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Who Checks AI?

Give an AI tool a decent prompt and it will turn out a news story in seconds. It can summarise a report, sort data and help a small newsroom work like a large, established one. But what do you do with a machine that invents a quote, recommends books that were never written, or leaves its own chatter inside a published story?

In July last year, The Economic Times published a story on an AI-generated video, posted by Donald Trump, showing Barack Obama being arrested. It carried a quote from US disinformation researcher Nina Jankowicz. As The News Minute reported, Jankowicz said she had never spoken to ET. The quote was later removed. By then it had travelled far and wide in the virtual world and probably even into an AI chatbot. A story about AI fakery carried a fake of its own.

The problem is not within India's media landscape alone. In May 2025, The Philadelphia Inquirer and the Chicago Sun-Times ran a summer supplement syndicated by King Features. Of the 15 books on its reading list, only five existed, Poynter reported. The freelance writer, Marco Buscaglia, admitted he had used AI and failed to check the output.

In November 2025, Pakistan's Dawn joined the list. Its November 12 report on auto sales ended with a line from an AI assistant offering to make the copy "snappier". The next day, Dawn published a regret saying the report had been edited using AI in violation of its own policy. The stray text was later removed.

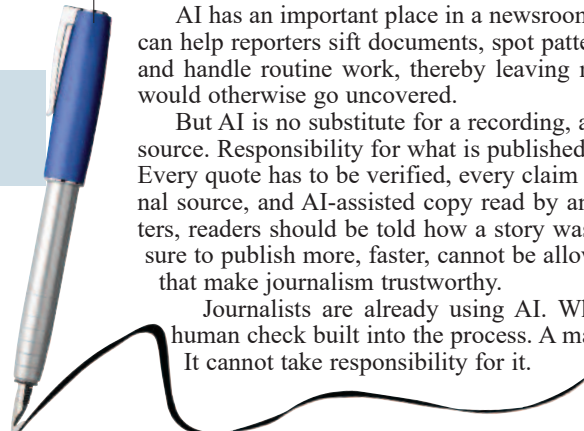
In February 2026, Ars Technica retracted a story within hours after engineer Scott Shambaugh pointed out that quotes attributed to him were AI fabrications. In March, European publisher Mediahuis suspended Peter Vandermeersch, a former editor-in-chief of the Dutch daily NRC, after NRC found fabricated quotes in 15 of the 53 newsletter pieces he had written since October 2025. Seven people denied saying what he attributed to them.

The details differ, but the nature of the failure is the same: nobody checked before it went out.

AI has an important place in a newsroom. When used with care, it can help reporters sift documents, spot patterns, transcribe interviews and handle routine work, thereby leaving more time for stories that would otherwise go uncovered.

But AI is no substitute for a recording, a transcript or a call to the source. Responsibility for what is published rests with the newsroom. Every quote has to be verified, every claim checked against the original source, and AI-assisted copy read by an editor. Wherever it matters, readers should be told how a story was produced. And the pressure to publish more, faster, cannot be allowed to remove the checks that make journalism trustworthy.

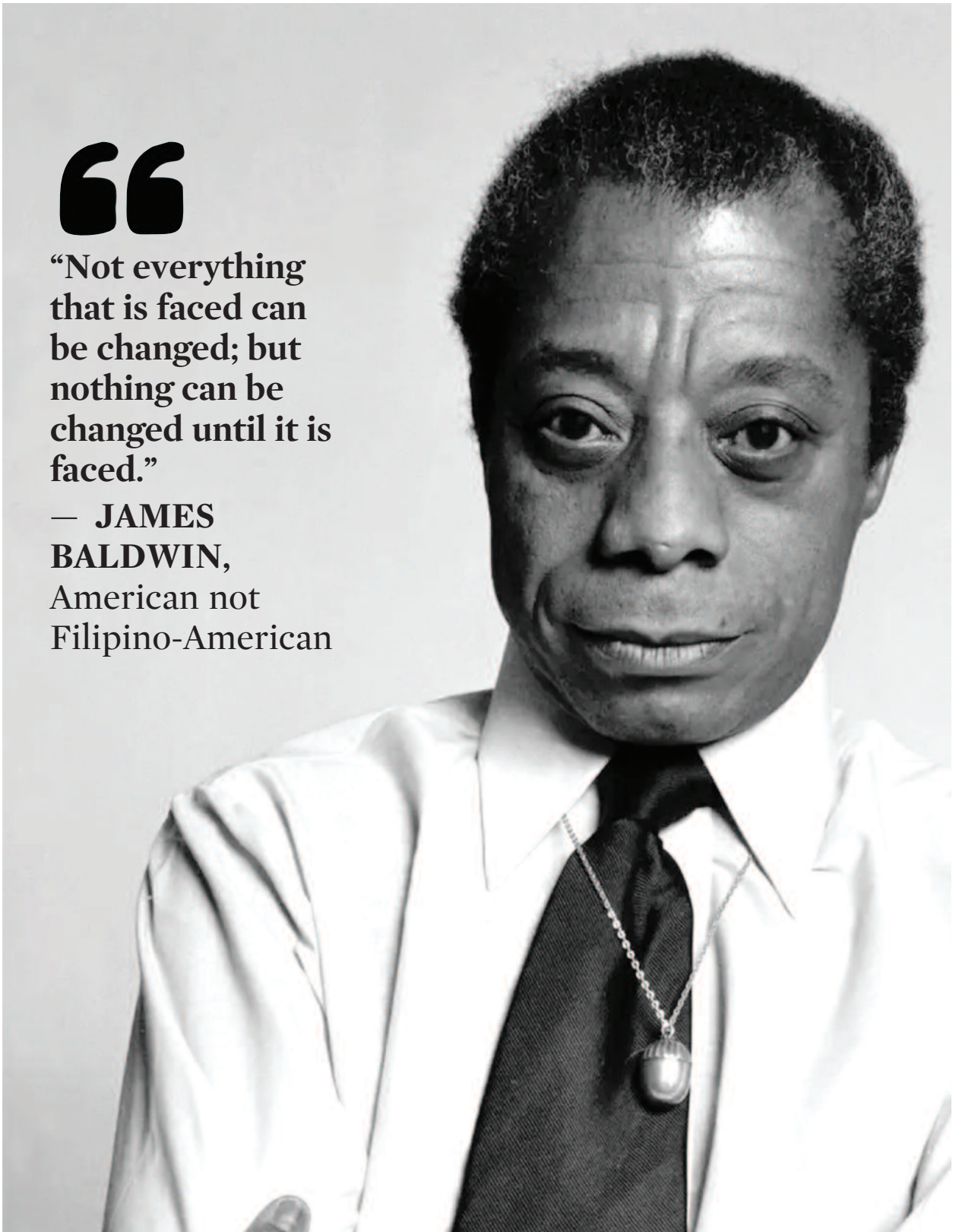
Journalists are already using AI. What newsrooms need is a human check built into the process. A machine can write the copy. It cannot take responsibility for it.

 Fearless
 Frank
 Free


“

“Not everything
that is faced can
be changed; but
nothing can be
changed until it is
faced.”

— JAMES
BALDWIN,
American not
Filipino-American



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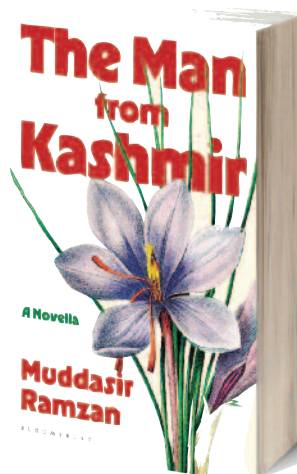
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Telangana Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, The Hindu Group Director N. Ram and Telangana Media Academy Chairman K. Sreenivas Reddy, along with senior office-bearers of press clubs and senior journalists, at the inaugural of the Federation of Press Clubs in Hyderabad on August 22.

Press Clubs Federation Launched in Hyderabad, Backs Press Freedom

The three-day event brought together media professionals from across the country to discuss declining public trust, editorial independence and the need for collective action to protect journalists.

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he Federation of Press Clubs, a national platform bringing together democratically managed press clubs, was formally launched in Hyderabad on August 22, with speakers calling for greater media accountability, stronger professional standards and collective efforts to safeguard press freedom.

The three-day programme, held from August 21 to 23, brought

together journalists, editors, media organisations and public representatives. The discussions focused on two pressing concerns facing Indian journalism: declining public confidence in the media and growing vulnerabilities faced by journalists in the course of their work.

