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The Divide

There has long been a tech gap between rich and developing countries. The entry of artificial intelligence (AI) has increased that gap and created a new digital divide. In the race that started with the advent of A.I., United States and China are way ahead while the European Union remains a distant third. All other countries are in a desperate rush to maintain a minimum presence in a technological race that could redefine the meaning and contours of development.

There are a few nations with computing power to build cutting-edge A.I. systems on one side of the divide, and on the other side, the rest without. This disparity is creating new dependencies and thus influencing geopolitics and global economics. According to data compiled by Oxford University researchers, only 32 countries have world's most powerful data centers which are used for developing the most complex A.I. systems. The United States and Chinese companies, which dominate the tech world, operate more than 90 percent of the data centers that are filled with microchips and computers, giving them what is known in industry parlance as "compute power". In contrast, Africa and South America have almost no A.I. computing hubs, while India has at least five and Japan at least four, according to the Oxford data. More than 150 countries have nothing.

Packed with powerful chips, these mammoth hubs cost billions to build and require enormous quantities of power and water to operate. Very few tech giants can establish these, and the gap between the countries hosting them and others is already playing out. The Haves are using this technology to bring revolutionary changes in all possible fields. Even the battlefield has undergone a change with A.I. powered weapons. In contrast, scientific work in the nations with little or no A.I. computing power is facing new limits and their dependence on foreign companies and governments is increasing.

Leadership in many countries feel that this situation touches their sovereignty. If no corrective steps are taken, this digital divide will only increase and that is not good for the well-being of the world.

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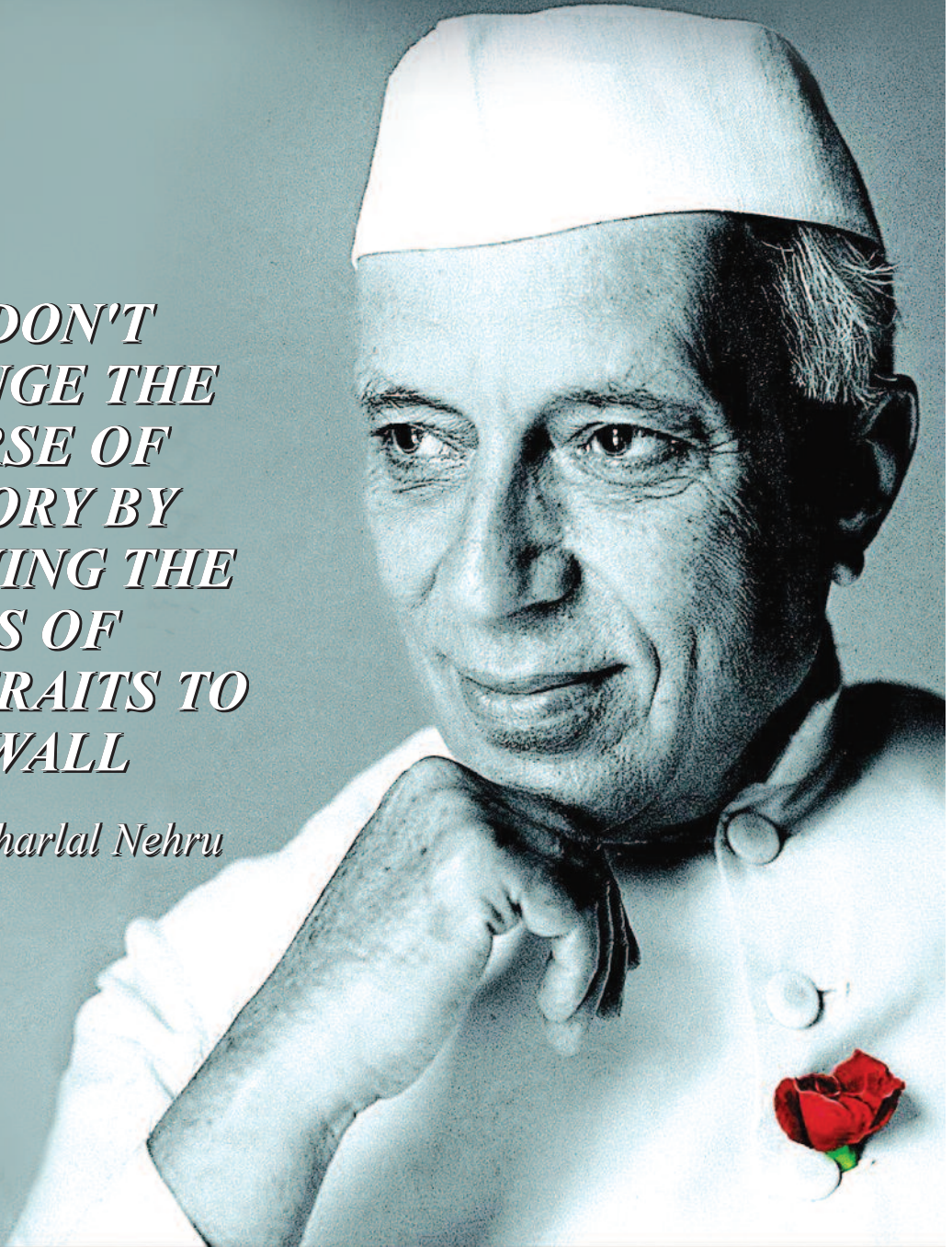
Free Frank Fearless



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

— Jawaharlal Nehru



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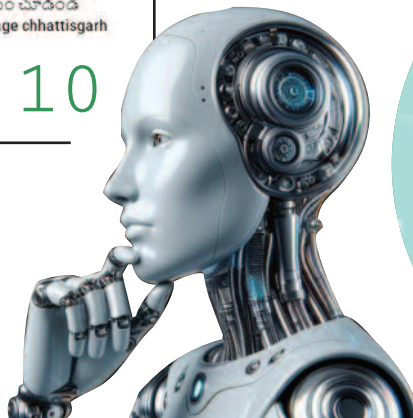


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AP Social welfare minister, Dola Sree Bala Veeranjanya Swamy is seen delivering his address. Seated beside him is Dr. Nimmala Rama Nayudu, Minister of Water Resources.

APUWJ holds a three-day State Conference, elects office bearers

A seminar was conducted on Artificial Intelligence and its usage in media



D. Soma Sundar

Secretary, IJU



At the 36th State Conference of the Andhra Pradesh Union of Working Journalists (APUWJ), a clarion call was given to its members to strengthen the working journalists' trade union movement in Andhra Pradesh. The conference asked the members to nurture the union as an independent and strong entity with an issue-based approach in the backdrop

of a highly politicised media scenario in the state. It also cautioned the members not to be a part of the political propaganda machinery created by the media managements. The conference urged civil society to support the media persons' struggle to preserve media freedom.

The State Conference was held on June 24th, 25th, and 26th in Ongole, Prakasam district of Andhra Pradesh. Around 200 elected delegates attended the conference, which also formed the

platform for holding the state elections. The State Executive Committee of the APUWJ appointed D. Soma Sundar, Secretary of IJU, as State Returning Officer and S. K. Babu as Assistant Returning Officer to conduct the organisational elections for the years 2025-2027.

I. V. Subbarao took charge for the second time as President of the APUWJ after the State Returning Officer declared it a unanimous election. He presided over the proceedings of the conference. K. Jayaraju, sitting Vice-President and former Deputy Secretary of the Union, was elected unopposed as General Secretary of the APUWJ. K.V.S. Swathi Prasad, Chava Ravi, G. Kondappa and K. Manikya Rao were elected as Vice Presidents of the Union. V. Venkateswarlu was elected as Treasurer and Ch. B. L. Swamy, A. Suresh, V. Murali, and M. P. R. Raju were elected as Secretaries of the Union. A fifteen-member State EC was also elected unopposed.

The first session of the conference was inaugurated by the Chief Guest, Dr. Nimmala Rama Nayudu, Minister of Water Resources, Government of Andhra Pradesh. The Minister commended the role played by media people in upholding democratic values in society. He requested the media to play a positive role in combating the fake news danger on some social media platforms. He also asked the media to highlight the welfare programmes introduced by the state government so that the benefits reach the needy properly. He heard the demands raised by the APUWJ and assured them he would take them to the notice of the CM, N. Chandrababu Naidu. Other guests who attended the conference include G. Ravi Kumar, Minister for Power; Dola Bala Veeranjanya Swamy,



IJU President K. Sreenivas Reddy (middle) with Balwinder Singh Jammu, IJU Secretary General (left) and S. N. Sinha, the Steering Committee member of the IJU (right).

Minister for Social Welfare; Mr. Magunta Srinivasula Reddy, MP from Ongole, and a few other legislators.

Ongole MLA D. Janardhan declared that he would construct a press club using his family funds, with accommodation facilities for visiting journalists.

