark onward, he says, "In 2010, former Kerala CM Oommen Chandy put a report in front of Kerala assembly. In front of my camera, he denied that anything had happened. But in 2010, I documented a case where he (Chandy) said that every year approximately 2,800 to 3,200 girls were taking up Islam. Just calculate it for the following 10 years, and the number is around 32,000."

We spoke with Sen over phone to find out whether the claims made by social media users based on the figure 32,000 mentioned in the teaser had any factual basis. Sen said, "This figure (32,000) is not mine. It was a piece of news in The Times of India... one thing I can tell you is that Oommen Chandy, the chief minister of Kerala, had placed this number in the state assembly. So this is not my number, I have got all the documents with me."

He also said, "VS Achuthanandan has categorically said Kerala will become an Islamic state...".

Alt News could not find any report by any media outlet which said that 32,000 women from Kerala had joined the ISIS. The number is so large that had there been such a statement by a chief minister, it would certainly have made headlines. We, however, found a 2012 India Today report which said, "On June 25, Kerala chief minister Oommen Chandy informed the state legislature that 2,667 young women converted to Islam in the state since 2006" (that is, from 2006 to 2012). There is no mention in the report of women joining the ISIS. The report added that Chandy had said there was no evidence for forced conversions in the state and the fears about love jihad were baseless. The New

Indian Express also quoted Chandy and mentioned the same data. None of the reports talked about any annual figure cited by the former CM, as claimed by Sen.

When Alt News shared the India Today report with Sudipto Sen and requested him to share the said 'TOI report' or other sources that he might have, with us, Sen said over a WhatsApp message, "Let the intolerance reach a crescendo. I'll share my data after the film is released. Why should I defeat the cause of my film?"

Achuthanandan's remarks wrongly used in teaser

In the YouTube interview, Sen also says, "15-16 years ago, in 2005, CPM patriarch VS Achuthanandan, who was the chief minister at the time, came down to Delhi and had a press conference. He made a shocking revelation; he said that a sinister



plan has been hatched by Islamic extremists led by ISIS that they want to convert Kerala into the hub of ISIS. For that, they are taking all sorts of means."

Sen used a clip of the press conference in the first teaser of 'The Kerala Story' released in March 2022. When we dug into the reported statements made by the Leftist leader, we found two things -

1. The press conference had actually taken place on July 24, 2010. Achuthanandan had spoken about the Popular Front of India (PFI), and his comments created much controversy.

2. The clip that has been used in the teaser is misleading because

the words spoken by Achuthanandan and the subtitle used in it are completely different. The actual words can be translated as "Independence Day on August 15...when nationalists and patriots take part in celebrations.. Youngsters are influenced.. lured with money...", while the subtitle in 'The Kerala Story' promo reads, "The Popular Front is trying to make Kerala a Muslim state just like the agenda of the banned organization NDF. Their plan is to make Kerala a Muslim state within 20 years." Some viewers had, in fact, pointed out in the comments section that the subtitles and the spoken words did not match. So, it is evident that the filmmaker has misquoted both Oommen Chandy and VS Achuthanandan to give his take on the state of affairs in Kerala an air of credibility.

However, the readers should note that VS Achuthanandan did speak about 'love jihad'. TOI quoted the Left leader as saying, "PFI was trying to multiply Muslim numbers in the state "by influencing youth of other religions and converting them by giving money, marrying them to Muslim women and thus producing kids of the community." The Congress criticized the comments as part of the Left's plans to appease the majority community. Interestingly, among those reacting sharply to the CM's comments was Oommen Chandy (who was an Opposition leader at the time). Achuthanandan later reiterated his stand in the state assembly and clarified that his remark against the PFI was being 'misinterpreted' as directed against the entire Muslim community.

2018 film, too, talked about 32,000 conversions

In 2018, Sen made a 52-minute documentary titled 'In the Name of

Love!'. In the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), the plot reads, "As per a recent report, since 2009 more than 17 thousand girls from Kerala and more than 15 thousand girls from Mangalore from Hindu and Christian communities have been converted to Islam and most of them ended up landing in Syria, Afghanistan, and other ISIS and Taliban influential areas." (sic) Interestingly, the figure 32,000 (17000+15000) shows up here as well. A screening of the film at JNU had resulted in a scuffle between two groups of students.

AltNews requested the filmmaker to share with us the 'recent report' mentioned in the synopsis of the film and other evidence which corroborate the numbers mentioned. The article will be updated as and when he responds to our query.

