



SCRIBES NEWS

A JOURNAL OF PRACTITIONERS OF JOURNALISM

Vol. 10 No.2 Pages: 32

APRIL, 2026

Editorial Advisers

S N Sinha, New Delhi

K Sreenivas Reddy, Hyderabad

L S Herdenia, Bhopal

Balwinder Singh Jammu, Chandigarh

Editor

Rahul Devulapalli
scribesnews.editor@gmail.com

Mail Id:
scribesnews@gmail.com

IJU website:
www.indianjournalistsunion.com

Speaking More, Answering Less

Joseph Vijay entered Tamil Nadu politics to join a long list of Indian actors who have switched careers to face electoral challenges. Since the launch of his party, TVK, he has been delivering speeches and actively campaigning during elections. Even his digital video campaigns have gone viral. But what is striking is that there is not a single widely visible interview of his on mainstream media channels.

A few months back, an anchor of a leading English news channel declared excitedly that his team had been invited to 'chat' with actor Vijay in Chennai. The channel presented it as an exclusive and highlighted that they were the first English media outlet to get access. What stood out was not what Vijay said. It was the fact that access itself had become the story. The interaction was neither broadcast, nor were glimpses of it made public. It remained a closed-door engagement and was passed off as a scoop.

During the recent election coverage in Tamil Nadu, the same channel featured a reporter speaking to a Vijay look-alike. The headlines made it appear like an interview with the actor. For the channel and its audience, the void seemed to be filled to some extent. But this is not just about Vijay or his apparent reluctance to engage in media interviews.

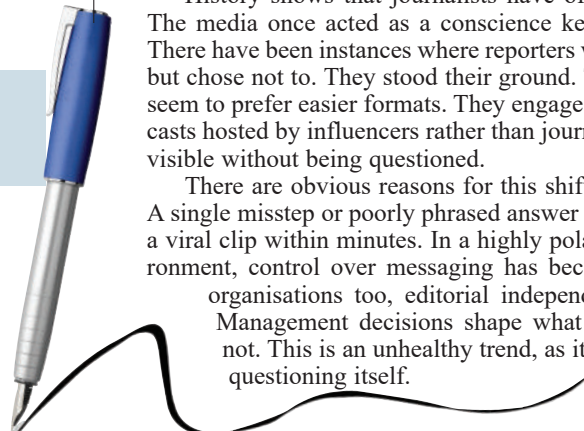
Across Indian politics, there is a visible trend. Leaders are speaking more than ever before. They are speaking in rallies, party programmes and across social media platforms. But where is the space for direct and unscripted questions?

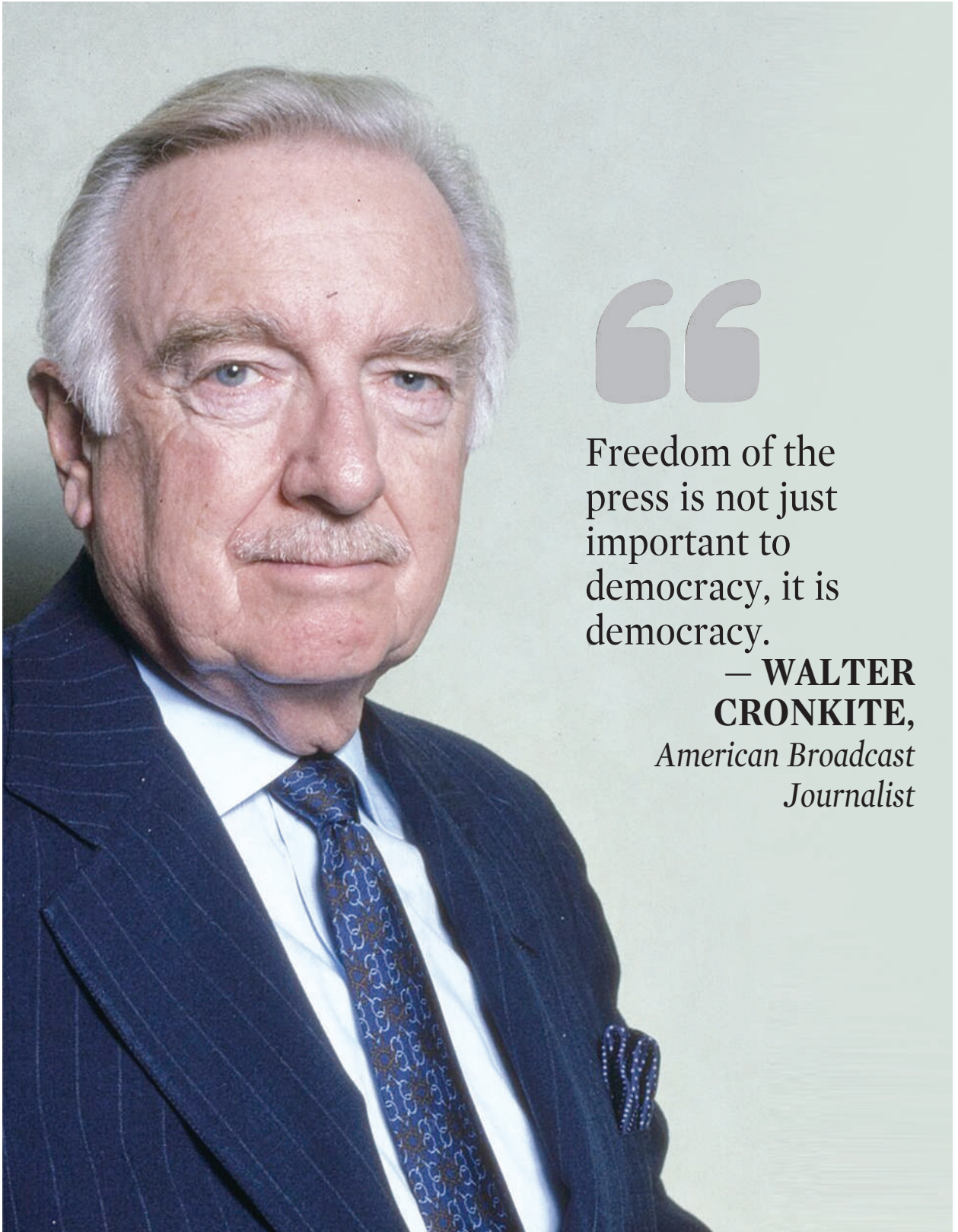
The traditional format of a politician sitting across from a journalist and answering uncomfortable questions is slowly disappearing. Press conferences are thinning. Messages are pushed out through WhatsApp channels or platforms like X. When media interactions do happen, they are tightly managed. Journalists seen as aligned often get more access. Interviews, when they happen, are selective and frequently pre-recorded. The kind of rigorous interviews that once defined political journalism is fading.

History shows that journalists have often held power to account. The media once acted as a conscience keeper for those in authority. There have been instances where reporters were asked to delete footage but chose not to. They stood their ground. Today, many top politicians seem to prefer easier formats. They engage in soft, conversational podcasts hosted by influencers rather than journalists. It is a way to remain visible without being questioned.

There are obvious reasons for this shift. Live questions carry risk. A single misstep or poorly phrased answer can spiral into a headline or a viral clip within minutes. In a highly polarised and digital-first environment, control over messaging has become critical. Within media organisations too, editorial independence is often constrained. Management decisions shape what gets asked and what does not. This is an unhealthy trend, as it risks eroding the culture of questioning itself.

Free Frank Fearless





“

Freedom of the press is not just important to democracy, it is democracy.

— **WALTER CRONKITE,**
American Broadcast Journalist

Inside



Stop Misuse of Advertisements as a Weapon: Punjab and Chandigarh Union to Centre and State Governments

PAGE 4



Office of Indian Newspaper Attacked after Alleged Threat by Assam Chief minister

PAGE 7



The dinner stopped. The journalists kept reporting

PAGE 10



IJU Plenary Flags Journalists' Concerns, New Leadership Takes Charge in Vijayawada

PAGE 13-17



Govt Orders Facebook, X to Act on Mohammed Zubair, Media

PAGE 20



Australia Proposes To Tax Meta, Google, TikTok To Fund Journalists

22



A Timely Guide to Deepening India-ASEAN Ties

PAGE 26



More Frivolity With a Pinch of Seriousness

PAGE 28



State Executive Committee members of the Punjab and Chandigarh Journalists Union

Stop Misuse of Advertisements as a Weapon: Punjab and Chandigarh Union to Centre and State Governments

Santokh Gill
*General Secretary,
 Punjab and Chandigarh
 Journalists Union*

Expressing deep concern over the increasing attacks on journalists across Punjab and elsewhere in the country, and the imposition of bans on channels to silence voices, the Punjab and Chandigarh Journalists Union has called for raising a strong voice on 3 May, the occasion of International Press Freedom Day. Highlighting concerns over the misuse of government advertisement policy, funded by public money, as an economic weapon by the Centre and State Governments, Balwinder Jammu, National President of the Indian Journalists Union, also demanded an end to this practice.

