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'Post' Wipeout

In what is described as possibly the largest one-day wipeout of journalists in a generation, The Washington Post sacked almost half of its editorial staff in the first week of February. In the process, whole departments like the foreign desk, sports, books and staff photography have become empty. The entire West Asia reporting network is gone. The Post's New Delhi bureau is now a thing of the past.

When the layoffs were initially announced, it was reported that one-third of the editorial staff had lost their jobs. But the latest reports suggest that the bloodbath covers between 44 percent and 47 percent of the newsroom strength.

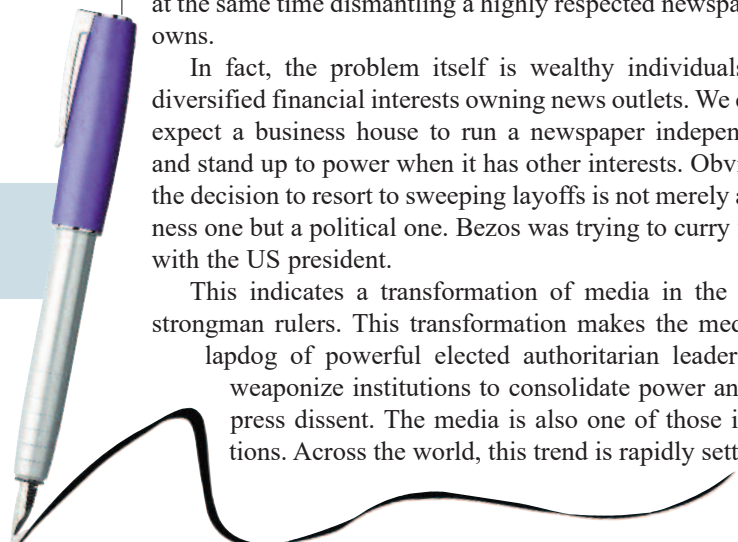
Billionaire Jeff Bezos purchased the Post in 2013 for \$250 million. When he took over the newspaper, Bezos vowed to maintain its editorial independence, promising that the paper's "duty will remain to its readers" and not to its owners. The Bezos-owned Amazon recently spent \$35 million to promote a film about First Lady Melania Trump. Amazon's production company then purchased the rights to "Melania" for \$40 million, making it the most expensive documentary ever.

Despite his rhetoric, it is now easy to see where Bezos is driving the legacy newspaper and where his loyalty lies. It is very sad to witness one of the richest men in the world spending millions to please the President of the United States while at the same time dismantling a highly respected newspaper he owns.

In fact, the problem itself is wealthy individuals with diversified financial interests owning news outlets. We cannot expect a business house to run a newspaper independently and stand up to power when it has other interests. Obviously, the decision to resort to sweeping layoffs is not merely a business one but a political one. Bezos was trying to curry favour with the US president.

This indicates a transformation of media in the era of strongman rulers. This transformation makes the media the lapdog of powerful elected authoritarian leaders who weaponize institutions to consolidate power and suppress dissent. The media is also one of those institutions. Across the world, this trend is rapidly setting in.

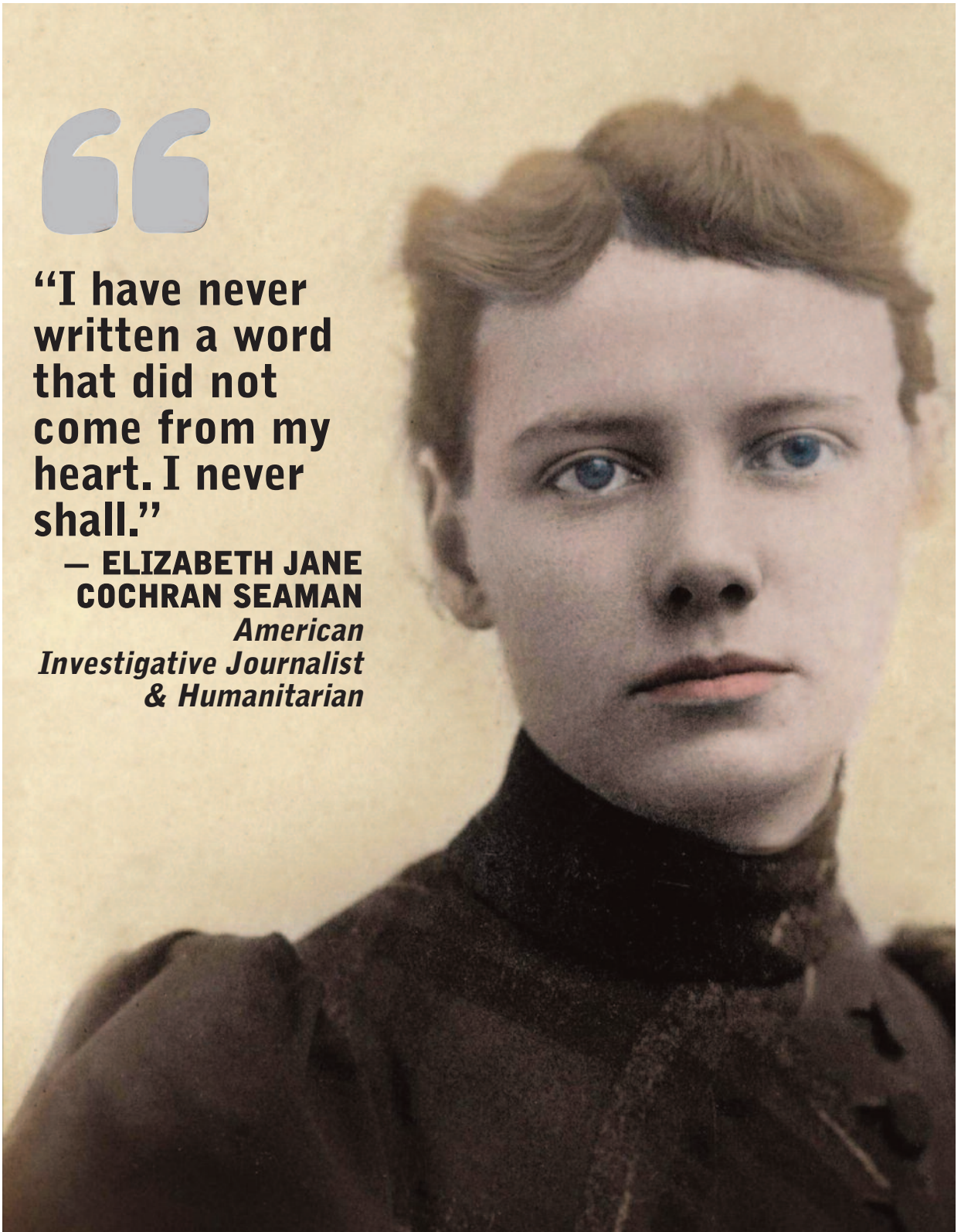
Free Frank Fearless



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**“I have never
written a word
that did not
come from my
heart. I never
shall.”**

**— ELIZABETH JANE
COCHRAN SEAMAN**
*American
Investigative Journalist
& Humanitarian*



Space donated by a well wisher

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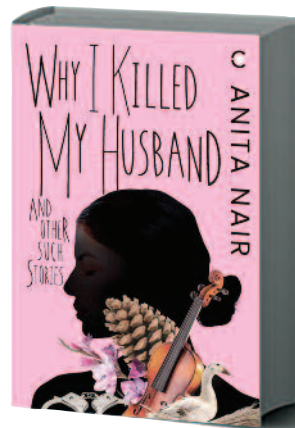


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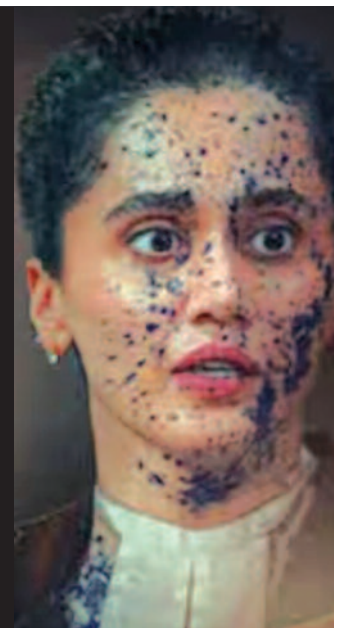


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Members of the Punjab and Chandigarh journalists union gather to condemn attacks on media persons.

Punjab and Chandigarh Journalists Union condemns increasing attacks on journalists

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Santokh Gill,

*Secretary General,
Punjab and
Chandigarh
Journalists Union*

*Sukhnaib
Sidhu
appointed
convener
of sub-com-
mittee on
digital media*

he State Working Committee of the Punjab and Chandigarh Journalists Union has strongly condemned the increasing attacks on journalists across the country and the stifling of press freedom. It termed the filing of cases against several journalists in Punjab and the raids on journalists' homes in Jammu and Kashmir as an attack on freedom of expression.

The meeting, chaired by Jai Singh Chhibber, was attended by the organisation's Chairman Balbir Jandu and National Secretary General of the Indian Journalists Union, Balwinder Jammu, among others. State Secretary General Santokh Gill said that Sukhnaib Singh Sidhu has been appointed convener of a five-member sub-committee to facilitate the inclusion of journalists associated with digital media in the organisation. The committee will submit its report soon.

It was decided to launch an awareness campaign through special programmes, seminars and meetings in different districts regarding the state of the media at

the national and international levels and the attitude of the state and central governments towards the demands of journalists in Punjab. A dozen representatives from the state will participate in the national conference of the Indian Journalists Union to be held in Vijayawada.