Discussion on the General Secretary's report was taken up on the first and second days of the event. About forty delegates participated in the deliberations and gave suggestions on improving the functioning of the Union. Sixteen resolutions were also adopted at the conference on the problems of people in the media. The audit report of the Union was presented to the conference by IJU President K. Sreenivas Reddy. Both the GS report and the audit report were approved by the conference unanimously.

On the first day, a seminar was held on the topic of "AI - Social Media - Fact Check." Working journalists should catch up with ever-

ELECTED LEADERS



I. V. Subbarao
President



K. Jayaraju
General Secretary

changing information technology, including AI, to improve their professional skills - this was the advice given by many experts. The well-attended seminar was inaugurated by Alapati Suresh Kumar, Chairman of the CR Media Academy of Andhra Pradesh and an NEC member of the IJU. He expressed serious concern over the rising trend of fake news on social media platforms.

Fake news is threatening the very functioning of democracy in the wake of ever-changing technology these days, he warned. Media people should understand the dynamics of AI's functioning and learn to check the veracity of the information communicated, he advised. Suresh Kumar assured that the CR Media Academy of Andhra Pradesh will strive to improve the professional skills of working journalists in association with the Union.

K. Sreenivas Reddy, Chairman of the Telangana Media Academy and IJU President, addressing the seminar, reminded attendees of the expanding scope of AI in the media in recent times. He appreciated the proposed plan of the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Mr. Chandrababu Naidu to make Andhra Pradesh a leader in using AI in the education field. Sreenivas Reddy advised media persons to learn how to use fact-checking tools in their daily profession.

The Executive Editor of *Visalaandhra* daily, Kuna Ajay Babu, narrated his experiences on the capabilities of AI in the day-to-day assignments of media persons. He also warned journalists of the dangers involved in using the technology. Mr. M. Narasimha Swamy, a journalist and subject expert on AI, explained in detail the functioning of AI in media, including social media platforms. He demonstrated to the



The 36th state conference of APUWJ saw an impressive turnout of members and dignitaries.

audience how AI works in reporting. He gave the example of an AI anchor and how it reported his speech on the spot while he was still delivering it. He introduced many fact-checking tools and explained how to make use of them. Balwinder Singh Jammu, the Secretary General of the IJU, S. N. Sinha, the Steering Committee member of the IJU, and D. Soma Sundar, Secretary of the IJU, spoke on the menace of misinformation and disinformation carried out day in and day out by the corporate media houses in the country. They explained how the national channels spread fake news during Operation Sindhoor.

They also warned journalists about the danger posed to national integration and social harmony through the fake news propagation by some social media platforms. They called upon media people to use their professional skills in countering false narratives. On the morning of the 25th, 36 motorbike riders carrying the APUWJ flags conducted a rally to the venue through the main streets of the city, commemorating the APUWJ 36th State Conference. The venue was named after the veteran leader of the Union from Prakasam district, Kancharla

Ramaiah, who passed away just six days before the conference. The meeting hall was named after another senior leader of the IJU, K. Amarnath. The dais was named after the late Ambati Anjaneyulu.

In the concluding session, K. Rama Krishna, Secretary of the State Council of the CPI, MLA K. Murali Mohan, and K. Srikanth, MLC, addressed the conference and extended their full support to the struggles waged by the Union.

At the conference, Y. Narender Reddy, Secretary of the IJU, DSR Subhash, President of the Tamil Nadu Union of Journalists, Srinivas Gundari, President of the Maharashtra State Union of Working Journalists, K. Virahath Ali, President of the Telangana State Union of Working Journalists, and K. Ram Narayan, General Secretary of the TUWJ, extended their greetings and recollected the prominent role played by the APUWJ in strengthening IJU. Shiva Yechuri, President of APEMJA, Nalli Dharma Rao, President of SAAMNA, Ch. V. Ramana Reddy, General Secretary of SAAMNA, and Sambasiva Rao, Vice President of APPJA, representing their respective unions, conveyed their messages. 



Why India's Data Protection Act Is Triggering Press Freedom Fears

In a joint memorandum to the I&B Ministry, journalists warned the law could undermine press freedom by restricting investigations, source protection, and access to public data.

T

Hera Rizwan

The Press Club of India, along with 21 other media organisations, has submitted a joint memorandum to Union Minister for Electronics and Information and Broadcasting, Ashwini Vaishnaw, requesting that journalistic work be kept outside the scope of the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act.

Backed by over 1,000 signatories—including journalists and photojournalists from across India—the memorandum raises concerns that the current provisions of the Act could undermine press freedom.

It warns that the law may allow excessive state interference in essential journalistic functions such as investigative reporting, safeguarding sources, and publishing information crucial to the public interest.

On behalf of the media community, Press Club of India president Gautam Lahiri and secretary general Neeraj Thakur formally handed over the memorandum to Dharendra Ojha, Principal Director General of the Press Information Bureau.

In May 2025, the Press Club of India launched a signature campaign

to build opposition to the contested provision in the DPDP Act. The joint memorandum submitted to the government marks the outcome of that effort, backed by a broad coalition of journalist bodies across the country, including the Indian Women's Press Corps, Delhi Union of Journalists, Mumbai Press Club, Press Club of Kolkata, Kerala Union of Working Journalists, and several others representing nearly every state and region.

DPDP Act not yet enforced, but contested

Speaking to BOOM, Lahiri said that they consulted legal experts and RTI activists before deciding to submit the memorandum. Based on those discussions, he said, there was a clear concern that once the DPDP Act is fully implemented, it could seriously compromise press freedom.

"This law, in its current form, poses a threat to freedom of expression, especially for working journalists," Lahiri said. He added that the government must devise a mechanism to exempt bona fide journalists from its purview.

"That is the basis of our appeal. We are urging the government to revisit these provisions," he said.

He also pointed out that journalists were initially exempted in earlier discussions of the legislation. "Even the final Bill was passed with minimal discussion," Lahiri said, explaining that the Lok Sabha cleared it right after the confidence vote, when most opposition members had walked out, and it passed by voice vote in the Rajya Sabha as well—without any serious debate on its provisions.

This lack of deliberation, Lahiri suggested, reflects the urgency with which the press must now seek clarity and protection under the law.

Although the law has been passed, its enforcement still depends on the notification of detailed rules by the government—

a process currently underway.

India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act was enacted on August 11, 2023, following its passage by the Lok Sabha on August 7 and the Rajya Sabha on August 9. However, the Act did not become fully operative immediately—it requires specific rules to be notified by the Central Government before its provisions take effect.

Drafting on these rules began in late 2024. By January 3, 2025, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) officially published draft rules and opened them for public consultation, which was meant to close February 18, 2025 but was later extended till March 5, 2025.

These draft rules cover consent mechanisms, data breach reporting, data retention timelines, parental consent for minors, and the setup of the Data Protection Board of India, among other operational details.

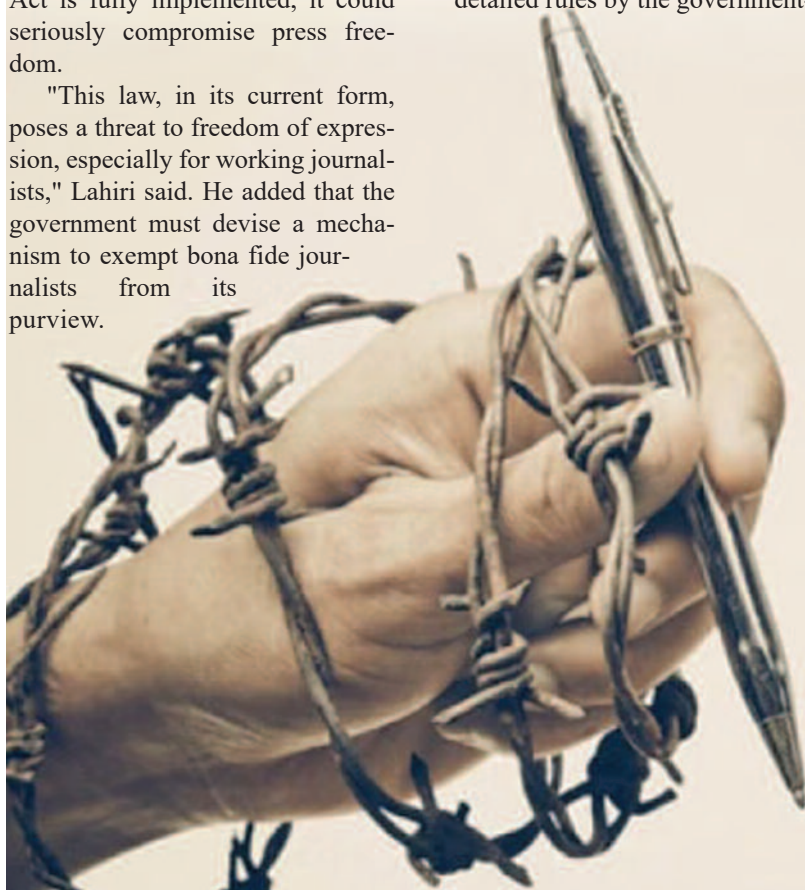
The final rules are still pending. Industry groups—like telecom firms and trade associations—have requested more time to comply and have raised concerns over issues such as potential data localisation requirements that weren't clearly addressed in the Act itself.