After the chaos at JNU over the screening of his film, Sen claimed that his film was not about Love Jihad. TOI reported that some crew members of the film had, however, refuted him. In a statement to ThePrint, Sen said, "First of all, let me clarify that I do not belong to the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) or the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). I come from a Communist family and do not believe in 'love jihad', a concept which is even being propagated by the likes of UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath. And this is exactly what I wanted to show through my film". However, 19.48-minute mark onward in the YouTube interview mentioned above, Sen says, "Now I am making a feature film... on the subject of Love Jihad; how these girls (are) being converted. It's a huge sinister plan..." Available data on Indian-origin fighters affiliated with ISIS AltNews reached out to Kerala Police. A public relation officer

speaking to us labelled the claim made in the teaser of 'The Kerala Story' - that 32,000 women from Kerala have been trafficked to Syria - as 'totally baseless'. As per the United States Department of State's Country Reports on Terrorism 2020 there were 66 known Indian-origin fighters affiliated with ISIS as of November, 2020. A number of mainstream media houses, including The Hindustan Times and The Indian Express, had covered the publication of the report and mentioned the number 66 in their headlines. The same report said, "Through the end of September, the NIA had investigated 34 terrorism cases it indicated were related to ISIS and arrested 160 persons."



The Hindu reported in June 2021 that four Indian women were lodged in an Afghanistan prison, who had accompanied their husbands to join the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP), and they were unlikely to be allowed to return to the country. The Week reported that the four women, believed to be Sonia Sebastian alias Ayisha, Raffeala, Merrin Jacob alias Mariyam and Nimisha alias Fathima Isa, had traveled to Nangarhar in Afghanistan between 2016 and 2018. The Observer Research Foundation, a prominent think tank, in 2019 published a document titled 'The Islamic State in India's Kerala: A primer'. A section in the paper titled 'Why IS and Kerala?' says, "The number of pro-IS cases reported in India from 2014 to 2018 is

between 180 and 200. This paper defines 'pro-IS cases' to include sharing or propagating IS propaganda online, attempting to travel to West Asia with the aim of joining the caliphate, and in fact joining the caliphate or working for its goals. The Indian Home Ministry puts the number at 155."

One of the authors of the paper - Mohammed Sinan Siyech - told AltNews, "There are many problems with the figure of 32,000 women joining the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria from India. The total number of people who joined ISIS from the whole world numbers up to 40,000 foreign fighters from 110 countries. (source: The Soufan Group Report titled 'Beyond the Caliphate, 2017'). The largest contributors were the EU, Russia, and Saudi Arabia. India barely features in the list. According to Indian government figures, not more than a total of 100 - 200 joined the group from India. Keralites make up around 20 - 25% of these figures. (source: 'The ISIS phenomenon: South Asia and beyond' - an ORF report)." Siyech added, "There is no mention of any figures from any source that would show that more than 200 people joined ISIS from India. In fact, this number is so small that most academics and experts often ask the question 'What had prevented Indian Muslims from joining the Islamic State?'"

To sum it up, AltNews found that Sudipto Sen, the director of 'The Kerala Story', has repeatedly claimed that 32,000 women have joined ISIS either from India or just Kerala, and mentioned this in his film, without any evidence to back the claim. Data available in the public domain suggests that the number of 'Indian-origin fighters affiliated with ISIS' is far less than that. ❏

— Courtesy: altnews.in

Tucker Carlson Makes a Big Bet on his Own Power

W



Philip Bump

The writer is a Post columnist based in New York. He writes the newsletter How To Read This Chart and is the author of The Aftermath: The Last Days of the Baby Boom and the Future of Power in America.

hen Fox News ousted host Tucker Carlson in April, it reportedly gave him what are known as "golden handcuffs": In exchange for \$25 million to buy out his contract, Carlson couldn't take a gig in competition with his former employer.

That was apparently not enough. Carlson announced that he intended to compete with Fox News, forgoing that money. At some point in the near future, he said, he'd be launching a daily show of some sort on Twitter.

Unlike most Americans - and certainly unlike the vast majority of the audience to whom Carlson spoke every night when Fox News was still his employer - Carlson has no need for that \$25 million. In fact, there's no indication that he's receiving any compensation for launching a show on Twitter. The platform's owner, Elon Musk, denied reaching any compensation deal with Carlson, who had also been offered lucrative gigs at Fox News competitors.

In other words, Carlson's interest, at least over the short term, is not money but influence. The uncertainty that lingers around Carlson's firing strengthens the idea that Fox News removed him out of concern

that he was using their airwaves to amass power and influence for himself. That Carlson finds retaining that power to be more valuable than a \$25 million paycheck suggests that he views his relationship with Fox News in the same way.

Carlson's announcement of his new show - offered on Twitter, naturally - includes the sort of dishonest rhetoric his fans have long expected. For example, Carlson insists that the media at large is dishonest and manipulative, a perhaps not-unexpected viewpoint from a guy whose own assertions were repeatedly dismantled for their errors.

Even in that assertion, though, he revealed his perspective on his firing.