The leaders warned against

delays in fulfilling important demands, including providing pensions and free bus passes to journalists and desk staff, creating a special fund for the welfare of journalists, increasing the number of residential houses for journalists in Chandigarh from 15 to 50, and providing accommodation to journalists in districts. They also decided to launch a struggle against the Bhagwant Mann government on these issues.

The meeting of the State Executive Committee of the union was held in Ropar under the chairmanship of State President Jai Singh Chhibber.

It was also addressed by State Chairman Balbir Jandu and General Secretary Santokh Gill.

In addition to paying tribute to the late renowned photojournalist Raghu Rai and journalist Jatinder Sandhu of Rampura Phul, the gathering observed two minutes of silence in memory of several other journal-

ists from Punjab and their near and dear ones. With unanimous consent, senior journalists Jagtar Bhullar and Preetam Singh Rupal were included in the sub-committee on Digital Media and given the responsibility to submit a detailed report soon. The union also decided to organise seminars in the Malwa, Majha, and Doaba regions.

The discussion was attended by many journalist leaders, including Senior Vice President Bhushan Sood, Organisational Secretary Davinder Bhangoo, N.P. Dhawan, Jaswant Thind, Jagsir Sandhu, Amarpal Bains, Prabhat Bhatti, Jagtar Bhullar, Bhupinder Malik, Manpreet Malleana, Gagandeep Arora, Virpal Bhagta, Gurtej Sidhu, Balwinder Bhangoo, Navkant Bhairomajra, and Harjeet Singh Kapurthala. The Ropar District Unit honoured National President Balwinder Jammu along with all the state-level leaders. ❏

PCI gets Chairman, Journalist Quotas Remain Vacant



Nava Thakuria



After months of uncertainty, the Press Council of India (PCI) got its chairman as Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai assumed charge on 24 April 2026. The retired judge of the Supreme Court of India, who was nominated for a second term for a period of three years, served as the PCI chairman from 17 June 2022 to 16 December 2025. However, the quotas for working journalists remain vacant, as seven members to be represented by professional scribes (other than editors) and six members to be represented by journalist-editors are yet to be picked to complete the 15th council. It is worth mentioning that two months ago, Rajya Sabha member Sasmit Patra urged the Union government in New Delhi to complete the current press council to safeguard democratic principles and strengthen media accountability. Speaking in the Upper House of Parliament on 10 February, the Biju Janata Dal leader asserted that the constitution of a full-fledged council after the term of the 14th council expired on 5 October 2024 was necessary for a free, fair, and responsible press. Patra specifically emphasised appointing the new chairperson, as the PCI remained headless since 17 December last year, to pave the way for completing the current council of the statutory, quasi-judicial, and autonomous institution.

Currently, the PCI has functioning members, namely Sudhanshu Trivedi and Brij Lal (Rajya Sabha lawmakers); Sambit Patra, Naresh Mhaske, and Kali Charan Munda (Lok Sabha members); Ashwini K Mohapatra (University Grants Commission); Manan Kumar Mishra (Bar Council of India); K Sreenivasa Rao (Sahitya Akademi); Sudhir Kumar Panda, MV Shreyams Kumar, Gurinder Singh, Arun Kumar Tripathi, Braj Mohan Sharma, and Arti Tripathi (who either own or carry on the business of management in big, medium, or small newspapers). The 28-member PCI (excluding the chair), which was initially set up in 1966 under the Press Council Act, 1965, and later re-established in 1979 following the Press Council Act, 1978, with an objective to improve the

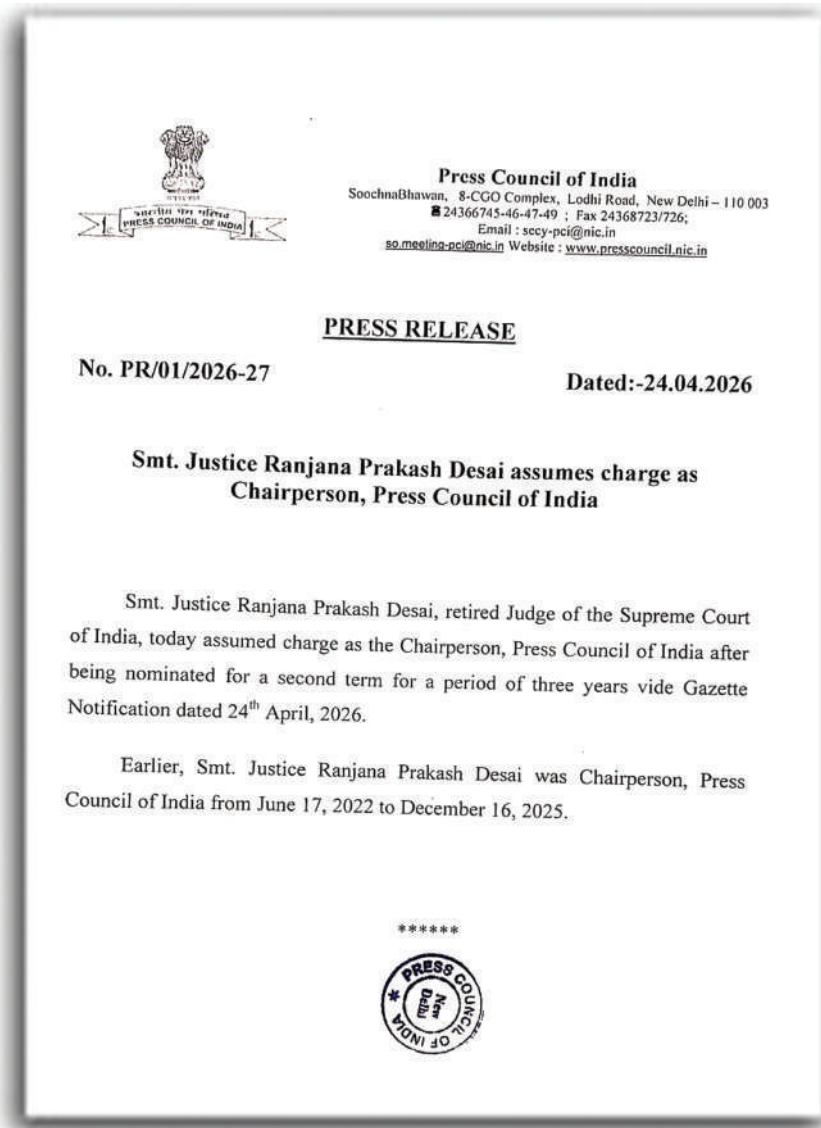


standard of newspapers and news agencies in the billion-plus nation, should have 13 individuals representing professional journalists, but those seats remain vacant till date.

The crisis started as many national journalist bodies opposed a change in the PCI rules to pick members from various press clubs instead of the national union of working journalists. Some of them even approached the court, making the situation more complex. They argue that press clubs are basically recreational bodies and that their coverage areas normally remain limited to a particular region, city, or town. Often, press clubs offer memberships to non-working journalists (like academicians, writers, film personalities, and diplomats) to enhance their influence, and hence their members may not do justice to professional media personnel in crucial junctures. More precisely, press clubs, press guilds, or media clubs cannot be all-India bodies (notwithstanding the nomenclature Press Club of India) with representatives from various parts of the vast country. On the other hand, they argue that recognised journalist unions usually comprise members from different parts of India.

As the PCI became headless, happening for the first time in the history of the statutory body, the question that arose was who was taking care of the robust Indian print media fraternity, comprising over 100,000 publications endorsed by the Registrar of Newspapers for India, in various frequencies and languages.

The PCI can officially receive complaints against a particular newspaper or news agency, or an editor or working journalist, for professional misconduct that deteriorates



the standard of journalistic behaviour. But it has limited power to enforce its guidelines by penalising print outlets as well as their editors and working journalists for violations.