Why journalists are concerned about the DPDP Act

Journalists and media bodies fear that the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, could restrict routine newsgathering and reporting. Their concerns are based on specific provisions in the law:

Broad definitions with no journalist exemptions:

The Act defines terms like Data Principal, Data Fiduciary, and Personal Data in ways that apply to journalistic work. For instance, a





person mentioned in a news article becomes a Data Principal, and the journalist becomes a Data Fiduciary, responsible for handling that data under strict rules. This means even quoting a person's name or taking a photo could be treated as processing personal data-potentially leading to penalties.

Consent requirements for reporting:

Sections 5 and 6 of the Act say that a Data Fiduciary must get "informed, clear, and unambiguous" consent before processing personal data. Journalists fear this would require them to get permission before publishing investigative or breaking news-such as during a riot, custodial death, or corruption scandal-which is neither practical nor in the public interest.

Risk of being labelled 'Significant Data Fiduciary':

Under Section 10, the government can designate certain data handlers as Significant Data Fiduciaries, based on how much data they collect. Journalists worry that those working with large datasets-like electoral rolls or public welfare

schemes-may fall under this category, facing added compliance and scrutiny.

Threat to source confidentiality:

Sections 28 and 36 give the Data Protection Board and the Union Government wide powers to demand any information from journalists and media organisations. This could expose confidential sources or whistleblowers, which are critical to investigative journalism and have "grave consequences for press freedom".

Dilution of the RTI Act:

One of the key concerns is that the Act weakens the Right to Information (RTI) Act, which journalists often use to access public records. The amendment to Section 8(1)(j) removes the earlier safeguard that allowed disclosure of personal information if it served the larger public interest. This change could block access to crucial data-such as records on government schemes, public servants, or beneficiaries-that has historically helped expose corruption and systemic failures.

What journalists are demanding from the government

To protect press freedom, the memo-

randum submitted by 21 press bodies and over 1,000 journalists urges the government to make the following changes to the DPDP Act:

Clear exemptions for journalists:

They want the law to clearly state that journalists and media organisations are not Data Fiduciaries when performing legitimate newsgathering and reporting in the public interest.

Remove ambiguity from the law:

Journalists are asking for revisions to vague terms and definitions that currently leave them open to liability for doing their jobs-such as taking a photograph, quoting a source, or publishing a report on public figures.

Protect journalists from arbitrary classification:

They demand that media professionals not be classified as Significant Data Fiduciaries, a label that could be misused to impose disproportionate obligations on the press.

Uphold the confidentiality of sources:

The memorandum calls for journalists and media outlets to be excluded from the powers under Sections 28 and 36 that allow government agencies to access sensitive or confidential journalistic material.

Restore full RTI protections:

Finally, they ask that the original version of Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act be reinstated, so that journalists can continue accessing important public interest information without being blocked by broad privacy claims.

Thus, journalists have raised concerns that several provisions of the DPDP Act could infringe on their constitutional rights under Article 19(1)(a) and (g), which protect freedom of speech and expression, as well as the right to practise their profession.

— *Courtesy: Boom*



YouTube

OPERATION KAGAR



నక్కల్ హత్య చేసింది ఇక్కడే||
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Operation Kagar - through the lens of YouTube channels

The conflict zones on the Telangana-Chhattisgarh border were captured closely by lesser-known independent digital players.



Amar Devulapalli

*Editor,
Mana Telangana*

Operation Kagar, the intense military thrust launched by the Indian government this year to flush out Maoists and curb Left Wing Extremism (LWE), drew national attention, and the spotlight fell on Karregutta Hills, which lie along the Telangana-Chhattisgarh border. When translated into Telugu, "Karregutta" simply means "black-coloured hills". True to its name, the Hills had indeed

turned dark with encounters and explosions, which rang out for weeks as central forces led by CRPF along with multiple state agencies including Chhattisgarh Police, DRG, and STF units combed the area to unearth Maoist hideouts and possible arms dumps.

Karregutta Hills are a tough terrain, rising to a height of 5,000 metres and extending for a few kilometres. As Operation Kagar centred around Karregutta, where the top leadership was suspected to be stationed, the



OPERATION KAGAR

ground reporting became all the more critical as it signalled a watershed moment for the Indian government which was taking the fight to the Maoists' stronghold in a bid to recapture every inch of land.

While the mainstream regional and national news channels did provide coverage in a structured manner, some lesser-known YouTube channels stood out for their raw, unconventional, and fearless reporting by introducing various facets of the region. Among them is a Telugu YouTube channel named Jungle Times. With a subscriber base of 47,000 and total views of 2 crores, the channel, helmed by a single anchor-cum-reporter, actively and regularly reported the ongoing events connected to Operation Kagar.

The channel uploaded at least nine videos on Karregutta Hills, giving regular updates to viewers. In one video, the reporter is seen trekking a hill, 30 kilometres from Karregutta, offering a glimpse into how difficult it is to navigate this terrain. In another

video, he profiled the Abujhmad area in detail; in another, he interviewed locals on their thoughts regarding the conflict and how local businesses were affected. In the process, the channel covered previous Maoist training centres, interviewed families affected by violence, and also documented how the bodies of top Maoists like Nambala Keshav Rao were cremated.

The channel is not limited to bloodshed and gore as it also focused on highlighting the different types of flora and fauna found in the region, while also bringing to life the hardships faced by women, such as the daily struggle of walking long distances to fetch water. Speaking of women, the channel closely interviewed the women commandos fighting the Maoists and also covered encounter sites. The impact of these videos could be seen in the comments section, where viewers appreciated the efforts of those running the channel. The editing, camera angles or sound quality may look amateurish when compared to satellite chan-

nels, but the content more than makes up for whatever is lacking.

Another Telugu channel that actively covered the conflict in Bhadrachalam district in Telangana and the border areas of Chhattisgarh was Manyam Muchatlu. It has 1,700 subscribers and has uploaded more than 190 videos. The channel depicted the lives of people living in the Dandakaranya forest area. In one of the videos, the reporter spoke about how the IEDs planted near Karregutta Hills had destroyed the lives of locals, with some of them losing both or one of their limbs, rendering them handicapped for the rest of their lives.

The channel also uncovered a rare temple tucked inside a cave in the midst of the jungle, offering a window to viewers who are otherwise detached from the region. There are many such examples of smaller YouTube channels operating in various nooks and corners of the country, armed with a single reporter and a cameraman, trying to report in their style and create their identities. ❏



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A Lot has Changed Since we Created AI Ethics Guidelines for Newsrooms

HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW NOW

We've updated Poynter's 'starter kit' for newsrooms to build AI policies, including sections for visual journalists and product teams



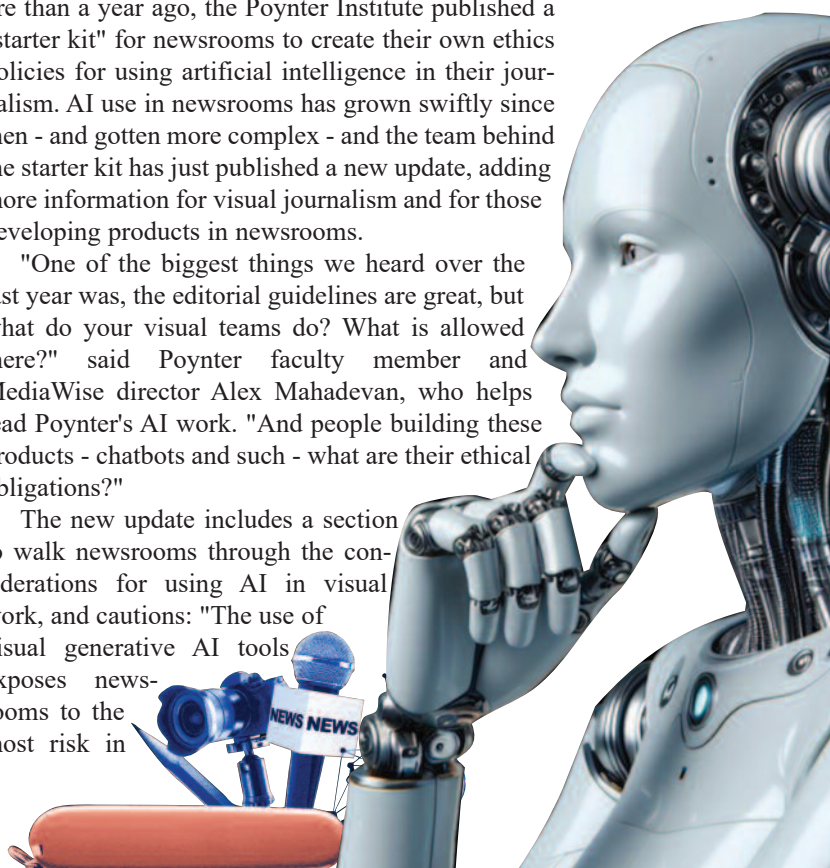
Jennifer Orsi

The writer is a Poynter's vice president for publishing and local news initiatives.