"The best you can hope for in the news business at this point is the freedom to tell the fullest truth that you can," he claimed. "But there are always limits. And you know that if you bump up against those limits often enough, you will be fired for it. That's not a guess. It's guaranteed."

As a long-standing member of the media myself, I can say that this is nonsense, that good-faith media organizations see no boundaries on telling the truth. Good-faith

organizations like this one, and unlike Carlson, also regularly correct our mistakes, a commitment that in the modern era is frequently used against us.

But you'll have noticed the subtext here: Carlson is obviously suggesting that he was fired because he was "bumping up against limits on telling the truth" at Fox News. What were those limits? Well, he spread false information about the war in Ukraine and about the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the Capitol in the weeks before his firing (well, the months before his firing). Perhaps what he was actually bumping into was Fox's limit on letting him spread misinformation.

He also framed his move to Twitter in the same way.

"As of tonight, there aren't many platforms left that allow free speech. The last big one remaining in the world - the only one - is Twitter, where we are now," he said. "Twitter has long served as the place where our national conversation incubates and develops. Twitter is not a partisan site: Everybody's allowed here and we think that's a good thing."

When he says "everybody's allowed here," of course, he means that Musk has rolled back prohibitions on misinformation and reinstated various dishonest or abusive voices in keeping with right-wing complaints about the platform under its previous management. Musk is not a fervent free-speech advocate in the aggregate; Twitter has blocked criticism and censored competitors repeatedly during his tenure, and the company has reportedly turned over data in response to government requests far more often. Musk is, however, someone who will not get mad at Carlson spreading right-wing misinformation, so it meets both



While announcing plans to start his show on twitter Tucker Carlson said "news you consume is a lie"

men's definition of First Amendment compliance.

That Carlson is coming to Twitter isn't only about this purported freedom, though. It's also another manifestation of the bet he's making on his own power relative to Fox News's.

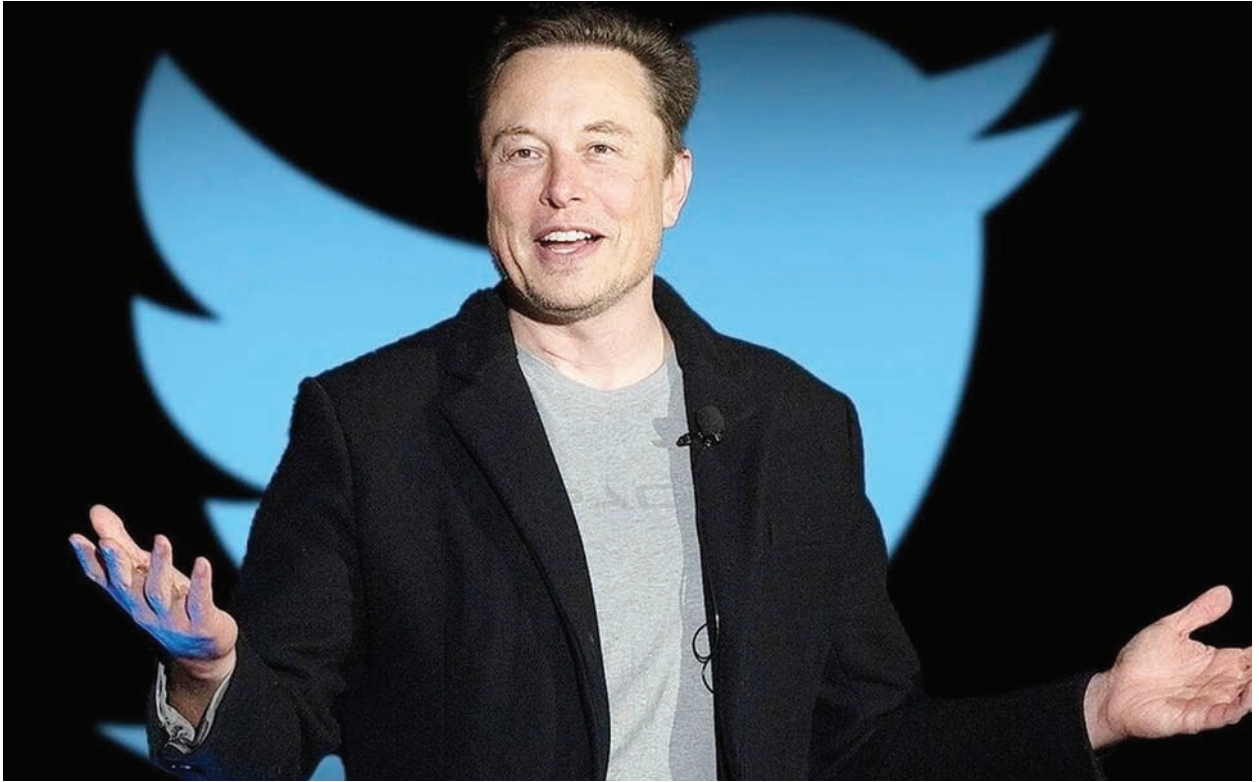
Consider an interesting question: Why was Carlson popular on that channel? He regularly beat the competition and his peers in the ratings, but why? How much of it was the lead-in from other Fox News programs and the channel's built-in audience, and how much of it was Carlson himself?

