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Fair Use

In recent weeks has come news that ANI, a news agency has been shaking down independent YouTubers, demanding that they pay the agency for use of its video footage or other media products, or face the prospect of having their channels deleted by YouTube.

A few of the YouTubers have highlighted the agency's strong-arm tactics on air, on their respective channels, while others have caved in to the demand and cut deals with the agency. Legally speaking ANI can seek payment for usage of its content. But it has to be reasonable. Taking advantage of the grey area in the copyright act ANI has been demanding exorbitant amounts of money.

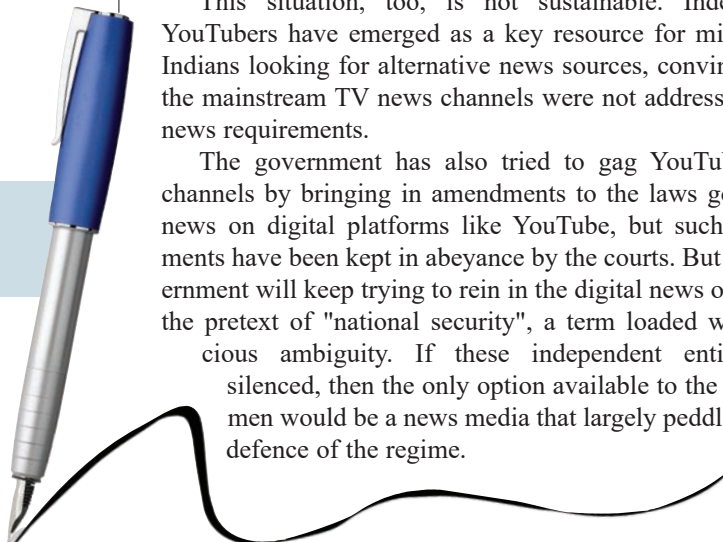
The government has a responsibility to address this problem. For that it has to amend copyright act to clearly specify the contours of fair use. Otherwise, independent YouTubers will continue to be harassed by the agency and other such purveyors of news footage. This is the need of the hour.

Secondly, YouTube needs to be sensitised to not shut down independent journalists with their YouTube channels, citing a government order or some complaint from a news agency. The past few years have seen YouTube yank the channels of reputed journalists based on frivolous complaints, sometimes without even alerting the content creators.

This situation, too, is not sustainable. Independent YouTubers have emerged as a key resource for millions of Indians looking for alternative news sources, convinced that the mainstream TV news channels were not addressing their news requirements.

The government has also tried to gag YouTube news channels by bringing in amendments to the laws governing news on digital platforms like YouTube, but such amendments have been kept in abeyance by the courts. But the government will keep trying to rein in the digital news outlets on the pretext of "national security", a term loaded with delicious ambiguity. If these independent entities are silenced, then the only option available to the countrymen would be a news media that largely peddles lies in defence of the regime.

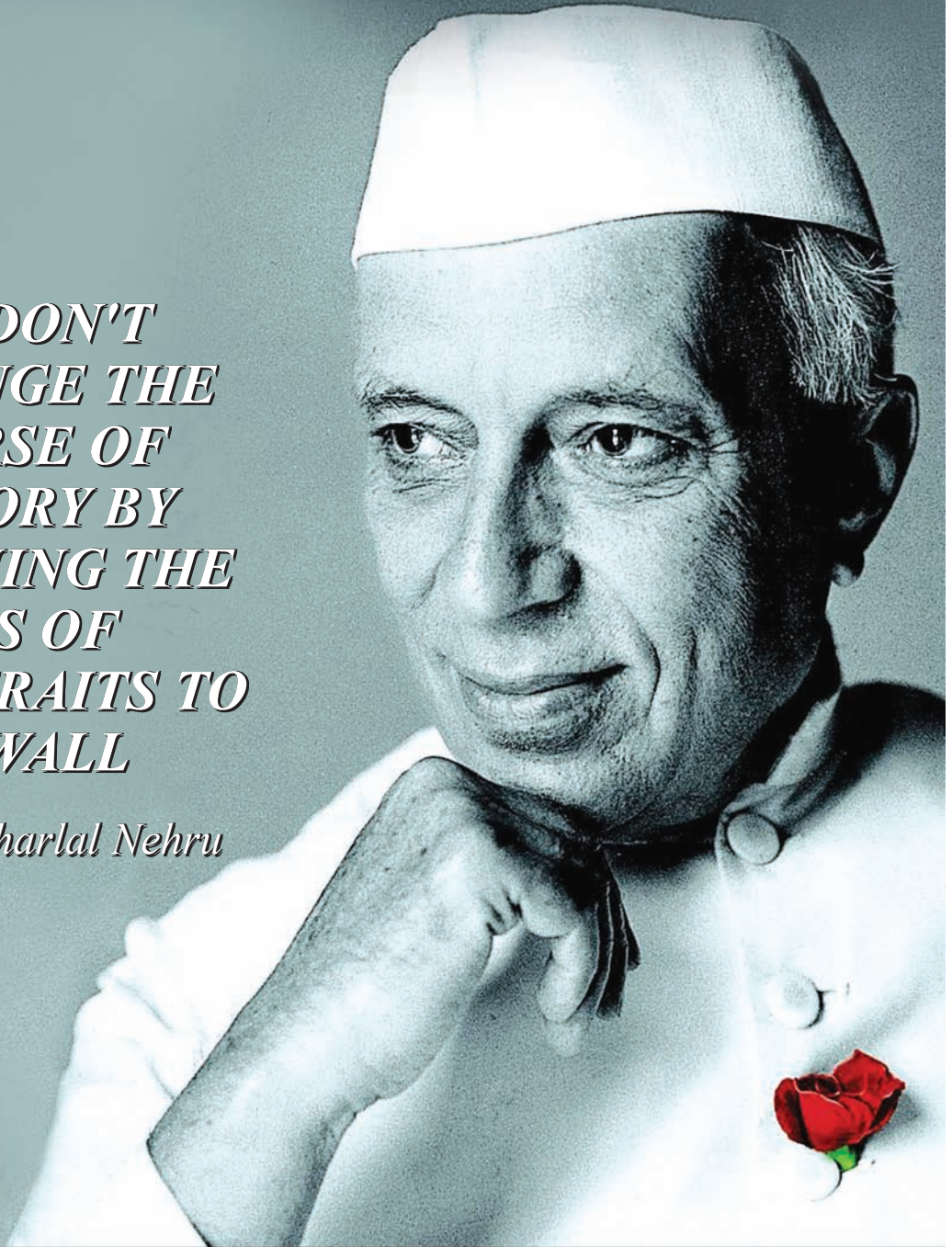
Fearless
Frank
Free



“

*YOU DON'T
CHANGE THE
COURSE OF
HISTORY BY
TURNING THE
FACES OF
PORTRAITS TO
THE WALL*

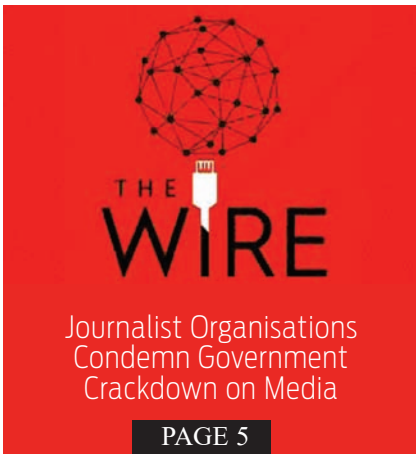
— Jawaharlal Nehru



Inside



URDU
JOURNALISTS
FETED 4



PAGE 5



Families of Deceased
Journalists get Aid from
Telangana Media Academy

PAGE 7



Dramatic Increase in
Targeted Killings of
Journalists

PAGE 8

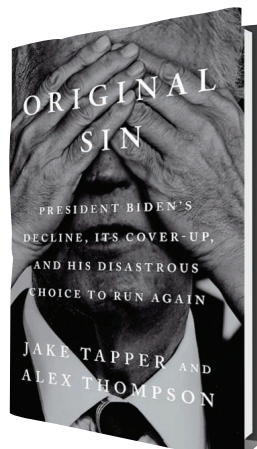


ANI Finds Business
Niche in Copyright
Claims Against
YouTubers

PAGE 11

All in a Day's Work
for Pankaj Tripathi's
Madhav
Mishra

24



'Original Sin'
Indicts the
'Cover-Up'
of a Steeply
Declining
Joe Biden

PAGE 26



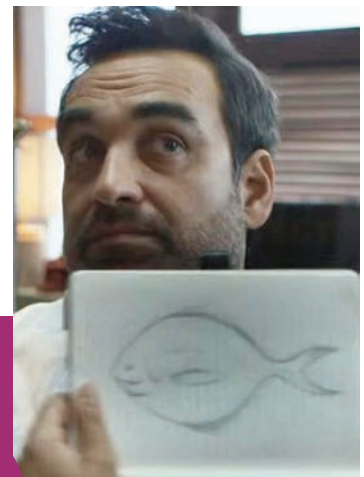
Skype Shuts
Down: Here's
What Will
Happen to
Your Data

PAGE 29



Semicolons
are Becoming
Increasingly Rare;
Their Disappearance
Should be Resisted

PAGE 20





Urdu Journalists Feted

M A Majid

The Telangana Urdu Working Journalists Federation, an affiliate of the Telangana State Union of Working Journalists (TUWJ) presented awards to best Urdu journalists at the state level at the TUWJ office auditorium in Hyderabad. These com-

memorative awards were given to eight senior Urdu journalists in the name of eminent Hyderabad Urdu journalists Faiz Mohammad Azgar, Tabassum Fareedi, Habeeb Ali Jilani and Raheem.