Gurtej Singh Sidhu of Bathinda and Mahendra Singh Rai of Barnala were appointed as special invitees to the State Working Committee, and Gurtej Singh Sidhu was also appointed in-charge of Muktsar district. The committee further decided to expand the organisation to other districts and intensify the membership drive. It was also decided to organise seminars at several places, including Chandigarh, on the occasion of International Women's Day on March 8. Among those present at the meeting were Vice President Bhushan Sood, Organising Secretary Davinder Bhangu, Jagsir Sandhu, Jaswant Singh Thind, Secretary N.P. Dhawan, Veerpal Bhagta, and representatives from various districts who participated in the discussion. ❑

TELANGANA: Accreditation Committees to Be Formed as Per Unions' Proposal



*TUWJ
members
meet state
Information
Minister
and submit
memorandum*

delegation of the Telangana State Union of Working Journalists (TUWJ), under the leadership of State General Secretary K. Ram Narayana, met Information Minister Ponguleti Srinivasa Reddy, who assured that accreditation committees would be constituted as per the proposals submitted by the union. A memorandum highlighting issues related to journalists' accreditation, website problems, cable channels and small newspapers was handed over to the Minister.

State General Secretary Ram Narayana explained to the Minister the various problems faced by journalists across different categories. He stated that although it had been announced that 44,709 journalists in the state would be issued accreditation cards, confusion had arisen among journalists as, according to the existing Government Order (GO),

even 50 percent of the cards might not be issued.

He pointed out that the conditions imposed on freelancers and veteran journalists were causing difficulties and that the website format was not user-friendly.

It was also brought to the Minister's notice that, under the present GO, the number of accreditation cards for journalists from major newspapers, satellite channels and desk journalists had been reduced, causing concern. Representatives of small newspapers were reportedly worried that they might not receive cards as they had in the past. It was also stated that journalists working with cable channels were being unfairly affected. Although they had received accreditation earlier, they now feared that they might not receive cards this time.

The delegation explained all these issues in detail to the Minister for nearly 20 minutes. The Minister responded positively and assured that accreditation committees would be formed in accordance with the proposals of the union. He also stated that the accreditation website would be simplified. The deadline for accreditation would be extended by another month, and journalists and union leaders need not be concerned. He clarified that all eligible journalists would be issued accreditation cards.

Those who met the Minister included TUWJ State Committee members M Venugopal, former District President V Venkateswarlu, District Secretary M Papparao, District Electronic Media President M. Bhupal and others. ❑



Members of TUWJ submit a memorandum to Telangana Information Minister P. Srinivas Reddy.

IJU Condemns Blocking of The Wire's Social Media Content



The Indian Journalists Union (IJU) has strongly condemned the alleged arbitrary and unexplained blocking of The Wire's Instagram page and the removal of its satirical video content from multiple social media platforms.

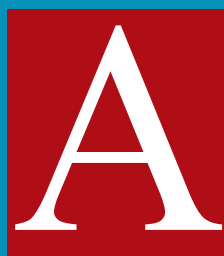
In a statement, IJU President K. Sreenivas Reddy and Secretary General Balwinder Singh Jammu said such actions, reportedly taken without prior notice or a formal explanation to the media organisation, were deeply disturbing and reflected a growing intolerance towards independent journalism.

They said the lack of transparency sur-

rounding the so-called "legal request" and the subsequent confusion over responsibility for the blocking raised serious questions about due process and accountability. Satire, criticism and commentary, they noted, are integral to a free press and are protected under the Constitution of India.

The IJU demanded a clear and public explanation from the concerned authorities and urged the government to refrain from opaque actions that undermine press freedom and erode democratic values. Any attempt to silence or intimidate the media, directly or indirectly, is unacceptable in a democracy, they added. ❏

TUWJ supports trade unions agitation



As part of the nationwide agitation held on Thursday against the anti-labour policies implemented by the BJP government in the country, the Telangana State Union of Working Journalists (TUWJ) has expressed its full support for the protest organised by trade unions in Hyderabad. Union state president K. Virahath Ali participated in the rally from RTC Kalyana Mandapam to Indira Park along with members of various trade unions. Speaking on the occasion, he said that it is regrettable that the central government is following policies favourable to corporate companies and is committing a huge betrayal of labour communities. He demanded that the four labour codes brought by the Modi government be immediately repealed. He expressed concern that out of the 29 laws repealed by the central government last year, two working journalists' laws have been repealed, which is a huge betrayal of journalists. Thousands of workers from 20 major trade unions participated in the rally. ❏



Khabhar Lahariya Khabhar Lahariya reports in local languages, including Bundeli, Awadhi and Bhojpuri, rejecting the idea that legitimacy requires elite, urban Hindi or English.

FROM RURAL MARGINS TO MEDIA TRAILBLAZERS:

India's Women Journalists are Rewriting the News



Khabar Lahariya, literally "news waves", is an all-women media organisation run since 2002 by rural reporters, many of them Dalit, Adivasi and Muslim, dispatching fresh stories from some of the most marginalised regions.

"We faced challenges at every level," founder Kavita Devi told UN News. "People would say women can't be journalists, but we went to villages, persisted and proved that women can not only report but tell stories that others cannot."

Long before global conversations about diversity entered newsrooms, these women were building their own.

Villagers initially doubted women could be journalists and educational barriers made recruiting reporters a daunting challenge, Ms. Devi said, recalling the scepticism they encountered. At the time, female reporters were virtually absent from newsrooms in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Many of the women who joined Khabar Lahariya had little formal education.

One such journalist, Shyamkali, transformed from being illiterate to becoming a senior reporter.

"I didn't know how to write a resume or handle a camera, but with training and guidance, I was able to learn everything, from interviewing to mobile journalism,

and now I report stories that mainstream media ignore," Shyamkali told UN News.

Khabar Lahariya's reporting also goes beyond mere representation. Shyamkali recounted a story about a woman who, driven to desperation, acted violently against her abusive husband.

Mainstream media reported the incident without context, focusing only on the shocking act, she said. But, Shyamkali's reporting brought the woman's perspective and underlying social realities to light, demonstrating how women journalists can add nuance, empathy and depth to stories often ignored or misrepresented.

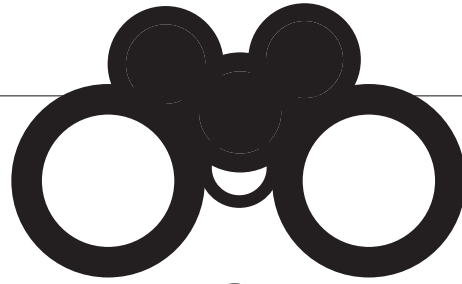
Language plays a critical role in Khabar Lahariya's mission. Publishing in local dialects like Bundeli, Awadhi and Bhojpuri, ensures that news is accessible, relatable and empowering for rural communities.

"When we explain issues in their language, people understand better," Ms. Devi said. "They see their own image in the news, especially women."

"A radical rethink is needed so that media can play its role in advancing equality," Ms. Madi said. "Without women's voices, there is no full story, no fair democracy, no lasting security and no shared future." ❏

— Courtesy United Nations

Pooja Yadav



Working of Watchdog!

Media Malice is not part of 'Freedom'



It is difficult to assess how many viewers, readers, WhatsApp and Facebook users felt shame. As journalism is faltering, can it still be called the Fourth Estate, at least in the two Telugu States?

The recent developments (second week of January 2026) in Hyderabad involving the arrest of journalists and social media operators have triggered a major political and legal debate regarding the boundaries of press freedom and the right to privacy.

The recent incident in Telangana, where a news channel broadcast a fabricated narrative regarding a Minister and a woman IAS officer, serves as a grim case study in the weaponization of "Freedom of Speech."

The most prominent recent case involves a broadcast by a popular Telugu news channel on January 8, 2026. The report suggested a "personal relationship" between a State Minister

and a senior woman IAS officer. The broadcast reportedly used sexual innuendo and "off-the-record" storytelling to imply a scandal, leading to widespread character assassination on social media.

On January 12, 2026, the Telangana Director General of Police (DGP) constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) led by Hyderabad Police Commissioner V.C. Sajjanar. On the intervening night of January 13 and 14, 2026, the SIT arrested an Input Editor and a Reporter. One was intercepted at Rajiv Gandhi International Airport (RGIA) while allegedly attempting to



Dr. Madabhushi Sridhar Acharyulu

Professor, School of Law, Mahindra University, Hyderabad



fly to Bangkok. The reporter was also detained for questioning but later released. The journalists were produced before a magistrate and granted bail on the condition of surrendering their passports and appearing before the SIT twice a week. Parallel to the popular TV case, the SIT is also investigating the circulation of "abusive and morphed" content targeting Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy.

A person named by the media was arrested for allegedly morphing the Chief Minister's images and sharing them in WhatsApp groups to incite unrest. Earlier, in March 2025, a Managing Director and journalist of a YouTube channel were arrested for sharing a video of a farmer using derogatory language against the CM.

Commissioner Sajjanar stated that "maligning any woman or public official under the guise of criticism is cruelty, not journalism." He emphasized that the police are targeting "paid artists" who use social media to disrupt public order.

As the police and investigative teams are working further, it is difficult to comment on or conclude the result and ensure prosecution. Cases were booked under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) (sections related to defamation, false statements and organized crime), the IT Act and the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act.