More than a year ago, the Poynter Institute published a "starter kit" for newsrooms to create their own ethics policies for using artificial intelligence in their journalism. AI use in newsrooms has grown swiftly since then - and gotten more complex - and the team behind the starter kit has just published a new update, adding more information for visual journalism and for those developing products in newsrooms.

"One of the biggest things we heard over the last year was, the editorial guidelines are great, but what do your visual teams do? What is allowed there?" said Poynter faculty member and MediaWise director Alex Mahadevan, who helps lead Poynter's AI work. "And people building these products - chatbots and such - what are their ethical obligations?"

The new update includes a section to walk newsrooms through the considerations for using AI in visual work, and cautions: "The use of visual generative AI tools exposes newsrooms to the most risk in



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It takes a small group of journalists a couple hours to fill in the guidelines, run it up the flagpole to news executives, and then issue a memo to the entire staff.

— **MCBRIDE**

regards to audience trust, and should be discussed in depth at your newsroom." The guidelines put a value on human coverage as the preferred option if possible, accuracy over aesthetics, no manipulation of real people and events and more.

The toolkit doesn't prescribe a newsroom's use of the technology, on visual AI or in other areas. Some newsrooms might ban AI use in any image creation. Some might allow it with certain circumstances and disclosures. The toolkit helps newsrooms create a formal ethics policy based on their comfort level with certain uses and how they'll communicate that to their audience.

"This is to help newsrooms," Mahadevan said. "It really starts with thinking about what your values are and building the policies around that."

Much of the new material was devised and workshopped during Poynter's second Summit on AI, Ethics and Journalism, which took place in New York City in April, this time in partnership with The Associated Press.

Poynter published its first guidelines in March 2024, and refined them further following its first AI Summit in St. Petersburg in June 2024. Much has changed in AI use in journalism since then, Poynter leaders said.

"Before we published these guidelines, most of the newsrooms that I talk to were avoiding AI, thinking that no good could come from it," said Kelly McBride, Poynter senior vice president and chair of the Craig Newmark

Center for Ethics and Leadership. "Many newsrooms are now doing tiny experiments, and many more are contemplating adding AI to their workflows."

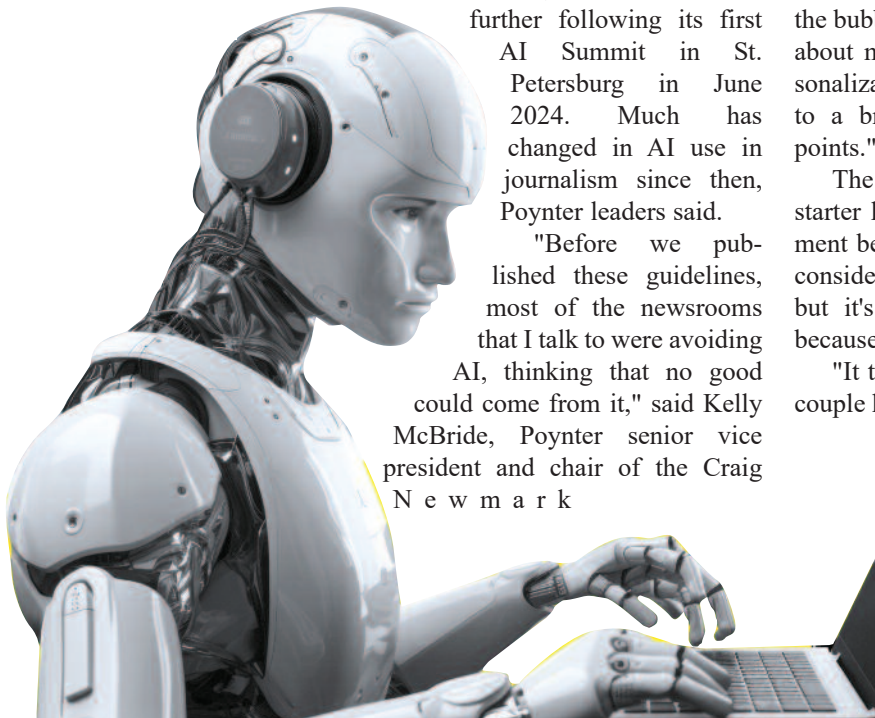
"A lot more people are using AI tools and recognizing that AI is not something we can run from. Again, there is such a demand for access to guardrails. A lot of news organizations have gone from these ad hoc experimentations to 'how are we going to build this into our CMS?' " Mahadevan said. "The phrase I keep hearing is operationalizing AI - how are we building AI into our workflow in a way that is valuable to our readers?"

Another important update is about news products, again emphasizing the values of transparency, fairness, human oversight and audience trust. Specific sections talk about guarding against biases inherent in AI and avoiding creating a reinforcing viewpoint bubble.

"One of the things we talked about a lot is what are we going ... to encourage newsrooms to do to avoid echo chambers if they are personalizing content?" Mahadevan said. "We put in these guidelines as a suggestion - the idea of breaking the bubble - so we have something in there about making sure when you design personalization, you do it to expose audiences to a broad range of stories and viewpoints."

The authors acknowledged that the starter kit for newsrooms is a long document because it asks them to thoughtfully consider and prepare for lots of situations - but it's easier than getting into trouble because you haven't planned.

"It takes a small group of journalists a couple hours to fill in the guidelines, run it up the flagpole to news executives, and then issue a memo to the entire staff," McBride said. "So it's not completely plug and play, but it's worth the time investment, because journalism ethics





The world's top journalists and emerging media leaders rely on the Institute to learn new skills, adopt best practices, better serve audiences, scale operations and improve the quality of the universally shared information ecosystem.

work best when there is local autonomy and buy-in."

To help news organizations share their ethics policies with their audiences, Poynter also has created a short, to-the-point, public-facing document that will give news consumers the basics in a digestible format. News organizations can post it on their website, explaining the ways they use AI and how they communicate it, and link to their full ethics policy.

Poynter's work with AI and AI ethics has also grown significantly in the last year, including expanding its AI training options and adding AI as a category of its new Consulting & Coaching offerings tailored to specific newsrooms' needs.

Mahadevan, McBride and faculty member Tony Elkins continue to teach and present on AI issues at conferences and meetings across the world, and Poynter experts are in-demand media sources on AI topics.

In May, Poynter's MediaWise media literacy program launched the Talking About AI Newsroom Toolkit to help journalists explain how they are using AI to their audiences. That project was completed in partnership with The Associated Press and funded by Microsoft.

About The Poynter Institute

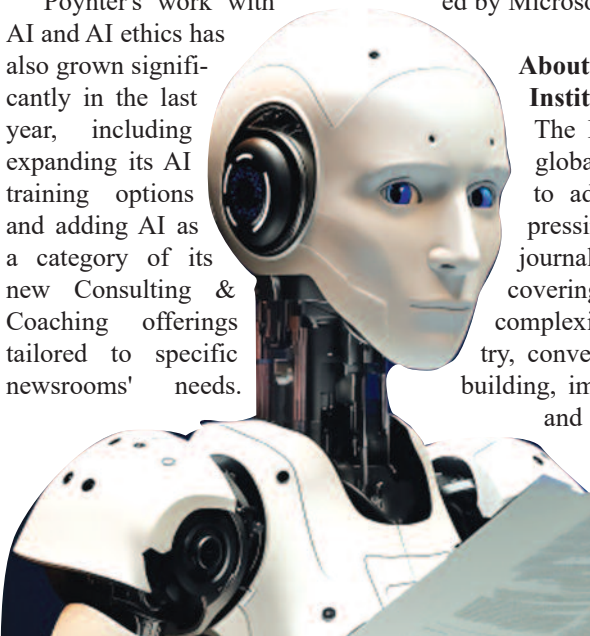
The Poynter Institute is a global nonprofit working to address society's most pressing issues by teaching journalists and journalism, covering the media and the complexities facing the industry, convening and community building, improving the capacity and sus-

tainability of news organizations and fostering trust and reliability of information. The Institute is a gold standard in journalistic excellence and dedicated to the preservation and advancement of press freedom in democracies worldwide. Through Poynter, journalists, newsrooms, businesses, big tech corporations and citizens convene to find solutions that promote trust and transparency in news and stoke meaningful public discourse. The world's top journalists and emerging media leaders rely on the Institute to learn new skills, adopt best practices, better serve audiences, scale operations and improve the quality of the universally shared information ecosystem.

The Craig Newmark Center for Ethics and Leadership, the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN), MediaWise and PolitiFact are all members of the Poynter organization. Support for

Poynter and our entities upholds the integrity of the free press and the U.S. First Amendment and builds public confidence in journalism and media - essential for healthy democracies. 