Besides newspapers, the billion-plus nation also supports nearly 400 satellite news channels, along with millions of portals, WhatsApp, and other digital media outlets. But these are not yet under the purview of the

PCI. In reality, all modern technology-driven news outlets remain outside its purview. As the PCI enjoys the authority to make observations whenever the conduct of any government is found inappropriate while ensuring freedom of the press, the demand to bring all news channels, radio, and digital platforms under the PCI's jurisdiction, along with its subsequent empowerment, continues to grow. ❏

Office of Indian Newspaper Attacked after Alleged Threat by Assam Chief Minister



Early on April 10, unidentified assailants pelted the Asomiya Pratidin office in North Lakhimpur with stones, shattering windows and damaging the newsroom, according to multiple news reports. No staff members were injured in the incident.

The attack followed comments by Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, in which he criticized the publication and allegedly threatened its parent company's chairperson, Jayanta Baruah, according to a statement released by the parent company, Pratidin Media Network.

"The attack on Asomiya Pratidin's office is a physical manifestation of the dangerous rhetoric coming from the highest levels of the Assam govern-

ment," said CPJ's Asia-Pacific Program Coordinator Kunal Majumder. "Politicians must be able to withstand critical reporting without resorting to threats that incite violence. We call on the Assam police to identify the perpetrators and ensure the safety of all journalists in the state."

The vandalism occurred less than 24 hours after the Assam state election ended and roughly 12 hours after Sarma, who is the leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party, allegedly told reporters that media figures like Baruah would be "politically and intellectually destroyed" if his government returned to power, according to multiple news reports.

Pratidin Media Network, which runs Asomiya Pratidin, had in the lead-up to the election reported critically on allegations that the BJP created thousands of fake social media accounts to target critics, tracked deepening internal party rebellions, and covered the chief minister's increasingly volatile relationship with the media.

North Lakhimpur police have registered a case regarding the vandalism but have not yet made any arrests.

The Office of the Assam Chief Minister and the Superintendent of Police for Lakhimpur District Gunendra Deka did not reply to CPJ's text messages and emails requesting comment.

— Courtesy CPJ



India's Media problem in 2 headlines: 'Anti-Women' Opposition, 'Mastermind' Nida Khan

It's clear how easy it is for misinformation to be deliberately or inadvertently amplified by mainstream media.



**Kalpna
Sharma**

In the last two weeks, we have seen how easily Indian mainstream media echoes the "manufactured narrative" that the Modi government and its surrogates seek to amplify.

Let's start with what the media has chosen to call the "Women's Bill" when in fact what they are referring to is the 131st Constitutional Amendment Bill to introduce delimitation of parliamentary and assembly constituencies based on the 2011 census.

The reason given by the government for formulating this law was that it would help push through one-third reservation of seats for women in parliament and legislative assemblies. The so-called "Women's Bill" reserving one-third seats in all legislative assemblies had already been passed in 2023. It was not notified, and therefore not implemented. Given these facts, the government did not explain why, when a law like this was already on the statute, and could have been implemented before the 2024 general elections, it remained in cold storage. Incidentally, that "Women's Bill" got the support of most opposition parties.

The government also did not care to explain why it had to call an urgent three-day session of parliament in the middle of assembly elections in several states to push through this bill and why it could not wait until later.

These are the obvious questions the media needed to ask. It did not. All major

media houses would also have known that the Women's Reservation Bill of Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam had already been passed in 2023. Yet, when this rushed session of Parliament was convened, and a united opposition defeated the constitutional amendment which needed two-thirds of Parliament to vote in favour, every major newspaper, barring The Hindu, headlined the defeat as one relating to the "Women's Bill". Inadvertently, or deliberately, these headlines played into the narrative that the Modi government had sought to amplify through this process: that they were committed to "Nari Shakti" but that the opposition was not, a useful trope to amplify in the elections to the Bengal and Tamil Nadu state assemblies.

One could argue that the front-page headline in a newspaper does not necessarily represent its editorial stance which is reflected in the editorial page. Yet, a front page is not made by junior sub-editors, especially the choice of the lead story. Senior editors check and approve it. And we also know, given diminished attention spans, that most people scan the headlines and perhaps read a couple of paragraphs. Rarely would the lay reader take the time to go into the details of this or any other issue.

Therefore, there is a reason that headlines matter, and that they should accurately represent events and developments and neither exaggerate, nor give the wrong and

inaccurate information, as in this case.

This article in Alt News, especially the latter half, gives you illustrations of what appeared the day after the vote in Parliament. Readers can judge for themselves the difference between a headline in The Hindu that read: "United opposition defeats Delimitation Bill" and one in Indian Express that stated: "Opposition stands, women's Bill falls." As mentioned earlier, the "Women's Bill" did not fall. It had already been passed in 2023. What should have been headline news on that day is that the government chose to notify the actual "Women's Bill" on April 16, a day before the vote in Parliament on April 17. By then it was clear that the Constitutional Amendment would not pass.

The other equally troubling incident is the way in which media handled what has now come to be known as the TCS sexual harassment case. The story began virtually unnoticed on April 9 when reports appeared around sexual harassment at a company in Nashik. Few details were known.

In the days to follow, as this article by senior journalist Sukumar Muralidharan outlines in OffBeatConcerns, the story was picked by several media portals close to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Within a couple of weeks, it had caught the attention of TV news channels. Terms like the usual "love jihad" and now "corporate jihad" began to be used as the office under the radar was run by the Tata Consulting Services (TCS).

This story by Prateek Goyal in NewsLaundry sets out in detail how the case developed in Nashik. When asked about media coverage around this case, a senior police officer told the reporter: "Media people have



made so many stories. No one is interested in what we say but only in what they want to hear."

While the story is still unfolding, and the police have arrested several men and declared a woman named in one FIR as "absconding", it is the way the media played up the role of this one woman that illustrates not just the crass insensitivity of some mainstream media houses but also, as in the case of the "Women's Bill", how readily they amplify a narrative that the BJP and its supporters have been plugging.

The woman in question is Nida Khan, an employee of TCS. The media, especially television news, repeatedly used her photograph and claimed she was the head of Human Resources and the "mastermind" of a conspiracy to convert fellow workers to Islam.

By the time TCS clarified that Nida Khan was not the head of HR but was an employee in another department, the damage had been done. A young woman, expecting her first child, who had recently transferred to Mumbai from Nashik, became the face of the alleged scandal at the TCS unit in Nashik. Her attempt to get anticipatory bail has failed. Worse still, TCS, which has

gone to great lengths to assert that it had a system to deal with complaints from its employees, suspended this young woman without doing its own independent inquiry into the case.

As of now, it is not clear what will happen to Nida Khan. It is clear, however, that the trial by the media has ruined her life. And it is highly unlikely that any of the newspapers or channels that used her photograph and repeated the falsehood will apologise. Meanwhile, the BJP and its supporters have no complaints.

This incident in the TCS office in Nashik, how it developed, the role of the Maharashtra police and the role of the media must also be viewed against the background of the developments in Maharashtra where a controversial anti-conversion law has been passed. As this article by Kunal Purohit in Article 14 points out, conspiracy theories about "love jihad" have been assiduously promoted by BJP supporters in the build-up to the enactment of the Maharashtra Freedom of Religion Act, 2026. Under this law, even if there is no complaint, the police can initiate action if it suspects that there are attempts at religious conversion.

— Courtesy NewsLaundry



Journalists that were in attendance for the White House Correspondents Dinner work following a press briefing at the Washington Hilton following an incident that disrupted the event

THE DINNER STOPPED. THE JOURNALISTS KEPT REPORTING

An attacker cut short the White House Correspondents' Dinner, but reporters in formalwear quickly pivoted from celebration to coverage



**Ren
LaForme**

ritics had already braced for an uneasy White House Correspondents' Dinner, with President Donald Trump in attendance and organizers opting for a safer, less confrontational program. But the night took a far more serious turn when a security incident abruptly cut the event short.

Shortly after 8:30 p.m., less than 20 minutes after Trump, first lady

Melania Trump, Vice President JD Vance and other officials took their seats, loud bangs echoed through the ballroom.

Video from inside the room - broadcast live and quickly shared on social media - shows the moment: heads turning toward the doors, the first lady visibly startled and security moving swiftly to surround the presi-

dent as attendees ducked under tables.

With few details and no immediate explanation, the mood shifted almost instantly from ceremony to confusion to reporting.