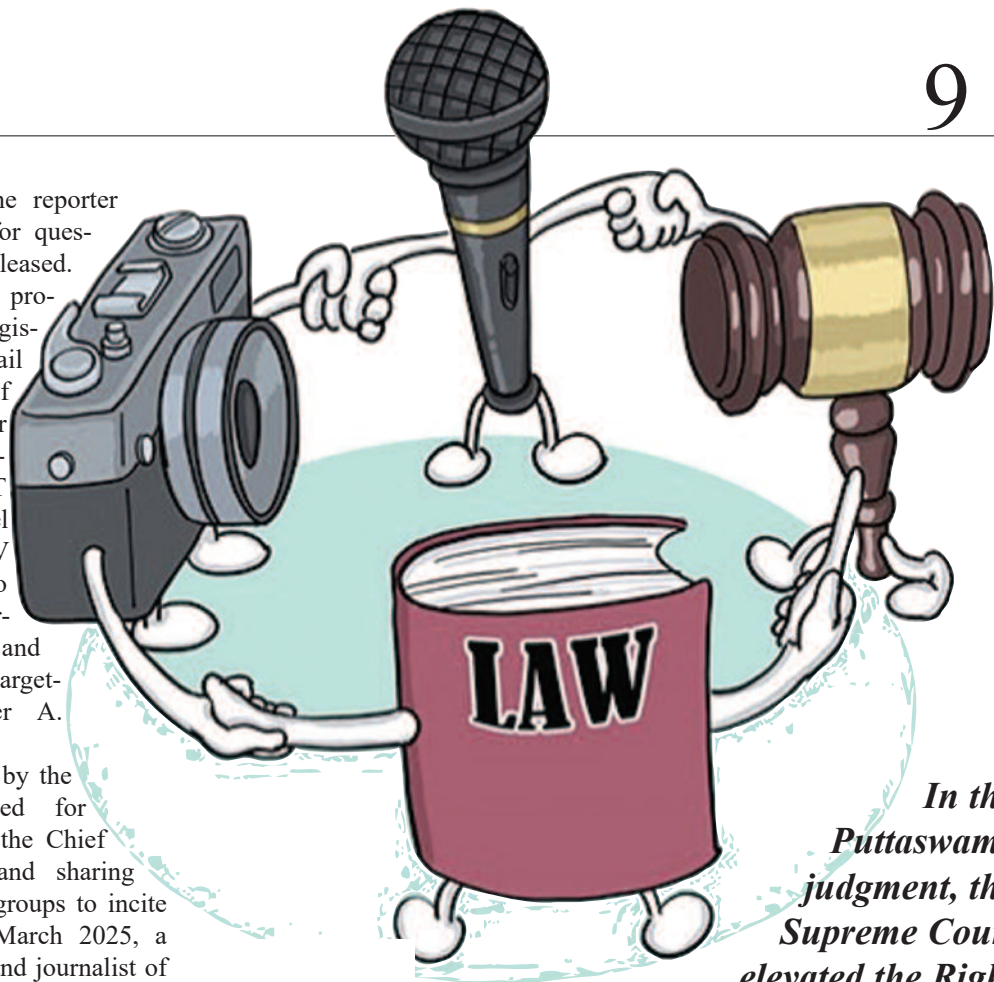
While the arrest of journalists is often viewed through the lens of state overreach, this specific instance compels us to distinguish between

legitimate reportage and criminal character assassination.

Midnight arrests, criticism by the opposition, and the IAS association

The government maintains that these actions are necessary to protect the dignity of public servants, especially women, and to curb the spread of malicious "fake news" that could incite social unrest. The BRS (Bharat Rashtra Samithi) and BJP have termed these "midnight arrests" a "direct assault on democracy" and "Emergency-style rule." BRS leader K.T. Rama Rao criticized the police for treating journalists like "terrorists" for bailable offences.

The IAS Officers' Association, led by Jayesh Ranjan, filed the formal complaint, asserting that the media must not be allowed to violate



In the Puttaswamy judgment, the Supreme Court elevated the Right to Privacy to a fundamental right under Article 21.

the privacy of individuals without any supporting evidence.

The Conflict: Freedom of Speech vs. the Right to Privacy

The bedrock of the Indian Constitution, Article 19(1)(a), grants the right to freedom of speech and expression. However, this is not an absolute right; it is subject to "reasonable restrictions" under Article 19(2), which specifically include decency, morality and defamation.

In the Puttaswamy judgment, the Supreme Court elevated the Right to Privacy to a fundamental right under Article 21. The article correctly points out that even if a personal

relationship exists between two consenting adults, public servants or otherwise, it falls within the "private domain" unless it directly impairs their public duties. Dragging private lives into the streets is not "news"; it is voyeurism, legally bordering on harassment and stalking.

Defamation and the "Public Good" Defense

Under the law of defamation (formerly Sections 499/500 of the IPC and now under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita), "truth" is a defense only if the imputation is made for the public good.

The Trap of Sensationalism: Creating a "fake" narrative or magnifying a "rumour" into a "scandal" fails the test of public good.

Character Assassination: When media outlets engage in "character assassination," they bypass the judicial process to pronounce a "social death sentence" on the victims. For a woman officer, this often involves deep-seated patriarchal tropes, making the offence not just defamatory but also gender-discriminatory.

Institutional Malice: The "Paparazzi" Comparison

One should draw a vital distinction between the traditional paparazzi and modern political media. While the paparazzi (famously linked to the Princess Diana tragedy) were driven by profit-seeking curiosity, the current trend in regional media is driven by institutional malice.

The Owner-Politician Nexus: When a channel owner uses their

platform to settle political scores or facilitate a cabinet reshuffle by "leaking" manufactured scandals, the journalist becomes a mere tool.

Criminal Conspiracy: If the SIT investigation remains limited to the reporters who filed the story and ignores the "hand that feeds," namely the owners and political masters, it fails the ends of justice. Legally, this is a matter of criminal conspiracy where the "intent" originates at the top.

The Erosion of Journalistic Standards

The article highlights a shift from objective neutrality to subjective fiction.

Verification: Standard journalistic ethics require seeking the version of the person being accused. By bypassing this, media houses violate the guidelines of the Press Council of India.

The "Smoke without Fire" Fallacy: Modern digital media creates the

"smoke" (misinformation) to convince the public there is a "fire"(guilt), effectively reversing the principle of "innocent until proven guilty."

The Need for a "Special Investigation" into Values

The legal takeaway is clear: Freedom of the press does not include the freedom to be a predator. When journalism adopts the "voyeuristic" lens, peering through the cracks of private lives for political leverage, it ceases to be a protected democratic activity.

The SIT must not only investigate the "source" of the fake news but also the systemic misuse of media platforms to conduct trials by television. As the article suggests, the real "Special Investigation" needs to be into the decaying social and professional values that allow women and public servants to be used as pawns in high-stakes political games. ❏





Newly elected members of the Karnataka State Journalists Union (KSJU).

Janaki Takes Charge as KSJU President

T

he newly elected body of the Karnataka State Journalists Union (KSJU) took charge on January 29 in Bengaluru, in the presence of leaders from the Indian Journalists Union (IJU) and senior journalists from across the state. V. Janaki Mohan and Anjan Kumar were recently elected as the President and General Secretary of KSJU.

Yelahanka MLA S.R. Vishwanath inaugurated the programme by lighting the ceremonial lamp. IJU Secretaries Y. Narender Reddy and DSR Subhash, IJU National Executive Member P. Bhaskar Reddy, former Superintendent of Police N. Krishnappa, former Deputy Superintendent of Police Basavaraj, senior journalist N. Krishnamurthy, and prominent social worker Santhosh Kumar attended as guests.

Speaking on the occasion, the guests said journalists have a major responsibility

in protecting democratic values and social justice. They suggested that journalism must stand firmly for the truth and work in the interest of the people. They also stressed the need for unity among journalists and the strengthening of journalists' organisations.

Senior journalists Ravindra Nayak, Nagaraj Shetty, Girish Rao, Manjunath, Ramesh, Dinesh, Uday, Diya, and Chiranjeevi Suttala shared their experiences and views on the challenges faced by journalists today.

KSJU office-bearers Dinesh Kumar, Prakash, Pradhana Nemirendru, Anjan Kumar, Jayalakshmi, Dayanand, and Kalyani also participated. Journalists from Udupi district, Bengaluru, rural areas, and Davanagere attended the programme in large numbers. ❑

Asom Bani Died Silently, an Unceremonious Departure for the News Weekly



Nava Thakuria

Amid the existential crisis in northeast India's well-known media house, the Assam Tribune group of newspapers, which worsened after the Covid-19 pandemic, a popular Assamese weekly newspaper from its stable ceased publication in the latter part of 2025. Asom Bani, once a mainstream weekly for Assamese readers for decades, stopped hitting the stands in September last year, as the management lost interest in continuing its printing every Friday. Even though the seven-decade-old Guwahati-based Assamese-language weekly disappeared from the media market, the management did not make any statement about Asom Bani's fate. Prior to its departure, the weekly was merged with Dainik Asom, an acclaimed Assamese daily from the prestigious media house, as its Friday supplement.

Once edited by prominent Assamese journalist-authors namely Satish Chandra Kakati, Tilak Hazarika, Phani Talukdar, Nirod Chowdhury, Homen Bargohain and Chandraprasad Shaikia, the weekly had Dilip Chandan as its last

editor, who served Asom Bani for nearly three decades. Launched on 1 July 1955 by legendary Assamese entrepreneur Radha Govinda Baruah, the weekly witnessed and reported various important socio-political developments including the Assamese medium movement (regarding instruction in schools), the Assam anti-influx agitation, the abrupt rise of separatist-influenced insurgency, social unrest, the emergence of regional politics and its diminishing popularity, all with sincerity towards the indigenous population.

As the pandemic severely affected the circulation of all newspapers published by the Assam Tribune group, the subsequent impact was observed in shrinking advertisement revenues from commercial entities. Like many other media institutions across India, the Assam Tribune group also faced a severe financial crisis that began reflecting in irregular salary disbursements to employees, including working journalists. The employees' union came forward publicly with various concerns, including unpaid dues meant for retired

employees. The union leaders also alleged that the group was not receiving a heavy amount of money from the State Information and Public Relations Directorate against published advertisements.