The programme concluded on August 23 with the adoption of the Hyderabad Declaration, which out-

lines the Federation's proposed activities on press freedom, journalists' safety, legal assistance, welfare and professional development.

Telangana Governor Shiv Pratap Shukla, who attended the gathering on August 21, stressed the importance of accuracy, impartiality and credibility in journalism. He cautioned against allowing the race for speed and sensationalism to undermine the verification of facts, particularly as news spreads rapidly through digital platforms. Shukla also drew attention to the challenges posed by artificial intelligence, deep-fakes and misinformation. While acknowledging the opportunities offered by emerging technologies, he called for greater digital literacy and fact-checking. He emphasised the need to provide younger audiences, particularly those influenced by social media, with reliable information.

The Governor also expressed hope that the Federation would work towards journalists' welfare, social security and professional development.

Deputy CM calls for fearless journalism and protection of press freedom

At the formal launch on August 22, Telangana Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka called on journalists to question those in power and help create an informed citizenry. He said criticism of the government was a necessary part of democracy and public office holders should be willing to listen. Referring to the freedom struggle, Bhatti recalled the role of publications associated with Mahatma Gandhi, B.R. Ambedkar and other leaders in shaping public opinion. He cited Gandhi's Young India, Navajivan and Harijan, Ambedkar's



Telangana Media Academy Chairman K. Sreenivas Reddy, The Caravan Executive Editor Harish Singh Bal, former Supreme Court judge B. Sudarshan Reddy and senior journalist Sangeeta Barooah Pisharoty at a session during the Federation of Press Clubs event in Hyderabad.

Mooknayak and Bahishkrit Bharat, and Bal Gangadhar Tilak's Kesari and Mahratta as examples of journalism's contribution to political awareness. He also invoked Jawaharlal Nehru's reported remark to cartoonist Shankar, "Don't spare me, Shankar," to underline the importance of accepting criticism. Journalism, he said, must not become driven solely by commercial interests or balance sheets. He expressed concern over the diminishing authority of editors and the growing pressure to treat news as a commercial product. Bhatti also referred to a purification ritual reportedly held in Haldwani two days after Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge's rally. He questioned what such incidents said about equality and dignity nearly eight decades after Independence, and stressed the continuing relevance of Ambedkar's ideals. On the challenges posed by digital platforms, he cautioned that freedom of expression should not become a licence to damage reputations. The spread of rumours through artificial intelligence and voice cloning, he said, made credibility even more important. Bhatti urged the Federation of Press Clubs to become

a strong institution that protects press freedom, safeguards journalists' rights and promotes professional standards. He highlighted the need to address the safety, dignity and working conditions of journalists in districts and small towns, who often alert the government to gaps in public services and welfare delivery. He said Telangana had a tradition of free expression and urged journalists to hold those in power accountable while upholding professional standards. He also assured that the government would favourably consider allotting land for a press club.

N. Ram calls for a return to reporting fundamentals

The question of declining public trust came into sharper focus at the media conclave on August 23, when N. Ram, Director of The Hindu Group, called for a return to the fundamentals of journalism.

Speaking at a session, Ram said the credibility crisis could not be blamed entirely on external forces. Political propaganda, misinformation and disinformation contributed to the problem, but sections of the media had also weakened public trust through sensationalism, inadequate verification, communal

rhetoric and excessive proximity to political and corporate interests.

He argued that journalism needed to place greater emphasis on ground reporting, investigative work, long-form stories, data reporting and explanatory journalism. These forms of reporting, he said, could help media organisations rebuild credibility by providing audiences with context and evidence rather than simply repeating claims or competing for attention.

Ram also called for transparent codes of conduct, independent self-regulation and a statutory framework for media regulation. He stressed the importance of media literacy in schools to help students evaluate information critically.

On press freedom, he cautioned that constitutional and legal safeguards alone could not sustain a free press without public support. He recalled instances in which collective action by journalists had compelled governments to reconsider measures affecting the media, and argued that press clubs had a role in rebuilding public trust while defending professional independence.

The session was moderated by Uma Sudhir, senior journalist and former Executive Editor of NDTV. Pratik Sinha, founder of Alt News, highlighted the financial pressures affecting journalism and the need for media organisations to explore sustainable models that reduce dependence on technology platforms and their algorithms. Syeda Faiza, Digital Editor of The Siasat Daily, emphasised the responsibility of digital newsrooms to verify information before publishing it, particularly when dealing with real-time content. The discussion underlined the need to balance the speed of digital journalism with accuracy,

depth and accountability.

Collective action to protect journalists

The second session, titled "Protection of Journalists: The Need for Collectivisation to Protect Journalists from Coercion by the State", examined the legal, economic and institutional pressures facing media professionals.

Former Supreme Court judge B. Sudarshan Reddy expressed concern over what he described as the silence of journalists in response to attempts by the Union government to introduce laws governing the media. He called for journalists to unite and seek wider public support to defend their rights. Justice Reddy said the constitutional guarantee of freedom of speech and expression under Article 19 was important, but could not be viewed in isolation from the economic and political conditions in which journalists work. He linked journalists' growing vulnerabilities to economic pressures and divisions within the profession.

Hartosh Singh Bal, Executive Editor of The Caravan, raised concerns about the growing prevalence of contractual employment and the weakening of journalists' unions. He called for collective action to protect workers' rights and resist attempts to undermine trade unions.

K. Sreenivas Reddy, chairman of the Telangana Media Academy, also expressed concern about declining standards in news reporting. The session was moderated by Sangeeta Barooah Pisharoty, president of the Press Club of India and Assistant Secretary General of the Federation of Press Clubs.

Hyderabad Declaration sets out priorities

The Hyderabad Declaration, adopted

at the conclusion of the conclave, will serve as the Federation's charter of activities. It commits the organisation to coordinating with press clubs across India and creating a common platform for collective action on issues affecting journalism.

The declaration identifies the safety and security of journalists, including their physical, mental and employment-related concerns, as a priority. It proposes assistance for journalists, photojournalists and other media professionals facing distress, particularly during medical emergencies and financial hardship.

The Federation also plans to facilitate legal aid for journalists facing persecution by the State, corporate interests and other non-State entities while carrying out legitimate journalistic work. It has proposed legal intervention against legislation that adversely affects press freedom and freedom of expression.

Other measures outlined in the declaration include reporting fellowships for journalists working on underfunded subjects, research and publications on the state of the press, training programmes, workshops and conferences. The Federation also proposes to develop media literacy curricula and work with organisations to introduce such courses to students.

Welfare measures include efforts to facilitate pension schemes, insurance coverage and other social security benefits, alongside health programmes for journalists and their families. The declaration also commits the Federation to promoting ethical journalism and professional standards, and collaborating with national and international organisations working for press freedom and journalists' rights. 



IJU former president S.N. Sinha speaks at the Andhra Pradesh Union of Working Journalists (APUWJ) 70th Foundation Day celebrations in Vijayawada during a seminar on "The Press: Then and Now".

APUWJ Marks 70 Years, Seeks Action on Journalists' Issues

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he Andhra Pradesh Union of Working Journalists (APUWJ) celebrated its 70th Foundation Day in Vijayawada with a seminar on "The Press: Then and Now", highlighting the challenges facing the profession and renewing its call for better protection and welfare measures for journalists.

Vijayawada MP Keseneni Sivanath, popularly known as Chinni, attended the programme along with MLA Bonda Umamaheswara Rao, Indian Journalists Union (IJU) Secretary-General D. Soma Sundar and other representatives of journalists' organisations. The event included the unveiling of a new union logo and the release of a souvenir documenting the organisation's history and its journey.

APUWJ State President I.V. Subba Rao, who presided over the meeting, recalled the union's seven-decade journey and its efforts to protect press freedom, professional rights and journalists' welfare. He stressed the need for collective action as the media industry undergoes rapid changes.

Speakers at the seminar discussed the transition from print journalism to electronic, digital and social media. They noted that technological advances had accelerated news delivery but also created new challenges involving accuracy, credibility and verification.

Soma Sundar said journalists had a responsibility to uphold professional

values and safeguard the credibility of the media. He observed that the expansion of digital platforms had changed how people accessed information, while the pressure to publish quickly could come at the cost of verification.

Sivanath expressed concern over the circulation of misinformation and the growing influence of unverified content on digital platforms. Recalling the practices of an earlier generation, he said journalists once sought the version of the person concerned before publishing a report. He urged media organisations to prioritise accuracy and impartiality over speed.

He also criticised some YouTube channels for publishing content without proper registration or accountability, alleging that certain outlets presented information according to their own preferences. He said the government and media organisations needed to address concerns about the credibility of news.