CNN media analyst Brian Stelter reported via FaceTime that audience members were crouched behind tables. CNN anchor Wolf Blitzer said he briefly stepped out of the room, heard what he believed were gunshots and then saw agents subdue someone. Police, he said, ushered him and others into a nearby men's room for safety.

As The New York Times launched a live blog and reporters inside the ballroom began filing dispatches, others scattered to find cameras - inside the hotel, on the street or back in nearby newsrooms.

In black tie and evening gowns, journalists did what they are trained to do: gather information, confirm what they could and tell the public what was happening, even as they were still trying to understand it themselves.

It was an extraordinary moment for the press. It was also, as Stelter wrote, "all too ordinary" in America. For a few minutes, the people who cover power experienced the kind of fear and confusion that millions of Americans have faced in schools, offices and public spaces.

The dinner itself never resumed. The reporting did, shifting from the ballroom to the White House briefing room, where journalists - some still in formalwear - continued covering the night.

"It was a shocking night. And in that way, it was in keeping with the nonstop, previously unimaginable events of Washington in the Trump era, in which no week seems to pass by without some extraordinary turn



FBI agents work Sunday, April 26, 2026, at an address in Torrance, Calif., connected to Cole Tomas Allen, who was identified as the shooting suspect at the White House Correspondents Dinner the night before.

of events," wrote The New York Times' Luke Broadwater, Shawn McCreech, Tyler Pager and Maggie Haberman (McCreech and Pager were in the ballroom).

"By the end of the evening, the president would show graciousness to the journalists he had planned to skewer and, after 15 months of attacking Democrats and reporters as enemies, he would take the occasion to call for unity."

What happened

Shots rang out just after 8:35 p.m. Saturday night at the Washington Hilton, Reuters' Kanishka Singh reported. The suspect sprinted through a security checkpoint before being tackled and taken into custody. A Secret Service agent was injured in the confrontation. Trump initially urged that the event continue but soon left the venue at law enforcement's request. He later appeared at the White House to say that the attacker appeared to be a lone shooter and would face federal charges.

Though criticism and concerns about security at high-profile gatherings immediately swirled online, security officials and outside experts said the Secret Service response largely worked as it was supposed to, Devlin Barrett, Eileen Sullivan and Chelsia Rose Marcus reported for the Times. The suspect never made it into the ballroom and was stopped within seconds of breaching an outer checkpoint by layers of security.

However, Emily Davies, Isaac Arnsdorf, Jeremy Roebuck and Joe Heim wrote for The Washington Post, the Trump administration "provided a lower level of security for the White House correspondents' dinner than it has for other gatherings of high-ranking officials, even though the president and many Cabinet members were in attendance, according to officials familiar with the plan."

Trump said he 'wasn't worried'

In a Sunday interview with "60

Minutes" and CBS News' Norah O'Donnell, Trump said he "wasn't worried" during the incident, and described the suspect as "probably a pretty sick guy" who had been "radicalized."

Trump acknowledged initially resisting Secret Service instructions as agents moved to secure him and said he later pushed for the event to continue, framing the night as "beautiful" because of what he described as a moment of unity between press and the administration.

The interview turned combative when O'Donnell read from the suspect's writings, which referred to a "pedophile, rapist and traitor."

"Well, I was waiting for you to read that because I knew you would because you're- you're he- you're horrible people," Trump said. "Horrible people. Yeah, he did write that. I'm- I'm not a rapist. I didn't rape anybody."

O'Donnell struggled to explain that she was trying to ask about the suspect's words and determine a motive, but Trump continued to admonish her.

"You shouldn't be reading that on '60 Minutes.' You're a disgrace," he said.

"But go ahead. Let's finish the interview."

Authorities identified the suspect as Cole Tomas Allen, a 31-year-old California man who traveled across the country by train and checked into the Washington Hilton days before the dinner, Alexandra E. Petri and Pooja Salhotra reported for The New York Times. Investigators say Allen was armed with knives, a shotgun and a handgun, and appears to have intended to target Trump administration officials, though his motive remains under investigation. Messages sent to relatives and writ-



President Donald Trump gestures as he speaks in the James Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House.

ings recovered from the hotel room expressed anger at administration policies and suggested plans for violence. Those who know him described him as intelligent and mild-mannered - "a completely average guy," said a high school student who had been tutored by Allen.

Almost immediately after shots were reported, social media filled the information vacuum with speculation, conspiracy theories and misidentified details, Stuart A. Thompson, Tiffany Hsu and Steven Lee Myers reported for the Times. Claims that the attack was "staged" surged across platforms like X, alongside false attributions about the shooter's motives and manipulated imagery - another example of how viral narratives can outpace verified facts and persist even after corrections emerge.

Amy Sherman of Poynter's PolitiFact checked some of those specific false claims, from misinterpreted comments by White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt - who metaphorically said, "There will be some shots fired tonight in

the room" - to incorrect reports that the suspect had been shot or killed. Even journalists contributed to the early confusion, including an erroneous social media post about the suspect's status.

Trump seized on the incident to argue that the White House Correspondents' Dinner should be moved to the new ballroom being built on the East Wing of the White House - a proposal that raises fresh concerns about press independence, Louis Jacobson wrote for PolitiFact. While Trump and his allies say a White House venue would be more secure, media experts warn it would give the president undue control over an event meant to celebrate press freedom, potentially allowing the administration to influence or even cancel it. "It would be a horrible idea," said Poynter senior vice president and ethics chair Kelly McBride. "The answer is clear: It has to be held in a neutral location."

"When you have an event put on by the WHCA, it should be controlled by that organization," said Tom Rosenstiel, a media critic and professor of journalism at the University of Maryland. "Having it on federal property gives the government undue control over it."

The dinner ended before it had truly begun. While Trump has pushed to reschedule it within 30 days, the White House Correspondents' Association has not committed to a timeline, Natalie Korach reported in Status, as safety concerns and logistics loom large after the incident. Organizing another gathering of that scale on short notice would be difficult, and some attendees are wary of returning, raising the possibility that any rescheduled event could be smaller. ❏

— *Courtesy Poynter.50*



AP Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu being felicitated by senior IJU leadership at the Plenary in Vijayawada

IJU Plenary Flags Journalists' Concerns, New Leadership Takes Charge in Vijayawada

T

he 11th plenary session of the Indian Journalists Union concluded in Vijayawada on March 29, 2026, with a strong assertion on safeguarding press freedom, restoring labour protections for journalists, and addressing the rapidly changing media landscape. Held at Thummalapalli Vari Kalakshetram, the three-day event began on March 27 with the National Executive Committee meeting and brought together around 250 to 300 delegates from over 20 states. The plenary combined organisa-

tional reviews, policy discussions, leadership transition, and cultural programmes.

Concerns over labour codes and media environment

The plenary raised serious concerns over the Union government's labour policies, particularly the four labour codes enacted in November 2025. Delegates described them as regressive and said they weaken long-standing protections available to working journalists

under the Working Journalists Act. The union pointed out that the absence of a wage board since 2007 has left journalists without structured wage revision for nearly two decades. It flagged growing job insecurity and the erosion of service conditions in the media sector. Concerns were also raised about the weakening of institutions such as the Press Council of India and the Central Press Accreditation Committee. Delegates said denial of representation to journalists' unions in these bodies affects accountability and transparency. The plenary also underlined the absence of a dedicated national law for the protection of journalists. It noted that attacks, harassment, and economic pressure through denial of government advertisements are increasing, leaving journalists vulnerable.



IJU President Balwinder Singh seen with former Presidents Sreenivas Reddy, S. N. Sinha, and Devulapalli Amar while hoisting the IJU flag at the venue

Presidential address calls for restoring safeguards

In his presidential address, Former IJU President K. Sreenivas Reddy criticised the Centre for replacing 29 labour laws with four labour codes. He called for restoring the Working Journalists Act and reintroducing a wage mechanism. He said safeguards for journalists have been steadily diluted and reiterated the demand for representation of national unions in statutory bodies. He also pointed out that journalists today face conditions worse than those in the unorganised sector.

Secretary General's report and organisational updates

Presenting the report, IJU President Balwinder Singh Jammu reviewed the union's activities since the last plenary in Chennai in 2022. He noted that the National Executive Committee met seven times and

Safeguards for journalists have been steadily diluted and reiterated the demand for representation of national unions in statutory bodies.