Soon rumours spread about the probable sale of the entire media group to another city-based television house. The Tribune management initially denied this, terming the reports false and motivated interpretations. In an official statement, the management assured its firm commitment "to its editorial independence, journalistic integrity, and continued services to its readers, advertisers, and stakeholders." It even urged all concerned to "disregard such baseless speculation and refrain from spreading misinformation." Needless to mention, its primary news outlet The Assam Tribune, which was launched on 4 August 1939 (with Lakshminath Phukan as its first editor), continues to be the highest circulated English daily in the north-eastern region.

However, assurances from the management led by Prafulla Govinda Baruah, the second son of R.G. Baruah, who passed away on 14 December at the age of 93, did not prevent the handing over of Dainik Asom, now over six decades old, to a different media group owned by young entrepreneur Kishor Borah, who runs the Assamese satellite news channel ND24. The deal was made public on 17 September last year, following which the new management took responsibility for publishing Dainik Asom, but did not choose to take care of Asom Bani, which had already ceased to be an independent publication. As a supplement of Dainik Asom, the weekly hit the stands on 12 September 2025 for the last time.



The new management of Dainik Asom did not retain all engaged media employees, and on a single day, 18 September, over 70 employees, many of whom were enjoying extended tenures with monthly lump-sum payments, lost their jobs. The Assam Tribune management assured them of all legal dues within a few weeks, but this did not materialise. Having no options, they approached the labour court demanding their dues, which reportedly amount to nearly six crore rupees in total. It is unfortunate that the media house, which was India's first institution to implement the recommendations of the statutory Majithia Wage Board in 2012, now appears to be avoiding legal payments to retired employees.

Media observers believe that the Tribune house usually maintained credibility while disseminating information, editorial viewpoints and other articles, but in recent times those principles were largely compromised. Its flagship outlet, The Assam Tribune, strongly supported the anti-Citizenship Amendment Act movement that broke out in 2019, providing significant space to public protests against the Union government's initiative to extend citizenship to persecuted Hindu, Sikh,

Buddhist and Christian families from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. The unrest engulfed the Brahmaputra valley of Assam for weeks, driven by the narrative that the new citizenship law would undermine the Assam Accord signed in 1985 to conclude the six-year-long anti-foreigner agitation.

Moreover, people in Assam recall when the newspaper carried a series of extensive reports related to a city press club election, where the editorial focus appeared biased, unprofessional and marked by character assassination of the then secretary of the Guwahati Press Club, putting its hard-earned integrity at stake. The Assam Tribune, in particular, exercised its liberty, but without accountability, to report on the matter according to what critics described as the callous planning of some ill-motivated reporters.

If the present financial status of the Assam Tribune group has become dire, it cannot be attributed solely to the pandemic. The situation was further complicated by a section of media professionals who, despite enjoying due benefits, allegedly contributed to internal disorder within the media house, while the management chose to remain a mute spectator to these developments. ❏



Media converts convict into 'Powerbroker'

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Shaukat H. Mohammed

The writer is a senior journalist based at Hyderabad

While January provided enough drama, with the abduction of former Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro and his wife by the United States, the activities of a man, Jeffrey E. Epstein, who allegedly killed himself in 2019, dominated the headlines in February. But not in the way the rest of the world reported the email trails of Epstein, who was convicted of child rape in 2008.

The media around the world reported with barely concealed glee about how rich and powerful men were cavorting with Epstein, making regular visits to his mega mansion in New York City, worth an estimated USD 60 million today, and to his private island in the Caribbean, flying in his private jet for whatever it was they were doing there. The disclosures felled several powerful men and women in the West, including Prince

Andrew, brother of King Charles of the United Kingdom. King Charles immediately divested his brother of all his titles, starting from "Prince".

But in India, the story of Epstein's cohorts like Anil Ambani and Hardeep Singh Puri, the Union Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, was just treated as a routine event. Emails to and from Epstein to Ambani and Puri speak of several meetings between them at different times.

Yet, the media spun the communications between a convicted child predator and Puri as normal meetings. One TV news anchor, Padmaja Joshi of NDTV, took great pains in her "debate" to delineate between an "Evil" Epstein and a benign "powerbroker". Puri met "Powerbroker Epstein", so where was the problem with that? "Networking was how



Epstein made a living, connecting one person to another. So, he was a powerbroker," Ms Joshi said with a straight face.

If she could spot the difference between "Evil Epstein" and "Powerbroker Epstein", why can't the world, she wondered. She was joined in this mendacity by Shazia Ilmi, a spokesperson of the BJP, while Ashutosh, a veteran journalist, was trying to get a word in edgewise to say that Epstein had been a convicted child predator. The response to this naked attempt to shield Puri from questions about the company he kept was so brutal on SM that Ms Joshi issued an apology, sort of, for her disingenuity.

Ms Joshi went all in to defend the reputation of Puri as a man wedded to getting American investments into India for the 'Digital India' scheme, but the other channels were not far behind.

Puri went on several TV channels to profess his noble objective of getting investment from a convicted paedophile and his other "friends". None of the interviewers was of a mind to ask Puri how he had taken it upon himself to pitch for investments in 'Digital India' when he had retired from the Indian Foreign Service in 2013. He had been a private citizen when he joined the BJP in 2014, yet he had the details about 'Digital India', which was officially launched in 2015. The media allowed Puri to use their platforms not to answer questions about his closeness to Epstein but to fling mud at Rahul Gandhi, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha. Puri had been under tremendous pressure to resign from the Cabinet, but he



was yet to resign or be sacked by Modi at the time of going to press.

Another issue in which the TV news media did not cover itself with glory was the trade deal between the US and India announced by US President Donald J. Trump in early February via a post on Truth Social, his SM platform. On the face of it, the deal is skewed heavily in favour of the US, with Trump announcing that all Indian imports into the US would attract a tariff of 18% while all products exported to India by the US would have zero tariffs.

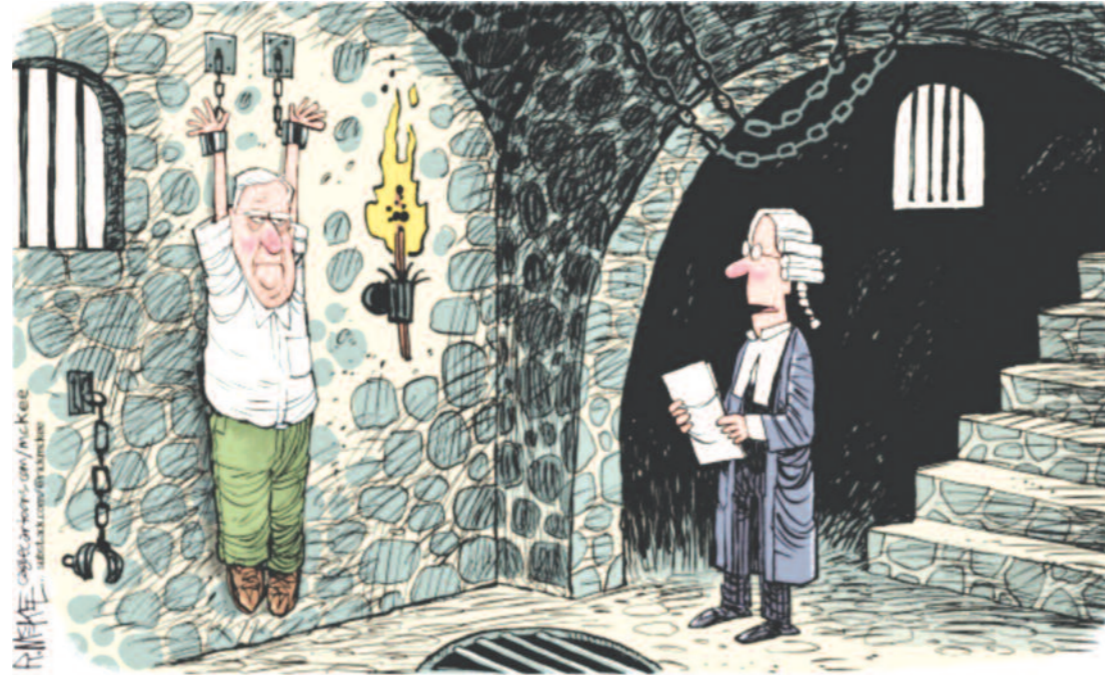
The media, per its wont, went overboard, celebrating what it called another "masterstroke" by the government. It failed to highlight the zero tariff which India had allegedly agreed to for imports from the US. It also ignored the fact that before Trump imposed a 50% tariff on Indian imports by August last year, and had magnanimously reduced it to 18 per cent, the average tariff on Indian imports had been about three per cent.