The MP assured the journalists that he would take up their pending issues with the Central and State governments. He said he would seek action on long-standing grievances and work towards resolving them.

Bonda Umamaheswara Rao also expressed support for the journalists' demands and said he would cooperate in taking them forward.

APUWJ representatives submitted a memorandum to Sivanath and Bonda, seeking intervention on issues affecting journalists across Andhra Pradesh. Their demands included financial assistance of ₹25 lakh for the families of journalists who die in accidents or other circumstances, improved healthcare facilities for journalists and their families, restoration of railway travel concessions, resolution of pending house-site and housing issues, and an increase in the retirement age of working journalists from 58 to 65 years.

Speaking on this occasion, IJU steering committee member SN Sinha lamented the technological advancements made in the media industry but expressed serious concern about the deteriorating standards and the credibility crisis faced by the media.

In the earlier era, there was a strict mechanism to verify news reports before publication. In those days, Sinha said, the editorial teams claimed responsibility for what they

had published, but these days, accountability has been missing.

He narrated his own experiences as a photojournalist in New Delhi and how politicians used to view news reports and photographs that were published.

The working journalists' trade union movement in the country has fought many battles for job security, wage revision and better working conditions for media workers, in which the APUWJ has played an important role, he said.

The union also sought accident insurance coverage of Rs 10 lakh for every journalist. These demands, the representatives said, were part of a broader effort to improve the security and working conditions of media professionals.

K Jayaraj, General Secretary, APUWJ urged the government to address the long-pending grievances and ensure that journalists could carry out their responsibilities without compromising their safety or professional independence.

The celebrations brought together journalists representing print, electronic and digital media. Senior journalist S.K. Babu was felicitated at the programme. ❏



Vijayawada MP Keseneni Sivanath (Chinni) addresses the gathering at the Andhra Pradesh Union of Working Journalists' (APUWJ) 70th Foundation Day celebrations in Vijayawada (top). IJU Secretary-General D. Soma Sundar speaks at the seminar on "The Press: Then and Now" (below), which discussed press freedom, journalists' professional rights and welfare, and challenges posed by technological changes in the media industry.



Protestors chant slogans as they celebrate the resignation of Indian Education Minister, Dharmendra Pradhan, in Mumbai on 26 July 2026

Gen Z Protests Expose India's 'Lapdog Media', Usher in New Reporters

As young demonstrators turned their backs on TV anchors, a new generation of phone-and-mic journalists covered a movement that shook the establishment



India's massive youth-led movement didn't just earn an unexpected retreat from the government. It also showed Gen Z's distrust and anger toward the country's legacy media, which they perceive as pro-establishment.

Nowhere was this more evident than at the protest site at Delhi's Jantar Mantar area where a large banner displayed the faces of mainstream television news anchors - dubbing them "India's worst enemies", "more dangerous than terrorists or anti-nationalists."

The protests in the capital in June-July were led by the satirical Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) and culminated in the resignation of India's education minister over repeated exam paper leaks, handing a rare setback to prime minister Narendra Modi, who's been in power for over 12 years.

Several videos showed protesters heckling, accosting and even physically assaulting reporters covering the protests with chants of 'Godi media', which can be translated as "lapdog

Karen Rebelo

The writer is an independent journalist reporting on technology and its impacts on people in India.

media."

Manisha Pande, editor-in-chief of independent outlet Newslandry, said she wasn't surprised by the anger directed at mainstream Indian TV news channels. "We've been leading up to this moment for a very long time," she told me. "A large number of people, irrespective of their ideology or the party they vote for, have come to believe that their real-life concerns are simply no longer reflected in prime-time news."

Why cockroaches?

The Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) started out as a joke - a satirical reaction to Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant's disparaging remarks in May likening some unemployed youth to cockroaches.

Abhijeet Dipke, who at the time was pursuing a Master's degree in Boston, embraced the insult and posted an AI-generated image showing a cockroach sporting sunglasses addressing a large crowd.

Dipke, 30, would go on to form the Cockroach Janta Party (or cockroach people's party), intended to be a play on Modi's Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP). His social media post listed "unemployed, lazy, chronically online, and ability to rant professionally" as eligibility criteria for anyone willing to join. Dipke had previously worked in the opposition Aam Aadmi Party's social media team.

Within days the CJP's Instagram account amassed millions of followers, overtaking the BJP's account that had 8.7 million followers at the time.

Saurabh Shukla, co-founder of The Red Mike, an independent news outlet on YouTube that won praise for its coverage of the protests, said

he sensed early on that this was going to be something big. The Red Mike makes most of its revenue through YouTube.

Shukla reached out to Dipke, who he knew from before, and asked if he was up for an interview on camera. That video, published on 21 May, got over a million views.

"At that time Dipke had no plans to come to India. He had no plans of forming the CJP, nothing at all," Shukla said. "Woh hansimazakmein [in a light-hearted way] we did that interview and it exploded."

The CJP channelled widespread anger over student suicides related to



a retest of the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), a highly competitive exam to study medicine. At least 12 students across the country died allegedly by suicide in around a month between the cancellation of the NEET exam on 12 May and a retest on 21 June, the Indian Express reported. The number of student suicides linked to the exam, which a court gave a nod to in 2016, is much higher.

Delhi's Jantar Mantar grounds, a designated protest site, became the venue for the Cockroach Janta Party to rally people to its cause. The CJP's call for reforms in an education system that prioritises test scores and

rote memorisation over learning struck a chord.

Many young Indians believed the system viewed them as vermin to be quashed and the chief justice, who later clarified his cockroach remark, had only said the quiet part aloud. An acute lack of jobs and simmering discontent over frequent infrastructure lapses in several BJP-ruled states saw people across age groups, religions and socio-economic strata join the protests as well.

The demonstrations in June-July were primarily in Delhi. But they also saw young people hold large gatherings in Mumbai and Bengaluru. The movement eventually became larger than the CJP or its leaders. It transformed into an outlet to express dissent, which has practically been criminalised in India. Modi himself coined a derogatory term for protestors: 'andolanjeevi' or those who survive off protests.

"The protest sites at Jantar Mantar and elsewhere across India have become more than places of political dissent," independent journalist Neha Dixit wrote. "They have turned into cultural fairs - spaces for celebration, catharsis and belonging."

The Gen Z reporters on the ground

The movement drew parallels to the anti-government Gen Z protests which overthrew incumbent regimes in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal, where anger was also directed at legacy news media. However, unlike other recent revolutions in South Asia, where Gen Z organised on platforms like Discord and Telegram, the movement in India seemed less co-ordinated.

Most of the videos shot by protesters themselves were uploaded to

Instagram, whose parent company Meta is reported to be censoring posts on New Delhi's request.

Vipul Kumar, a Gen Z journalist with independent news outlet The Wire, said he was asked twice or even three times by protesters if he belonged to a lapdog media outlet. "Especially the young people that were out there were extremely vigilant that no establishment media should push their narrative and that they don't demean or defame protesters," Kumar said.

As Delhi Police restricted mobile internet services at the protest site, Kumar would interview people, record visuals and head to the exit to relay information to the newsroom. He relied on his phone, a monopod and a small mic to report.

Kumar told me journalists carrying a traditional mic with a logo were perceived as being pro-establishment, whereas those that used a more discreet collar mic or Bluetooth mic were left unbothered by protesters.

"Any person with those mics was

questioned," said Kumar, who stressed that even reporters who didn't belong to any establishment media but used a traditional mic were heckled.

Newslaundry's Manisha Pande said a TV mic has come to symbolise the government in people's minds. "It's remarkable that the microphone - the very tool that once symbolised journalism - has now come to represent something bad, even hostile. For many people, it has come to represent an uncaring State," she said.

India's news ecosystem

India was ranked 157 out of 180 countries in the RSF's World Press Freedom Index for 2026. Gautam Adani and Mukesh Ambani, India's two richest men and close allies of Narendra Modi, own vast TV news networks.

Journalists who question the BJP are often harassed. Prominent broadcast journalists have migrated to platforms like YouTube after finding no place for themselves in corporate-owned newsrooms that depend on ad revenue.

Independent news media like The News Minute, Article 14, Scroll and others doing accountability journalism survive precariously and face constant threats of litigation and scrutiny into their finances.