By going to Twitter, Carlson's explicitly testing that proposition. There's not a lot of overlap between the natural audiences for Fox News and Twitter. In 2022, the median age

of a Fox News viewer was 69. According to Pew Research Center's 2022 analysis, only about 5 percent of active Twitter users were 65 or older. Fox News's viewership also skews to the right politically, but most Twitter users are Democrats or Democrat-leaning independents - in keeping with the younger user base.

That may be changing, certainly. Musk's efforts to embrace right-wing politics both personally and on the site are undoubtedly going to have a ripple effect on the population of users. I would be quite surprised, for example, if the partisan ratio of those who've signed up for Musk's \$8-per-month "verification" service are mostly Democrats.

Recent polling from YouGov shows the big gap in how much trust older and Republican Americans



Reacting to the plan of Carlson, Alon Musk, the owner of the Twitter said, Tucker is subject to the same rules and rewards of all content creators

afford to news on Fox and on Twitter. More than half of Republicans say that Fox News is a trustworthy news source, compared to only a third of Democrats. But less than 3 in 10 Republicans say the same of Twitter. Those 65 and older are six times as likely to say they view Fox News as a trustworthy source of news than they are to say the same of Twitter.

That's the bet, then: Can Carlson find an audience on Twitter that can compete with the one he had at Fox News?

This bet is made easier by the fact that his Fox News audience wasn't that big. Yes, he won the ratings, but he only pulled in a few million people a night. His announcement video for his new Twitter show has


already garnered 93 million views, according to Twitter's public metrics - but that's a two-minute, news-breaking clip. Can he generate the same interest on a regular basis? Do those metrics even accurately capture how much influence he's having?

That question will prove essential over the long term. Carlson had increasingly used his show not to bolster Republican politicians (as Sean Hannity does regularly) but instead to mold them. A perch on Fox News with a guaranteed audience of millions of Republican-leaning or sympathetic viewers is a good way to do that. A Twitter show with murky metrics that requires more effort to watch than simply flipping on the living room television at some

point before 8 p.m.? Perhaps not.

But this is the bet. Carlson thinks he is powerful enough to skip millions of dollars and move to a platform not heavily used by his existing fan base and still influence the political conversation. It's a big bet, and a risky one.

It is also a bet that reveals what has long been apparent. Carlson's announcement of his Twitter show was ironic in its excoriation of how the media tries to manipulate people. That, not informing his audience, was long his goal at Fox News. Whether he can do so as effectively in this new format remains to be seen.

— *This opinion piece first appeared in the Washington Post* 

All about 'Bollywood Odyssey,' a New Book that Deconstructs Bollywood Music

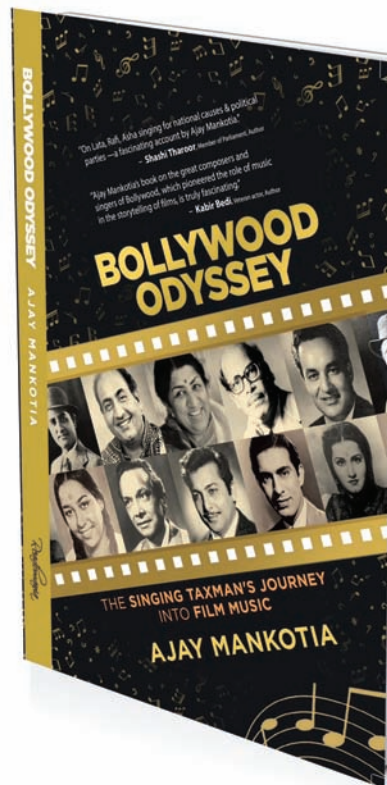
Ajay Mankotia's 'Bollywood Odyssey' takes the readers through the making of iconic songs and profiles the legends behind them

B

Aditya Mani Jha

ollywood music, although crucial to the success and legacy of a film, has always existed in a standalone capacity. After all, there are tonnes of bad or middling Bollywood movies that feature sublime music composed by masters. It is in the service of this inimitable world that retired IRS (Indian Revenue Service) officer Ajay Mankotia has written his recently published book *Bollywood Odyssey: The Singing Taxman's Journey Into Film Music* (Readomania). The book is a collection of profiles of the iconic singers, music composers and lyricists who created some of the most famous Bollywood songs of all time - from the Mangeshkar sisters to Madan Mohan, Khayyam, R.D. and S.D. Burman and many others, Ajay has done a fine job of chronicling their highs and lows.