— *Courtesy: poynter.org*



Three Deaths in a Month: A Grim Period for Telangana's Journalists

All three were aged 40 or below and known to be active journalists

In the month of June, Telangana lost three working journalists, two to serious heart issues and one to suicide. Sometimes hidden behind a mic or a pen, many media personnel are dealing with stress, pressures, financial instability, health negligence, and loneliness. All three journalists, through their respective roles, were important stakeholders of the media industry of the southern state.

On June 23, the news of Jeedipally Dattureddy's sudden death in Warangal shocked and saddened the journalist community. At just 37, Dattureddy was known for his sharp ground reports and commitment to fieldwork. He was working with Eenadu and had previously reported from Hyderabad and Nalgonda before being transferred to Warangal last year. A native of Kamareddy district in Telangana, he had built a quiet yet impactful career. On that Monday night, he collapsed at his home after a massive heart attack. By the time he was brought to a government hospital, he was declared dead.

Condolences poured in from quarters cutting across political lines, as BJP MP and Union Minister Bandi Sanjay, State Cabinet Minister and Congress leader Seethakka, along with former ministers and BRS MLA Harish Rao, called his death a loss to journalism. He is sur-



Jeedipally Dattureddy



Swetcha Votarkar



Bhukya Sunil

vived by his wife and a six-year-old son.

A few days later, Swetcha Votarkar, a 40-year-old TV news presenter, was found dead at her residence in Chikkadpally, Hyderabad. She was discovered by her daughter, who returned home from school and found her mother unresponsive behind a locked door. What followed was traumatic for the child, as neighbours broke down the door and found her unconscious. Doctors declared Swetcha dead on arrival.

It was a case of suicide, and her father, Shanker, has publicly said that emotional stress due to a strained personal relationship might have pushed her to take the extreme step. According to him, Swetcha had been in a relationship her family disapproved of, and the breakdown of that bond may have disturbed her.

The death of Swetcha was widely grieved by the fraternity, as she had worked in multiple Telugu news channels and was very much a recognised face. Condolences

poured in on social media, remembering her as a brave, bold, and outspoken person who stood up for human rights and was deeply committed to the profession.

A third tragedy was recorded as Bhukya Sunil, a senior journalist from Sakshi newspaper and based in Mulugu district, passed away at 37 due to cardiac arrest. He had been undergoing treatment in a private hospital in Hanamkonda. His condition worsened, and he was being shifted to Hyderabad when he died on the way. Sunil was known for his coverage of tribal and rural issues in the region. Local public representatives expressed deep shock and assured that Sunil's family would be supported by them.

All three were field journalists and aged 40 or below. It is time for media managements and journalists themselves to introspect and build an ecosystem where mental and physical health is evaluated and treated on time to prevent such losses to the industry.





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As the trusted voice of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, Sakshi stands at the heart of change. Through unbiased reporting, insightful coverage, innovation and sharp analysis, we empower 86.35* lakh readers every day with informed choices, a strong voice and unwavering confidence.



*Source: All India, All Respondents, IRS 2019 Q4 Total Readership



Indian TV news media takes Iran for Israel

W



Shaukat H. Mohammed

The writer is a senior journalist based at Hyderabad

When Israel launched its unprovoked war on Iran in mid-June, it was a surprise for the world. What was not surprising, however, was the way the Indian TV news media covered what US President Donald J. Trump called the "12-day war" in a nod towards the six-day war between Israel and its Arab neighbours in 1967. It was a war which the Arab states decisively lost, and Israel captured the Sinai in Egypt, the Golan Heights in Syria, and West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, the latter two regions have become a hotbed of resistance against the occupation.

Israel launched the war against Iran, with which it does not share a border, more than 1,500 km away, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu claiming that Iran was "days away from producing nuclear bombs" which posed an "existential threat" to his country. That was enough

for the Indian TV news media to run with the narrative that Iran was planning a nuclear attack on Israel, when it was Israel that had launched the war, and the IAEA had said that Iran was not anywhere near the production of nukes.

Arnab Goswami of *Republic TV* was particularly odious in his coverage of the war, blaming Iran for every war on Israel from the time it was carved out of Palestine in 1948, barring the Holocaust. Speaking in grave and self-righteous tones, normally associated with clergymen claiming they could make the lame walk and the deaf hear, Goswami conducted "debates" on his channel.

The "debates" featured the usual suspects, including Deepak Vohra, a former diplomat, who has his name printed on his shirt or jacket, probably to remind himself of what his name is, and Gaurav Arya, a retired army major who was last on active duty in 1999.



Vohra and Arya has such warm and cozy feelings for the Israelis it would make the Israelis squirm in embarrassment. Vohra—who made his bones on TV when he said that the Israelis should kill 10 children in Gaza for every child killed in the Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October—called for Israel to inflict major damage on Iran. His blood lust only seemed to egg on Goswami and Arya to come up with more absurd prescriptions on how to fix the Iranian regime.

Other channels, both Hindi and English, were not far behind Republic TV, in their denunciation of Iran and fulsome praise for Israel. It was clear to all but those of the meanest intelligence that the media was taking a cue from the government's position of remaining silent on the Israeli war on Iran, bringing to mind Lal Krishan Advani's damning observation about the media's (exclusively the print media's) role during the 1975-77 national Emergency: **"When the media was asked to bend, it crawled."**

The Indian TV news media does not have a correspondent in either Israel or Iran, who could have provided the ground reality. This is obviously because the cost of having a correspondent in these two countries would be an expense that Indian news channels do not want on their books. So, they came up with cheap graphics to stand in for the destruction wrought by Israeli bombs on Iranian cities, including its capital Tehran. It appeared that this time around, Israel



did not pay for the trip of Indian media to visit Israel, like it did after it launched the war in Gaza, probably because the action was in Iran. The last time the Indian TV news media was taken on a junket to Israel, at Israel's cost, the media reported on what it was paid for: peddling the Israeli line against Hamas and the Palestinians. Full paisa vasool for the Israelis.

The last time that the Indian TV news media was taken on a junket to Israel, at Israel's cost, the media reported on what it was paid for: peddling the Israeli line against Hamas and the Palestinians. Full paisa vasool for the Israelis.

Nine days into Israel's war, the United States jumped into the war on behalf of Israel, by bombing three nuclear facilities in Iran, in the cities of Natanz, Isfahan and Fordow. The US dropped at least 12 "bunker buster" bombs on the three facilities. These bombs, each weighing 30,000 pounds (13,600 kg), are designed to penetrate the earth and explode deep inside to cause maximum damage. The US said it used the bombs because Iran's nuclear facilities, particularly its uranium enrichment centre in Fordow, was buried hundreds of feet in the ground. Donald Trump

also announced a ceasefire between Iran and Israel after the bombing run by the US.

In the Iran-Israel War, too, the channels focused exclusively on the damage done in Israel by Iran's bombs. Demonstrating a bewildering capacity of hypocrisy, the channels focused on the damage done to a hospital in Beersheba, Israel, by Iranian bombs, expressing shock and awe at Iran's depraved conduct of the war. They conveniently forgot that Israel had destroyed all the hospitals in the Gaza Strip, most times with patients inside.

While the Israel-Iran War agitated the channels, they found another issue to outrage over: the winning of the Democratic primary by Zohran Kwame Mamdani for the forthcoming election to be mayor of New York City. Mamdani is an American of Indian descent, but the media found some of his SM posts in which he had railed against Narendra Modi and Israel. That was enough for the media to heap the choicest epithets on Mamdani, all under the garb of being "neutral" observers. It was dispiriting, but then the news media has lost all sense of balance in the past few years.



REUTERS INSTITUTE REPORT 2025:

Changing Newsrooms Face a Challenging Future



The 2025 *Digital News Report* published in June by the Reuters Institute gives a reality check - audiences across the world are drifting away from traditional newsrooms. Instead, they are getting glued to TikTok reels, Instagram stories, YouTube explainers, and podcasts. The traditional gatekeepers of journalism, whose revenues are shrinking and formats are changing, now find themselves attempting to catch up with the video-first social media world.

This year was particularly intense as over 70 nations held elections, prompting a surge in news activity, polarisation, and misinformation. In many countries, trust in the media either plateaued or continued to erode. As per global analysis, the rise of creator-led news ecosystems and the entry of AI are both a threat and an opportunity in journalism.

Against this backdrop, India stands out not just for its massive media market but also for the deeply polarised and politically fraught environment.

The exclusive India section in the Report has been compiled by Anjana Krishnan, Research Associate, Asian

College of Journalism, Chennai. The report wastes no time in highlighting the current crisis: "Press freedom in India remains a significant concern following the re-election of Prime Minister Narendra Modi for a historic third term."

According to the Report's narrative, media plurality is under pressure, corporate ownership is consolidating, and critical journalism is increasingly under attack. It underlines that some digital platforms have adapted through innovation and defiance to the mainstream media.