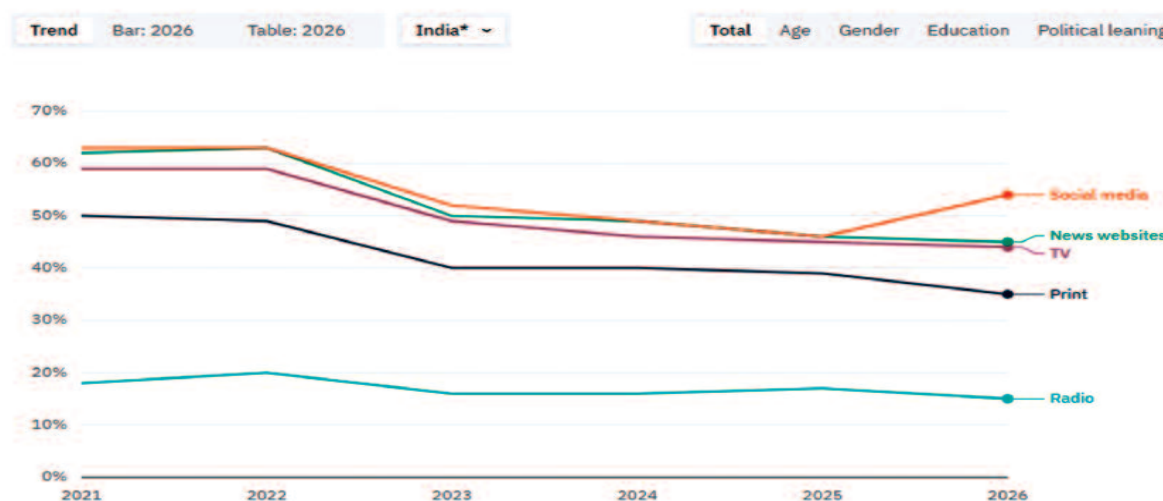
Much of legacy TV news' credibility crisis stems from the way it has demoralised those who have challenged the State: university students, farmers, Adivasis (indigenous people) and protesters against the Citizenship Amendment Act, many of whom were Muslims.

Television news channels, whose audiences are middle-aged and older Indians, have also been called out for stoking Hindu-Muslim animosity, spreading pro-government disinformation and ignoring opposition voices.

The proportion of English-speaking Indians who turn to TV for news is much higher among adults over 54 (54%) than among those under 25 (30%), according to the Digital News Report 2026 tracking news consumption habits globally. Most young Indians get their news from

News sources - India*

Proportion of people who accessed news from each source in the last week



Data from the Reuters Institute's Digital News Report - CC-BY

Instagram (61%), YouTube (55%) and WhatsApp (53%).

The recent protests were often blacked out by mainstream TV news channels even though they had overtaken the capital in July, with authorities shutting down several metro routes to Jantar Mantar.

According to Red Mike's Saurabh Shukla, who previously worked with NDTV, now owned by the Adani Group, what differentiated independent outlets from legacy media is that they never let go of the story. "This was our chance as independent journalists to cover it the way it should be covered," he told me. Shukla said he and PEEK TV's co-founders Priyanshi Sharma and Vedanta Agarwal were there from day one.

"Every day we did something," he said. "In fact, when there were only 50 people on the 22 or 23 June I was there; when there were 20 people, I was there; when it was raining, I was there; when it was very hot I was there."

Reporting from the protests

Journalist Priyanshi Sharma, one of the founders of PEEK TV, a short-form video news outlet, said the blackout by legacy media at the onset of the protests caused an information vacuum filled by independent journalists, news creators and commentators on video platforms.

When the protests seemed to be fizzling out, Sonam Wangchuk, a well-known educator and activist, joined their ranks by going on a hunger strike.

By day 21 of his hunger strike, when Wangchuk had lost a dangerous amount of weight, with fears that he might die on the government's watch, the Delhi Police forcibly removed him from Jantar Mantar, unwittingly invigorating protesters.

PEEK TV's Priyanshi Sharma said she fielded many questions on their reporting and read comments alleging the CJP was bribing them for news coverage.

"While we were covering this protest for that whole month," Sharma said, "a lot of times people would ask us, and some of our seniors also would ask us, 'Why are you doing this? Just stop doing it! It's not going to lead to anything.' We kept reporting because it was a protest that had genuine students participating in the heart of Delhi. As journalists, we also felt that hunger strikes should not be normalised."

On 20 July, when protesters tried to march to the parliament, Delhi

"It's not these reporters who are behind the rot in legacy media that we are seeing," she said. "It's the owners and the anchors and the higher-ups, not the reporters who are just reporting the story on the ground."

Police and other paramilitary forces unleashed a violent crackdown involving tear gas, pellet guns and indiscriminate charges. While TV news focused on the policemen who were injured, newspapers like The Hindu and The Hindustan Times fact-checked the official narrative that no pellet guns were used on the day.

Youtuber Samdish Bhatia's video documenting the violence in the capital, where Bhatia can be heard repeatedly calling out to his cameraman Parth to show police and security forces raining blows on protesters, has over 6 million views. The

video on YouTube has several replies from people contributing small sums in gratitude and to sustain the channel.

Powerful artificial intelligence CCTV cameras at every corner, facial recognition software, and even a policeman wearing smart glasses were seen at Jantar Mantar. Food delivery apps were barred from bringing food to protesters and restaurants sending food were even questioned by the police.

Yet India's Gen Z were under-terred. Videos showed them fanning each other as the crowds swelled at Jantar Mantar. They vented their anger through humour, quirk and irreverent profanity-laden posters and chants not seen or heard in any recent protests in India, where respect for elders is ingrained since childhood.

While the BJP's social media game has always been strong, entrenching itself on Facebook, WhatsApp and X, the party was no match for an unserious generation whose memes and dance reels went viral.

"This was called an Instagram protest and we were always Instagram first," PEEK TV's Priyanshi Sharma said.

Sharma, who worked as an anchor with NDTV in the past, was sad to see reporters being heckled by protesters. "It's not these reporters who are behind the rot in legacy media that we are seeing," she said. "It's the owners and the anchors and the higher-ups, not the reporters who are just reporting the story on the ground."

Journalism or activism?

PEEK TV, barely a year old and launched by two Gen Z journalists, got a shoutout at Jantar Mantar's 'wall of fame' poster, mentioning

journalists who did a commendable job.

But the reception was not always uniform.

Sharma said a group of protesters who didn't appear to be from Delhi got verbally aggressive when she asked them if they were lost on their way to the parliament in the absence of CJP volunteers who could direct them.

Shukla from The Red Mike said he faced a dilemma on 20 July while reporting in the evening from Delhi's Janpath road, when there was mayhem and stones were pelted at the police. Every protest has some fringe elements that try to spoil it, he said, and he thought showing the violence would ruin the entire movement.

"We were in a dilemma but we showed it," Shukla told me. "We said, 'Look, the police are chasing them away. There's stone pelting happening from that side.'"

The Wire's Vipul Kumar said not everyone reporting from Jantar Mantar was practising journalism. Some, he said, were indulging in activism and, in a few instances, vigilantism. Kumar pointed to the incident where a reporter pulled down the face covering of a protester while filming him, claiming he perpetrated violence.

"The line was blurred in those couple of weeks," Kumar said. "People were desperate to make heroes. I don't know why."

Priyanshi Sharma said the protests also changed what is perceived as political. For example, many brands who shied away from political content have now expressed interest in collaborating with PEEK TV, which earns revenue primarily from such partnerships.

In the aftermath of the protests, a bill promising stricter punishment

for those who leak official documents was passed in the monsoon session of parliament, with MPs using slang like 'clock it', 'delulu,' and 'FOMO' for the first time.

Modi, who asked his ministers to be more active on Instagram, posted a vertical selfie video on the platform in his bid to woo Gen Z.

In another video, he said he forgave the youth who used profanities against him. But BJP supporters doxxed young women, harassed them, threatened to rape them for insulting the prime minister. People have posted pictures of hoardings urging Gen Z to pledge against making "anti-prime minister slogans."



Meanwhile, prime-time news speculated if the agitation was foreign-funded and algorithmically amplified.

Newslandry's Manisha Pande described prime-time news' response as self-preservation. "They have to say, 'These are bad people, these are rioters, these are terrible people,' because their own survival depends on discrediting them," she said. "They have gone so far in being with the establishment (that) they are pretty much the establishment right now. They are an arm of this government."

What's next for India's media?

When asked how Indian legacy media can regain the trust of its audiences, Shukla was sceptical. He said there are many things legacy media should do which they are incapable of doing. "When you take money from the government and run the channel, then you will not be able to question the government," he said, referring to the prominence of state advertising in the revenue of legacy outlets.