Since his youth, Ajay has been a Bollywood music geek. In the 1950s, his mother Usha and his late maternal uncle Satish both worked at All India



BOOK REVIEW

Radio; the former as singer and the latter as music composer. Thanks to this background and the passion that he has sustained throughout his life, Ajay is a veritable encyclopaedia of Bollywood, as I discovered during a telephonic interview.

"The lyrics that we had in Bollywood through the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s were written by poets," said Ajay. "They had the necessary sensitivity, the sensibilities required for such a job. They were aware of the struggles of the marginalised. They also had the vocabulary and the skills required to express a romantic sentiment. It was very different from the lyrics we hear these days, which are quite forgettable in comparison."

Recurring themes

This tension between art and commerce is one of the recurring themes of the book - and, one could argue, one of the dominant narratives of all of Bollywood. Like in the essay on the composer Jaidev, Ajay describes one of his songs in this manner, which makes it clear that commercial concerns were the last thing on Jaidev's mind.

"It was not a commercial concoction; it did not earn an instant applause. It was not a hummable fun and dance number. It was serious, intricate, layered; inspired by Hindustani classical and folk music. It wove a rich tapestry of musical and lyrical nuances. There was a subtle variation of pace and mood. It was difficult to appreciate on the first listening; but it grew on you, wrapping you in its complexity: raag-based structure, leisurely pacing, soothing orchestration, sensitive lyrics and myriad musical variations."

Ajay Mankotia is similarly insightful about the political influ-



Music Director S.D. Burman during a song recording at Bombay HMV's studios. Playing the sitar is his son Rahul Dev Burman

ences of the artistes being profiled here. For example, here's his assessment of the great Sahir Ludhianvi. "If his poems and lyrics had a bitter tenor to them, it was because he was overwhelmed by the circumstances around him. It was this rare sensitivity towards the plight of the exploited sections that formed the cornerstone of his poetry. In his much-acclaimed poem 'Talkhiyan', he powerfully spoke of the structures of exploitation and their agents like the capitalist, the usurer, the priest, and others. While he critiqued the nation, and was cynical of politics, he never lost faith in the collective power of people."

Bollywood Odyssey understands the multi-modal role of the Bollywood composer very well. In so many cases, the composer has a duty almost as momentous as that of the film's director. Could we imagine films like *Rockstar* or *Abhimaan* without their songs? We cannot, because the music and the emotions

therein are part of the film's skeletal structure. Because of this inevitable truth, the composer's task becomes a massively collaborative one, requiring a certain creative synergy from all parties involved. As Ajay said during our interview, "There are so many creative and pragmatic decisions during this process. Which singers to use for which song, how long should a song be vis-à-vis the scenes immediately before and after, which raags or symphonies are best-suited for bringing out grief, expressing love or remorse or patriotism...the possibilities are endless and the best composers know when to use a particular tool and how."

Bollywood Odyssey is highly recommended if you are a Bollywood newbie. It will give you a bird's eye-view of the classics and educate you on the fundamentals of Bollywood music. And if you're a hardcore Bollywood geek, pick up the book and you might learn something new. ❏



What you Should Watch Instead of 'The Kerala Story' to Understand the State

The makers claim the movie is based on true stories. But they depict a Kerala that outsiders alone can imagine; none who grew up there

O

Yamini Nair

n the opening day of *The Kerala Story*, as I stepped out of the movie theatre after watching the film, my cousin called me. She casually mentioned her outing with her domestic worker, Vijayamma, in Kollam, Kerala. The 70-year-old worker, a staunch Hindu - she reads the Bhagavad Gita at a temple - stopped by a church and prayed with folded hands, chanting "Narayana Narayana" (Lord Vishnu). My cousin talked about how moved she was.

The domestic worker in question is an average Malayali for whom governments don't make

MOVIE REVIEW



a difference, and neither does religion. She sees her lord in a church and a temple. Perhaps a mosque, too. A single mother who toiled throughout her youth, she doesn't see the political fault lines between gods.

Back in Noida, I had just gotten home having watched *The Kerala Story*. It was as insidious as I had feared. The Prime Minister of India has hailed it as a film that "exposes terror conspiracies" at an election rally in Karnataka. An average Malayali, Hindu, Muslim or Catholic - will find several parts of the movie laughable.

As a reviewer put it, some scenes were straight out of a tourism brochure, one completely out of touch with the real Kerala. The protagonist, in a scene with a Kathakali performer, suddenly becomes an actor from the North on a tour of Kerala!

The makers claim the movie is based on true stories. But the experience of a handful of people from the state is portrayed as a well-rounded story of Kerala, proclaiming that the state is a "ticking time-bomb". They depict a Kerala that outsiders alone

can imagine; not those who grew up there. Muslim men in Kerala are not out to destroy the lives of Hindu women. They are ordinary people who run businesses, work in government offices, study in universities as any other student, trying to make a living. Yet the uncensored bloodshed seems to be depicted with the sole intention of creating fear about a certain community.