The media did not think it was its job to question the government about Trump's claims that most

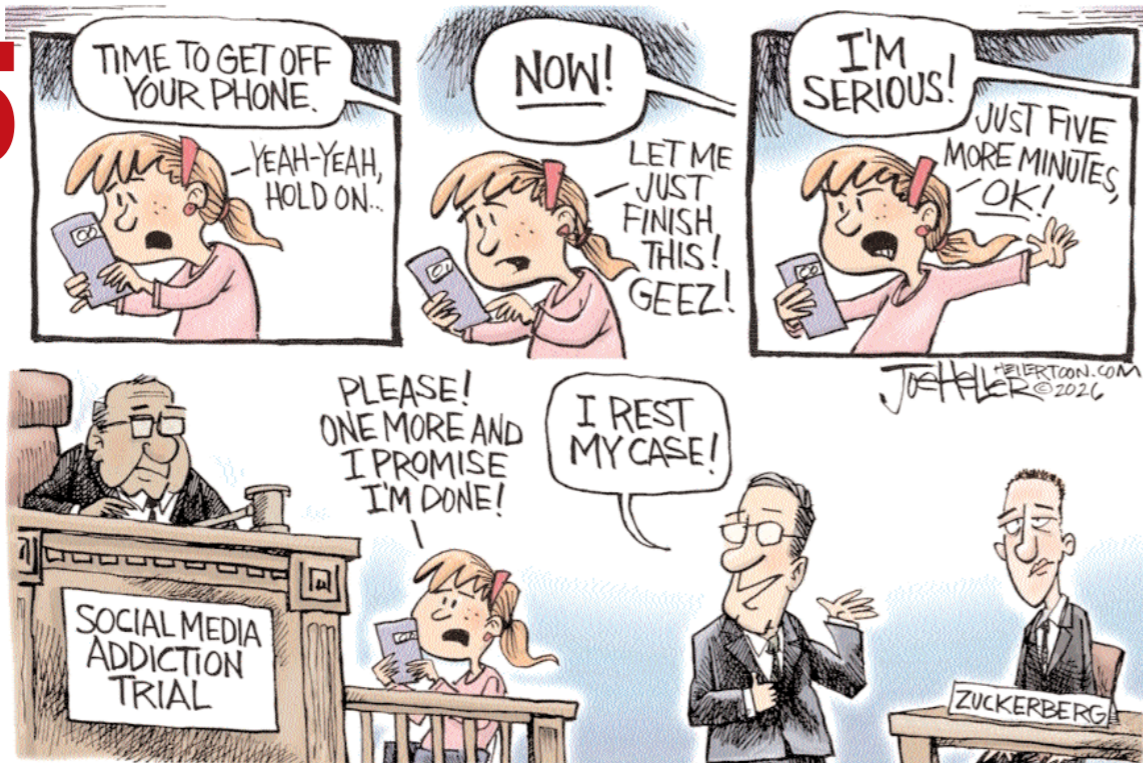
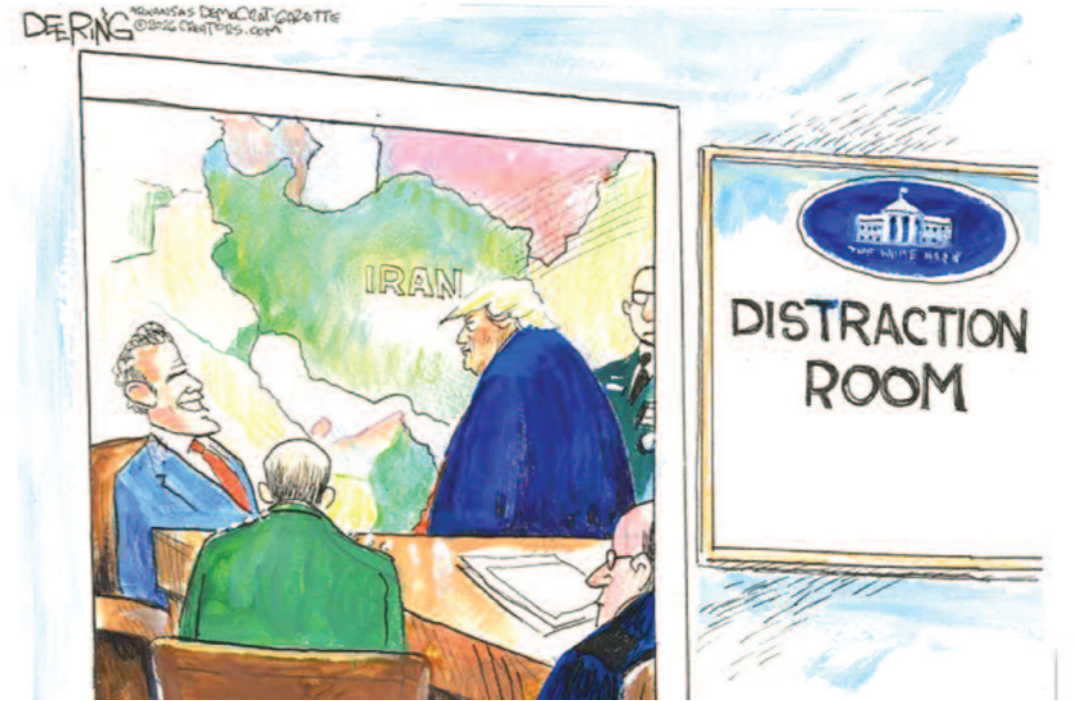
American goods, including farm products, would be imported by India at zero per cent tariff. More importantly, it did not question Puri, the Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas, on whether India had committed to stopping all its purchases of crude oil from its all-weather friend, Russia. Senior government ministers like Piyush Goyal and S. Jaishankar spent time passing the parcel with the media when asked about the ending of Russian oil purchases, under pain of renewed tariffs by Trump.

Goyal and Jaishankar answered all media questions with the stock "wait till the interim agreement is signed". They also claimed, without offering any proof, and without being challenged by the supine media, that American farm produce would largely be kept out of the interim agreement. Indian farmers could have hell to pay if American farm and dairy products are allowed free rein in India, because unlike in India, American farmers are heavily subsidised by the US government and can thus dump their products in India. ❏

CARTOONS OF THE MONTH



"SORRY, ANDREW, NOBODY BUT TRUMP BELIEVES THE EPSTEIN FILES ARE A DEMOCRAT HOAX."



Joe Heller



BEN JENNINGS
04.02.2026

Labour Codes Under Fire as Trade Unions, IJU unite for Nationwide Strike



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he Indian Journalists Union (IJU) extended its support to the nationwide general strike called by central trade unions on February 12, 2026, protesting against the four Labour Codes enacted by the Union Government. In a statement issued on February 11, IJU

president K. Sreenivas Reddy and secretary general Balwinder Singh Jammu said the replacement of 29 existing labour laws, including the Working Journalists Act, with four consolidated codes has weakened statutory protections available to workers across sectors, including media employees.

They said the new codes dilute hard-won labour rights, weaken collective bargaining mechanisms and adversely affect job security and social security benefits.

The IJU particularly objected to the abolition of the Working Journalists and Other Newspaper Employees Act and the dismantling of the Wage Board mechanism under the pretext of labour law consolidation. According to the Union, these provisions were crucial in safeguarding service conditions, wages and professional rights of journalists and non-journalist newspaper employees.

Demanding immediate corrective steps, the IJU leadership urged the Union Government to reinstate the Working Journalists Act and restore the Wage Board system to ensure fair wages and statutory protection for media workers. The Union also called upon all its affiliated state units to actively participate in the strike



IJU President K. Sreenivas Reddy and AITUC General Secretary Amarjeet Kaur speaking at a seminar against the new labour codes in Hyderabad.

programmes organised by national trade unions.

Earlier, on January 22, senior trade union leader Amarjeet Kaur had strongly criticised the Labour Codes, terming them a serious threat to workers' rights, press freedom and the federal structure of the Constitution. She was speaking at a seminar on "New Labour Laws in India and Their Impact" organised by the Neelam Rajasekhhar Reddy Research Centre at Indrajit Gupta Hall in Hyderabad.

Kaur said the labour codes were anti-worker and designed to benefit corporate interests at the cost of labour welfare. She criticised the fixing of the minimum wage at ₹178 per day, saying it would further depress wages. She pointed out that large sections of the workforce, including contract labourers, daily wage earners, self-employed persons and agricultural workers, have been

kept outside the ambit of labour protections.

Raising concerns over access to justice, she said trade union registration has become extremely difficult and labour courts have been abolished, forcing workers to approach regular courts for dispute resolution. She also flagged what she described as excessive centralisation of powers in the hands of the Union Government, arguing that it undermines India's federal structure.

Referring to changes in industrial closure norms, Kaur said the threshold for seeking government permission to close establishments has been raised from 100 to 300 workers. As a result, she claimed nearly 80 per cent of industries would fall outside the protective framework that previously required prior approval. Calling it a decisive moment for the working class, she urged workers across the country to participate in the

February 12 strike.

Speaking at the same seminar, K. Sreenivas Reddy said journalists have lost crucial legal safeguards under the new labour regime. He recalled that the Working Journalists Act of 1955 and related post-Independence legislations were enacted to protect journalists' welfare and press freedom, and their repeal has left media employees vulnerable.

Indian Federation of Trade Unions national vice president P. Prasad said the dignity of labour has declined sharply in recent years. He observed that while labour reforms introduced after Independence were progressive, those implemented after 1991 have been regressive.

He also noted that the historic Trade Unions Act of 1926 would effectively cease to operate from April 1, 2026.



‘I’m a Salesman for Nature’:

How One Journalist Has Protected India's Wildlife for 44 Years

Bittu Sahgal, one of India's strongest environmental advocates, has long shown how journalism can be a powerful tool for protecting the wild. Through Sanctuary Asia magazine, he has used storytelling and reportage not just to inform, but to rally people to defend nature.

I

n the year 1977, a young advertising professional trekked to Upper Dachigam near Kashmir - the route winds through rugged, alpine meadows - all in an attempt to spot the hangul, a flagship stag species endemic to the region. He penned his experiences down, which later made it to a full-page feature in The Indian Express.

Looking back, the boy would recall the incident as shaping two of his life's leitmotifs - Bittu Sahgal is now a veteran journalist with four decades of advocacy in conservation. He's hailed for his prowess in environmental activism, wielding the pen as powerfully as he champions causes on the ground.