In what the Report calls a "unique collaborative effort," digital platforms like *The Wire*, *Scroll.in*, *NewsLaundry*, *Caravan*, and *The News Minute* came together for a special YouTube-based election broadcast. The day-long programme was run entirely through subscriber donations and crowdfunding, moving away from conventional advertising and offering an alternative to the mainstream coverage that many viewed as either diluted or biased.

The platforms did not just collaborate once. They have expanded their partnerships into video podcasts, joint investigations, and long-form analyses, showing how small outfits can amplify impact through cooperation.

The biggest behavioural shift comes from how Indians access news.

The traditional gatekeepers of journalism, whose revenues are shrinking and formats are changing, now find themselves attempting to catch up with the video-first social media world.

According to the Report, YouTube is the most used platform for news at 55%, WhatsApp follows at 46%, Instagram clocks in at 37%, and Facebook remains significant at 36%.

Video-led and smartphone-first consumption seems to be the norm. When asked which news sources they pay the most attention to on YouTube, the respondents in India chose creators focused on news (39%) over traditional journalists. That's a telling indicator of credibility slowly shifting towards individual voices from institutional and legacy brands.

Creators like Dhruv Rathee, with 28 million subscribers, now shapes a large part of political discourse, especially during events like elections. Even legacy names like Ravish Kumar, formerly with *NDTV*, have migrated to YouTube where they command loyal viewership and enjoy editorial freedom.

Despite the rise of independent creators, legacy news brands cannot be completely written off. Among English-speaking respondents, *NDTV*, *The Times of India*, and *the Hindustan Times* continue to perform well online. Regional print giants like *Dainik Bhaskar* and its digital edition still enjoy substantial reach. *The Print* and *NewsClick*, despite being newer entrants, command loyal audiences. But this comes with a caveat. The dataset reflects India's urban, English-speaking online users and not the full depth of the country's rural or vernacular media landscape.

The Report also highlights unsettling incidents. *Vikatan*, a Tamil digital news site, was blocked by the

central government after publishing a cartoon critical of the Prime Minister over the deportation of Indian migrants from the U.S.

Mukesh Chandrakar, a journalist in Chhattisgarh, was murdered after exposing corruption in local contracts. The Reporters' Collective had its nonprofit status revoked by tax authorities. These are not isolated incidents but part of a growing familiar pattern of regulatory pres-

system might lack the rigour and credibility of International Fact Checking Network certified partners. What makes this especially worrying is the scale of misinformation on platforms like WhatsApp. A staggering 53% of Indian respondents identified WhatsApp as the biggest threat when it comes to false and misleading information - the highest number across all countries surveyed. Trust in news in India stands at 43%, placing it in the middle of the global pack. Among the brands, respondents said they placed their trust in *The Times of India*, *The Indian Express*, and *The Hindu*, which enjoy the highest trust levels. *The Wire*, *Scroll.in*, and *Republic TV* are at the lower end, possibly reflecting how polarisation impacts public trust scores, rather than the quality of content per se.

Interestingly, public broadcasters like *All India Radio* and *Doordarshan* also enjoy relatively high trust.

The Report ends with multiple tensions coexisting in India's media environment. Freedom of expression is expanding in digital formats but shrinking legally and politically. Platforms like YouTube are becoming powerful channels for news, while their role in amplifying misinformation remains contested. For journalists and newsrooms in India, the path ahead is both promising and perilous. On one hand, never before has it been easier to build an audience using just a camera and Wi-Fi. On the other hand, the protective shields that protect journalism - press freedom, legal independence, regulatory fairness - seem to be eroding. ❏



sure, online abuse, and legal harassment - all of which have serious effects on journalism.

Meta's announcement to end its third-party fact-checking initiative in the U.S. sent ripples through Indian fact-checking outfits. Though India-specific plans were unclear, Indian fact-checkers expressed concern that the emerging "Community Notes"

LESSONS UNLEARNED :

The Human Cost of Sensationalised News

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he horrid media coverage of the recent tragic death of fellow journalist, news anchor, and activist Swetcha, along with the shocking interviews of her grieving minor daughter in Hyderabad, has once again raised several pertinent questions about the priorities of our journalists and media houses: sensationalism over sensitivity, entertainment over empathy, and revenue over responsibility.

This piece is about the gross violation of guidelines, ethics, laws, and, most importantly, basic humanity committed by [a section of] the media.



Y Krishna Jyothi

Glorification of Death

In this case, provocative headlines and news reports explaining the intricate details of the crime scene only glorified the alleged "suicide". Indeed, our "creative minds" went the extra mile to barge into the bedroom and capture the crime scene from multiple angles.

The Press Council of India's Norms of Journalistic Conduct [2022 edition and applicable to journalists working for any platform] provide clear guidelines on reporting suicides and crimes [Norm 39(b)], and incidents involving women and children. For instance, the media must refrain from prominently mentioning the word "suicide" in headlines, explicitly describing the method used, recreating the crime scene, and providing

details such as the location or information about family members-because there is more to it than we see.

A Public Health Issue, Not a Crime Story

Once treated as a crime, suicide is now considered a mental health issue. But when the media reports it, it becomes a "public health" matter [Norm 39(a)]. Given its sensitivity and magnitude, it is crucial to understand the social and psychological repercussions that the news we report might have.

Several studies have established a disturbing trend called "Copycat Suicides" or "Suicide Contagion," which shows that media coverage can significantly impact the suicide rate. Hence, avoiding prominent coverage on the front page or landing page and curbing the frequency or duration of such stories across platforms is necessary. Yet, many media outlets have



failed to publicise helpline numbers or encourage people to seek professional help.

Sensational Narratives and Violation of Law

Who could resist those racy narratives sprinkled lavishly with speculations and stereotypes? In fact, some electronic and digital media outlets projected the deceased as a weak character [Norm 39(b)(7)(a)] and even politicised her death to suit their agendas—all aimed solely at keeping the audience hooked to the screens 24x7. The fact that our biases can hugely impact such cases is something we never seem to care about. So much for dignity in death [Article 21 of the Constitution of India]!

The law mandates that the details of suicide notes, confession letters, or any other evidence related to the case must not be made public. Yet here we are—dissecting, analysing, and debating the contents of letters written by the accused; blatantly offering our "expert" opinions on prime-time debates and social media platforms—busy conducting our own trials [Norm 43(a)].

It bears stating—however unpleasant—that it is illegal to publish photos, videos, or other details of the accused, as they are equally entitled to privacy as the victim or survivor. "Innocent until proven guilty" is a principle enshrined in our legal system [Norms 43(a)(i-x)].

Language [Norm 39(b)(2)] and expression play a pivotal role in reporting, helping us present news fairly and accurately. Sensitising reporters, deskers, anchors, camerapersons, and video editors to this is a prerequisite. Needless to say, it is the responsibility of media houses to hold periodic in-house awareness

sessions and orientation classes.

But of course, what could be more glamorising than the death of a public figure [Norm 35]? What could "organically" earn us more clicks and views than invading the privacy [Norm 42] of an individual and her grieving family? After all, media houses need revenues to thrive, and viewers crave "instant gratification".

Exploiting a Grieving Minor

And here comes the most revolting part—thumbnails, photos, and videos depicting a grieving minor girl, along with stories about the sexual



abuse she faced. A couple of news and YouTube channels have even circulated these stories on WhatsApp and other social media platforms, highlighting their utter disregard for her privacy, safety, and psychological well-being.

How many of us know that these protections are otherwise guaranteed by child protection laws [like the POCSO Act and the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act], the PCI guidelines, the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, and guidelines from the Broadcasting Content Complaints Council (BCCC) and News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Authority (NBDSA)?

But now, with the child's identity

[Norm 42(ii)] splashed all over the Internet, she risks being hounded, stigmatised, and victimised for life. If prosecuted, those involved in reporting and approving these news stories could face up to a year's imprisonment and/or a fine under the POCSO Act, and may also be charged under the JJ Act, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, and Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita.

How difficult is it to say "NO" to such appalling coverage? Has our mindless pursuit of "breaking news" and "scoops" trumped our discretion?

Ethical Collapse of Journalism

While journalists of the past entered this profession with passion and a commitment to uphold its integrity, today's journalists often undervalue the very principles the Fourth Estate stands for and conveniently ignore the consequences of their words and actions. The result: from once being the people's voice to becoming their nightmare, journalism has turned into a spectacle of ethical collapse.

We are entitled to freedom of speech under the Constitution of India, but let's not forget that it comes with reasonable restrictions [Article 19(2)] in the interests of public order, decency, and morality.

Now, as I wonder whether training or retraining and imbibing sensitivity and accountability among media persons is a distant dream, I'm constantly bombarded with reactions like: "You guys haven't even spared one of your own," "Dignity in death is a joke for you people," and "Can we file cases against reporters and editors for regressive journalism?"