The story of a bunch of misguided youth choosing terrorism can be from any state.

The makers seem to have missed other real-life stories from Kerala - ones that Malayalis hold close to their hearts. Malayalam cinema still stands out amid the riot of confusing unrealistic movies today because it stays close to life, people and their emotions. It has depicted beautiful relationships between people from different religions and castes, without hurting any.

The story of *Kanchanamala*, a Hindu woman who loved a Muslim man, Moideen, was made into a film *Ennu Ninte Moideen*. They had only one mission - a life together. In her 80s, *Kanchanamala* still lives the life

of his widow after the man drowned in a river in Mukkam, Kozhikode.

Ennu Swantham Sreedharan is the true story of a Muslim woman who raises three children of her Hindu domestic worker and friend Chakki after her untimely death. The couple - Thennadan Subaida and Abdul Aziz Haji - are no more. But Sreedharan narrated their heart-warming story on social media that led to the making of the film. He revealed how the couple never tried to convert the three kids to Islam but raised them with their own children.

In the national award winning film *Thanichalla Njan*, Razia Beevi, a Muslim woman takes home an elderly Brahmin woman, Chellamma Antharjanam, who was sitting on a railway track to kill herself, and takes care of her as own mother. Again, a true story that happened in Kerala.

When politics blurs our vision, it turns into a dangerous game that erases several true stories. Its gravity challenges that of a black hole, sucking in gullible people. Amid all this, let the tribe of Vijayamma thrive. ❏

— *Courtesy: Indian Express*

Alarming Plunge

I

n their reports Ernst & Young (EY) and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) estimated that the Indian media and entertainment industry would grow to be collectively worth Rs. 2.8 lakh crore by 2025. After the pandemic setbacks the TV advertising revenues remained flat and struggled to grow while other media advertising revenue bounced back. The above reports must have been happy news for TV media owners. But the fraternity of journalists is not happy. They are worried about their freedom and the freedom of media. The yearly ranking in press freedom index given by the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) put India in 161st place among 180 countries for 2023. This is a sliding down of 11 places from the last year's 150th rank.

Founded in 1985 in France the RSF is recognised as a public interest organisation working to defend and promote media freedom and has consultative status with the United Nations, UNESCO, the Council of Europe and the International Organisation of Francophonie (OIF). As per the RSF's definition press freedom is "the ability of journalists as individuals and collectives to select, produce and disseminate news in the public interest independent of political, economic, legal and social interference and in the absence of threats to their physical and mental safety."

The RSF has 134 correspondents around the world and it releases daily updates on jailed journalists and instances of press censorship etc. They insure journalists on mission in high-risk areas and lend them helmets and bulletproof jackets. RSF provides journalists with legal help when they are victims of abuse and assists reporters forced to flee with asylum applications. The World Press Freedom Index is their most visible initiative to protect the freedom of media across the world. Reporters Without Borders develops a score between 0 (for the

worst possible performance in terms of securing press freedom) and 100 (the best possible score). In the 2023 index Norway scored 95.18 at the top position while North Korea's score was 21.72 in the bottom. India scored 36.62, a place below 70 falls under the 'problematic' category.

From 133 in 2016 India has been consistently falling in the index. This year till now one journalist was killed for his reporting in Maharashtra and 10 journalists are behind bars. The main reasons behind the fall in the index are the increasing violence against journalists and a politically partisan media. Such media which maintains close ties with the ruling establishment dangerously restricts the free flow of information.

As we all know journalists have been haunted and targeted by the ruling establishment for either revealing uncomfortable truths or asking uncomfortable questions and they always treat media as an adversary. As a result most media houses, particularly TV media, have become the megaphone of the ruling parties at the centre and several states. Journalists have been arrested and kept in jail for months on flimsy charges and when released by courts have again been arrested on the same charges. Raids on and searching of media houses and newsrooms by central agencies have become a common affair creating hostile working conditions for journalists to perform their duty.

When such harsh reality is staring at the face persons at the top have been trying to brush off the falling rank on RSF index as "mind games", The Minister for External Affairs said "I was amazed at our number. I thought we had the most uncontrollable press, and somebody is getting something fundamentally wrong." The government must come out of this mind set and work to uphold our constitution which implicitly assures freedom of press under article 19(1)(a). ❏

THE LAST PAGE



By
S N SINHA

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

RSF Report Asia - Pacific

Sclerotic One-Party Regimes and Media Control by Oligarchs

North Korea (180th), China (179th), Vietnam (178th), Myanmar (173rd) - Asia's one-party regimes and dictatorships are the ones that constrict journalism the most, with leaders tightening their totalitarian stranglehold on the public discourse. Starting with Xi Jinping, who secured a historic third term as China's leader, ensuring a concentration of power never seen since Mao Zedong, so as to pursue the crusade against journalism he launched ten years ago.