Shukla had just returned from a reporting trip in the eastern state of Jharkhand, where students are fighting for a slew of examination reforms inspired by the protests at Jantar Mantar. During his trip, Shukla met a few young people who wanted to be journalists after watching him on YouTube.

One of these youths who asked Shukla for advice told him he didn't have the money to go to Delhi to cover the protests but had been covering the Jharkhand protest since day one. "We just need hard work, a phone and a small mic," Shukla told him. "You need to have the courage within you," Shukla told me. "That boy was convinced and I saw him do a lot of good work."

Spurred by the CJP protests, Gen Alpha kids in India (those born after 2010) have started making videos exposing the dismal state of local government schools and civic amenities. In two separate videos from Maharashtra, children in school uniforms pretended to be reporters showing the condition of roads riddled with potholes during the monsoons in their respective villages. The pretend microphones in their hands were rolled-up umbrellas and empty water bottles.

— Courtesy
Reuters.institute

Expecting an Inclusive and Effective Press Council in India



**Nava
Thakuria**

s the Union government of India has nominated 13 media professionals to fill the vacancies in its statutory and autonomous body, the Press Council of India (PCI), the journalist fraternity now hopes for better days ahead in the largest democracy on Earth. After a prolonged delay that drew severe criticism from various quarters for not completing the Press Council of India (PCI), the central government in New Delhi reconstituted the 15th council on 7 October 2026, adding six editors and seven working journalists belonging to newspapers and news agencies. The PCI led by Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai (retired) had 14 members, including lawmakers, representatives from the Bar Council of India (BCI), University Grants Commission (UGC) and Sahitya Akademi, along with a few newspaper owners. The 29-member 15th council will expire on 18 December 2027.

"In exercise of the powers conferred by clause (a) of sub-section (3) and sub-section (5) of section 5 read with sub-section (1) of section 6 of the Press Council Act, 1978 (37 of 1978), the Central Government hereby nominates the following members (editors namely Pradeep Kumar Jain, Sayed Raza Husain Rizvi, Ankur Dua, Aparna Shukla, Raj Parwana/Narender Singh and Vinod Bajpai, as well as working journalists namely Vinod Kohli, Geetarth Pathak,

Prajananda Chaudhuri, Kingshuk Pramanik, C K Nayak, Prasanna Kumar Mohanty and Bijoy Kakchingtabam) to the Press Council of India," said a notification from the Union Information and Broadcasting Ministry.

For months, however, the quasi-judicial PCI had been functioning without representatives from the working journalists' category, including editors. The PCI was initially set up in 1966 under the Press Council Act, 1965, and later re-established in 1979 under the Press Council Act, 1978, to ensure the freedom and quality of mainstream media in the South Asian nation. Justice R.P. Desai, who served as PCI chairperson from 17 June 2022 to 16 December 2025, assumed the same charge again on 24 April 2026. The retired Supreme Court judge was nominated for another three-year term. But the quota for working journalists remained vacant, leaving the 15th

The PCI led by Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai (retired) had 14 members, including lawmakers, representatives from the Bar Council of India (BCI), University Grants Commission (UGC) and Sahitya Akademi, along with a few newspaper owners.

PCI council incomplete (<http://www.presscouncil.nic.in/CurrentMemberPCI.aspx>).

Months earlier, a Rajya Sabha member raised the issue. Sasmit Patra also urged the Union government in New Delhi to complete the current PCI so that the media watchdog could perform its duty to safeguard democratic principles and

strengthen media accountability. Patra, a Biju Janata Dal leader from Odisha, asserted that constituting a full-fledged council after the term of the 14th council, which expired on 5 October 2024, was necessary for a free, fair and responsible press. Earlier, the concerned ministry informed Parliament that the process of nominating members under the working journalists' category was sub judice before the Delhi High Court. Besides the chairperson (by convention, a retired Supreme Court judge is usually appointed), the PCI comprises 28 members, of whom 13 represent professional journalists. Another six members represent newspaper management, including owners; two each are drawn from large, medium and small newspapers, while one member represents news agencies. The two Houses of Parliament usually send five members, while three individuals are nominated from the BCI, UGC and Sahitya Akademi. Representatives of small newspapers also have a place on the council.

The PCI's functioning members included Dr Sudhanshu Trivedi and Brij Lal (Rajya Sabha lawmakers); Dr Sambit Patra, Naresh Ganpat Mhaske and Kali Charan Munda (Lok Sabha members); Prof. Ashwini K. Mohapatra (UGC); Manan Kumar Mishra (BCI); Dr K. Sreenivasarao (Sahitya Akademi); and Sudhir Kumar Panda, M.V. Shreyams Kumar, Gurinder Singh, Arun Kumar Tripathi, Braj Mohan Sharma and Arti Tripathi, who either own newspapers or are involved in their management across the large, medium and small categories.

The crisis for the PCI began when some national journalists' organisations, including the Indian Journalists Union and the All India Working News Cameramen's



Association, legally opposed a change in the PCI rules to select members from various press clubs instead of the national forum of working journalists. They argued that press clubs are primarily recreational bodies and their coverage areas are normally limited to a particular region, city or town. Many press clubs offer membership to non-working journalists, such as academicians, writers, film personalities and diplomats, to broaden their influence. The organisations argued that this could mean press club members might not adequately represent professional media personnel at crucial junctures.

The robust Indian print media fraternity comprises over 100,000 publications recognised by the Registrar of Newspapers for India, in various publication frequencies and languages. The billion-plus nation also supports nearly 400 satellite news channels, along with thousands of portals, WhatsApp channels and other digital media outlets. Revenue from newspaper sales and advertising has continued to shrink since the Covid-19 pandemic, as alternative media outlets began dominating the financial market. However, many

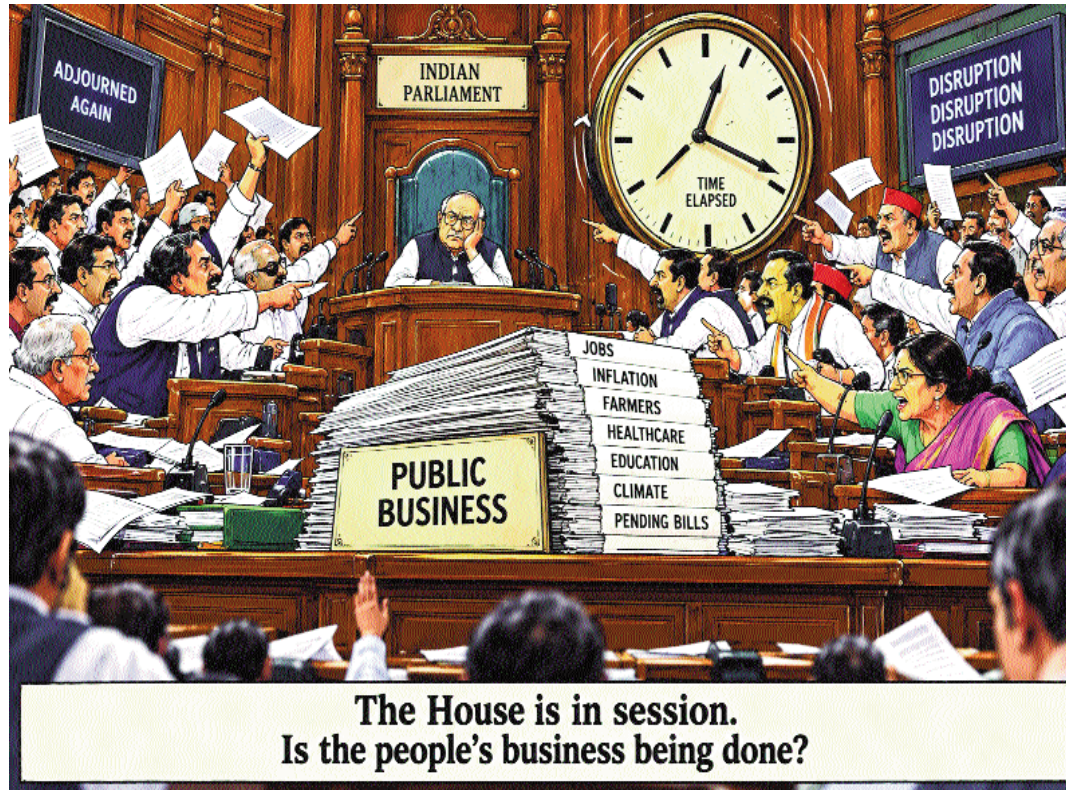
print media observers believe traditional media will gradually recover from its sudden losses. A resurgence in readership is expected as consumers experiencing digital fatigue turn back to print outlets for reliable information. It is estimated that Indian print media readership will nearly double by 2030.