Well, all I could reply was, "Ignorance of the law is no excuse, and journalists are not above the law!"



Why Did India Miss the Zohran Mamdani Story?

Indian lack of interest in a campaign in which an American of Indian origin will possibly govern one of the most important cities in the world is part of the diminishing of Indian vision and influence in South Asia.

T



Omair Ahmad

The Writer is last novel, Jimmy the Terrorist, was shortlisted for the Man Asian Literary Prize, and won the Crossword Award.

he Indian media has woken up late to the news of Zohran Mamdani, the 33-year-old who has now won the Democratic primary for mayor of New York City. To be fair, Mamdani was not a frontrunner for the race, but he has been in second place for a while with one poll, just before elections, giving him an edge. Nobody expected his comprehensive victory, probably not Mamdani himself. Nonetheless there were enough reasons to cover the story. Mamdani was in the race to become the first American of Indian origin for the post, and New York City is huge. Its population of nearly 8.5 million is larger than that of all but 12 of the states in the US, and its operating budget is over US \$ 110 billion, approximately ten times that of the state of Delhi.

More to the point, Mamdani ran his campaign with an enormous outreach to South Asians, with ads in Urdu/Hindi using Bollywood themes. And if anybody had forgotten, he is also the son of t h e

famed filmmaker Mira Nair as well as of the respected Ugandan academic of Indian origin Mahmood Mamdani. Whether for serious reasons - a person of Indian origin managing one of the most important financial and creative cities in the world - or for simple entertainment reasons, Mamdani was a story that should have written itself for the Indian media.

And yet, go further back than a day or two and all you find is a deathly silence.

It is worth asking why.

The short, depressing answer is that Mamdani is Muslim - he identifies as a Shia of Twelver belief if anybody is interested, even if it is nobody's business but his. As India has embraced Hindutva over the last dozen years it has celebrated those of Indian origin like Priti Patel or the eminently forgettable and quickly forgotten Rishi Sunak whose connections are more attenuated than those of Mamdani, and who you will struggle to find campaigning in any South Asian idiom whatsoever. For Muslims, Sikhs, and others, the government has little time, either ignoring them or painting them as separatists. Given that the majority of our media feels the necessity to crawl before power, we see the world through an increasingly narrow lens.

But there is more to it than just that. If an Akhand Bharat - a larger South Asia where borders do not stand between people



- exists, then it exists abroad. As anybody who has lived overseas can tell you, desis find it easy to be desis out of the subcontinent, to meet over food, music, and movies.

Divisions still remain, of course, and I confess to being annoyed with some of my Pakistani-American cousins and there was that memorable iftar in upstate New York where I was one of two people who identified as Indian while the rest were very Kashmiri. Language, politics, and food can be barriers as well as meeting grounds, but despite that, South Asians abroad have largely preferred to find grounds to meet and mingle rather than stand apart. A large part of that was the wider experience created by filmmakers and academics like Zohran Mamdani's parents. It has been one of the reasons that he has been so successful at reaching across ethnicities and was able to address, with affection and a sense of ownership, the "Bangladeshi auntie" who campaigned for him near the end of his victory speech.

That capacious sense of self has evaporated over the time that Modi has presided as India's prime minister. He may have invited all South Asian heads of state for his first inauguration, but the goodwill and standing that India had across much of South Asia has gone. In 2014 India was one of the largest donors to Afghanistan's government, today it is sidling up to the Taliban. At that time, India was one of the key partners helping in the restoration of democracy in Myanmar, today it is fencing its borders because of the violence in Manipur and its only interlocutor in Myanmar is the military junta. In 2014, India's position in Bangladesh was as of the pre-eminent foreign supporter even as it engaged with the growing influence of China. Today it is pushing people



Democratic mayoral candidate Zohran Mamdani takes selfies with supporters after speaking at his primary election party, Wednesday, June 25, 2025, in New York

across the border in violation of any basic rule of law or humanitarian principles. In 2014, Nawaz Sharif fought with the military leadership to attend an Indian prime minister's inauguration. Today, even our airspace is closed to each other.

Many of these changes are ones in which India could do little, but not all. Furthermore, as Indian foreign policy has become more transactional, as it has touted its own power as a very large economy cumulatively (ignoring that at per capita levels, its people are hardly better off, and in some case worse off, than its neighbours') it has looked to the US, Europe, and the world. The cost has been borne by the management of its relations in the neighbourhood.

When India passed its powerful Right to Information Act in 2005, countries lined up to learn from our experience. India exported its experience with police reform to other Commonwealth countries. Today, there is hardly any form of legislation in India that inspires South Asia and the world. If anything, we are cited as a caution of what could go wrong. It is incredibly ironic that the

political party that bangs on about Akhand Bharat, putting up maps that strain our ties with our neighbours, has presided over the greatest withering of Indian appeal across the subcontinent.

This has an impact on the desi diaspora as well. While the India Impact Fund, an organisation promoting the participation of Indian and South Asian Americans in politics backed Zohran Mamdani, a group titled Indian Americans for Cuomo and the American Hindu Coalition attacked him. This seems to be principally because Mamdani has criticised Modi in a similar vein as he has criticised the Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Mamdani's comprehensive victory, in which South Asians have had a strong contribution, will likely have limited influence from anybody who approves of the current Indian government. As we increasingly find ourselves alone in our own neighbourhood our policies are also isolating us in the South Asia abroad as an increasingly diminished India chooses to march alone. 

— Courtesy: The Wire

The Early Classics Series

The early Indian stories in this series, translated into English for the first time, are a portal through which you can enter an India that now exists only in memory

T

Vineetha
Mokkil

he Early Classics series, published by HarperCollins India, gives readers a welcome chance to journey back to the past. The stories in the series—written in Kannada, Odia and Malayalam during the late 19th to the mid-20th centuries—have been translated into English for the first time.

In her Introduction to the three short story collections in the series, Series Editor Mini Krishnan—a prominent presence in the sphere of translated literature in India—explains the genesis of the project. It all began when she started to wonder: "What will happen to those writers who were no longer with us but were the reason we are where we are in terms of tastes, styles, experiments and themes?" The thought of the "sun setting on our literary past, where pre-modern met modern" was worrying.

The stories in the series span a range of literary traditions. Themes range from

class and caste divides and gender politics to faith, friendship, love, bureaucratic apathy and corruption. The narratives, peppered with the writers' insights, capture the major social and cultural churnings of the time. Some of them are experimental in terms of form. Some put a new spin on old plots. The translators have taken care to preserve the original flavours of the stories that are rooted in specific regional milieus. Thanks to them, the collections seamlessly transport you to three different parts of India and to a different time.

The Malayalam anthology includes memorable tales such as Vengayil Kunhiraman Nayanar's 'Dwaraka', considered to be the first short story in the language in the fantasy genre; Moorkoth Kumaran's 'Just a Glimpse', which makes a strong statement against regressive rituals; T.N. Nambi's 'Kunju Namboodiriyude Randam



BOOK REVIEW

Veli', a well-crafted critique of Namboodiri men's practice of marrying multiple times; B. Kalyaniamma's humorous story 'Nambiar's Secret'; C.C. Ammal's detective tale 'A Case of Homicide'; and V.A. Amma's engaging 'Oru Podikkai' about a wife who is determined to reform her neurotic husband.

The Kannada collection features Panje Magesharaya's 'At A Teashop in Kamalapura', which is said to be the first modern Kannada short story; Ajjampur Sitaram's 'The Girl I Killed', which delves into India's complex cultural landscape; pioneering writer and editor N. Thirumalamba's 'The Child, A Teacher'; Triveni's 'Two Ways of Living'; and Sara Aboobacker's 'Between Rules and Regulations', among others. The Odia anthology includes Fakir Mohan Senapati's 'Rebati', a moving story about a young girl's thirst for learning; Suprabha Kar's 'The Long Wait'; Harischandra Badal's 'The Tiger'; and Rajkishore Ray's 'Bauli' and K.C. Panigrahi's 'Victory Celebration, both of which criticise government policies in their own subtle way.

The translators' Introductions to the story collections are both engaging and illuminating. They painstakingly trace the arc of the short story in the languages featured. Their notes take you on a rewarding journey through pre- and newly independent India, dissecting the relationship between Indian language writing and English over the years; the evolution of women writers in Malayalam, Kannada and Odia; and the vital role of translators in the literary landscape. The translators share the challenges they faced

in sourcing and selecting the stories from a vast pool; transcribing some of them by hand from the archives; getting the necessary permissions; and finding the original publishers, some of who have shut shop by now. Their notes are also a reminder of the fact that a venture like this shaped by many committed individuals: the series editor and other editors, the translators themselves, and writers (literary critic and author Dr M.M. Basheer was a driving force behind the selection of the Malayalam stories).