As a result, China is the world's biggest jailer of journalists and press freedom advocates. In this disastrous ranking, it is closely followed by Myanmar, which has become an information black hole since the coup of 1 February 2021.

The other phenomenon that dangerously restricts the free flow of information is the acquisition of media outlets by oligarchs who maintain close ties with political leaders. This is particularly the case in "hybrid" regimes such as India (161st), where all the mainstream media are now owned by wealthy

businessmen close to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.


At the same time, Modi has an army of supporters who track down all online reporting regarded as critical of the government and wage horrific harassment campaigns against the sources. Caught between these two forms of extreme pressure, many journalists are, in practice, forced to censor themselves.

The same trend can be found in Bangladesh (163rd) and Cambodia

the process of being literally erased from the media landscape. Elsewhere, the media also know the risks they are taking if they target the sovereign too directly, such as in the sultanate of Brunei (142nd), Thailand (106th), and Bhutan (90th).

On the other hand, changes of government loosened constraints on the media in Pakistan (150th) and the Philippines (132nd), even if these two countries continue to be among the world's most dangerous countries

for journalists. Renewals of government coalitions also explain the progress of countries as Sri Lanka (135th), Malaysia (73rd), and Australia (27th). At the upper end of the Index, functional democracies such as Taiwan

(35th), Samoa (19th) and New Zealand (13th) have perfected their roles as regional press freedom models. One of this year's surprises is the entry of Timor-Leste, a young democracy still under construction, into the Index's top 10. This is a positive confirmation of the observation made above about one-party regimes: excessive, ultra-concentrated power is the main obstacle to journalistic freedom. It is when political, economic, and judicial powers are balanced and regulated that press freedom can fully flourish. 



(147th), where governmental persecution of independent media has intensified in the run-up to elections that are due to be held in the coming months.

Off-limit questions

Another regional specificity is the persistence of off-limit questions and taboo subjects that prevent journalists from working freely. This is clearly the case in Afghanistan (152nd), where the Taliban government does not tolerate no straying from their fanatical version of Sharia and where women journalists are in

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"Only Education can change a family's fortune and liberate them from the clutches of poverty.. It defines the standard of living and lifestyle of a person.. I took the responsibility of educating your children and brought many reforms in Higher Education Sector including providing Free Education so that poverty should not be an obstacle in pursuing Higher Studies.." - Your Chief Minister

Jagananna Vidya Deevena

Total Fee Reimbursement..

Regular quarterly payments soon after the completion of the quarter..

Sri. Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, Hon'ble Chief Minister to deposit Rs. 703 Crores directly into the bank accounts of mothers of 9.95 lakh students for January - March, 2023 quarter, with the click of a button in Kovvuru of East Godavari District, Today..

Including the arrears of Rs.1,778 Crores kept pending by the Previous Government from the year 2017 onwards,

Jagananna Government has so far paid **Rs.14,912.43 Crores** towards 'Jagananna Vidya Deevena' and 'Jagananna Vasathi Deevena' alone..

Jagananna Government has so far paid Rs.14,912.43 Crores towards 'Jagananna Vidya Deevena' and 'Jagananna Vasathi Deevena' alone..

Jagananna Government is not only taking care of the educational expenses of students but also their boarding and lodging expenses.. Financial assistance of Rs. 20,000 to students pursuing Degree courses, Engineering and Medicine, Rs.15,000 to Polytechnic students and Rs.10,000 to ITI students in two instalments every year regularly.. Assistance under this scheme is given to all children in a family, irrespective of their number..

Revitalising the Higher Education Sector..

- Ensuring that no student is deprived of higher education due to poverty, Jagananna Government brought in schemes like 'Jagananna Vidya Deevena' and 'Jagananna Vasathi Deevena' providing Total Fee Reimbursement along with boarding and lodging expenses..
- Jagananna Government has revised the Curriculum by including 4-year UG Honors Degree along with job oriented modules and 30% Skill Development Courses to increase the employability of the students and to meet the industrial needs..
- As part of their Curriculum, Online Verticals have been introduced through which the students can pursue necessary skills in online mode..
- By introducing a 10 month mandatory internship, Jagananna Government is preparing students to cope with industrial requirements..
- Signed MoU with Microsoft to provide training to 1.62 lakh students in 40 Skill Development Courses where 1.20 lakh students have already completed their training in Microsoft Technology, Likewise, 33,000 candidates in Salesforce, 23,000 in AWS, 20,000 in Nasscom, 10,000 in Palo Alto and 7,000 candidates in Allianz Data Analytics have pursued training and received certificates.. Andhra Pradesh is the only State in this Country to achieve more than 2 lakh certifications in a Calendar Year..