The greatest irony is that the PCI has the authority to accept complaints against any newspaper, news agency, editor or working journalist for professional misconduct that lowers journalistic standards. However, it has limited powers to enforce its guidelines by penalising print outlets, their editors and working journalists for violations. Many media professionals are demanding that the PCI be reorganised, with its name changed to the Media Council of India and television channels, radio and digital platforms brought under its jurisdiction.

As the Press Council has the authority to make observations when the conduct of a government is found to be inappropriate with regard to the guaranteed freedom of the press, the journalist fraternity is calling for an empowered council with a wider remit.



CARTOONS OF THE MONTH



'The Most Accurate Truth'

After CBS News hit the brakes on a 60 Minutes story about CECOT prison, the League of Latin American Citizens decided it was time to start their own newsroom. Within months, El Grito Media has become a definitive resource.



**Carolina
Abbott Galvão**

On July 7 in Houston, an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent shot and killed Lorenzo Salgado Araujo, a fifty-two-year-old Mexican man. Audrey Colocho and Katherine Torres of El Grito Media—which this spring started publishing stories directly on Instagram, X, YouTube, and TikTok instead of on a dedicated site—tried to piece together what happened, beginning with a social media post. Soon, they had collected more footage, from more angles—providing a definitive account that became a source for major news outlets.

El Grito, Spanish for "the yell," based in Washington, DC, is an initiative of the League of Latin American Citizens (LULAC), which provides the newsroom with funding but no editorial oversight. The staff, led by editor Arleen Aguasvivas, comprises two full-time members, one fellow, and seven interns: Colocho is a rising senior at the University of California, Berkeley, and

Torres, who just graduated from Wellesley, lives in Boston. Their short videos, which cover a range of subjects affecting the Latino community, from immigration and law enforcement to mental health and childcare, attract tens of thousands of views.

After literally months of working on that, they called us up," Proaño told me, of CBS, "and said, 'Hey, we're going to kill the story.' The team were very apologetic, and I could tell that they themselves were disheartened by it.

Juan Proaño, LULAC's chief executive, told me that he began entertaining the idea of working on a media-related project last year when CBS halted a 60 Minutes story about a group of Venezuelan detainees deported by the Trump administration to El Salvador's CECOT prison. LULAC had filed a claim with the federal government seeking compensation for the "wrongful arrest, detention, and removal" of the prisoners—many of whom have said they endured physical and mental abuse while in custody. "After literally months of working on that, they called us up," Proaño told me, of CBS, "and said, 'Hey, we're going to kill the story.' The team were very apologetic, and I could tell that



they themselves were disheartened by it."

Though the segment eventually ran, Proaño began to feel as though the writing was on the wall: LULAC was not going to be able to get Latino stories "through the more traditional national media networks." He decided something needed to change.

He wasn't quite sure what that would look like until Aguasvivas, who was in talks with him about a role at LULAC, spelled it out. "I was like, 'You want a newsroom,'" she told me. Proaño asked her to run it. Aguasvivas, a video producer and journalist who worked at NBC News for nearly a decade, made sure to set up ethical guidelines: "I got guaranteed, in writing, that regardless of who our funders might be or the advocacy side of what the organization might be pushing, LULAC

would always respect that El Grito is editorially independent," she told me. Transparency is a priority too. Whenever her reporters receive information from LULAC's advocacy arm, she said, reporters disclose that connection.

The majority of El Grito's staff is either in college or recently graduated. Aguasvivas has advised them on ambitious investigations and timely reporting, on ICE shootings and Supreme Court cases that engage the Latino community. In states such as Maine and Texas, entire neighborhoods "have received calls" from El Grito journalists, she said. "They are doggedly determined."

With its reels, El Grito Media is also educating its audience: One video features Brittany Francis, the executive director of Peoples' Counsel, a nonprofit that advocates for survivors of police abuse, who

explains why law enforcement can't stop bystanders from sharing video. In another, Ana Paula Sanchez, a student journalist who is also a rising senior at UC Berkeley, outlines financial risks to immigrants taking on loans.

Torres told me she believes El Grito Media is providing a valuable service by publishing old-school journalism on social media platforms that tend to be flooded with biased content or misinformation. People often get sucked into "black holes," or echo chambers, but El Grito doesn't "have an agenda of what they want Latinos to think or vote," she said. Next, Torres and Colocho are investigating the use of excessive force by the El Paso Police Department. "We want to present the most accurate truth," Torres said. ❏

— *Courtesy Columbia Journalism Review*

PRESS FREEDOM

Scroll Instagram posts on Kashmir pellet victims withheld in India, fourth block since June

The other posts that were restricted in the country were about a meat ban in Amritsar and a US case about an alleged plot to kill a Khalistani leader



Instagram has blocked four posts by Scroll on the social media platform since June, citing "legal requirements" under the Union government's Information Technology Rules.

The platform informed Scroll through a message on its dashboard that access to the content had been restricted in India "through an automated system implemented pursuant to legal requirements" under the rules.

On August 6, a post about Scroll's report on how most pellet gun victims in Kashmir have not received compensation even a decade after they were injured was blocked. A second post with a photo in which pellet injuries were not visible, published later in the day, was also restricted. Instagram did not provide a specific reason for the actions.

On July 5, a post relating to a Scroll article about how Kashmir's turbulent history has, for several years, provided grist for Bollywood creators looking to generate xenophobic content, was initially restricted when it included a screenshot from teaser of the film Chauhaan, showing pellet injuries. A separate post with a photograph of Srinagar's Lal Chowk was allowed, and is still available. No specific reason was provided for this.

The platform also blocked a post on June 22 about an article explaining how a ban on the sale of meat in Amritsar had triggered a



legal challenge and raked up a contentious history. It did not specify a reason for doing so, apart from citing legal requirements under the IT rules.

Three weeks prior to this, on June 1, the platform restricted a post relating to a Scroll article reporting about a United States court postponing the sentencing of Indian citizen Nikhil Gupta, who pleaded guilty in an alleged plot to kill Khalistani leader Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. In this case as well, Instagram did not provide a specific reason for why the post was blocked.

The posts were restricted only on Instagram, and remain visible on other Meta-owned platforms such as Facebook and Threads, even though they include the same visuals. Scroll has requested comment from Meta, the parent company of Instagram. This story will be updated if we receive one. 

— Courtesy Scroll.in



Pakistan: Kashmir News Blackout Highlights Media Crackdown

A sweeping crackdown on protests has also spread to the media. In Pakistan-administered Kashmir, protests calling for electoral reform were violently suppressed and led to mass arrests. At the same time, in recent weeks, the authorities have also stepped up measures to restrict media coverage of the region, where legislative assembly elections have been underway since July 27.

Internet access was suspended in the region on June 5 and has only been partially restored. On August 2, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting blocked access to the Al Jazeera website, accusing the media outlet of sensationalised news coverage of the region.

On August 4, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting then imposed new draconian guidelines: under the new 'Foreign Media Facilitation Guidelines 2026', foreign correspondents - including Pakistani journalists working for

international media outlets - are required to obtain a No Objection Certificate (NOC) to cover news outside the cities of Islamabad, Lahore, and Karachi.

The guidelines also stipulate that media professionals may have their accreditation revoked for vague reasons such as "acts contrary to Pakistan's ideology, sovereignty, security, or public order".

The crackdown also targeted Razi Tahir and Muhammad Saif. These two independent journalists, who work for the YouTube channel The Independent Lens, have been detained in Islamabad since August 1, after covering a demonstration in the capital in support of the protest movement in Kashmir.

Tahir had previously been arrested on June 23 under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), before being released on bail on July 8, 2026. This controversial law, amended in 2025, exposes journalists to criminal penalties based on

vague concepts, such as the dissemination of "false information."

Beyond Kashmir, legislation is increasingly being used to crack down on media professionals. On July 29, the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) summoned freelance journalist Asad Ali Toor under Section 26A of the PECA, which penalises the dissemination of "false information".

State pressure is also being exerted on newsrooms. In July, journalist Munizae Jahangir, vice chair of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, was forced to leave Aaj TV after 11 years at the helm of her program Spotlight.

"There was external pressure putting the management under severe strain," Jahangir told RSF. "The situation for journalists has never been so serious."

Pakistan ranks 153rd out of 180 countries in RSF's 2026 World Press Freedom Index.