The event, chaired by Urdu Working Journalists Federation President M.A. Majid was attended by Hyderabad MP Asaduddin Owaisi. Prominent leaders from public life and journalism including

Advisor to the Telangana government and former minister Shabbir Ali, Telangana Media Academy Chairman and Indian Journalists Union President K. Sreenivas Reddy, IJU Steering Committee Member Devulapalli Amar, and TUWJ President K. Virahath Ali participated in the function. More than 150 Urdu journalists and Urdu intellectuals attended the meeting. ❑

NHRC Takes Cognisance of Journalist's Murder in Haryana, Seeks Report from DGP

Taking suo motu cognisance of the shocking murder of Dharmendra Singh Chauhan, a journalist, in Haryana's Jhajjar district, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has issued a notice to the state's top police boss. It demanded a detailed report on the incident from the DGP within two weeks. Chauhan was affiliated with online media outlet Fast News India. He was fatally shot on the evening of May 18 near his residence in Luhari village, Jhajjar district. He sustained a gunshot wound to the head and the villagers rushed the journalist to a



Dharmendra Singh Chauhan

nearby hospital, and he was later referred to a hospital in Gurugram, where he succumbed to his injuries later that night.

According to initial reports from local authorities, Chauhan had left for a routine walk after dinner when unidentified assailants opened fire on

him and fled the scene. Nearby residents discovered Chauhan critically injured and lying in a pool of blood after hearing gunfire.

In a statement, NHRC observed that if the reported facts are true, they raise "a serious issue of violation of the human rights of the victim." The Commission has directed the director general of police (DGP) of Haryana, to submit a comprehensive report on the case, which should include the current status of the investigation being conducted to identify and apprehend the perpetrators. ❑

Journalist Organisations Condemn Government Crackdown on Media



Journalists' organisations including Indian Journalists Union (IJU) and Press Club of India have condemned the government crackdown on news outlets and journalists in the wake of the ghastly terrorist attack at Pahalgam. On 9 May 2025, the news website The Wire released a statement, stating that "the Government of India has blocked access to thewire.in across India." Some internet service providers said that The Wire has been "blocked as per the order of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology under the IT Act, 2000."

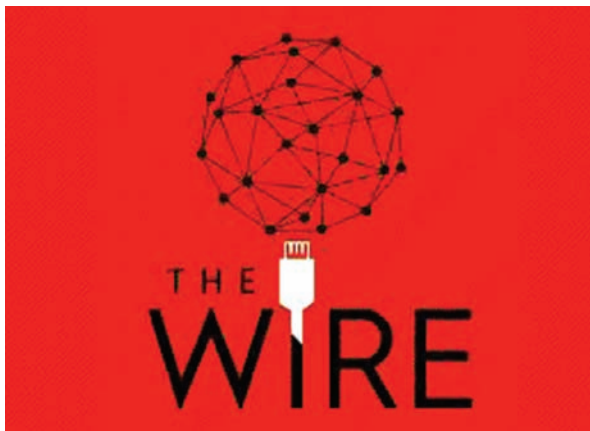
In a statement issued on May 10 the media bodies said if the government of India had indeed ordered this block, it would constitute a grave action against the interests of a free press in India. The statement expressed deep concern over, "any action by the government that stifles independent news media such as The Wire".

The block is especially concerning as it appears to follow on the heels of actions against journalists across India after the horrific act of terrorism in Pahalgam on 22 April 2025, which was uniformly and unequivocally condemned by the Indian press. However, sec-

tions of the media and some You Tube news channels have been unfairly targeted. The X account of independent media organisation Maktoob Media has been "withheld" in India on a "legal demand," alongside the accounts of Kashmir based news organisations, and senior journalists such as Anuradha Bhasin and Muzamil Jaleel.

Previously, in the wake of the Pahalgam terror attack, Kashmir-based journalist Hilal Mir was detained, allegedly for his posts on social media. The X account of BBC Urdu too has been withheld in India. There are news reports that the government has issued executive orders to block 8,000 X accounts. X has not been allowed to share any details of these orders owing to legal restrictions, which goes against transparency and accountability, the statement said.

The journalist organisations demanded lifting of the blocks. The statement said that while there is no doubt that the media as a whole has to conduct itself responsibly, the arbitrary blocks on some social-media accounts of media-persons and news organizations, the orders for which have not been made public, must be lifted. It added that such crackdowns are against the freedom of the press and directly against the interests of the Indian public. The organisations strongly urged the government to be transparent in its actions, and to let journalists and news organisations carry out their work in an unrestricted manner. Signatories to the statement include Indian Journalists Union, Press Club of India, Indian Women's Press Corps, Press Association, Delhi Union of Journalists, Kerala Union of Working Journalists and Working News Cameramen's Association



Om Birla Nominates Sambit Patra and Two Others to the Press Council of India

Om Birla, the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, has appointed three members to the Press Council of India.

Among them are BJP leader Sambit Patra, Shiv Sena's Naresh Mhaske, and Congress's Kali Charan Munda. This body serves as a quasi-judicial entity for overseeing the print media sector.

Press Council Composition and Roles: The Press Council of India consists of a chairman and 28 members. Thirteen members represent working journalists, with six being newspaper editors and seven being journalists other than editors. Additionally, six members are from those who own or manage newspapers, divided equally among large, medium, and small publications.

Furthermore, the Council includes a representative from news agency management. Five members represent Parliament, with three nominated by the Lok Sabha Speaker and two by the Rajya Sabha Chairman to advocate for readers' interests.

Recent Nominations to the Council: Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar recently appointed BJP members Sudhanshu Trivedi



and Brij Lal to the Press Council. The University Grants Commission (UGC) selected Ashwini K Mohapatra from Jawaharlal Nehru University, while Manan Kumar Mishra was chosen by the Bar Council of India. Sahitya Akademi nominated its Secretary K Sreenivasarao.

The Council also includes three members nominated from various sectors: education, law, and literature. These representatives come from the UGC, Bar Council of India, and Sahitya Akademi respectively.

This diverse composition ensures that different perspectives are considered in regulating the print media industry. The inclusion of professionals from journalism, management, education, law, and literature aims to balance interests and uphold standards within the media landscape.

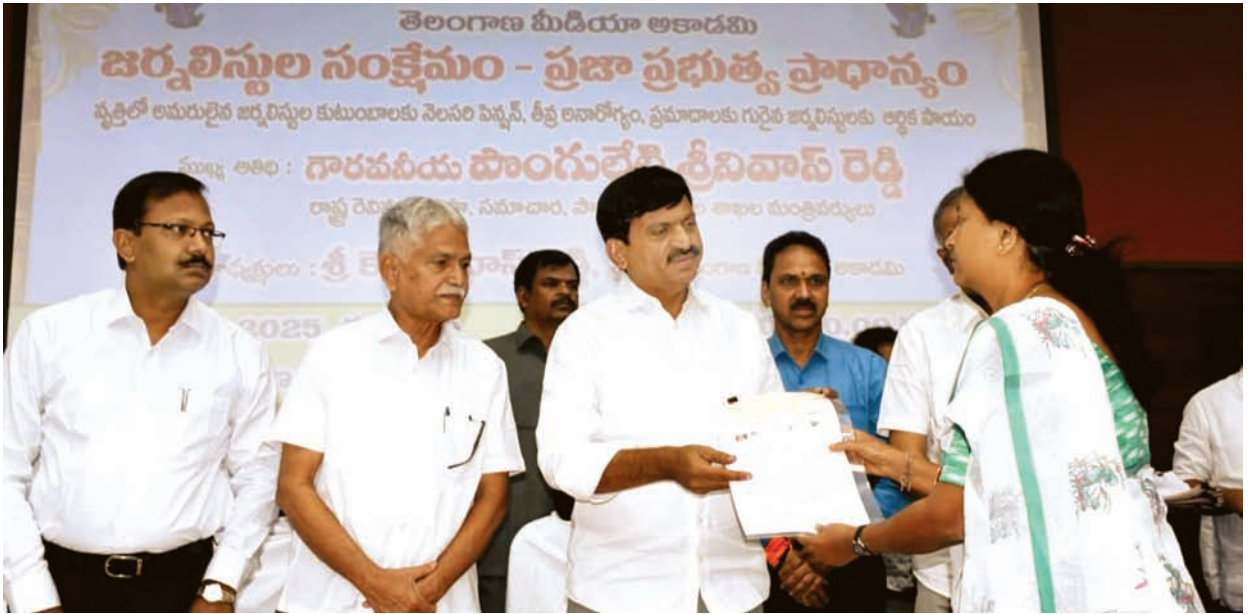
— Courtesy: oneindia.com



**ALAPATI
SURESH
AP MEDIA
ACADEMY
CHAIRMAN**

Indian Journalists Union (IJU) National Executive Committee Member and Editor of Scribes News, the Union owned monthly magazine dedicated to media issues, Alapati Suresh Kumar has been appointed Chairman, C Raghavachari Media Academy of Andhra Pradesh by the government of Andhra Pradesh.

A well-known journalist in both the Telugu states with over 40 years of standing, Alapati had a fair share of exposure and made his mark in all the three versions; print, electronic and web media. He has two books on contemporary politics to his credit and produced a documentary on Amaravati, the capital. He will serve in the new position for two years.



Telangana Minister for Information and Public Relations Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy handing over cheque to the kin of a deceased journalist

Families of Deceased Journalists get Aid from Telangana Media Academy



K. Ramnarayana

*General Secretary,
TUWJ*

Telangana State Union Working Journalists (TUWJ) came to the aid of kin of 38 journalists who passed away prematurely, by facilitating financial succour to the families. The financial aid has also been extended to eight journalists who were bedridden due to accidents and illness. The financial assistance has been provided by the Telangana Media Academy.

TUWJ has took up the case of deceased journalists and submitted applications to the Media Academy on behalf of the affected families. In a function organised by the Media Academy on May 9 the affected families received cheques from the hands of Minister for Revenue, Housing and Information and Public Relations Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy,

Telangana Media Academy Chairman K. Sreenivas Reddy and Information Commissioner Vinay Krishna Reddy at Media Academy auditorium in Hyderabad. Families of the deceased and ailing journalists have been given a cheque of one lakh rupees each. A monthly pension of Rs. 3,000 and Rs. 2,000 for children education has also been sanctioned to the kin of deceased journalists.