**— K. Sreenivas Reddy,
Former IJU President**

coordinated programmes across states. State units in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Kerala, Karnataka, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan conducted conferences during the period. He encouraged more seminars alongside such meetings to deepen engagement. He also informed that the IJU office in Delhi is now operational and welcomed the inclusion of the

Rajasthan Patrakar Parishad under the IJU umbrella. The report was adopted after detailed discussion.

State reports reflect varied challenges
Representatives from multiple states presented reports on regional issues, highlighting challenges such as attacks on journalists, financial stress in media organisations, and the growing impact of digital platforms.

Speakers from Telangana, Bihar, Karnataka, Punjab, Odisha, Puducherry, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala outlined local concerns while reiterating the need for collective action at the national level.

Balance sheets adopted

Audited balance sheets for 2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25 were presented by former IJU President, S.N. Sinha. Delegates reviewed the

financial position of the organisation and adopted the accounts.

Eleven resolutions passed

The plenary passed 11 resolutions covering labour rights, press freedom, institutional reforms, and welfare measures. Key demands included withdrawal of the labour codes, reintroduction of the Working Journalists Act, and enactment of a national law for journalist protection. The union also called for setting up a Media Commission to review the sector. There was a strong push to convert the Press Council of India into a Media Council with wider jurisdiction across platforms. Resolutions also addressed allocation of government advertisements to small publications, housing rights of journalists, restoration of concessional railway travel, and concerns over the eviction of the UNI office in New Delhi.

Amendments to strengthen organisation

The plenary approved several constitutional amendments aimed at strengthening the union's structure and expanding participation, including that of women. Changes included increasing the number of vice-presidents from three to four and executive committee members from 15 to 18, taking the total strength to 31. Provisions were also introduced to include web media categories in membership. The amendments also proposed creating a trust to pursue IJU objectives and expanding representation in the National Council. A revised contribution structure for members and support for the union's publication Scribes News were also approved.

Chief Minister's assurances and

remarks

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, N. Chandrababu Naidu, who inaugurated the plenary, said journalism has seen a shift with sections of the media becoming partisan. He stressed the need to distinguish between professional and political media and opposed politicians owning media houses. He assured support for journalists in the state, including allocation of land in Amaravati for the IJU office, reduction in lease rates for the Vijayawada Press Club land, and issuance of accreditation cards to eligible jour-

Journalism has seen a shift with sections of the media becoming partisan. He stressed the need to distinguish between professional and political media and opposed politicians owning media houses.

— N. Chandrababu Naidu,
Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister,

nalists. He also announced that attacks on journalists would be investigated by officers of the rank of Superintendent of Police and said the government would strengthen the Journalists' Welfare Fund. A number of MPs, state ministers and senior political leaders attended the programme.

New leadership assumes office

Balwinder Singh took charge as the new president, thanking members for their confidence and calling it a responsibility to carry forward the union's work. D. Somasundar, who

assumed office as Secretary General, said the union provides a platform where even grassroots journalists can rise to leadership roles. Both leaders assured continued efforts to strengthen the organisation. Senior leaders including K. Sreenivas Reddy, S.N. Sinha, and Devulapalli Amar expressed confidence in the new team.

Confederation meet proposed in Hyderabad

The IJU leadership proposed hosting the next meeting of the Confederation of Newspaper and News Agency Employees Unions in Hyderabad. Around 100 delegates are expected to attend the two-day meeting, with the Telangana unit expressing readiness to host it.

Tributes and cultural programmes

The plenary began with floral tributes to founder Manikonda Chalapathi Rao and senior leaders Ambati Anjaneyulu, K. Amarnath, and Premnath Bhargava. The IJU flag was hoisted at the venue, followed by participation from national leaders and delegates. Cultural programmes added to the event, with performances by artistes from the Indian People's Theatre Association and Kuchipudi dancers from Vijayawada. Mimicry artist Sylvester also performed.

Host union appreciated

The IJU leadership appreciated the efforts of the Andhra Pradesh Union of Working Journalists for organising the plenary and arrangements for delegates. Leaders called upon members to prepare for sustained efforts to improve the media environment and defend press freedom in the country. ❑

MORE PICTURES ON 16-17



11th Plenary



Highlights

V I J A Y A W A D A

The 11th Plenary session of the Indian Journalists Union (IJU) was celebrated on a grand scale at Thummalapalli Vari Kshetraiah Kalaa Kshetram in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh from March 27-29. AP Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu attended the event which saw the participation of around 300 journalists from across the country.



Israeli Killing of Lebanese Journalist Draws International Condemnation

Lebanese PM calls attack that killed Amal Khalil a 'war crime', with rescuers attempting to free her also targeted



**Peter
Beaumont**

Israel's killing of a prominent Lebanese journalist in a double-tap strike has been greeted with international outrage as Lebanon's prime minister described the attack as a "war crime".

Amal Khalil, 43, who worked for al-Akhbar newspaper, was buried on Thursday. She was killed in what colleagues described as a sustained attack by Israeli forces, with rescuers attempting to dig her out of the rubble of a building also targeted and prevented from providing life-saving assistance. Her death prompted renewed accusations that Israel has a policy of

targeting media workers, despite its repeated denials.

Khalil had previously spoken of receiving a threat via an unidentified Israeli phone number that she would be killed if she did not leave southern Lebanon, where she had long been based.

Khalil's killing was condemned by senior figures from across Lebanese politics even as they prepared for fresh talks in Washington on Thursday aimed at extending a fraught ceasefire with Israel. Lebanon's president, Joseph Aoun, said Israel's "deliberate and consistent targeting of journalists" was "aimed at concealing the truth of its aggressive acts against Lebanon, in addition to constituting crimes against humanity punishable under international laws and conventions".

Echoing Aoun's comments, the prime minister, Nawaf Salam, said the targeting of journalists amounted to war crimes. "Israel's targeting of media workers in the south while they carry out their professional duties is no longer isolated incidents, but has become an established approach that we condemn and reject, as do all international laws and conventions," Salam wrote on social media, emphasising that Lebanon would pursue actions in international forums in response to



Mourners carry the coffin of Amal Khalil during her funeral in Baisariyeh, Lebanon

Israel's conduct.

Khalil was the ninth journalist killed in Lebanon this year. Last month three journalists were killed in a double-tap attack. As further details of the killing emerged on Thursday, it became clear that the group Khalil was with had come under sustained attack over several hours - and that Israeli forces had apparently been aware of their identities. Adding to the sense of horror was the fact that Khalil was trapped for hours in a house that had been bombed by Israeli forces. She died despite frantic efforts by her family, her editors and Aoun to organise a rescue. According to her employer and the Lebanese health ministry, Khalil was working near the village of al-Tiri when a vehicle she was driving behind was hit by an Israeli airstrike, killing two people and wounding her and her colleague Zeinab Faraj, a freelance photographer.

Colleagues said Khalil and Faraj had been bearing protective equipment prominently marked with press signs and that Khalil had managed to call her office to say she was taking cover in a house and was under threat.

The house in which they were sheltering was hit by a second Israeli airstrike. Rescue workers reached the scene and recovered Faraj but Israeli forces fired on those attempting to free Khalil.

The Union of Journalists in Lebanon said that when medics attempted to rescue her, Israeli forces prevented access to the site and used stun grenades. Khalil's body was eventually retrieved shortly before midnight, at least six hours after the strike.

Israel denied that it targeted journalists or that it had prevented rescue



Amal Khalil reporting from near a destroyed bridge in Qasmiyeh in March

teams from reaching the area, and said the incident was under review. Previous "reviews" have rarely if ever attached any blame to Israeli forces, who typically attempt to suggest killed journalists are members of armed groups.

On Thursday, Ophir Falk, a foreign affairs adviser to the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, told the BBC's World at One that the incident was under review but struggled to explain why Israel had killed so many journalists if it was not a deliberate policy.

"I can tell you one thing, we're looking into this incident, but what I can tell you for 100% sure is that Israel never targets civilians. It never targets journalists. To the contrary, we do everything possible to minimise the risk to civilians and to journalists," said Falk.

In an earlier statement the IDF said it had identified two vehicles that had "departed from a military structure used by Hezbollah", without providing evidence for the claim. It said one of the vehicles had approached Israeli troops in a man-

ner that was an "immediate threat" after crossing a "forward defence line", violating a ceasefire.

In 2024, however, Khalil told local media she had received an Israeli death threat warning her to leave the south and threatening to destroy her home and decapitate her. "I have informed the relevant authorities about this, as the enemy has recently used this tactic with many others there," she said at the time.