— Courtesy RSF



Kim Dong-hyeon and Haecho, the two Korean activists who were captured by Israeli forces after attempting to sail to Gaza on a humanitarian mission

South Korea's Travel Ban Makes Reporting from Dangerous Countries Difficult

Penalties for travel to blacklisted countries have recently risen, while aid workers and activists say they have also been caught up in the law

Raphael Rashid

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hortly after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, freelance photographer Jang Jinyoung crossed from Poland into Lviv and travelled on to Kyiv, where he spent a fortnight document-

ing the war. South Korea's foreign ministry had designated Ukraine off-limits days earlier, making unauthorised visits a criminal offence. He knew he was breaking the law but went anyway, as no Korean



A man photographs a crater at the site of a Russian missile impact in Ukraine

journalist had yet reported from inside the country.

"Everything back home was being relayed through foreign outlets. I wanted to see it more directly for myself," Jang told the Guardian.

On his return he was placed under criminal investigation. After refusing to accept a summary fine, a court north-west of Seoul this month convicted him and fined him 5m won (US\$3,600).

Many countries release travel advisories for their citizens, but South Korea is one of the few developed democracies that criminalises visits to blacklisted countries. On Friday, the country's maximum penalty for such an offence tripled -

from a year in prison or a 10m-won (US\$7,200) fine to three years or a 30m won (US\$21,700) fine, at the court's discretion.

The government says the system is necessary to protect citizens' lives and safety, but critics argue the restrictions go beyond what's required, and those with a genuine need to travel, including journalists and aid workers, are being unfairly caught out by the law.

The foreign ministry says it grants 5,000 to 6,000 exceptions a year, including about 50 to journalists. But permission is discretionary and decided case by case. In Jang's case, the application process for Ukraine specifically had not opened

when he departed for the country.

His case has been condemned by domestic and international press groups, and he is appealing against his conviction and plans to challenge the law at the constitutional court. He wants the permit system replaced with one where journalists simply notify the authorities of their plans.

"Permission is control, and control over what gets covered reaches into editorial territory. The ban is the biggest barrier there is for anyone trying to report what is really happening in a conflict."

The travel ban in its current form began in 2007, when 23 members of a South Korean church travelled to Afghanistan against government

warnings and were seized by the Taliban. Two were shot dead, and the remaining 21 returned after Seoul negotiated directly with their captors. Within weeks the government designated Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia as travel-ban areas, making unauthorised visits a crime.

The current restrictions currently cover 10 countries in their entirety, including Ukraine, Iran, Iraq, Sudan and Haiti, with partial bans on a dozen more, among them Myanmar and Gaza. The decision to impose stricter penalties followed 2025 revelations that hundreds of South Koreans had been lured to Cambodia by fake job adverts and held in compounds run by fraud syndicates. The areas banned by the government in Cambodia were downgraded in July, after the ministry recorded a 94% fall in reports of Koreans being confined against their will.

But the law has entangled people travelling for reasons far removed from the scam compounds, including journalists, rights activists and aid workers.

Data released to the office of opposition lawmaker Kim Gunn shows the ministry reported 22 people to police in the first seven months of this year - more than double the total for 2025 and the most since 2020. Over the past decade, it has reported 120 people.

All but one of this year's cases concerned Europe, where the travel ban covers all of Ukraine, along with stretches of Russia and Belarus on the Ukrainian border.

Earlier this month, police opened a criminal investigation into six South Korean activists who had travelled to Kyiv to lobby against the forced repatriation of two North Korean prisoners of war.

The law also allows the ministry to invalidate passports without any

criminal case. It used this in March against Kim Ahyun, a peace activist known as Haecho, as she prepared to join a Gaza aid flotilla. On Thursday the Seoul administrative court rejected her challenge. Unless it is overturned, she cannot travel abroad at all. In a statement, the foreign ministry said that by restricting passport use, the law had played an important role in protecting Korean lives over two decades, and denied that it amounted to censorship.

"It is the minimum measure necessary to secure the lives and physical safety of citizens in dangerous areas", it said.

Jong-Chul Kim, a public interest lawyer who has been assisting Haecho, said the system was disproportionate, punishing people after they travel and stripping passports before they go.

"The travel ban system, which has a strongly paternalistic character, not only infringes on individuals' freedom to make their own choices regarding movement, but also seriously reduces

the space for international civil society activities", he said.

Aid agencies working out of South Korea face the same restrictions and have long pressed for overseas relief work to be recognised as a category in its own right, saying they cannot get permission under the current system. A bill to do that has sat before parliament since 2024.

Jun Mo Lee, who runs the Korean office of the Irish aid agency Concern Worldwide, said that with proper security systems, risk assessments and guidelines in place, there were many countries where humanitarian workers could safely be allowed to travel.

"What we need is not less protection, but a more practical and proportionate system that balances safety with humanitarian access," Lee said.

— *Courtesy*
The Guardian



***It is the minimum
 measure necessary to secure
 the lives and physical safety
 of citizens in dangerous
 areas.***

2.44 Lakh Social Media Posts Taken Down In March-July 2026: Centre's Data



The duration of these takedowns coincided with the widespread protests by students led by the Cockroach Janata Party on the NEET paper leak issue.

Multiple government departments asked social media platforms to take down 2.44 lakh pieces of content between March and July this year, an official note said on Thursday.

The government's fact-check body run by the Press Information Bureau said that the IT Intermediaries Rules 2021 were amended in February to expedite action against unlawful content, and the takedown time was reduced to three hours from 36 hours.

"During the period from March 2026 to July 2026, around 2.98 lakh URLs were sent for takedown, out of which 2.44 lakhs were sent by states (82 per cent). Of these, 51 thousand URLs were sent by I4C in the context of cyber, infrastructure, and stock-investment scams," the PIB Fact Check account said on X.

The duration of these takedowns coincided with the widespread protests by students led by the Cockroach Janata Party on the NEET paper leak issue.

Several political leaders, social media influencers and others reported that their content was being blocked on social media platforms, mainly on Meta's Instagram.

The government's fact check unit said that the majority of the unlawful content intimated by I4C were related to transnational financial frauds, CSAM (Child Sexual

Abuse Material) and offences related to women and children in the last two years.

The details were shared by the PIB Fact Check account in response to recent reports on Meta automating content blocking to comply with the government's three-hour takedown requirement.

PIB Fact Check called the report misleading and said, "The API integration with Meta took place in 2025 at the request of Meta." The government's fact check unit said that with 600 million users in India posting up to 78,703 items every 68 seconds, it is reasonable to expect that on average, one of these items may not be lawful.

"The State and its instrumentalities cannot abdicate their responsibilities and allow free rein to lawlessness in cyberspace," PIB Fact Check said.

The fact check unit said that IT intermediaries act on intimations issued by competent authorities. "Only authorised officers as notified by the concerned ministry or state government can send intimations for unlawful content takedown through Sahyog. All such intimations are reviewed by the concerned governments periodically," the fact check unit said. ❏

— Courtesy
#e4m



‘The Man from Kashmir’: Life Unfolds Amid Collapse

Mudassir Ramzan's prose simulates the communal and repetitive participation of oral storytelling.



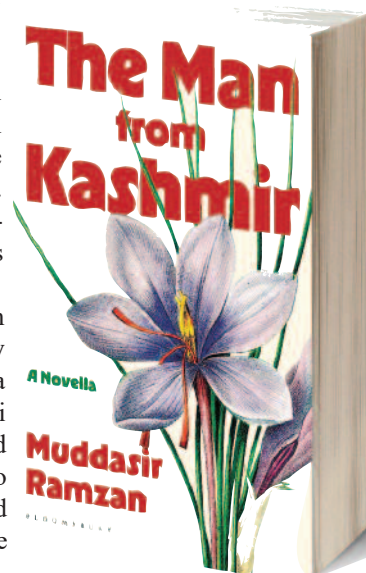
Kamran Bashir

Mudassir Ramzan's novella *The Man from Kashmir* opens with an epigraph from James Joyce's *Ulysses*: "History...is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake."

These lines are spoken by Stephen Dedalus in an uncomfortable conversation with his headmaster, Mr Deasy. Deasy rambles on about his own narrow views - British nationalism, religion, and a grand divine purpose moving history toward a predetermined goal. Stephen counters this view by perceiving history as chaotic, relentless, filled with violence and trauma. Ramzan's novella may well be read as the history and becoming of young Dedalus. Ahmed - born in a mosque of the fictional town, Poshmarg, and raised within a particular Kashmiri Muslim texture - dies at the end by suicide in a foreign land. In his prehistory and disintegration are the lives and stories of his tribe that finally weigh him down. When Ahmed's friend Peter asks Rahil about his profession, he replies:

But what should have culminated in the attempt to "express oneself in some mode of art as freely as one can" ends in an existential defeat. Ahmed's becoming is always relational to the larger political, religious and cultural realities of Poshmarg.