And his brainchild, wildlife magazine Sanctuary Asia, is an article of faith for those who look to journalism to shape the future of conservation. The story of how the magazine was born in 1981 is as



Bittu Sahgal is a veteran journalist who helms the Sanctuary Asia magazine, India's leading magazine for wildlife science.

iconic as the ones that have filled its pages in the last 44 years.

One evening, while sitting around a campfire at Ranthambore, Sahgal asked his mentor Fateh Singh Rathore (often described as the founding father of Ranthambore National Park) a simple question: What can I do to save the tiger?

Rathore responded, "Bittu, there are hundreds of bekaar (useless) magazines

Krystelle Dsouza

on Indian politics, sports, films... but not one wildlife magazine. Start one! Win public support. That will help. But you are a Bombaiya, city-bred, I know you will do nothing! Then, on your next visit, you will ask the same question. You city people are like that only."

"Exactly nine months later, in October 1981, I handed him the inaugural issue of Sanctuary Asia," Sahgal shares. Ever since its first edition, the magazine hasn't wavered from its moral compass - "without having missed a single issue despite wars, social strife, and economic meltdowns" - never deflecting from speaking truth to power, amplifying the voices of marginalised communities and ensuring every species gets its moment in the sun.

Every alternate issue of the monthly magazine is dedicated to young readers (Sanctuary Cub). Then, in 2015, Sanctuary Nature Foundation was established as an extension of the same vision, bringing together conservationists, naturalists, photographers, writers, and editors to impact change on the frontlines.

It's sufficient to say that few manage to summon the kind of alchemy Sahgal brings to the topic of conservation.

His life, he says, has been a mosaic of inflection points. His earliest memories of the wild are rooted in his growing-up days in Shimla, as he ardently watched monkeys and admired the forests that lay just beyond the boundary wall of the Bishop Cotton School where he was studying. Later in life, his friendship with Fateh Singh Rathore, among others, strengthened his resolve to protect the wild.

Recalling one anecdote from those years, Sahgal shares, "We had



Bittu Sahgal with Indira Gandhi

just finished dinner and were sitting around the fire at Ranthambore when I heard a scuffle behind me. Fateh shone his powerful torch, and it fell on dragmarks and a pool of blood. We discovered a young sambar fawn had been killed by a leopard just feet away from where we sat, and we hadn't realised a thing."

Sahgal is a living archive of these stories - events, and incidents that deepened his awe towards the wild. But the one that transformed the love into a deeper calling was when he came across the carcass of a tiger that had been poisoned. "I thought to myself, nature already hands these creatures so many trials in their lives, and as humans, we just add to these trials," he shares.

Despite this being my first interaction with Sahgal, there's a semblance of familiarity. His name has featured across my interviews with conservationists, wildlife activists, and even homestay owners who've enjoyed a visit from him.

The quest to be Sahgal-approved is real. When I tell him this, he laughs. While 'Sahgal, the conservationist' is well known, few know about 'Sahgal, the salesman'. I didn't either until we backtracked into his youth.

"From calendars to posters to huge polythene buckets for the chemical industry, I sold everything as a teenager in Kolkata," he shares. These gigs were undertaken by day between 10 am and 6 pm; between 6 am and 9 am, he attended his BCom lectures at St. Xavier's College. His salesman's instinct and experience taught him an important lesson. "You can't walk into a room and sell a guy something that he doesn't really need."

Now, Sahgal contextualises this learning - "people need to be convinced that it is in their best interest to save the biosphere, the forests, wetlands, grasslands, rivers and oceans. I'm still a salesman. A salesman for nature," he beams.

There wasn't a direct segue from sales to journalism. The years in between were filled with chartered accountancy, advertising, and more. But the perks and pay paled in comparison to the satisfaction Sahgal drew from his time in the wild. The only thing that could come close to it was the pleasure of writing about these experiences. And thus started Sanctuary Asia.

In 1989, the BSES (Bombay Suburban Electric Supply) wanted to install a 500-megawatt thermal plant

in Dahanu, Maharashtra. This was just a year after Dahanu had been declared a 'Green Zone' owing to its horticultural status. The thermal plant would impact the region's agriculture. A 2009 study highlights Dahanu's scale of production - over 50,000 tons of chikoos, 2,000 tons of guavas, 50,00,000 coconuts, a monthly production of 8,500 railway wagons of vegetables, 2,500 wagons of fodder, and 500 truckloads of spider lilies.

Sahgal, who had friends in the region, fighting tooth and nail against the expansion of the thermal plant in every way they could, could empathise with their pain.

In 1994, after a plea in the Bombay High Court was declined, on a request from Nergis Irani, a prominent resident of Dahanu who was the founder of the Dahanu Taluka Environmental Welfare Association (DTEWA) and leader of the long-term campaign against the plant, Sahgal approached the Supreme Court. He filed a writ petition seeking the implementation of the Dahanu ESA notification, which followed the 1991 decision to declare Dahanu taluka an Ecologically Fragile Area (EFA) under the Environment Protection Act, 1986. The aim was to curb polluting industries and regulate land use in the region.

In October 1996, the Supreme Court directed the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) to re-examine the issue and set up the Dahanu Taluka Environment Protection Authority (DTEPA).

Sahgal recalls the outcome clearly. "We went to the Supreme Court and were able to prevent the second thermal plant from coming up. We had asked for the demolition of the first one, but the court allowed it to



Over the last four decades, Bittu Sahgal has attempted to advocate for nature conservation through his writings.

remain, on the condition that a radius of 10 kilometres around the designated area be created around it. That decision led to the idea of eco-sensitive zones."

He commends Debi Goenka, Shailendra Yashwant and Shyam Chainani, the founding member of the Bombay Environmental Action Group, for advocating for this concept. According to Sahgal, it has since helped protect our coastal landscapes, mangroves, leopard habitats, and other vulnerable ecosystems.

Eco-sensitive zones are now protected buffer areas around national parks and wildlife sanctuaries, notified by the MoEF&CC. They regulate activities such as mining, construction, large-scale tourism, and pollution, thus helping reduce pressure on fragile landscapes while still supporting local livelihoods, including practices like organic farming.

But despite the impact his work was having, Sahgal says there were always naysayers. "In 1981, when I started Sanctuary Asia, 90 percent of my time was spent explaining to people why I had started a wildlife magazine when the nation had so many "real problems"." Four decades later, protecting the bios-

phere and the climate crisis have become the fulcrum of virtually every other environmental debate in the country. Convincing adults was always tough. That's where Sahgal appreciates the lack of cynicism and the pure innocence of children.

One of his favourite programmes, now part of the Sanctuary Nature Foundation, is 'Kids for Tigers', an adult literacy programme launched in 2000, which took environmental education to 700 schools across India through workshops, nature walks, camps, and tiger fests. "Propelled by Sunil Alagh of Britannia Industries and Prannoy Roy of NDTV, children met government officials, sports personalities, celebrities, and journalists, to convince them that protecting nature is the surest way to safeguard both present and future generations," Sahgal shares.

This is important to Sahgal. In fact, it's the most important thing that Sanctuary Nature Foundation does. I ask him why, and he pauses before he replies, "My generation owes your generation an apology because my generation has not looked after your world." ❏

— *Courtesy The Wire*

AI Could Unlock Billions for India's \$30 Billion Media Industry, says JioStar vice-chairman Uday Shankar

India's media industry stands at a historic inflection point. Artificial intelligence, long discussed as a technological disruptor, could now become the lever that propels the country from a domestic content giant to a global creative powerhouse.

Delivering the keynote at the IndiaAI Impact Summit, Uday Shankar argued that AI offers India a once-in-a-generation opportunity to lead, not follow, in global media and entertainment.

Shankar credited the prime minister's vision for centring India's growth agenda around AI and described the summit as overdue. Drawing on three decades in media, he traced the industry's transformation from the arrival of the first newsroom computers to the launch of India's earliest digital platforms, each wave of technology reshaping speed, scale and audience engagement. The numbers tell a story of staggering growth. In just 25 years, India's media and entertainment sector has expanded from a few billion dollars to become the world's fifth-largest market, contributing more than \$30bn to the economy. Television households have jumped from about 70m to over 210m, with more than 800m video consumers today. Yet global influence remains elusive. While South Korea exported *Squid Game* and *Parasite* to worldwide acclaim, and Puerto Rico



produced the most-streamed artist on the planet, India has struggled to consistently break through beyond its domestic and diaspora audiences. The constraints are structural. Hollywood studio productions command budgets of \$65m to \$100m, with tentpoles running as high as \$300m. The average Indian film operates on \$3m to \$5m. A marquee US television episode can cost \$20m to \$30m; an Indian serial is typically produced for Rs 7 lakh to Rs 10 lakh per episode, roughly \$10,000. The capital gap, Shankar argued, has narrowed ambition and limited global competitiveness.

AI, he said, changes the equation by rewiring the three pillars of the industry: content, consumer and commerce. On content, AI-powered

production is collapsing infrastructure costs and accelerating timelines. At JioStar, the company recently produced *Mahabharat: Ek Dharmayudh*, a 100-episode live-action series delivered three to five times faster than a traditional production pipeline. The implication is stark. The remaining constraint is no longer capital, but imagination.

On consumers, AI enables conversational discovery, interactive storytelling and regionalisation that goes beyond simple dubbing to reflect India's linguistic texture. On commerce, it unlocks granular segmentation and dynamic pricing, moving beyond the blunt instruments of subscription and advertising that have defined the industry for a century.

The prize is vast. The global media market, currently worth nearly \$3trn, is projected to reach \$3.5trn by 2029. India's share remains under 2 per cent. Even a shift to 5 per cent would generate tens of billions of dollars in additional value.