According to Khalil, the warning - allegedly sent from an Israeli phone number - included details of her recent movements and said: "We know where you are and we will reach you when the time comes." It was not clear who had sent the message.

Reporters without Borders condemned the latest Israeli killing of a journalist. Clayton Weimer, its executive director, said the IDF had received messages from his organisation as well as from journalists, asking that it allow ambulances to get to Khalil. ❏

— *Courtesy The Guardian*



GOVT ORDERS FACEBOOK, X TO ACT ON MOHAMMED ZUBAIR, MEDIA

This comes a few weeks after X, following a 'legal demand' due to government orders, withheld accounts of several parody handles and activists in India.



In a fresh spate of takedowns, at least three Facebook pages - of news platforms Molitics and National Dastak, and satirist Rajeev Nigam - have alleged that their accounts were "restricted" in India following government orders. Several posts on X by Alt News co-founder Mohammed Zubair too faced similar action, the fact-checker posted on Sunday (March 29).

As of Monday (March 30), a message on the three Facebook pages read: "Content not available in India. This is because we complied with a legal request to restrict this content." It is not yet clear what led to the orders. However, these accounts have been known to often report on stories critical of the government, in addition to promoting satire and fact-checks.

According to the notice received by Molitics, Meta restricted access to the content on these pages "pursuant to a notice from The Government of India / Law Enforcement under Section 79(3)(b) of the Information Technology Act, 2000".

Molitics has more than 4.5 lakh followers on Facebook and over 67.2k followers on X.

While Section 79(1) of the IT Act shields digital platforms as well as social media intermediaries, like tech companies like X, Meta and YouTube, from legal liability for

content posted by users, the sub section - Section 79(3)(b) - removes this shield and mandates the intermediaries to remove or disable access to content flagged by the government authorities as "unlawful".

"When people at the top of power start feeling uncomfortable with the truth, the pillar of journalism begins to crumble. This has been happening for the past several years. And now, the speed of the attacks has increased. @moliticsindia, whose purpose is to discuss public-interest issues, to raise people's voices, to spread scientific awareness, has been working in this direction for the past several years. It has also been receiving punishment for this. One more punishment has been received. Our Facebook page has been restricted in our country. No reason has been given. We urge all of you to stand with us in this situation!!!!"

National Dastak, with 14.2 lakh followers on Facebook, describes itself as an alternative media that widely reports on issues of exploitation of Dalits, Adivasis, OBCs, women, farmers, and minorities, too received the same notice by Meta.

In January last year, their YouTube channel had briefly faced a clampdown, which the channel claimed was on orders of the Income Tax department. "The Income Tax

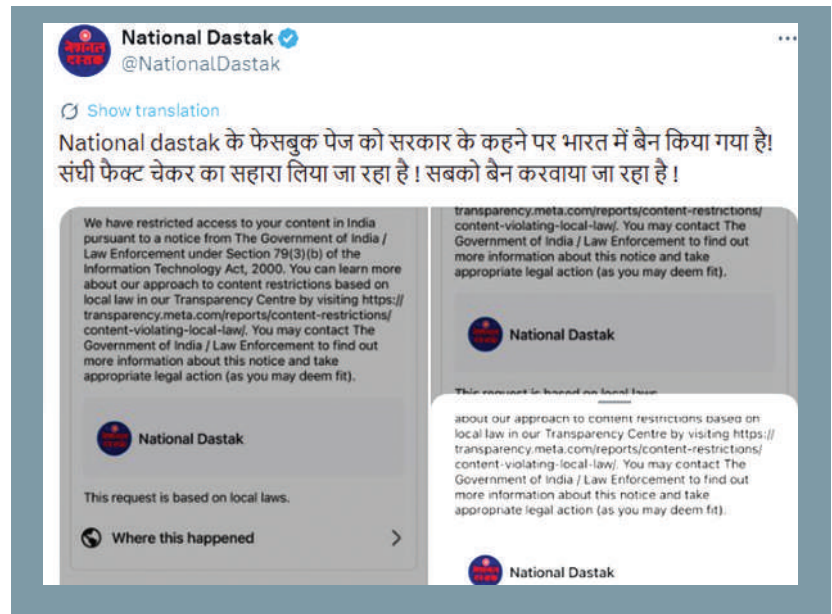
Department has frozen the account of National Dastak. No notice was issued. No opportunity to respond, nor any hearing," they had alleged in a post. Their channel has been back since.

Writer and satirist Rajeev Nigam, who has more than 6.6 lakh Facebook followers and over 2.2 lakh on X, said his Facebook page was also among those restricted in India on Sunday. Nigam, who is vocal about various political issues and prominent figures including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has previously spoken about how he receives backlash and legal notices because of his work. One of his parody videos on how Modi acts with foreign leaders went viral and continues to be shared despite government efforts to block parody videos of the same topic.

While Nigam has not publicly shared the communication he has received, if any, in a post on X, he expressed his worry that his Facebook page was also among those taken down by the government.

"My Facebook page won't be visible to people in India.. This isn't just happening to me, it's happened to many others too, without any reason being given.... Dear government, why don't you tell us what was lacking in our service to you... You're not just stopping us from speaking out, you're closing off all our avenues. Go ahead and do your "Mann Ki Baat," don't let anyone else speak. Well, we are just helpless citizens, what can we even do, but you shouldn't ignore the cries of the innocent... Thank you, Modiji," he said.

Meanwhile, Mohammed Zubair, too, received an email regarding a blocking order over several posts on



his X account. "Got an email from X saying that they received a blocking order from the Indian Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology citing Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000, regarding my X account. So, Exposing the fake propaganda and false narrative set by the BJP Minister and Official handles is not allowed now?" he wrote in a post on the platform. Section 69 (A) of the IT Act pertains to content that violates national security, or threatens India's foreign policy, which is then taken down on orders of the IT ministry. The posts in question were on a recent incident of vandalism during Ram Navami celebrations in the Murshidabad district of West Bengal, where 'I Love Muhammad' flags were reportedly removed and replaced with saffron flags.

"When the Indian right wing shared cropped videos with false narratives, the Indian Ministry of Electronics and Information technology didn't have a problem. But soon after the right wing propaganda was

busted by sharing the actual video of vandalism by the goons, The @MIB_India ministry woke up and ordered @X to block my tweets," he said.

This comes a few weeks after X withheld accounts of several parody handles and activists in India citing legal demand.

The Hindu has reported that within a year of being empowered to directly issue takedown notices for online content, the Union home ministry has issued an average of about 290 such notices every day.

The Wire has previously reported on how the User Manual for Sahyog Portal (IT intermediaries), that lays down the union government's takedown mechanism for content online, makes it clear that orders are unilateral, and a direct correspondence between government agencies and intermediaries like social media platforms and telecom providers. It excludes journalists or content creators from its definition of "stakeholders".

— Courtesy The Wire



Australia Proposes To Tax Meta, Google, TikTok To Fund Journalists

The proposed News Bargaining Incentive would charge major platforms that choose not to strike commercial deals with news publishers a 2.25% tax on their Australian revenue.



Australia has proposed taxing digital giants Meta, Google and TikTok a proportion of their revenue to pay for news reporters. The government released draft legislation Tuesday it intends to introduce to Parliament by July 2 that would create a financial incentive for the social media companies to strike deals with news organisations to pay for journalism.

The platforms' criticisms included that the proposal was a "digital services tax" that misunderstood the evolving advertising industry and would fail to deliver a sustainable news sector. Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said a monetary value needed to be attached to journalists' work.

"It shouldn't just be able to be taken

by a large multinational corporation and used to generate profits for that organisation with no compensation appropriate for the people who produce that creative content," Albanese told reporters.

"We think that investment in journalism is critical to a healthy democracy," he added.

It's Australia's second legislative attempt to make the platforms pay for the Australian news text and images that their users view.

Digital platforms had been pressured to strike deals with Australian news publishers to pay for journalism by legislation passed in 2021 that created the country's News Media Bargaining Code.

The platforms chose to reach commercial deals with news creators rather than be forced into arbitration and have a judge set the price.

But they have since avoided renewing those deals by removing news from their services.

The proposed News Bargaining Incentive would charge major platforms that choose not to strike commercial deals with news publishers a 2.25% tax on their Australian revenue.

The platforms would be given offsets and their overall costs would be lowered if they agree to pay publishers for journalism, the government said. The government expects the incentive would raise between 200 to 250 million Australian dollars (\$144 million-\$179 million) a year. That was about as much as the platforms paid news outlets when the News Media Bargaining Code was working at its peak. The government



would distribute that income among news organizations based on how many journalists each organization employed, Communication Minister Anika Wells said.