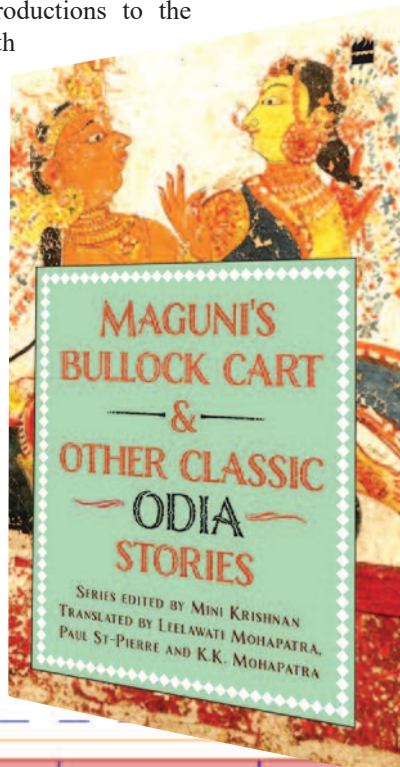
Since three translators worked on the collection of Odia stories, they ask in their introductory note, "If the translation resonates with the readers, does it matter whether one or three translators were involved?" A rhetorical question of course, but they do go on to tell readers that the three of them "harmonised beautifully, like the three musketeers".

These behind-the-scenes glimpses provided by the translators at the start of each collection take readers through the process of putting them together. They also offer readers context about

the times when the stories were written as well as slices of literary and cultural history. These notes help to draw readers closer to the heart of the series.

The stories featured in the Early Classics are a portal through which you can enter an India that now exists only in memory, or in books. They evoke the customs, cadences, and atmosphere of a different time, but also remind us that we are not all that different from those who came before us, and the stories we tell and the concerns that preoccupy us are inextricably linked despite the passage of years. ❑

— *Courtesy: outlook*



Book Cover Harper Collins
Publishers India

Asy-Going Charm Loses the Vote to an Over-Hyped Election

I

**Nandini
Ramnath**

n Phulera village in Uttar Pradesh, where time tends to move at a glacial pace, things are finally beginning to hot up. The contest between Manju Devi (Neena Gupta) and Kranti Devi (Sunita Rajwar) for the sarpanch's post is round the corner. The threat of regime change assumes war-like proportions.

Manju Devi's bottle gourd election symbol is being wielded with ferocity against Kranti Devi's cooker. Manju Devi needs all the help she can get from her husband and ex-sarpanch Brij Bhushan (Raghubir Yadav), daughter Rinku (Sanvikaa) and supporters Vikas (Chandan Roy) and Prahlad (Faisal Malik). Kranti Devi's ambitious husband Bhushan (Durgesh Kumar) and his lackeys Binod (Ashok Pathak) and Madhav (Bulloo Kumar) have the backing of the legislator Chandrakishore (Pankaj Jha), who has a long-running beef with Brij Bhushan. Although the new season of Prime Video's *Panchayat* is

organised around the election, there is occasion for village council secretary Abhishek (Jitendra Kumar) to ponder whether he should flee Phulera for good. Abhishek has long been trying to clear the exam for a prestigious educational institute.

But he has lowered himself deeper into the Phulera swamp than he

OTT REVIEW





Chandan Roy, Jitendra Kumar, Neena Gupta, Raghubir Yadav, Faisal Malik, Sanvikaa

cares to admit. He has lost his neutrality as a government employee and his heart to Rinku. He has genuine affection for Vikas and Prahlad.

Initially focusing on Abhishek's fish-out-of-water experiences, *Panchayat* has evolved - or devolved in some respects - into a study of local-level politics. The Hindi comedy continues with the "six steps forward three steps backward" approach that has characterised it since the first season in 2020.

The more things change in Phulera, the more they stay the same - once an insight into the rural setting, this is now also a major source of contrivance. Hugely popular and spawning remakes in other languages too, *Panchayat* isn't going to give up hard-earned territory in a

hurry, just like Manju Devi.

The latest eight-episode instalment hypes the election, which invites an income tax raid and even the intervention of the "High Command", represented by Member of Parliament (Swanand Kirkire). It appears at times that Manju Devi and Kranti Devi are competing to lead the country, rather than Phulera.

The tried-and-tested plot elements work far better than the new shenanigans. Writer Chandan Kumar and director Deepak Kumar Mishra - both veterans of the series - are adept at maintaining interest levels. The creators drop in sharply written stand-alone moments and entertaining non sequitur-heavy conversations whenever the electioneering gets out of hand, which is nearly

always.

The core group - Abhishek, Manju Devi, Brij Bhushan, Vikas and Prahlad - continues to demand and earn emotional investment. Anything involving Vikas and Prahlad is a showstopper. Chandan Roy, as Vikas, and Faisal Malik, as Prahlad, have imbibed their fictional selves so completely that they can easily command a spin-off series.

Durgesh Kumar is a riot as Bhushan, as is Pankaj Jha as Chandrakishore. Their antics are nudging *Panchayat* into a direction that takes us further away from Abhishek's dilemma. For all of Bhushan's boundless scheming, it's a miracle - or a convenient oversight - that he hasn't cottoned on to the Abhishek-Rinku coupling, which remains as dull as ever.

Not for the first time, now more than ever, Abhishek wonders whether Phulera will survive without him. *Panchayat* is still laidback enough to postpone the decision for a few more seasons. 

— Courtesy: scroll.in

Initially focusing on Abhishek's fish-out-of-water experiences, *Panchayat* has evolved - or devolved in some respects - into a study of local-level politics. The Hindi comedy continues with the "six steps forward three steps backward" approach that has characterised it since the first season in 2020.

Journalists or Extortionists?



owadays, suddenly we are getting news of journalists being arrested in cases of extortion and other criminality. These arrests not only degrade the already declining reputation of journalists but also defame the media world and journalism.

The question is, *who are these journalists?*

Are they bona fide journalists or criminals who veiled themselves as journalists to protect their crime and criminal activities? The police in one of the cases informed during a press conference that "inter-state criminals were posing as journalists." We all must think on this issue and start raising our voice against these criminals and extortionists to safeguard our profession.

Last month, Noida police arrested a woman anchor, Shazia Nisar, and her accomplice, another journalist, Adarsh Jha, on charges of blackmailing and extortion. As per the complaint by Jagdish Chandra, owner and Chief Editor of the channel Bharat24, Shazia, working as an anchor in his channel since 2022, has been blackmailing him by threatening to implicate him in a false rape case and commit suicide, and demanded Rs 65 crore. Jagdish Chandra also said that she had taken Rs 2.26 crore through cheques but did not give any satisfactory answer why they didn't approach the police earlier instead of paying her such a huge amount. When police raided Nisar's Delhi home, they recovered Rs 34.50 lakh in cash, three mobile phones, two laptops, and a Scorpio car. Noida Police arrested Pankaj Parasar, owner of the Tricity Today news portal, along with Dev Sharma and Awadhesh Sisodia, for allegedly being part of gangster Ravi Kana's gang and running fake news to extort money. Police said the accused intimidated people through fake news and that call records proved links to the Kana gang. They recovered Rs 6.3 lakh and two luxury vehicles and traced 15-20 suspicious bank accounts showing illegal transactions.

Gangster Ravi Kana was arrested last year in a gang rape case and for other illegal activities in Noida and Ghaziabad. Police have now filed a chargesheet against Pankaj Parasar, for-

mer president of the Noida Media Club, accusing him of extorting Rs 20 lakh by threatening fake news coverage. Over a dozen cases have reportedly been registered against him in the past. A UP police inspector and three journalists were also arrested in an extortion case. The inspector was caught taking Rs 8 lakh from a call center owner last November. Journalists Sushil Pandit, Udit Goyal and Raman Thakur were arrested for extorting money from the same person in exchange for removing his name from an FIR. Police also seized a Mercedes car from one of them, allegedly linked to criminal activity. Journalists from Noida, Sushil Pandit of *sansaniindia.com* and Udit Goyal of *grenoexpress.com*, along with Chandan Rai from *policemedianews.com* (Sahibabad) and Nitish Pandey of *policenewsup.com* (Lucknow), were arrested for publishing defamatory content to blackmail a police officer. Police said the four "non-accredited journalists" were involved in illegal land occupation, soliciting money for favours and intimidation.

In the last ten years, we have seen that journalists were targeted for doing their job and criminal laws were misused by law enforcing agencies to punish and threaten journalists all over the country. In one report by Columbia Law School's Human Rights Institute in partnership with the Clooney Foundation for Justice's TrialWatch initiative and National Law University, Delhi, examining over 400 criminal cases initiated against journalists in India between 2012 and 2022, it was found that reporting on public officials is the most common reason for charges being slapped to put journalists behind bars. The Report provides critical empirical and legal analysis of the way criminal law is systematically employed across Indian states to suppress independent journalism and curtail freedom of expression. If telling the truth to people is a crime, then journalists are criminals. But if criminals are using journalism for their interest, then we all must stand out and identify them to safeguard not only journalism but also to keep people's faith in journalism. 

THE LAST PAGE



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