TUWJ State President K. Virahath Ali, General Secretary K. Ramnarayana, IJU Steering Committee Member M.A. Majid, State Secretaries K. Srikanth Reddy, G. Madhu Goud, State Executive committee members A. Rajesh, B. Kiran Kumar, Ghous and HUJ President Shiga Shankar Goud participated in the programme. 



Dramatic Increase in Targeted Killings of Journalists

International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has on May 3 launched its 23rd annual South Asia Press Freedom Report. The report highlighted a dramatic increase in targeted killings of journalists. Here we give the Foreword to the report written by IFJ's Asia-Pacific Director Jane Worthington

23rd

annual South Asia Press Freedom Report highlighted a dramatic increase in targeted killings of journalists. Here we give the Foreword to the report written by IFJ's Asia-Pacific Director Jane Worthington.

There is no doubt that democracy in South Asia is facing a severe and troubling downward trajectory and, with it, an enormous crisis in collective political confidence. Everywhere we look, nations are struggling not just to get the balance right but they are defaulting their citizens in democracy's fundamental fora - to respect basic human rights, to give clear regard to the rule of law, to value all people equally, to tolerate differences and

opposing ideas and - importantly for the media - to allow true freedom of speech, association and belief. A quick walk around the national headlines gives a pretty clear picture. Under the strong arm of military control and its dominance over the country's political sphere, Pakistan is for all intents and purposes an authoritarian regime operating under the guise of democracy. Afghanistan remains shut down internally and locked off from the world under the ongoing repression and international isolation wrought by the Taliban regime. India's ever-increasing polarisation has the world's largest democracy precariously exposed to the whims of misinformation, state sanc-

tioned propaganda and viral outpourings of hate speech. Bhutan may guarantee freedom of speech, but the situation on the ground remains constrained and fragile. Nepal's political instability and policy stagnation is fuelling broader social discontent and a return of a determined and aggressive pro-monarchy movement. The Maldives is again tipping precariously toward unchecked state power via a heavily weakened opposition. Sri Lanka's ongoing penchant for restrictions and disruption of civic rights and its systematic failure to address past crimes remains a critical concern, even despite the political departure of the country's entrenched dynastic rule. And lastly, there is Bangladesh - an enormous democracy standing on extremely shaky ground after a mass popular uprising brought down the brutal dictatorship of Sheikh Hasina. To say things are precarious in South Asia is a vast understatement. As for the media, the situation represents an even more formidable and perilous frontline. In this report, *Frontline Democracy: Media Amid Political Churn*, we break down the complexities and challenges of an industry that is endeavouring to find level footing and steady ground in democratic spaces riven by political challenges and massive economic and civil disruption. We also outline how the ongoing collapse of revenue streams and the fact that too many media houses remain compromised and over reliant on revenue from government advertising, means that too many journalists also remain unpaid while still working. While the ever-expanding digiverse continues to offer immense opportunities for journalism and its potential to expose corruption and human rights violations as well as challenge main-



Bangladesh's journalists faced harassment, arrests, and heavy restrictions while covering national anti-government demonstrations in 2024. Students protesting near Dhaka University in Bangladesh's capital on August 12, 2024, demanded accountability and a trial for Bangladesh's ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina

stream and official narratives, the big question remains - how does it sustain? With so much of South Asia's media also in the midst of a fight for financial survival due to the drastic industry transformation, the stakes for democracy remain exceedingly worrying. It is true that the rise and rise of the growing gig economy continues to have a profound impact on the way journalism in South Asia is being created and shared. While it is generating incredible opportunities for investigations, storytelling, monetisation and using secure channels to publish vital news in closed political spaces, it is also leading media workers into a world of contracts, precarious work, freelancing and unstable work with little or no job security. At the same time, the increasing influence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on the industry continues to play out, destroying tra-

ditional media jobs with a flick of a key. Compounding the financial challenges is the ongoing safety and security situation confronting South Asia's journalists and media workers both online and offline.

From May 1, 2024, to April 30, 2025

IFJ and its affiliates recorded around 250 media rights violations against media workers across the South Asia region. Targeted killings of journalists rose dramatically as violence escalated, up from eight deaths in 2023-24 to 22 killings in 2024-25, with Pakistan leading the tally with nine journalists murdered, Bangladesh with six and India with five. Bangladesh had the highest total number of violations amid its national wave of protests with at least 67 violations recorded, followed by Afghanistan with 48,

Nepal with 41, and Pakistan with 35. In this climate, the collective voice of industry unions is ever more critical. Importantly, this report tells the story of how journalists and their representative bodies continue to fight for journalists' rights, wages and working conditions and how they are also standing up against increasingly authoritarian governments and calling them to account. In every country, journalists and media activists continue to push back on this democratic frontline.

Here they prevail and endeavour to find solutions to complex problems by forming alliances and working with civil society to establish stronger protections for media workers and drive future industry viability through the sharing of ideas and strategies. With misinformation and disinformation now the number one risk facing the world, the imperative is evident that South Asia's media must remain the watch-dog to these fragile democracies. And journalists must continue to play the crucial role

in shaping public opinion, disseminating facts and vital information and holding the power to account, while also supporting the process of political participation and public mobilisation. But importantly, we must underline, there can be no robust fourth estate if there is no decent work for media workers. These brave and important people cannot sustain without a living wage. And there can be no democracy without them. This is the most critical frontline. 

Media Bodies Take up Signature Campaign against Arbitrary Provisions in DPDP Act

Media bodies have started a signature campaign seeking amendments to the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023. At the end of the campaign the organisations will submit the memorandum signed by journalists, unions, press clubs, and media rights organisations from across the country, to the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY).

The Press Club of India has taken this initiative along with Press Club Hyderabad, State Press Club Madhya Pradesh, Delhi Union of Journalists, Indian Women's Press Corps, Press Association, Kerala Union of Working Journalists, Working News Cameramen's Association, Mumbai Press Club, Press Club Jammu, Kerala Press Club Delhi, Indian Journalists Union, Press Club Kolkata, Press Club Bangalore, Gauhati Press Club,



Shillong Press Club, Chennai Press Club, Pink City Press Club Jaipur, Chandigarh Press Club, and Press Club Trivandrum.

The memorandum flags concerns pertaining to specific definitions and provisions of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act that have a direct and adverse impact on press freedom in general and journalists in particular, affecting the rights granted under Article 19 (1)(a) and (g) [fundamental right to freedom of speech and the fundamental right to trade and professions] of the Constitution of India.

The DPDP Act was passed by

both houses of Parliament in August, 2023. On August 11, 2023, it was notified in the Gazette of India. On January 3, 2025, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) published the draft of rules for public consultation and suggestions. The last date for submission of comments and suggestions was February 18, 2025.

The DPDP Act has not been operationalised yet as rules for implementing the law have not been promulgated. However, several news reports suggest that the Government of India is likely to notify the rules in the near future. 

ANI Finds Business Niche in Copyright Claims Against YouTubers

The news agency is using a chink in YouTube's copyright policy in India to shut down news content producers if they don't cough up large sums for using its videos and visuals.



Ayushi Kar

Sumit (name changed on request) had seven days to save his YouTube channel. YouTube had notified him that many of his videos were flagged for copyright violations by Asian News International (ANI) for using its visuals.

Sumit received more than three copyright strikes in one go. These particular videos were immediately taken off air, and YouTube informed him his channel would soon be permanently deleted. YouTube strikes down a video when it receives a claim of copyright infringement against a YouTuber. Three strikes in a row means he is out of YouTube for good. He had just seven days to contest it.

After trying many jobs, Sumit had turned to YouTube, where he has built a following as a political commentator critical of BJP—a growing genre attracting former journalists, comics, and citizens. Against him was the fifty-five-year-old media goliath ANI that has become the primary source for daily video reportage for both TV news and social media creators.

Sumit said he reached out to ANI. It asked him eventually to pay between Rs 15-18 lakh (precise amount withheld to protect identity) in copyright penalties and licence fees to withdraw the strikes. Despite repeated requests for a cheaper deal, ANI didn't budge.

Sumit said he paid the 'full amount' to resolve the copyright claim and save his channel. In return, ANI lifted the copyright strikes and granted Sumit a one-year prospective access to its audiovisual and written news content. Sumit isn't the lone guy facing the aggressive copyright claims of ANI, which has adopted a new strategy to punitively leverage YouTube's copyright policies in India to generate revenue. Using the death clause in YouTube policy and India's vague provisions for fair use of copyrighted material, ANI is effectively forcing YouTube creators to buy expensive year-long licences.

The agency's approach is to negotiate pricey licensing deals with YouTubers, including several who are strong critics of the BJP, even as YouTube holds a sword over the content producer's channel for multiple claims of copyright violation.

Besides Sumit, The Collective spoke to three other YouTubers who have signed or are in the process of signing a deal with ANI after receiving copyright strikes. ANI initially quoted between Rs 15 lakh and 25 lakh to these YouTubers to revoke the strikes. We reviewed the YouTubers' correspondence to confirm that ANI has made such demands. Industry insiders told us of



at least three others who had complained to peers that ANI was asking for exorbitant sums, which in at least one case went up to Rs 40 lakh. We could not independently verify that. When we asked ANI about it, it did not directly deny the claim in its response.

While ANI might be following a business it understands to be legal and fair, the episode has raised larger concern about copyright laws and the fair use rights in India by content producers who are worried about being squeezed out of their livelihoods - sometimes wiping out years of labour to build a community - between YouTube's policies and copyright owners willingness to play hardball.

Ravish Kumar, one of India's most prominent journalists on YouTube with 13.2 million subscribers to his channel, told The Collective that he takes all necessary precautions to not violate copyright and has not received a notice from any entity, but he is concerned too.

"In this case, only YouTube can and should provide protection. YouTube engages a lot with creators on copyright issues. But one thing still bothers me: A channel being summarily shut down with just three strikes against mere claims of copyright infringement. Instead of a strike, there can be a system of sending a notice to remove the video. But the channel should not be shut down until the right authority decides on the infringement," he said.

"If the creator is being forced by an entity to pay lakhs of rupees using the threat of a strike, then this is not a fair business practice in my view. In case - and only when it is determined that an infringement has taken place - a penalty can be imposed, but it should not be like a defamation suit of Rs 100 crore. In any case, the punishment imposed should be pro-

portionate to the violation. How can three violations steal one's means of livelihood and years of work?" he added.