Reforms of Jagananna Government yielding results..

- The number of students who passed Intermediate but could not get enrolled for higher studies in 2018-19 was 81,813 but with the effective implementation of 'Jagananna Vidya Deevena' and 'Jagananna Vasathi Deevena' the number has come down to 22,387 in 2022-23. The dropout percentage in entry to higher education has come down significantly to 6.62% in 2022-23 against the national average of 27%..
- The Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) for 2018-19 was recorded as 32.4%.. Steps are being taken to increase the GER to 70%.. The average number of girls enrolling in colleges per 100 boys has increased from 81 in 2018-19 to 94 in 2020-21..
- The Campus Placements have also made a quantum jump from 37,000 in 2018-19 to 85,000 in 2021-22.. So far this year, 80,000 students secured jobs in campus placements, which would increase further more by the end of August, when the process of placements completes..

NOTICE THE DIFFERENCE !!

| Name of the Scheme | Number of beneficiaries | Amount disbursed (Rs. in Crores) | Details of the Scheme |
|---|-------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| Jagananna Amma Vodi Rs.15,000 financial assistance per year to mothers, who send their wards to school. | 44,48,865 | 19,674.34 | NO |
| Jagananna Vidya Deevena Total Fee Reimbursement.. | 26,98,728 | 10,636.67 | Leave aside Vasathi Deevena, even Vidya Deevena assistance was plagued with irregular disbursement, meagre amounts and lot of handover. Jagananna Government paid the fees rest pending by Previous Government.. |
| Jagananna Vasathi Deevena Towards boarding & lodging expenses.. | 25,17,245 | 4,275.76 | Forget about the uniforms, even textbooks could not be provided to the students even after 6 - 7 months of reopening of schools.. No provision at all for other student necessities.. |
| Jagananna Vidya Kanuka Jagananna kit with uniforms, bilingual textbooks, Oxford dictionary, shoes, socks, belt etc., is given from the day of reopening of schools itself. | 47,40,421 | 2,368.33 | |
| Jagananna Goru Mudda Improvised, quality, tasty, hot cooked meals with daily change in menu. | 43,26,782 | 3,590.00 | Poor quality food.. Paltty funds.. Even the meagre allowance of Aayee were kept pending for 89 months.. On an average only Rs. 400 Crores was spent per annum.. |
| "Nadu - Nedu" in schools First Phase | 15,715 | 3,669.00 | Schools in Dilapidated State.. Lack of facilities.. |
| Second Phase | 22,344 | 8,000.00 | |
| Total revamp of 45,975 schools with an expenditure of Rs.17,805 Crores in three phases.. | | | |
| YSR Sampoorna Poshana Wholesome and improvised nutritious food to children aged between 6 months to 5 years, besides pregnant women and lactating mothers. | 35,70,675 | 6,141.34 | Namesake nutritious food, that too limited to a fee.. On an average only Rs.500 Crores was spent per annum.. |
| Swechha (Sanitary Napkins) Freedom from restrictions... | 10,01,860 | 32.00 | NO |
| Taba to class 8th students to promote Digital Education.. | 5,18,740 | 685.87 | NO |
| Jagananna Videse Vidya Deevena (Total reimbursement of tuition fee up to Rs. 1.25 Crores to students, who got admitted in the top 50 O&E and Times ranked Foreign Colleges in 21 Faculties..) | 1,858 | 132.41 | Meagre financial assistance that too for their own people.. Lack of transparency in selection of colleges.. Huge pending in payment of fees.. Total dues of Rs.318 Crores were not paid since 2016-17.. |
| YSR Kalyanamastha, YSR Shaadi Taha Aiming to encourage education, 10th pass is made mandatory for both bride & groom. | 16,668 | 125.50 | Meagre amounts, which is not even closer to half the assistance provided to various communities by Jagananna Government.. Assistance to the BCC was given for only one year.. Scheme was completely withdrawn from October 2016, in Rs.60 Crores were not paid to the beneficiaries.. |
| Total | | Rs. 59,331.22 Crores | |

Appeal to Mothers..

Mothers are requested to pay the college fee pertaining to their children within a week or 10 days after the amount is credited into their accounts. In case of failure to do so, the next instalment of the fee reimbursement will be paid directly into the accounts of colleges..

If you face any problems regarding fee reimbursement, dial Toll free no. **1902**

Sri. Merugu Nagarjuna, Hon'ble Minister for Social Welfare

Sri. Botcha Satyanarayana, Hon'ble Minister for Education

Note: Sri. Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy, Hon'ble Chief Minister to deposit financial assistance under "Jagananna Vidya Deevena" at 11:00 AM on 24th May, 2023 at Kovvuru, East Godavari District. Watch this programme live on all popular news channels.
Issued by: Commissioner, I&PR Department, Government of Andhra Pradesh