The tax would apply to Meta Platforms, which owns Facebook and Instagram, Google, which is owned by Alphabet Inc., and TikTok, which is majority-owned by U.S.-backed investors.

Opposing the proposed legislation, Meta said news organizations "voluntarily post content on our platforms because they receive value from doing so."

"The idea that we take their news content is simply wrong. This proposed legislation, which would apply to

platforms regardless of whether news content even appears on our services, is nothing more than a digital services tax," Meta said in a statement.

"A government-mandated transfer of wealth from one industry to another, with no connection to the value exchanged, will not deliver a

sustainable or innovative news sector. Instead, it will create a news industry dependent on a government-administered subsidy scheme," Meta added.

Google said "we reject the need for this tax."

"It ignores the fact that Google already has commercial agreements with the news industry, misunderstands how the ad market changed and mandates payments from some companies while arbitrarily excluding platforms like Microsoft, Snapchat and OpenAI -- despite the major shift in how people consume news," a Google statement said.

TikTok did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

All the targeted platforms are American. U.S. critics have argued that Australia's News Media Bargaining Code had disproportionately cost American corporations.

Albanese was not concerned by potential pushback from the United States.

"We're a sovereign nation and my government will make decisions based upon the Australian national interest," Albanese said.

***.We're a
sovereign nation
and my
government will
make decisions
based upon the
Australian
national
interest.***

—ALBANESE

— Courtesy NDTV World

BBC TO CUT ALMOST ONE IN 10 STAFF TO MAKE £500M SAVINGS

The BBC has announced it will cut between 1,800 and 2,000 jobs - or almost one in 10 - in an attempt to tackle "significant financial pressures".



**Paul Glynn,
Ian Youngs**

he broadcaster needs to make £500m savings over the next two years, and interim director general Rhodri Talfan Davies did not rule out axing entire channels or services. "We need to look at everything, and at a scale of £500m inevitably there are going to be some big and some difficult choices, but we do need to step through this carefully," he told BBC Radio 4's Media Show.

He said the corporation would give more details later this year about how its services would be affected.

"For audiences, the job in hand now over the next three or four months is to work through how we make those changes without damaging the services that we know are critical to the BBC across radio and television and online," he said.

"Put simply, the gap between our costs and our income is growing. This is being driven by a number of factors: production inflation remains very high; our licence fee and commercial income is under pressure; and the global economy remains turbulent."

He also acknowledged that the job cuts would be "really difficult news" for staff.

Philippa Childs, head of broadcasting union Bectu, warned that "cuts of this magnitude" would be "devastating for the workforce and to the BBC as a whole".

The BBC currently has about 21,500 full time equivalent employees.

In an email to staff on Wednesday, Talfan Davies said: "As you know, the BBC is facing significant financial pressures, which we need to respond to with pace.

"Put simply, the gap between our costs and our income is growing. This is being driven by a number of factors: production inflation remains very high; our licence fee and commercial income is under pressure; and the global economy remains turbulent."

He also imposed tighter controls on spending on recruitment, travel, management consultancies, and attendance at conferences, awards and events.

In an email to staff on Wednesday, Talfan Davies said: "As you know, the BBC is facing significant financial



Childs said BBC staff were "already under significant pressure after previous redundancy rounds", and further cuts "will inevitably damage its ability to deliver on its public mission".

pressures, which we need to respond to with pace.

"Put simply, the gap between our costs and our income is growing. This is being driven by a number of factors: production inflation remains very high; our licence fee and commercial income is under pressure; and the global economy remains turbulent."

He also imposed tighter controls on spending on recruitment, travel, management consultancies, and attendance at conferences, awards and events.

The news of the cuts comes in advance of the arrival of a new BBC director general, former Google executive Matt Brittin, who will officially succeed the recently departed Tim Davie on 18 May.

Childs said BBC staff were "already under significant pressure after previous redundancy rounds", and further cuts "will inevitably damage its ability to deliver on its public mission".

She continued: "At a time of fake news and an industry that is becoming more concentrated in the hands of a few multinational corporations, the UK

needs a confident, ambitious and sustainably-funded BBC more than ever.

"The government must ensure that Charter Renewal puts the BBC's funding on a more secure, long-term pathway and prevent our national broadcaster facing death by a thousand cuts."

Laura Davison, general secretary of the National Union of Journalists, said the plans for "more brutal job cuts are wrong, damaging and will cause uncertainty and distress for workers at the BBC".

She said: "These cuts severely undermine the BBC's ability to fulfil its purposes: providing quality journalism and programming that informs, educates, and entertains.

"Plans for further cuts follow years of real-terms budget reductions and relentless cost-saving measures which have impacted core parts of the corporation. This can't go on. The BBC cannot provide quality journalism without the talented and experienced workers who make it possible."

— Courtesy BBC

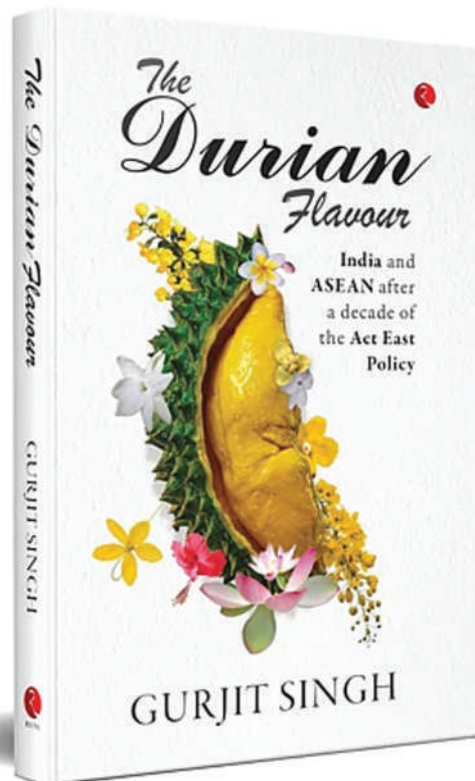
The Durian Flavour: A Timely Guide to Deepening India-ASEAN Ties

N

o other region can quite match South East Asia in its proximity to India in multiple senses. It is also a region projected to be, along with India, the growth engine of the world for the foreseeable future. The region is finally opening up to India and Indians in unprecedented ways. Hundreds of flights every week connect India to the region. Indian tourists are flooding ASEAN countries thanks to newly liberalized visa regimes for Indians. Trade, commerce and investment flows are on the upward trajectory. Long years of cultivating our relations with the region appear to be bearing fruit. All this makes it worthy of far greater scholarship as well as public awareness in India.

Ambassador Gurjit Singh's highly readable 'The Durian Flavour' is packed with policy prescriptions as well as practical suggestions. One would be hard put to find another work whose scope covers our relations with ASEAN in such breadth and depth - from its early tentative beginnings, gradual development, to the present momentum of a 'comprehensive strategic partnership' and including a play-book for the future. Even rarer to find is a work of this kind by a practitioner - one who has been both envoy to a key ASEAN country (Indonesia) as well as India's Ambassador to ASEAN, and who has also spent many years of scholarship on the subject. He thus brings unique perspectives to bear on his scholarly yet lucid addition

to the literature on our relations with the region with which we



**Jaideep
Mazumdar**

BOOK REVIEW

share an unsurpassed civilizational affinity.

To an observer, the progress of India's relations with ASEAN may appear to be of a glacial pace. It is true that dramatic developments in the relationship (such as the presence of all ten ASEAN leaders at our Republic Day in 2018) have been few and far between.. That is the result of many factors that the book brings forth - from the differences engendered during the Cold War and the strategic hesitancy to engage India more closely among some countries in the region to the vast diversity of political systems and economic conditions among its member countries that makes decision making itself a fraught exercise, along with a few miss-steps along the way. Of late however, the rapid growth of bilateral relations with these countries has given ballast to

point to the fact that attitudes on both sides are changing in positive ways.

For Indians, it is easy to be lulled by the romance of our civilizational affinity with the region and to think that relations will organically grow from that. The book recounts Tagore's beautiful words after his visit to Java in 1927:

In a dim, distant, unrecorded age we had met, thou and I-When my speech became entangled in thine and my life in thy life.