This is arguably the first case to come out in public about any major news outlet enforcing copyright claims at wide scale against YouTube creators in the space of news and political satire. One prominent and recent instance of copyright claims filed by a legacy media organisation was the 2021 defamation and copyright violation case brought by India Today group against Newsland for a satire roasting its anchors.

We sent a list of detailed ques-



tions to ANI pertaining to the reported assertions, claims and facts of the story. It did not deny any of the claims or assertions. Neither did it answer the specific questions. It instead shared a general statement defending its policies and practices. It said: "In any society governed by the rule of law provides for punishment for theft. ANI invests heavily in original news gathering, with bureaus across India and abroad and significant resources deployed in real-time content production. As the exclusive copyright holder of its content, ANI has the sole legal right to communicate its work to the public or license its use.

"Enforcing these rights - through mechanisms like YouTube's copyright policy or legal action - is not extortion. It is the lawful protection of property, as guaranteed by copyright law. Anyone disputing our rights is free to seek legal

recourse," ANI said.

We asked YouTube whether its practice of deciding at the first instance whether a copyright claim against creators' work on its platform is valid and deciding to take down videos and channels on its discretion puts the latter at a disadvantage.

YouTube's spokesperson said, "We work hard to balance the rights of copyright holders with the creative pursuits of the YouTube community. It's not up to YouTube to decide who 'owns the rights' to content, which is why we give copyright holders tools to make copyright claims and uploaders tools to dispute claims that are made incorrectly."

We found this was not entirely true. YouTube does take the first judgement call on such claims and then leaves it to the creator to dispute it or strike a deal with the claimant. YouTube shared a brief of its copyright policies with us, which contradicted the publishing giant's quotable statement.

The grey zone of Indian copyright laws and YouTube's policy in India muddies the waters and gives ANI an additional bargaining chip.

You Too, YouTube?

India's Copyright Act 1957 allows usage of someone's copyrighted material under terms of "fair dealing".

Section 52 of the rules under the 1957 law establishes grounds of fair dealing, allowing use of copyrighted material without the copyright owner's permission for purposes such as criticism, comment, news, reporting and many more.

In practice, there is a severe lack of specificity in law and regulations about how fair use doctrine is to be practised. It can boil down to an argument over whether the usage of a four-second clip out of a two minute video for news and analysis

constitutes fair-use? In absence of clear guidelines, courts become the arbiter, in each instance.

News and political creators on YouTube that we spoke to talked about the lack of clarity on fair use of ANI's material, both in Indian law and the way YouTube deals with it.

YouTube claims to have a vetting mechanism to filter copyright claims. In its public information forum, it claims that it globally applies copyright exemption based on the 1998 Digital Millennium Copyright Act of the US, with its own categories of exemptions called "fair use." Technically news, satire and parody are some of the exceptions, says YouTube. In its response to us, YouTube said it works under "applicable copyright laws" but did not clarify if this meant the Indian copyright law or the US one as it claims on its website. YouTube provided a summary of its processes.

A copyright infringement by a creator on YouTube potentially leaves the platform open to liabilities as well. So, YouTube's peremptory and discretionary strikes against creators gives the global giant protection from potentially expensive legal wranglings by litigious copyright claimants.

The creators we spoke to pointed to the fact that YouTube tends to play it safe in India and finds it better to promptly take content down rather than risk wading into legal trouble about the validity of a claim of infringement.

The fair use doctrine is given a short shrift by YouTube, which swiftly takes down content accused of violating copyright, long before the fairness of its use is ever truly examined, the creators claimed. It is mainly because ANI can hold YouTube liable as the publisher of content it claims infringes copyright.

YouTube chooses to apply fair use in a way that protects its own liability while leaving the courts to be the final adjudicator.

Fair-use principle is further hamstrung by the inability of small creators to challenge the powerful, litigious organisations in court. The process is fairly arduous and might not guarantee results in the favour of the creator. So, in many cases such strikes hold.

YouTube has another condition that spells doom for the creator. If a channel has three strikes in a ninety-day period, it will automatically be deleted with the creator being effectively banned from the platform. To larger creators, the platform provides a seven-day grace period where the creator is given time to reduce the strike count. But the clock keeps ticking, forcing the creators to settle with the copyright holder.

This seven-day ticking clock



under YouTube policy allows ANI to hold disproportionate bargaining power in negotiations.

A copyright lawyer explained, "Why can ANI charge exorbitant sums to a creator for ANI content? It is because YouTube's process allows it." Judicial remedy is unappealing for the aggrieved individual content creators because it is tedious and costly. And YouTube is afraid of getting caught in a legal wrangle outside the US.

Under the Indian Copyright Act and IT Rules, ANI can potentially bring a suit against YouTube for alleged copyright infringements. It is

trigger-happy with litigation in general. Since last year, ANI has brought several suits against large American tech firms. In June 2024 it filed a defamation case against Wikimedia Foundation, the owner of Wikipedia. In November 2024, ANI sued OpenAI. This and the current judicial environment seriously disincentivises YouTube to take ANI on.

Nikhil Narendran, a partner specialising in technology, media, and telecom at the law firm Trilegal, explained, "In India, the intermediary does not have as strong a protection as it would in the rest of the world. Freedom of speech is not as protected in India as it is in the US."

Platforms such as YouTube that provide space to creators are known as intermediaries.

"Consequently, US corporations often do more to protect speech in the States than they do in India. We, as a society, arguably place less value on free speech compared to many other parts of the world. Hence intermediary processes in India are aimed more at protecting frivolous claims relating to private rights such as copyright or defamation rather than on protecting public interests such as right to free speech or access to knowledge," he added.

This discrepancy can be seen in what and who YouTube publicly claims that it will protect. YouTube, for instance, clearly states what content categories qualify for copyright exemptions in both the US and the EU. For certain American YouTubers, the company also provides a legal fund of up to \$1 million to fight copyright cases in court. For India, YouTube has been ambiguous in stating its obligations for content creators.

With limited protections guaranteed by YouTube, the creators have no choice but to go to court and sue

potentially both the platform and ANI. But most content creators face a dilemma.

Even if they believe their use falls within permissible copyright exceptions, in court they would face a highly litigious ANI and YouTube. In this scenario, their channel would remain deleted for 2-3 months with no guarantee of a fair resolution. Conversely, if creators have inadvertently or otherwise exceeded the bounds of fair use, YouTube's threat of channel takedown - depriving them of their sole income stream - leaves them with no choice but to pay up.

YouTubers spoke to The Collective about receiving copyright strikes from ANI for remarkably short clips: one for under ten seconds, another for less than thirty seconds used in the lower portion of a video featuring the creator's face and commentary. Since YouTubers are still in negotiation with ANI they were reluctant to allow us to review all their content that were taken down. We were not able to vet all clips taken down by ANI. But fair use is a highly subjective and tricky problem to adjudicate in India, and it is convenient for YouTube to tango with the big mastheads than duel with them espousing the cause of individual players.

Conversely, some YouTubers admitted they had used ANI clips more extensively, in ways that might



not qualify as fair dealing under the Indian Copyright Act.

It is the aggression by ANI that has taken the YouTubers by surprise. One creator put it pithily, "Mujhe patatha ki ek din ANI copyright strikes karega, par mujhe laga ki main usse kam parise main nipta lunga". (I knew I would get copyright strikes. But thought I could get it done with them at lower rate.)

There are several complex copyright questions that YouTubers are now left to contend with. Such as, who owns the rights of videos shared by government officials and ministers on social media. Ownership clarity does not exist.

ANI didn't answer our question on why its content used by Indian content producers on YouTube channels does not fall under "fair dealing" as defined by the Indian Copyright Act.

The 2024 Lok Sabha elections cemented political critique on YouTube as a lucrative business. With airwaves devoid of any critique of the BJP, citizens made internet stars out of content creators who would dare to take them on. It just takes a good camera, some quick thinking, and news clippings from social media, for people to upload daily videos ripping apart the BJP's

and the media for not holding them accountable. And there is good money in it.

A YouTuber who runs a political commentary channel with a few million subscribers explained, "On any average year, I will make Rs 50-60 lakh from YouTube. During elections when engagement was high this figure reached unimaginable heights."

ANI with its fawning coverage of the BJP, too, was caught in the crosshairs. Wife of ANI owner Sanjiv Prakash, and ANI editor-in-chief Smita Prakash, did a post-mortem analysis with Right-leaning intellectuals on how Left-leaning YouTubers had taken hold of political narratives.

Affected YouTubers shared their correspondence with ANI on post-claim settlements. Ishaan Prakash - son of the agency's editor-in-chief Smita Prakash and Managing Director, Sanjeev Prakash - was marked on conversations with YouTubers as well. ANI did not respond to the specific query on Ishaan Prakash's role in these negotiations with the YouTubers.

How this episode evolves with ANI, YouTube and content producers could end up shaping the online news media industry and set the standards for fair usage by deals behind closed doors between entities with unequal negotiating powers, and not by the courts or government.

YOUTUBE RESPONDS TO THE STORY, "ANI FINDS BUSINESS NICHE IN COPYRIGHT CLAIMS AGAINST YOUTUBERS"

The Reporters' Collective's May 19 investigation detailed how Asian News International (ANI) is exploiting YouTube's policy of dealing with copyright infringement claims to negotiate lucrative content syndication deals with news creators.

The story asserted that ANI hold a negotiating imbalance while

demanding high prices from news creators because YouTube first takes down videos and channels upon receiving claims based on a 'judgment call' it makes on the claims receives and then informs the creators to defend their case if they with the claimant or in a court of law. The story noted that while the copyright law in India does allow usage of copyright material

under certain circumstances, such as for news and analysis, in practice, the lack of specifics in the Indian copyright regulations and YouTube's policy on copyright claims is creating a loophole that ANI can exploit.

We had sent detailed questions to YouTube before publishing the story, but it chose not to respond to them. YouTube instead sent a statement that was quoted in the story. After the publication of the story, on May 20, YouTube sent us a rejoinder.