Hollywood's defensive posture towards AI, he suggested, offers India a rare window to design the business models and regulatory frameworks that could set global precedents. The shift in advantage, he argued, favours nations with deep cultural reservoirs and massive audiences.

— Courtesy
Indiantelevision.com

How to Cover a Country Cut Out from the Internet? The Battle to Report on Iran from Exile



Iranians marked the first days of 2026 with nationwide protests against the regime. Initially driven by worsening economic conditions, the protests grew into a broader challenge to Iran's clerical leadership. According to independent reporting, this was the largest uprising since the Islamic Revolution which transformed the country in 1979.

On 8 January Iranian authorities imposed a near-total internet shutdown. This left most people in the country effectively cut off from each other and the outside world. Although restrictions appear to have eased slightly in recent days, connectivity remains patchy. Experts say the partial rollback may reflect the growing costs of maintaining the regime's most severe internet blackout to date.

Even so, most Iranians are still largely offline, making it much harder for journal-

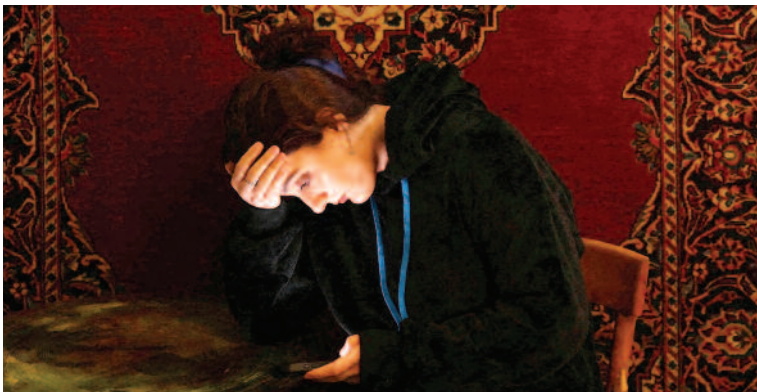
ists in exile to verify events inside the country. To find out more about what reporting under these conditions is like, I spoke with four Iranian media professionals in exile and one Iranian media outlet. We discussed the impact of information control and repression, and the role of exiled media in Iran today.

This is not the first time the Iranian regime has implemented an internet blackout. The first full, nation-wide blackout occurred during nationwide protests in November 2019 and it was a week-long. The regime upped the ante in 2025 with a nearly two-week internet shutdown during the short war between Iran and Israel. Therefore, the current blackout is considered the longest and most severe: it's not only the internet that has been cut, but also telephone lines.

Negar Mortazavi is a US-based Iranian journalist, editor and host of the Iran Podcast, and a Senior Fellow at the Center for International Policy (CIP). She describes how the Iranian government has been strengthening their internet infrastructure in the past six years so they can shut it down again if needed, while reducing the internal damage, including losses to businesses and online services.

Mortazavi explains how cutting communications serves two main goals. First, it makes it harder for coordinated groups, including alleged agitators or armed cells, to organise and to communicate with any outside backers. Second, it limits information sharing by preventing people inside Iran, and international media, from

Gretel Kahn



An Iranian woman, Samaneh, tries to connect to the internet to check on her visa status for her migration process, after a nationwide internet shutdown since January 8, 2026, following Iran's protests, in Tehran, Iran, January 25, 2026.

learning what is happening on the ground.

"There's no way they can stop coverage from reaching the media outside. Eventually it has to come out, but they can delay it," she said. "Then there's also information sharing inside the country. If people don't have access to satellite television and communications are cut, it's difficult for them to know protests are going on, especially if they're in small towns or rural areas."

Rieneke Van Santen is the Executive Director of Zamaneh Media, an Iranian media organisation in exile based in Amsterdam. She said that they are used to dealing with high levels of censorship, but stresses this is the worst they've seen so far.

"People in Iran are completely isolated," she said. "[The government] has been building a policy and a strategy around communication and the internet to further isolate people and censor them."

Asal Abasian, an Iranian freelance journalist based in Paris who frequently contributes to the BBC, echoed that while Iran has imposed shutdowns before, the current approach stands out because it combines multiple tactics at once: broad blackouts, targeted throttling, platform disruptions, cyberattacks, and coordinated disinformation, which makes the repression more sophisticated and comprehensive than before. "The state has become more adept at combining digital repression with legal and extralegal pressure - summoning journalists, freezing assets, or threatening relatives - creating a climate of compounded fear," Abasian said.

The blackout has made the task of reporting on Iran during this pivotal moment a significant challenge for journalists in exile. Abasian, who



A protester raises a hand in support at Persian Square in the Westwood neighborhood of Los Angeles, California, during a rally for freedom in Iran.

does research on Iran for the Committee to Protect Journalists, said that exiled reporters depend on encrypted tools, diaspora networks, satellite imagery, and open-source verification, while building long-term trusted relationships with sources to manage risk.

"Inside the country, reporters risk arrest, interrogation, or professional bans," Abasian said. "Outside, exiled journalists grapple with digital security threats, online harassment, and psychological pressure stemming from threats against family members still in Iran. Verification becomes especially difficult amid deliberate information blackouts and the flooding of social media with state-backed narratives."

Omid Rezaee is an Iranian journalist writing for the German newspaper Zeit, with over 10 years of experience reporting for Persian media. Unsurprisingly, he said it has been extremely difficult to reach people inside the country during this time. "I know the political scene. I know civil society activists. I have a huge network all across the country, but the blackout means I have no access to any of them," he said.

During the first days of the shutdown, Rezaee explains, neither he nor other journalists in exile had any independent information, so they were forced to rely on state media, which is unreliable. A few rare phone calls from people leaving the country, and limited satellite access, helped them get a rough picture of what was happening inside the country, but not enough.

"With that kind of internet shutdown, exile journalism just shuts down because you're completely cut off. It is a new experience. I guess if it happens more often, we'll find ways to adapt, but for now it's just unbelievable," Rezaee said.

Roosbeh Bolhari is an Iranian journalist based in the United States who has worked for outlets like Radio Farda, Voice of America, and now Iran International. Bolhari similarly describes being unable to communicate with the extensive network of sources he has in the country.

"It is very difficult. I barely had any connection with them during this time. Even now, as we're talking, I'm worried because no one has any information about them," he said. ❏

— Courtesy Reutersinstitute

'WHY I KILLED MY HUSBAND':

Anita Nair's 'state of the nation' stories leave little room for subtlety



Anita Nair's latest book, imaginatively titled *Why I Killed My Husband and Other Such Stories*, resurrects her 2020 audiostory by the same name and packs in five new short stories. She describes this collection of fiction as "state of the nation" stories, a phrase she has borrowed from the crime novelist Ian Rankin.

And indeed, it proves to be a succinct introduction to the stories - a map, if you will, for the readers to tell them where the path leads, and what they can expect on the journey.

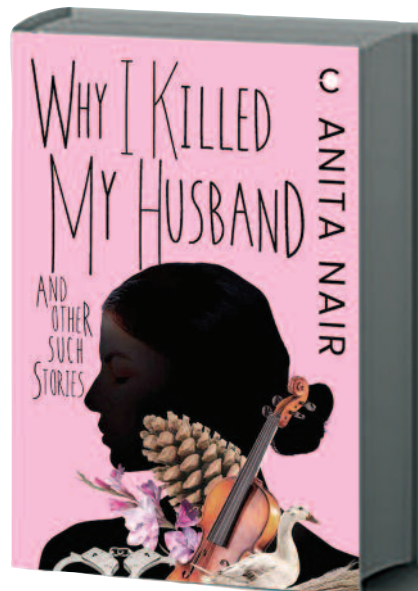
The book opens with the titular story, "Why I Killed My Husband." The story's culminating point is in the title - the reader is ready for what's to come. Anjali, a middle-class Tamil Brahmin girl employed at a bank, is married off to the best-suited prospect. Best-suited is strictly subjective here. She has been prepped for marriage all her life and her personal achievements, likes and dislikes, and modest ambitions have been enthusiastically sidelined in the pursuit of this grand dream. A hefty dowry can in no way guar-

antee a happy marriage.

Anjali realises her husband, Madhavan, is a first-class bully and a good-for-nothing. A perennial artist in bloom, he quits his job to become a concert-level violinist. The collateral damages are burdening his already overworked wife and turning their son against his mother. Anjali's quiet furies are tough to read, biting the reader's skin like a fire ant. Madhavan's constant whining is intolerable - I wanted to reach into the pages and land a nice slap

Sayari Debnath

Nair is hyper aware of the making of her stories and overt references to politics snub out all nuance that the reader might prefer to discover on their own.



BOOK REVIEW

under his ears. This feeling of violence is delectable - Nair teases this for as long as she can in both Anjali and the reader. I felt my mood swing from despair to anger, in a steady rhythm. The drama works, it really does, and Nair is at her strongest here. But as also a crime fiction writer, Nair falls short of imagination when Anjali finally decides to kill her husband. A déjà vu moment awaits those who have recently watched Radhika Apte starrer *Saali Mohabbat*.

The second story, "Quota Girls," is high on emotions. It follows two students, Uma Shree and Savitha, who have secured admission to a government medical college through caste-based reservation. The girls belong to the manual scavenging community - the untouchable of the untouchables. An education is a shot at a new life, where their caste will finally cease to matter. The girls couldn't be more wrong. They are subjected to relentless bullying for being "quota girls" and their peers (all doctors-in-waiting) and professors are casteists par excellence. The grind of medical science is nothing compared to the abuse that the girls are subjected to every day.

"Quota Girls" could have been one of the best stories in the collection, but it suffers from a dearth of subtlety. Every sentence is so on the nose, so carefully dancing to the tones of political correctness that at one point it starts to read more like a complaint report and less like a story. The great anger that breathed life into the introductory story does not find its way here.