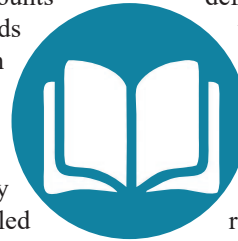
However, it is important to remember that our meeting 'in that unrecorded age' was through the functional medium of trade and commerce, not through colonialism or proselytization. So too in today's world, while civilizational affinity has a part to play, functional cooperation is the more certain foundation

geopolitics in the region as well as events such as the Covid pandemic and its repercussions. Unfortunately, our economic engagement with ASEAN (especially in the context of RCEP) as well as the pace of our defence and security cooperation has, to a large extent, been hostage to the China factor.

The Durian Flavour concludes with a chapter devoted to India-ASEAN relations in a changing global order. It makes the case for functional cooperation between the QUAD and ASEAN and recounts some positive movements in this direction. However, further progress along this line would depend on whether the QUAD's present functional agenda will survive. China does loom very large over ASEAN, cartographically as well as metaphorically, and this contributes to at least some of its hesitancy to fully engage with partners and in areas that China is sensitive about.. A normalization of India-China relations may bring its own dividend in our relations with South East Asia. In his foreword to *The Durian Flavour*, former President of Indonesia, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, sums up the work well for its "forward looking approach to overcoming perception gaps....with practical suggestions, useful for both academics and policymakers'.

The reader might legitimately ask - why reference the durian? It is not a fruit that is universally loved and is largely unfamiliar to Indians. But, as Ambassador Gurjit Singh explains, like the durian, India-ASEAN relations require adjustment, accommodation and acceptance to enjoy its fruit!

— *Courtesy Outlook*



India-ASEAN relations are entering a decisive phase, driven by growing trade, connectivity, and people-to-people exchanges. Southeast Asia, alongside India, is emerging as a global growth engine, making the partnership increasingly strategic. While civilizati

our relations with ASEAN as a group and vice versa.

The value of the book lies in it not being limited to the official viewpoints alone but referencing as it does a wide spectrum of strategic thinkers and academics in the region. It marshals conclusions from a bottom up look through attitudinal surveys among both Indians in India and citizens of ASEAN countries. These surveys are useful as they

for our relations. The book explores this in some detail, going into every aspect of our relations with ASEAN - be it the civilizational and historical links or recent economic, defence, security and people-centred cooperation. It traces the growth of our relations from humble beginnings to the multi-faceted cooperation we see today. It also examines the dynamic context in which this relationship has grown mirroring the evolution of



'MAAMLA LEGAL HAI' SEASON 2 REVIEW:

More Frivolity With a Pinch of Seriousness

The eight-episode series led by Ravi Kishan is out on Netflix.

I

**Nandini
Ramnath**

n season two of the Netflix comedy series *Maamla Legal Hai*, change is in the air. The canny lawyer VD Tyagi (Ravi Kishan) is now a principal district judge at the fictitious Patparganj court, sworn to uphold the law rather than bend it. After the BC and AD eras, it's the VD era, Tyagi brags. But life on the other side of the witness stand is not so pliable.

Tyagi is accused of bias simply because he bares his teeth too freely. He is loath to abandoning his glad-handing ways. Tyagi

often seeks out the other newly appointed principal district judge, the seasoned and pragmatic Kailash (Dibyendu Bhattacharya).

Tyagi's former employees, including Balli (Anjum Batra) and Sujata (Nidhi Bisht), are struggling to adapt too. Although they now have their own prized chamber, they spend most of their time squabbling with each other.

Pro bono queen Ananya (Naila Grrewal) continues to fight the good fight, representing

OTT REVIEW



As the stakes rise, the series questions whether justice can truly prevail in a courtroom dominated by ego clashes and absurd cases.

Season 2 balances comedy with commentary, hinting at the consequences of unchecked authority and overlooked inefficiencies.

a man wronged by his deodorant brand even after he confuses "sexist" for "sexiest". Ananya has competition in the bleeding heart department from Nayana (Kusha Kapila). The women compete for the kind of absurd cases that burden Indian courts.

Taking off from actual litigation, Maamla Legal Hai looks at the lighter side of the legal system. The second season maintains its predecessor's frivolity even as it tries to live up to the solemnity of Tyagi's new position.

Creators Saurabh Khanna, Kunal Aneja and Sameer Saxena, director Rahul Pandey, and writers Aneja, Syed Shadan and Mohak Aneja up the ante somewhat. Sexual harassment, gay rights, the death penalty: Maamla Legal Hai attempts to acknowledge the serious aspects of litigation. But the show's heart beats faster for tomfoolery, which is

deftly portrayed by the ensemble cast.

The focus is less on Tyagi and more on the other characters. Various alumni from the previous season alongside a couple of new additions try to keep eight scatter-shot, frequently silly episodes on track.

It takes Tyagi to restore the balance. He isn't always up to the task. Neither is the show.

Having already declared its preference for comedy, Maamla Legal Hai is wary of confronting the full horrors of just how powerful judges can be, how poorly stored evidence can ruin cases, how disinterested lawyers can betray litigants. In the moment when a character realises how grave the matter is, his response is to throw in the towel.

It's just as well. Seriousness isn't this show's strong suit. ❏

— Courtesy Scroll.in

Acquittal in Chhatrapati murder case raises serious questions for press freedom



he acquittal of journalist Ram Chander Chhatrapati's murderer by the Punjab and Haryana High Court is a serious blow to press freedom. Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh had been convicted by a trial court in 2019 for the murder of Chhatrapati, a working journalist who ran the Hindi newspaper Poora Sach in Sirsa, Haryana. He was sentenced to life imprisonment for orchestrating the killing after the journalist exposed allegations of sexual abuse of women followers at the Dera headquarters.

The High Court has now acquitted Ram Rahim, citing lack of evidence, while upholding the life sentences of three other accused - Kuldeep Singh, Nirmal Singh and Krishan Lal.

The case has long been a symbol of the risks faced by journalists who expose powerful figures. In 2002, Chhatrapati published a letter from an anonymous woman alleging sexual abuse within the Dera. Following this, he was threatened repeatedly and eventually shot outside his residence. He succumbed to his injuries a month later at PGI Rohtak. Despite this acquittal, Ram Rahim remains in jail, serving a 20-year sentence handed down in 2017 for the rape of two women followers.

The fallout from Ram Rahim's 2017 rape conviction also exposed the scale of his influence. Violence by his followers led to the deaths of 38 people. Around 50 women came forward with allegations of abuse. He was also accused of forcing hundreds of followers to undergo castration under the pretext of spiritual advancement. Despite such serious allegations, he continued to enjoy significant public and political backing.

Ram Rahim, who styled himself as a spiritual leader, built a vast following and a public image that blurred the line between

religion and spectacle. Known as "Rockstar Baba", he appeared in music videos, produced films, and projected himself in extravagant ways. His actions often attracted controversy, including complaints over his portrayal of religious figures.

What remains deeply concerning is the political patronage he has received over the years. Ram Rahim claims to have over 60 million followers across multiple centres. This influence has translated into support from political parties and governments. Since his conviction in 2017, he has been granted parole multiple times, reportedly spending over 400 days out of jail. Many of these releases coincided with election periods in Haryana and Punjab. His most recent parole, for 40 days, was granted in January 2026. The acquittal in the Chhatrapati murder case has sent shockwaves through the journalistic community. A case involving the killing of a working journalist, now weakened by investigative lapses, raises serious concerns about accountability. It also impacts India's standing in global press freedom rankings.

I recall that when journalists in Sirsa and civil society groups organised protests demanding justice, even attending such gatherings came with threats. I personally received a warning not to visit Sirsa. Yet, the determination to stand by a fellow journalist only grew stronger. The demand then, as now, was for a fair and thorough investigation and accountability at the highest level.

This case once again underlines the urgent need for a Journalists Protection Act. Journalists must be able to work without fear, intimidation or violence. The Indian Journalists Union (IJU) has repeatedly called upon both state and central governments to enact a comprehensive media protection law. ✠

THE LAST PAGE



By
S N SINHA

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



READ & SUBSCRIBE 

SCRIBES NEWS

A JOURNAL OF PRACTITIONERS OF JOURNALISM



SPECIAL ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION

₹100/-

Contact: scribesnews@gmail.com,
scribesnews.editor@gmail.com

Date of Publication 4th April 2026, Date of Posting 6th & 7th April

RNI No: TELENG/2017/72414 TITLE CODE: TELENG00034

The more
social media
we have, the
more we think
we are connecting,
yet we are really
disconnecting
from each other.



Be a Responsible User