The Reporters' Collective stands by the facts and assertions in its story in its entirety.

We are appending YouTube's rejoinder here with our response and providing a link to this blog page at the end of the original story.

YouTube's Statement:

- ▶ YouTube is not a court of law and we don't adjudicate copyright ownership disputes or make legal determinations on the merits of fair use or other exceptions.
- ▶ Our role is to process copyright takedown notices that comply with applicable laws, such as the DMCA or local equivalents, and provide a dispute pathway for uploaders who believe they have the rights to use this content.
- ▶ While we do not make final legal determinations about fair use/fair dealing, we do require that copyright claims meet legal requirements under the applicable laws, including whether the claimant has considered exceptions to copyright like fair use/fair dealing.
- ▶ Therefore, our review of a copyright takedown notice is to ensure it meets these legal and procedural requirements for such notices. It's incorrect to charac-

terise this review of the notice itself as a 'judgment call' or legal determination of copyright ownership.

- ▶ These are matters for resolution between the parties involved or to be determined by a court of law.

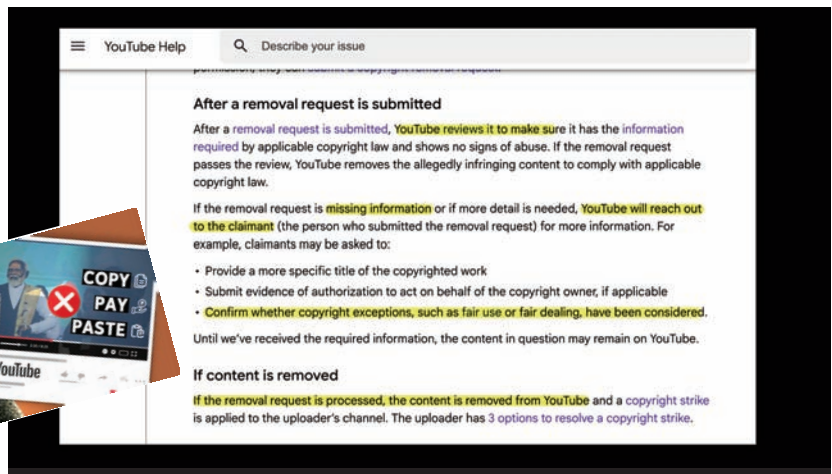
The Reporters' Collective's reply: We stand by our story.

- ▶ In para 3 of its rejoinder, YouTube says it does not make the 'final legal determinations' about fair use and fair dealing, but it does require that claims of copyright infringement meet legal requirements under applicable laws. In Para 4 it says YouTube reviews the notices to ensure the notices meet both legal and procedural requirements. This reaffirms what our story reports: That YouTube is taking the first call on whether a copyright infringement claim is right or not and then informing the creator about it.
- ▶ YouTube describes its decision-making on the legality of a copyright claim as a 'review'. This is playing with words. At its discretion, it takes down content producers' videos based on such 'reviews', and the creator gets the

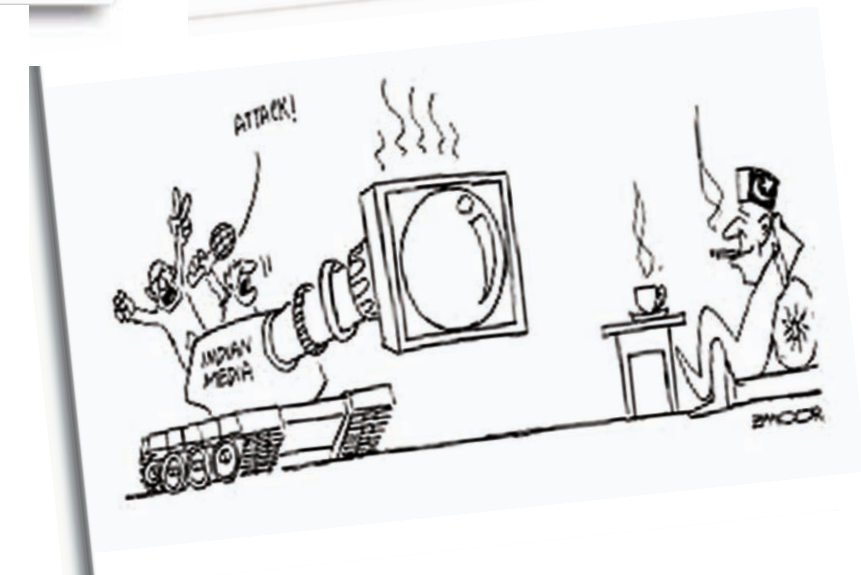
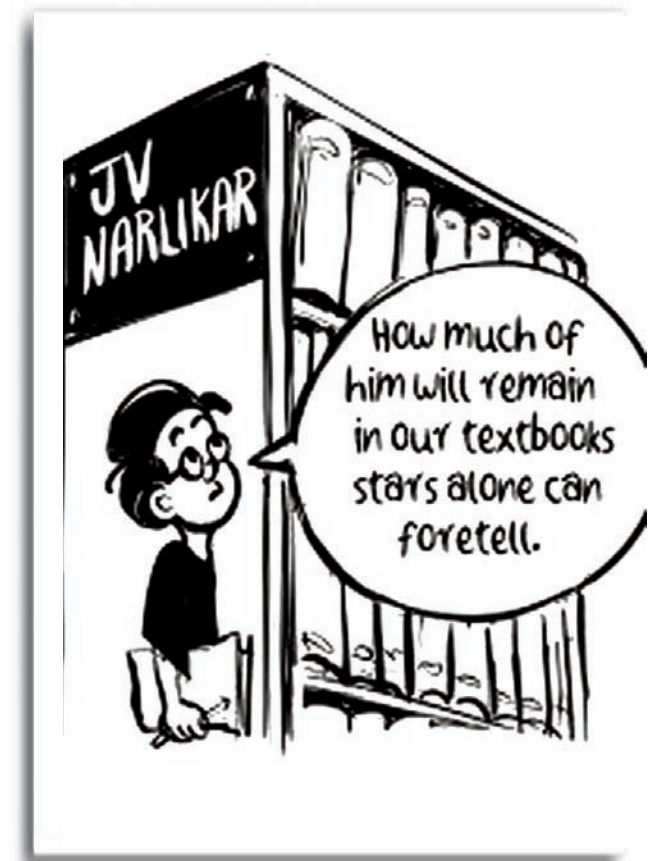
chance to challenge it only subsequently.

- ▶ YouTube's publicly stated policy on the copyright review process also states as much.
- ▶ YouTube does make an initial judgment call, and then, as it has stated in its rejoinder, the final determination on the claim can, quite naturally, be made only in a court of law.
- ▶ More significantly, YouTube's response fails to counter our story's central assertion: that its policy of shutting down the entire channel of a creator on the receipt of three or more copyright claims that it reviews positively is leading to a sword hanging on the creator's work while he ends up in negotiations with ANI.
- ▶ YouTube's copyright policy for creators hangs like a sword over their heads, leaving them vulnerable to potential coercion from claimants of copyrights.
- ▶ Our story does not delve into whether YouTube's policy is legally sound. It does assert that YouTube's policy is leading to a moral hazard at the cost of the creators on its platform. ❏

— *From the blog of Reporters Collective*



CARTOONS OF THE MONTH



From Defenders to Skeptics: The Sharp Decline in Young Americans' Support for Free Speech



or much of the 20th century, young Americans were seen as free speech's fiercest defenders. But now, young Americans are growing more skeptical of free speech.

According to a March 2025 report by The Future of Free Speech, a nonpartisan think tank where I am executive director, support among 18- to 34-year-olds for allowing controversial or offensive speech has dropped sharply in recent years.

In 2021, 71% of young Americans said people should be allowed to insult the U.S. flag, which is a key indicator of support for free speech, no matter how distasteful. By 2024, that number had fallen to just 43% - a 28-point drop. Support for pro LGBTQ+ speech declined by 20 percentage points, and tolerance for speech that offends religious beliefs fell by 14 points.

This drop contributed to the U.S. having the third-largest decline in free speech support among the 33 countries that The Future of Free Speech surveyed - behind only Japan and Israel.

Why has this support diminished so dramatically?

People of some countries increased support for free speech.

But those in other countries, including the U.S., supported free speech less in a 2024 survey than they did in the same survey in 2021. The numbers show the difference and direction of change between the overall Future of Free Speech Index scores for each country in 2021 and 2024.

Shift from past generations

In the 1960s, college students led what was called the free speech movement,

People of some countries increased support for free speech

But those in other countries, including the U.S., supported free speech less in a 2024 survey than they did in the same survey in 2021. The numbers show the difference and direction of change between the overall Future of Free Speech Index scores for each country in 2021 and 2024.

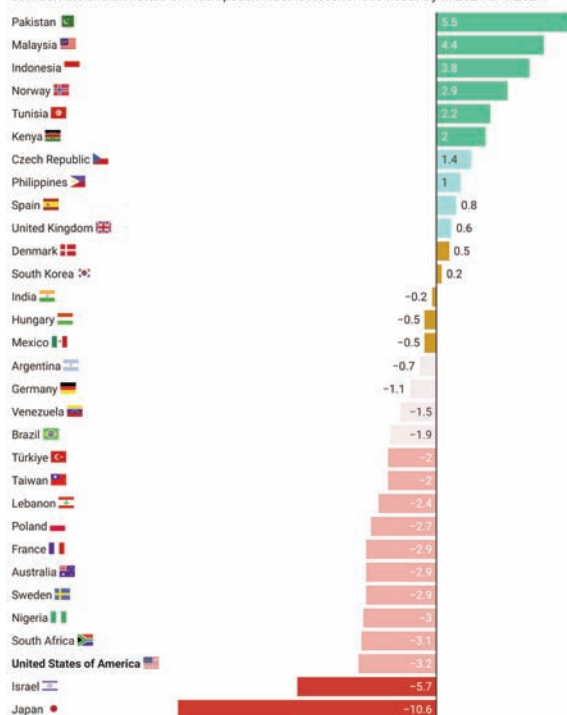


Chart: The Conversation, CC-BY-ND • Source: The Future of Free Speech • Created with Datawrapper

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demanding the right to speak freely about political matters on campus, often clashing with older, more censorious generations.