"The Little Duck Girl" is my favourite story in the collection. Set in a fictional Kerala town, a middle-aged bachelor lives a comfortable life of not doing anything. He is on good terms with his backstabbing



siblings and only needs enough to feed himself. This is the time of the anti-CAA-NRC movements, and while Shree Raman knows about it, he couldn't be bothered to fight it. The only event he looks forward to every year is the arrival of the "little duck girl," a young child with Mongoloid features who wanders with the gypsies and tends to ducks. They give him free duck eggs in exchange for a small slice of land to tend to their birds. When the little duck girl, Asha, arrives after a break of several years, she's not so little anymore. Shree Raman's old maid goes on leave and leaves him in Asha's care, and tongues start to wag when she moves in with him. Her uncertain origins and the maddening fervour of citizenship complicate matters, and Shree Raman offers to marry her as the most practical way to continue their arrangement.

What works for this story is not so much its politics (again too on the nose!) but Nair's talent in creating a loveable fool out of Shree Raman. His determined indifference to the world does not shelter him from its ugliness, and his affection for the young girl ultimately emboldens her to do what is right at the great cost of personal safety. I did not expect to grow so fond of Shree Raman and by

the end of the story, I felt I could love him as one would a helpless puppy.

"Field of Flowers" takes the reader to an akhada in north India where the wrestlers josh and build their bodies with equal enthusiasm. Sportsmanship spirit, which should ideally trump all differences, is no match for class-caste politics. This is worsened by the arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic, which upturns the social order within the akhada and the village. A moving tale of quiet aggressions, "Field of Flowers", however, loses its way in the middle before eventually picking up pace.

The final story, "The Land of Lost Content", was a real drag. Social media influencer Urvashi receives a phone call from the police pulling her up for fraudulent activities, which, among other things, includes, as the police claims, being involved in human trafficking. Anyone with a passing level of intelligence will see it coming from a mile that this is nothing but an elaborate online scam. For someone who spends much of her time on the internet and makes money off it, it is ludicrous that Urvashi is wholly unaware of such fraudulence. ❏

—*Courtesy Scroll.in*

The Message Is Very Strong

There are moments in Assi when you will get scared, when you will get angry, when you will feel helpless...



A

Almost every woman has felt it. That slight frisson of fear. A warning that you sense in your gut before it courses through your body.

Your heart beats a little faster. Your hands feel slightly clammy. Late at night, you look at an empty skywalk. Or subway. Or an empty train or bus that you need to catch. An empty road that you need to walk down.

On that road -- it should be safe; the streetlights are on -- a car nears. Comes too close.

A thought flashes through your head, right or wrong: Why did you decide to step out alone this late? (Not that it is really safer if you have a male companion; especially if someone else has decided they want 'to have some fun' that night.)

The car stops. The woman is grabbed. Her beautiful indigo and white printed long skirt is pulled off and flung on the road -- the defence lawyer will later point out that there is not a single tear in it so clearly she could not have resisted -- and the horror that is inflicted on Assi's Parima (Kani

Kusruti) that night is reflected in her single eye, the other one has been beaten shut; in the counts to see who can keep it up the most (the loser is to buy the rest of the four perpetrators beer); in the grin of the perpetrator video recording the assault...

It is indeed a powerful beginning, especially in contrast to the happy, loving little family -- mother, father, son and the madness-turns-into-fun and working parents rush to get their day started -- in short; the absolutely everyday, absolutely normal life they lead.

After the rape, Parima is abandoned on a railway track -- she's been used and now she's thrown.

A humanitarian saves her and here comes the film's first flaw -- chillies are flung off a plastic-sheeted cart and she laid on it (it's an old style filmi touch; something you now see in long-running soap dramas) and feels 'off' in a film that has been exceptionally difficult-to-watch-without-your-stomach-churning real until now.

Her husband Vinay (Mohammed Zeeshan Ayyub)

**Savera R
Someshwar**

OTT REVIEW

reaches the hospital, son Dhruv (Advik Jaiswal) in tow. Is it shock that makes him bring his little son to the hospital especially when he has supportive neighbours? Does he know what has happened to his wife?

She recovers slowly; her eyesight is impaired because 'the arteries in her head have been injured due to her head injury'. But since she has decided to go to court, identifying the aggressors has become vital because their DNA does not match the DNA found on her.

She can't identify them in a line up and you know in that moment that question is going to come up in court: How can you not recognise the faces of the people you claim raped you?

Tossed into the mix is Manoj Pahwa, a desperate father who has used his money to pull his son out of trouble before and is willing to do anything to do so again. A man who cannot see beyond his son. To whom the victim does not exist. To whom the victim is his son.

For me, the most powerful one was the moment between one of the rapists (Abhishek Kaushal) and his sister (Payal Samyani). She makes him confess. For the first time, you see the rapist ashamed; he's in tears and holds her tight, begging for forgiveness. She can't stand it; can't stand him and struggles, in tears, a scream locked in her throat, to free herself. The moment when you realise children talk, and understand, more than you, as a parent, think they do. And a little boy comes to know what has happened to his mother.

'Do what?' How does the father even answer such a question. He tries, amid his shock, to buy time.

The moment when Parima tells the judge, 'Madam, I love flowers.



There was a bouquet behind my head in the car. Now, I can't stand their fragrance.'

And when one of the rapists is murdered. 'I feel good that he has been murdered,' Parima tells her husband. Almost immediately, there is shock and disgust on her face that she feels like this as she wonders what kind of person she now is.

In the red screen that flashes every 20 minutes, dragging you out of the movie, reminding you with a punch in the face that a woman has been raped. That's why the film is titled *Assi Eighty*. The number of women raped every day. *Assi* is also a stark reminder that one rape changes multiple lives forever. The survivor will never see the world through the same eyes again. 'You look at the mirror,' says Parima. 'The face is the same. But the reflection will never be the same.'

Her family's life will never be the same again. Not will the lives of those who love her. Nor will the lives of the rapist's wife. Or daughter. Or sister. Or family.

There are sub-plots -- especially the one involving the Chhatri Man, a vigilante -- that could have been snipped in the scripting stage. It would have given the film a different kind of heft.

And in bring in marital rape. The film tries to give too many messages and, in the process, does not do justice to them. In the investigation of the rape which seem rudimentary.

In not utilising the talent of formidable actors like Naseeruddin Shah, Supriya Pathak, Seema Pahwa and Kumud Mishra.

Taapsee Pannu, as the lawyer, Ravee, has the meatiest role; unfortunately, maybe playing the lawyer or acting in courtroom dramas is something she has become used to now.

What I found most disturbing was the presence of children in the courtroom. Is a child witness in a rape case not questioned in-camera? Are school children allowed to sit in court as the audience when a rape case is being tried? ❑

—*Courtesy rediff*

People's Trust - Remembering Mark Tully

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Journalism is a profession where learning never stops. The day you stop learning, you begin to decline. In this field, there are constant temptations to seek shortcuts to success. At times, proximity to power brings a sense of pride, but that is precisely when credibility begins to erode. In journalism, credibility and the trust of readers and viewers are the greatest assets.

Mark Tully was a name synonymous with credibility for Indians over several decades at the BBC. People trusted his reports more than those of many other outlets. Sir William Mark Tully, born in Calcutta in 1935 to William Scarth Carlisle Tully and Patience Trebi, grew up during the fading years of the British Raj. His childhood memories of Durga Puja in Calcutta and Kartik Purnima in Puri shaped his understanding of India. Though sent to the United Kingdom for education, he returned to India as an assistant representative at the BBC's New Delhi bureau. In 1972, he became the BBC Bureau Chief in New Delhi, covering South Asia with a deep commitment to free and fair reporting.

His independence eventually brought him into conflict with the BBC's top management. In 1993, he openly criticised what he saw as the organisation's decline, accusing it of editorial rigidity combined with commercial pressures. He publicly criticised Director General John Birt's style of functioning and resigned in 1994. During his long association with the BBC, he became known for balanced, empathetic and insightful reporting on India. At a time when the only major alternative was the government-controlled All India Radio, his voice became one of the most trusted in the country.

Tully's career was marked by coverage of defining events: the 1965 Indo-Pak war, the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, the Emergency of 1975 and the 1977 elections,

the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the Bhopal gas tragedy, the hanging of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, militancy in Punjab and Operation Blue Star, the assassination of Indira Gandhi, and the demolition of the Babri Masjid. Rajiv Gandhi is said to have accepted the news of his mother's assassination only after hearing Tully's report on the BBC.

His credibility made him a household name in South Asia. In Indian villages, people would say, "Tully sahib ne kaha hai to sach hi hoga." Yet he was also targeted by political establishments across the spectrum. During the Babri Masjid demolition, he was chased by Kar Sevaks. As General Secretary of the Delhi Union of Journalists (DUJ), I received a complaint from journalists after their equipment was damaged. The complaint copy also bore the signature of Mark Tully. During the Emergency, when foreign correspondents were asked to sign undertakings accepting pre-censorship, Tully refused and was given 24 hours to leave the country.

Though British by nationality, he remained deeply connected to India. He wrote about his English nanny who once scolded him for learning to count in Hindi, fearing he might "go native." In the end, he chose to live and die in India. His cremation in Delhi was conducted with Vedic chants, reflecting the bond he had formed with the land of his birth.

Mark Tully once said, "There is only one rule in journalism. Ask yourself, why should anyone trust you over the long run? If you keep that question in mind, it automatically disciplines how you report. Trust, once corroded, can never be regained." These words are especially relevant today, when public trust in journalism is visibly declining. Restoring credibility and trust is not optional. It is essential for the survival of journalism and to save democracy. ❏

THE LAST PAGE




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