Sociologist Jean Twenge has tracked changes in attitudes using data from the General Social Survey, a biennial survey conducted by the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center.

Since the 1970s, this survey has asked Americans whether controversial figures - racists, communists and anti-religionists - should be allowed to speak. Support for such rights generally increased from the Greatest Generation, born between 1900-1924, to Gen X, born between 1965-1979.

But Gen Z, those born between 1995-2004, has reversed that trend. Despite the fact that the Cold War, which pitted the communist Soviet Union and its allies against the democratic West, ended more than three decades ago, even support for the free speech rights of communists has declined.

Political drift and cultural realignment

At the same time, some data suggests that young Americans may be drifting rightward politically.

A Harvard Institute of Politics poll in late 2024 found that men ages 18-24 now identify as slightly more

conservative than those ages 25-29. Another Gallup survey showed that Gen Z teens are twice as likely as millennials to describe themselves as more conservative than their parents were at the same age.

This shift may help explain changes in speech attitudes.

Today's young Americans may be less likely to instinctively defend speech aligned with liberal or progressive causes. For example, support among 18- to 29-year-olds for same-sex marriage, generally considered a liberal or progressive cause, fell from 79% in 2018 to 71% in 2022, according to Pew Research.

Attitudes toward hate speech

The Future of Free Speech study found that younger Americans are especially hesitant to defend speech that offends minority groups. Only 47% of those ages 18 to 34 said such speech should be allowed, compared with 70% of those over 55.

Similarly, tolerance for religiously offensive speech was 57% among younger respondents, down from 71% in 2021.

This concern over harmful or bigoted speech is not new. A 2015 Pew survey found that 40% of millennials believed the government should be able to prevent offensive speech about minorities.

More recently, a 2024 report by

the nonpartisan free speech advocacy group FIRE found that 70% of U.S. college students supported disinviting speakers perceived as bigoted. Over a quarter said violence could be acceptable to stop campus speech in some cases.

Broader implications Why does this matter?

The First Amendment protects unpopular speech. It does not just shield offensive ideas, but it safeguards movements that once seemed fringe. Whether it's civil rights, LGBTQ+ rights or anti-war protests, history shows that ideas seen as dangerous or radical in one era often become widely accepted in another.

Today's younger Americans will soon shape policies in universities, media, government, tech and the public square. If a growing share believes speech should be regulated to prevent offense, that could signal a shift in how free speech is interpreted and enforced in American institutions.

To be sure, support for free speech in principle remains strong. The Future of Free Speech report found that 89% of Americans said people should be allowed to criticize government policy. But tolerance for more provocative or offensive speech appears to be eroding, especially among young people.

This raises questions about whether these changes reflect a life-stage effect? Will today's young people become more speech-tolerant as they age? Or are we seeing a deeper generational shift?

The data suggests Americans across all generations still value free speech. But for younger Americans, especially, that support seems increasingly conditional. 

— *From: The Conversation*

Young Americans' support for free speech declines

In both 2021 and 2024, nationally representative groups of 18- to 34-year-olds in the U.S. were asked whether they believed people should be able to express various potentially controversial statements. Smaller percentages agreed in 2024 than in 2021.

People should be able to express statements that:



Chart: The Conversation, CC-BY-ND • Source: The Future of Free Speech • Created with Datawrapper

Semicolons are Becoming Increasingly Rare; Their Disappearance Should be Resisted

A



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recent study has found a 50% decline in the use of semicolons over the last two decades. The decline accelerates a longterm trend:

In 1781, British literature featured a semicolon roughly every 90 words; by 2000, it had fallen to one every 205 words. Today, there's just one semicolon for every 390 words. Further research reported that 67% of British students never or rarely use a semicolon; more than 50% did not know how to use it. Just 11% of respondents described themselves as frequent users. These findings may not be definitive. According to the Guardian, the Google Books Ngram Viewer database, which surveys novels and nonfiction, indicates that semicolon use in English rose by 388% between 1800 and 2006, before falling by 45% over the next 11 years. In 2017, however, it started a gradual recovery, with a 27% rise by 2022. Yet when you put the punctuation mark itself into the database, rather than the word "semicolon", you get a quite different result - one that looks very much like a steady decline.

Virulent detractors

The semicolon first appeared in 1494, so



it has been around for a long time. So have arguments about it.

Its detractors can be quite virulent. It is sometimes taken as a sign of affected elitism. Adrian Mole, the pretentious schoolboy protagonist of Sue Townsend's popular novels, says snobbishly of Barry Kent, the skinhead bully

at his school: "He wouldn't know what a semicolon was if it fell into his beer." Kurt Vonnegut (whose novels are not entirely free of semicolons) said semicolons represented "absolutely nothing" and using them just showed that you "went to college".

Other writers have expressed pure animosity. American journalist James Kilpatrick denounced the semicolon "girly", "odious", and the "most pusillanimous, sissified utterly useless mark of punctuation ever invented".

The utility of this much maligned punctuation mark in contemporary prose has been called into question. British author Ben McIntyre has claimed Stephen King "wouldn't be seen dead in a ditch with a semicolon".

He obviously hasn't read page 32 of King's wonderful book *On Writing*, where King uses semicolons in three sentences in a row.

Impeccable balance

Before I defend the semicolon, it is worth clarifying what it actually does. Its two uses are as follows:

- 1) it separates independent clauses, but establishes a relation between them. It suggests that the statements are too closely connected to stand as separate sentences. For example: "Speech is silver; silence is golden."
- 2) it can be used to clarify a complicated list. For example: "Remember to check your grammar, especially agreement of subjects and verbs; your spelling, especially of tricky words such as 'liaison'; and your punctuation, especially your use of the apostrophe."

Semicolons have long played a prominent role in classic literature.

Journalist Amelia Hill notes that Virginia Woolf relies heavily on semicolons in her meditation on time, *Mrs Dalloway*. The novel includes more than 1000 of them, often used in unorthodox ways, to capture the flow of its protagonist's thoughts.

Other supporters of the semicolon include Salman Rushdie, John Updike, Donna Tartt, Mark Twain, Charles Dickens and Jane Austen. Novelist Philip Hensher has celebrated the semicolon as "a cherished tool, elegant and rational." In 1953,



Virginia Woolf, semicolon enthusiast

theatre critic Kenneth Tynan called it "the prize-winning supporting crutch of English prose".

In his essay *Semicolons: A Love Story*, Ben Dolnick refers to William James's deft use of semicolons to pile on the clauses. He claims this is like saying to a reader, who is already holding one bag of groceries, "Here, I know it's a lot, but can you take another?"

"The image of the grocery bags,"

observed Mary Norris, a highly respected copyeditor at the *New Yorker*, "reinforces the idea that semicolons are all about balance." Harvard professor Louis Menand has praised as "impeccable" the balancing semicolon on a public service placard (allegedly amended by hand) that exhorted subway riders not to leave their newspapers behind on the train: "Please put it in a trash can; that's good news for everyone."

The poet Lewis Thomas beautifully captures the elegance of a well-used semicolon in his essay *Notes on Punctuation*:

The semicolon tells you there is still some question about the preceding full sentence; something needs to be added. It is almost always a greater pleasure to come across a semicolon than a full stop. The full stop tells you that is that; if you didn't get all the meaning you wanted or expected, you got all the writer intended to parcel out and now you have to move along. But with a semicolon there you get a pleasant little feeling of expectancy; there is more to come; read on; it will get clearer.

As Australian novelist David Malouf has argued, the semicolon still has a future, and an important function, in nuanced imaginative prose:

I tend to write longer sentences and use the semicolon so as not to have to break the longer sentences into shorter ones that would suggest things are not connected that I want people to see as connected. Short sentences make for fast reading; often you want slow reading.

We cannot do without the semicolon. The Apostrophe Protection Society is going along very strongly. I would be more than happy to join a Semicolon Supporting Society. 



TV News Media 'Captures' Pakistan from Noida

I



Shaukat H. Mohammed

The writer is a senior journalist based at Hyderabad

f one were to take the falsehoods peddled by the mainstream TV news media even a tad bit seriously, then India had made quick work of Pakistan's military and occupied a country of nearly 25 crore people in a matter of four days.

Outright lies were passed off as fact on the TV news channels, with each channel trying to outdo the other with lurid headlines. These headlines screamed that Pakistan Occupied Kashmir was now under India's control, the port city of Karachi had been destroyed and taken over by the Indian military, and the garrison town of Rawalpindi was now under the command of Indian soldiers.

This bloodlust of the media was on full display with the channels ginning up stuff that said

General (elevated to Field Marshal after Operation Sindoor) Asim Munir of Pakistan had been deposed in the middle of the skirmish with India. Another said that Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif was cowering in a military bunker fearing for his life. A third claimed that India had bombed a nuclear bomb repository in Pakistan. And on and on.

They ignored the advisories of the government to exercise restraint in their reporting on Operation Sindoor, and bashed on regardless with their war mongering, desperate for TRPs.

Apart from pushing fake news, the channels leavened their warmongering with "debates" in which former Indian army generals ratcheted up the demand for "badla", portraying Pakistan not as a country with advanced Chinese weaponry



and the willingness to use it-but as a pushover waiting for India's righteous retribution. Talk of India forming an 'Akhand Bharat' by capturing POK to begin with via Operation Sindoor rent the air.

This, despite the government's efforts to say that the skirmish with Pakistan was restricted to the use of the Indian Air Force to destroy terrorist camps in the neighbouring country. The IAF's jets used their BVR (beyond visual range) capabilities to lay waste to the terrorist camps in Bahawalpur and Muridke in Pakistan and in Muzaffarabad in POK.

When Pakistan rained missiles and drones on civilian areas in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and Rajasthan killing several civilians, the IAF responded by bombing Pakistani military sites, inflicting substantial damage to several such sites.

Operation Sindoor would probably have escalated to a hot war had not the warring parties decided to call a "cessation of firing", as S. Jaishankar, the External Affairs Minister, put it on May 10.

But U.S. President Donald J. Trump stole the thunder from the leadership of the warring countries by posting on his social media platform that it was his government that had worked "through the night" to mediate a ceasefire. Trump then proceeded to claim seven more times after the 10 May announcement that it was, he who had persuaded the leadership of Pakistan and India, using the threat of suspending US trade with the two countries.

Trump was doing his own thing while India made it clear that it would not welcome any mediation between India and Pakistan, citing the Shimla agreement between the



two countries, signed in 1972.

Then the Minister for External Affairs stepped in, of his own volition, to announce to four media outlets that he had called the authorities in Pakistan to alert them that an attack on terrorist camps in that country was forthcoming. He said that he had made it clear to the Pakistanis that India would not be attacking its military sites, so they had the "option of standing out", he said.

"They chose not to take that good advice," Jaishankar said with the intensity of a school principal addressing recalcitrant school children. Rahul Gandhi, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, immediately jumped in and demanded action against the MEA, claiming that he had acted like a 'mukhbir' (spy) of the enemy country.

The TV news media took it upon itself, with gusto I might add, to change the narrative about Jaishankar's message to Pakistan, debating about what his words meant, drowning any rational argument with cacophonous "experts".

Some ruling party members dusted out an agreement between India and Pakistan from 1991 which said

that the nuclear-armed neighbours needed to inform each other if they were undertaking any military manoeuvres along the border. That agreement applied to peacetime manoeuvres, not a combat situation, but the media went ahead and tried to portray the opposition as "anti-nationals" and worse, citing the agreement.

The media found another dangerous angle to peddle. TV anchors and their guests urged India to adopt the "Israeli model" in its dealings with Pakistan, neglecting to mention the fact that while Pakistan is a sovereign nation with a standing military, Israel's war in Gaza is against the people whose land it has illegally occupied since 1948.

Amid all the warmongering and the peddling of fake news, Sushant Sinha, an anchor who runs a so-called 'News ki Paathshala' on Times Now Navbharat, came up with a mealy-mouth justification for the warmongering and the fake news. "No harm was done with our reporting in India, so what if we got some of our reports wrong," Sinha said with phoney self-righteousness. The perversity of the TV news media never ceases to amaze. 



Pankaj Tripathi in Criminal Justice – A Family Matter (2025)

All in a Day's Work for Pankaj Tripathi's Madhav Mishra

The eight-episode Hindi series is out on JioHotstar

P

**Nandini
Ramnath**

ankaj Tripathi's Madhav Mishra has gone from being one of the reasons to follow the *Criminal Justice* series to being the main attraction. The formidable lawyer, whose sangfroid comes wrapped in a steeliness forged by his humble origins, was introduced in the JioHotstar show's first season in 2019. In the fourth and latest season, Madhav is once again at the front and centre of the proceedings.

In the third season from 2022, Madhav had moved from the back of a Maruti van into his own office. Vertical mobility awaits Madhav in *Criminal Justice – A Family Matter*. He is offered a position in a prestigious law firm. But before that, Madhav – part attorney and part detective – must solve the mystery of who has slashed a nurse's throat, and why.

Roshni (Asha Negi) is found dead at the apartment of her lover, the surgeon Raj (Mohammed Zeeshan Ayyub). Although Raj is separated from his wife Anju (Surveen Chawla), they share parenting responsibilities of their Asperger's syndrome-affected daughter Ira (Khushi Bhardwaj). Raj is an instant suspect, as is Anju, who lives in the apart-

MOVIE REVIEW



Mohammed Zeeshan Ayyub and Surveen Chawla in Criminal Justice – A Family Matter (2025)

ment across from Raj.

Among the returning characters are the advocate Mandira (Mita Vashisht), public prosecutor Lekha (Shweta Basu Prasad) and police inspector Gauri (Kalyanee Mulay). Madhav's super-chirpy wife Ratna (Khushboo Atre) is back too, promoted from beauty parlour owner to unofficial paralegal – a contrivance that gives Ratna something to do in a show that doesn't really have room for her.

Directed by Rohan Sippy – who also helmed the second and third editions – the Hindi-language *A Family Matter* is an improvement on its most recent, overwrought season. The latest eight-episode series is based on a story by Harman Wadala, Rahul Ved Prakash, Varsha Ramachandran and Riya Poojary, and a screenplay by Wadala, Sandeep Jain and Sameer Mishra.

The themes include temptation – a partnership for Madhav, Roshni's unwise dalliance with Raj, the efforts of Lekha and Mandira to avenge their previous defeats by

Madhav. Mandira dismisses Madhav as the “fluke artist of the century”. There are some missteps for Madhav and his assistants Shivani (Barkha Singh) and Deep (Aatm Prakash Mishra) as they develop their defence.

This being a legal drama with heavy lashings of a detective thriller, the focus is on the investigation rather than meaningful character development. Inspector Gauri pursues leads with eyeball-straining zeal, but she is no match for Madhav's Sherlockian laser gaze.

The ample twists and red herrings provide a distraction from the lip service paid to “justice for all”. Madhav's gradual entry into the upper reaches of society, coupled with Ratna's aspirational ways, allow a subtle class bias to creep into *Criminal Justice*.

Larger questions of the meaning of justice for victims and perpetrators have been set aside for a jolly good time in Madhav Mishra's delightful company.

The series has settled for mild

fireworks inside the courtroom and light comedy outside it, chiefly emanating from Madhav's textbook Hindi-aided drollery. The most engrossing scenes revolve around the cross-examination of witnesses, which gives Madhav pause for thought – is his folksy approach always successful?

This is the only extent to which Madhav grows as a character. Pankaj Tripathi is typically superb as Madhav, smoothly moving from self-deprecating wit to empathy. But the lack of a serious challenger to Madhav is glaring, despite impressive efforts by the advocates played by Shweta Basu Prasad and Mita Vashisht.

The easy-going tone sobers up only in the presence of Surveen Chawla's murder accused. Chawla is excellent as Anju, whose personality has hidden layers and secrets. Chawla plays Anju with the right correct of gravitas and feeling, giving *A Family Matter* much-needed heft. 

— *Courtesy: Scroll*

'Original Sin' Indicts the 'Cover-Up' of a Steeply Declining Joe Biden

Jake Tapper and Alex Thompson's new book is an investigative account of loyalists and family members who shielded the diminished president from full public view.



In December 2022, Jon Favreau, a co-host of the massively popular liberal podcast "Pod Save America," took his family to visit the White House. Favreau, a former speechwriter for Barack Obama, had extensive connections within the Biden administration and brought his family along to visit his old stomping grounds. After a brief detour to say hello to a friend, Favreau went to his old office and was surprised to find President Joe Biden sitting there, charming his family. Not only that, the president had recognized Favreau's mother-in-law from a fundraiser she had attended years earlier; he soon invited the whole group to the Oval Office, where he regaled them with a blow-by-blow account of Supreme Court nominee Robert Bork's failed confirmation hearings in 1987. The president's staff seemed either blithely unaware that he was devoting a huge chunk of a weekday afternoon to story time or unwilling to intervene, but then again, Biden had always been a yapper.

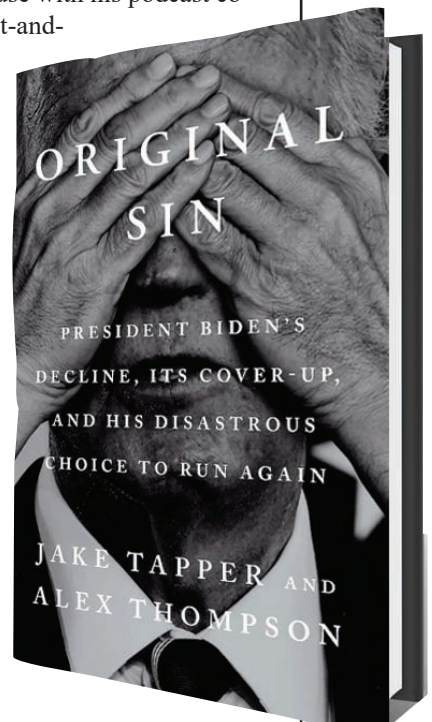
In April 2024, Favreau visited the White House with his podcast co-hosts and several other "influencers" at a meet-and-greet the night before the White House Correspondents' Association dinner. Biden was incoherent and frail; he kept telling stories that no one could understand. Sixteen months had passed, but he seemed to have aged a half-century. An alarmed Favreau approached a White House aide, but his concerns were brushed off. The president was just tired, he was told. It was the end of a long week. There was no reason for concern. Two months later, Biden delivered the single worst performance in the 60-year history of televised presidential debates, dooming his reelection campaign, destroying his presidency and essentially delivering the country to Donald Trump.

Favreau's experience was hardly unique. Far from it. "Original Sin: President Biden's Decline, Its Cover-Up, and His Disastrous Choice to Run Again," CNN anchor Jake Tapper and Axios reporter Alex Thompson's

Alex Shephard

The writer is senior editor of the New Republic, where he has covered politics and culture since 2015. His work has also appeared in New York, GQ, the Atlantic, the Nation and other publications.

BOOK REVIEW



account of Biden's marked deterioration throughout his presidency, is littered with similar anecdotes. The result of more than 200 interviews, the book is a damning account of an elderly, egotistical president shielded from reality by a slavish coterie of loyalists and family members united by a shared, seemingly ironclad sense of denial and a determination to smear anyone who dared to question the president's fitness for office as a threat to the republic covertly working on behalf of Trump. For years, they denied the president had any issues and kept him away from a public that had long since concluded that he was too old for the job. It worked for an astonishingly long time, until, very suddenly, it didn't.

Of the many virtues of "Original Sin," the greatest is its stubborn focus on Biden's health as not just the most important factor in the 2024 election but the sole defining reason for Trump's victory. "The original sin of Election 2024 was Biden's decision to run for re-election," Tapper and Thompson write, "followed by aggressive efforts to hide his cognitive diminishment." "Original Sin" is not really a "campaign book" - its account of the 2024 election largely ends after Biden drops out - but its simple assessment of the race is more compelling than anything else I've read about it.

For Tapper and Thompson, Kamala Harris never had a chance. Had Biden announced he would serve only one term after the midterm elections in 2022, the party could have run a primary and selected a candidate who wasn't saddled with the considerable damage of Biden's administration - Gaza, inflation, the growing belief that he was simply no longer capable of being president. When Biden finally bowed to reality and announced he



Former president Joe Biden during a farewell event at Joint Base Andrews in January.

would no longer seek reelection, Harris was the only option and arguably the worst imaginable pick: Naturally cautious, she couldn't break from the unpopular administration she belonged to. "Original Sin" is rarely better than when Tapper and Thompson are writing - with extensive reporting and clear-eyed prose - about the disaster that Biden caused. "No one thought that the Harris campaign had been without error," they write. "But for the most knowledgeable Democratic officials and donors, and for top members of the Harris campaign, there was no question about the father of this election calamity: It was Joe Biden." Over the next year, dozens of books will appear that attempt to explain this election. It's hard to imagine any doing better than that.

How Biden, Harris and the Democratic Party got there is a more complicated story. Tapper and Thompson pose three questions at the end of the book's first chapter: "What was the extent of [Biden's decline]? Who knew about it? Was it a conspiracy?" As with the provocative claim of a "cover-up" in the

book's subtitle, the invocation of Watergate is far from subtle. In any case, their extensive reporting speaks for itself: To answer those questions, they write, "We will let the facts speak for themselves."

The facts certainly point to Biden's staff having more strategically protected him from public view after the midterms, when he increasingly struggled to handle the basic duties of the presidency. If his mental state was bad, he was in just as rough shape physically - aides were reportedly mulling using a wheelchair to transport him if he won a second term.

As Biden's decline worsened, one aide noted that his entire presidency changed. "Everything got shorter," Tapper and Thompson write, "speeches, paragraphs, even sentences. The vocabulary shrank." And yet, Biden was almost never confronted with evidence that he was faltering or that the public had determined he was unfit for the presidency. Biden's family and a group of loyal aides who Tapper and Thompson call "the Politburo" were singularly devoted to the belief that Biden was uniquely capable of

leading the country, and they went to great lengths to limit the president's access to negative information to sustain it. The result was a political environment in which those who challenged the president's standing, such as then-Rep. Dean Phillips (D-Minnesota), who mounted a quixotic primary campaign, were ostracized and a media environment in which few reporters were willing to question the president's fitness for office. (Thompson was one of a handful of exceptions to the rule.)

You can fairly label that a cover-up - I would - but as far as conspiracies go, it's hard to think of a less successful one. Before the end of Biden's first year in office, a majority of voters had already concluded that he was too old to be president, a number that increased every year until, in the summer of 2024, it encompassed a sizable majority of the electorate. Given the realities of aging - there is no way for Joe Biden to get younger - this should have been alarming for Democrats everywhere. Some sources in the book plausibly tie Biden's steep decline to the stress caused by his son Hunter, who spent the second half of his father's presidency fighting several felony charges. It's a claim that's well supported in "Original Sin," and it makes sense when you compare video footage of Biden in 2021 to Biden in 2024. The presidency undoubtedly took a huge toll on him - but he wasn't exactly nimble when he first entered the White House. Even in the earlier clips, he's still old, still shaky, still prone to fits of incoherence. Democrats surely noticed that Biden was old during the first two years of his term, but few raised concerns about his stamina - or the promise to serve as a "bridge" that implied he would only serve one term.

After the party outperformed



From left: Alex Thompson and Jake Tapper, co-authors of "Original Sin."

expectations in the 2022 midterms, Tapper and Thompson report, "no Democrats in the White House or leaders on Capitol Hill raised any doubts, either privately with the president or publicly, about Biden's second run." Some were optimistic about their chances after the strong showing in the midterms; others were aware that speaking out would cause trouble: "Democrats knew that the White House watched closely for any signs of dissent. They kept quiet and went along." But they should have known then that Biden, whose approval rating was hovering around 40 percent, was already doomed, thanks to a lethal combination of high inflation and growing concerns about his mental fitness. As Biden's deterioration increased in 2023 and 2024, several Democrats approached his staffers to inquire about the president's fitness or his stubbornly bad poll numbers. "Original Sin" includes several iterations of the same anecdote: Whenever anyone raised a concern about Biden's ability to handle the rigors of the presidency, they were told the same thing: Biden was not just fine, he was exceptional. Even if they had lis-

tened to those concerns, "Original Sin" argues, it was likely far too late to do anything about them.

Put another way, the emerging conventional wisdom that Biden entered a steep decline in 2023 may be accurate, but it ignores the fact that voters had come to a different conclusion far earlier - and were summarily ignored by Democratic politicians, who had plenty of time to act on their concerns and didn't. It's hard, moreover, to fault voters for concluding that Biden was unfit for office before the end of his first year. In "Original Sin," there is evidence that Biden's cognitive decline began all the way back in 2015, after the death of his son Beau, and that he required extensive help to conduct straightforward interviews during the 2020 election. (He was often helped by being able to use a teleprompter, since so much of campaigning was done remotely during the covid pandemic.) The most troubling suggestion in Tapper and Thompson's book is that Biden's real original sin wasn't running for reelection - it was running for the presidency in the first place. 

— *Courtesy: Washington Post*

Skype Shuts Down: Here's What Will Happen to Your Data



Skype Shutting Down: The free video-calling portal will be replaced by Microsoft Teams

Over two decades after revolutionising the way people connected across the globe, Skype is shut down on May 5 marking the end of an era. Skype's parent company, Microsoft, announced the closure in February, stating that the free video-calling portal will be replaced by Microsoft Teams.

While the closure affects both free and paid Skype users, the Skype for Business users will be assimilated into Microsoft Teams, which offers many of the same core features and more.

Here's what will happen to your Skype account:

- ▶ Users simply need to log in to Teams with their existing Skype credentials, and their chats and contacts will be automatically available to them.
- ▶ If a user does not want to use Teams, they can opt to download their Skype

data and transition to another video-calling service.

- ▶ Users will have until January 2026 to export or delete their Skype data.
- ▶ If users log in to Microsoft Teams Free by then, the Skype call and chat history will remain available to them.
- ▶ If the user does not take any action, the Skype data will be deleted in January 2026.

How to export Skype data?

- ▶ Sign in to the Skype Export page using your Microsoft account
- ▶ Select the option to download your conversations, files, or both.
- ▶ Select Submit request, then select Continue when prompted.
- ▶ When the export process is complete, click Download.

Why did Skype shut down?

Such was Skype's meteoric rise that Microsoft integrated it across platforms such as Windows, smartphones and Xbox consoles. At one point, Microsoft was aiming to reach 1 billion users. However, frequent interface changes and bloated updates made it clunky. The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic and competitors such as Zoom, Webex, Discord and Slack was the final death knell for the platform.

In 2025, Skype dwindled to about 23 million monthly users, down from its 150 million in 2011, and far from the 400 million registered users it once claimed. ❏

— Courtesy: NDTV



Battered Credibility of TV News



he Indian television news channels are now determined to completely destroy the credibility of media, and for this they are competing with social media. At the time skirmishes between India and Pakistan during Operation Sindoor most of the national news channels crossed the line and instead of doing their core job of reporting news they started rumor-mongering in the name of nationalism. Viewers who want factual news, particularly during the warlike situation, were fully disappointed with TV anchors and some so-called war experts looking more interested in starting a full-fledged war between the two nuclear-nations. These cheerleaders for war gave legitimacy to all fake news of social media in place of giving balanced reporting on a warlike situation. Foreign media like "The Economist" and "The New York Times" criticized Indian TV journalism strongly; The Economist called the spread of disinformation "the culmination of decades of descent into inanity," adding that "Indian television achieved the astonishing feat of making social media appear sane." The New York Times said "anchors and commentators became cheerleaders for war between two nuclear-armed states. Some well-known TV networks aired unverified information or even fabricated stories amid the burst of nationalistic fervor."

These TV news channels competed with each other in giving 'Breaking News' by fabricating stories and in the process created some astonishing developments. Their prime-time anchors claimed that the Indian navy launched strikes on Pakistan's Karachi's port and destroyed it; the Indian Air Force fighter jets had destroyed a Pak fighter plane and captured the pilots; the Indian army crossed the international border; Pakistan's Prime Minister had sought refuge in a bunker and their army chief General Asim Munir had been ousted in a coup. All these breaking news got no mention in any of the newspapers in India or abroad. But they catered to the war euphoria of viewers and NYT said

"Indians watching television thought their country was only moments away from annihilating Pakistan".

And that's the reason why the so called bhakts were not able to digest the news of ceasefire and started trolling foreign secretary and his family.

When TV news channels failed in their duty, newspapers proved themselves to be the torch-bearer of journalism as they know that they were having an ethical responsibility to defend their credibility and they were answerable for what they publish. The Economist praised the Indian newspapers for sticking to core principle in contrast to the chaos on television and noted that, "newspapers proved reliable". After Op Sindoor, a new trend started in advertising field with advertisers wanting authenticity and credibility of news and they started preferring newspapers to advertise their products and services. There was a big advertisement by India's leading newspapers, which says "Look like paper, Act like a Shield" and "Just like India's air defense blocked every enemy missile, we too protect you from fake news and unsubstantiated forwards. That's the power of print for you. Only the truth-verified, vetted and delivered to your doorstep."

In this new age of speed public are hungry for instant news, and for this they are depending on 24/7 television news and social media platforms. But Indian TV news channels proved themselves to be incapable of airing factual news. The type of falsehoods promoted on the so-called national TV channels in the name of nationalism harm not only the viewers but the nation also. We as journalists are embarrassed and ashamed to see this digression of journalism which is supposed to be the fourth pillar of democracy and at one time used to question the powerful establishments in our country. Fortunately print media continues to work as a flag-bearer of journalism and still it has been working as watchdog of democracy without succumbing the pressure of authoritarian forces. 

THE LAST PAGE



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