At the very start, *The Man from Kashmir* establishes a deceptively simple language and tone. This is a novella that demands what Toril Moi calls "the willingness to look and see" - to pay maximum attention to the words on the page until we find ourselves asking, "Why this?" The



BOOK REVIEW

novella's vitality, in contrast to other works in Kashmiri Anglophone fiction, comes down to the fact that the author strives toward an idiosyncratic form of expression - a form and language intrinsic to the story he wants to tell - about fractured lives in 1990s' Kashmir and the question of what constitutes the individual.

Ramzan's focus on the logic of collectivity is not coincidental. He probes the space between what belongs to the individual alone and that which is ours together. He ventures into the unarticulated, the currents of the flesh and soul that flow blindly, the parts of our being that rise when we are enthused and fall when we are afraid or despairing.

Yet, Ramzan does not offer enough space for each character to flourish in the liminality of their lives. This is reflected in his explorations of shame, for example - in Ahmed's uncle Farooq's surrender to self-pleasure, his guilt, his resentment at Fatima's marriage to a teacher and the subsequent decision to join the revolutionaries. It is, again, evident in the story of Ram and Lalita who elope because of their family's caste differences. And the same pattern follows when Fatima keeps the report of her cancer to herself and ventures on a pilgrimage to Mecca.

There is no centre in the novella. No single story matters more than another. There is only chaos, hysteria, and violence making confluences. Ram and Lalita's story appears urgent until it dissolves into other fragmented lives, each out-

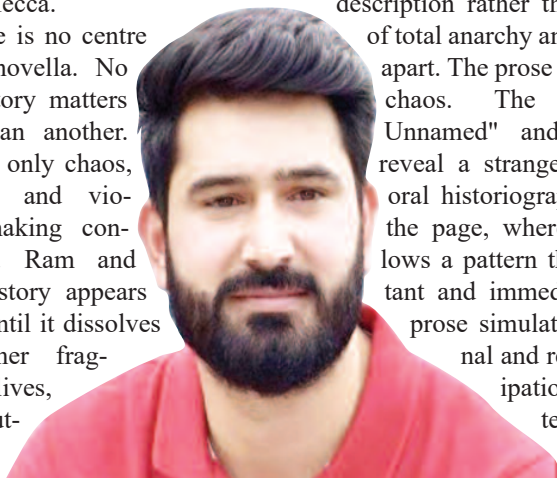
running the last. Ahmed, the man from Kashmir, amid this chaos and disruption, becomes, toward the end, a mere witness who is on the precipice of rewriting and challenging the institutionalised narratives. This is not a failure of craft. It is formal fidelity grounding a literary structure that mirrors the shape of a historical and an existential experience.

In WB Yeats' philosophy, history is cyclical rather than linear, operating on repeating 2,000-year cycles. He visualised these eras as intertwining, cone-shaped spirals called gyres. The widening gyre represents a period of extreme chaos, signalling that one historical age is reaching maximum expansion and collapse. Yeats anticipated the birth of a rough beast, ushering in a new heartless epoch. Ramzan's novella is exactly the widening gyre made text. The fragmentation, disrupted chronologies, and the dissolution of a single centre are not aesthetic choices but the unfolding of living inside a collapse. And the collapse sticks to the immediate present - the world becomes the here and now; the world becomes the present. Ramzan sees the rough beast already here, in the uniformed men and the jobless future. With Ramzan, the gyre is a description rather than a prophecy of total anarchy and things falling apart. The prose itself enacts the chaos. The parts "The Unnamed" and "Awakening" reveal a strange translation of oral historiography brought to the page, where violence follows a pattern that is both distant and immediate. Ramzan's prose simulates the communal and repetitive participation of oral storytelling. The

mnemonic device of repetition - early arrival of winter running through the first three parts, the continuity of narrative in the same cold season in "The Widening Gyre" exactly where it was left in "Awakening" part - coerces the reader to look for continuity even as the timelines vary. The result is a fragmentary tale and a temporal dissonance, hinting that only the word there is a tool to make sense of.

Walter Ong, in *Orality and Literacy*, details how speech fundamentally shapes storytelling. In oral cultures, words are not abstract or static objects but dynamic events. To sustain memory, oral storytelling relies on formulas, repetition and a highly participatory structure. Ramzan's prose participates in this tradition, refusing to let the stories of a generation become archival in the cold sense. This style mirrors Derrida's concept of iteration, where repetition acts as a productive force that keeps the narrative emotionally immediate but inherently unstable. For Derrida, a cold archive attempts to freeze a single unchanging meaning. True iteration, however, requires a sign to be uprooted and used again. Each repetition happens in a new moment; it injects fresh life and new context. It keeps the narrative in motion. Because words are iterable, context can never be fully saturated or controlled. Ramzan's prose is unmoored; the oral idiom breaks free from rigid and overarching narratives. By choosing oral iteration over rigid written structures, the narrative deliberately cuts itself loose from a fixed anchor. It allows the meaning to swing wildly from loose to sudden and tight, almost towards a psychological thrill, in the immediate emotional context. 

— Courtesy Scroll.in



'OPERATION
SAFED SAGAR'
REVIEW:

A soaring tribute to tactical brilliance

The six-episode limited series is out on Netflix.



T

**Nandini
Ramnath**

he Kargil War of 1999 was fought between India and Pakistan on snowy peaks and in thin air. The conflict, which gave India a decisive military and moral victory over its reviled neighbour, continues to inspire films and shows.

The Netflix limited series Operation Safed Sagar recounts the vital contributions of the Indian Air Force's Golden Arrows Squadron. The Hindi show, based on actual events and real individuals, examines how bravery, tactical brilliance and a typical Indian workaround altered the course of a conflict that was threatening to go in Pakistan's favour.

The squadron comprises young fighter pilots raring to go but not equipped to do so. Their commanding officer Tony Dhanoa (Jimmy Shergil) brings in Ajay Ahuja (Siddharth) to

coach the youngsters.

Dhali (Abhay Verma) is gifted but impatient and aggressive. Baldy (Mihir Ahuja) has a case of the nerves. Together with Sangy (Taaruk Raina) and Goofy (Arnav Bhasin), these pilots must learn to trust each other and pool their individual skills when the war breaks out.

War is inevitable, despite Indian prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee (Aanjjan Srivastava) making a crucial visit to Pakistan. The bonhomie between Vajpayee and Pakistani prime minister Nawaz Sharif (Vinay Pathak) suggests a historic thaw.

Pakistan's Army chief Pervez Musharraf (Manu Rishi Chadha) is seething in the shadows, outraged by Sharif's perceived betrayal. Musharraf schemes to scuttle the peace summit even while it is on, sending Pakistani

OTT REVIEW



soldiers disguised as jihadist fighters over the Line of Control.

The Pakistanis give Indian Army soldiers a tough fight. Western Air Command chief V Patney (Adil Hussain) and the Golden Arrows Squadron scramble a response that involves untested fliers, underpowered planes and a hugely risky strategy.

Oni Sen directs six episodes written by Sandeep Jain, Nikhil Ravi, Barun Kashyap and Abhijeet Singh Parmar. Shot by Setu, the series is an all-but-official chronicle of high-flying valour, with inputs from and scrutiny by the Defence Ministry.

Operation Safed Sagar stays within strictly prescribed limits while also veering off for dramatic effect. The IAF ethos, the discipline, the sacrifice, the moist-eyed salutes and rousing speeches, the possibly final goodbyes and the "Bombs away!" lingo are all on display, as are also personal doubts and inter-personal rivalries.

The balance between cold strategy and fuzzy emotions, which is de rigueur in productions about military triumphs that came at the cost of

human lives, isn't smooth. The series could easily have been a film that focused on the thrilling aerial combat missions and left the emotional dredging to other similarly themed projects.

Sub-plots about Ajay and his wife Alka (Amrita Bagchi), Tony and his spouse Kamalpreet (Dia Mirza) and Baldy's romance with Madhavi (Prajakta Koli) are aimed at exposing the messy hearts pumping beneath the uniforms. While they reveal the unique dynamic that exists among the armed forces and their families, they are distractions from the real deal.

The most unanticipated dimension to the writing is the audacious solutions that Ajay and Tony come up with to defeat a sneaky adversary. This involves making do with existing resources while also hoodwinking Pakistan and its ally, the United States.

The maximum creative licence is exercised in portraying - rather, imagining - backroom politics in Islamabad and Washington DC. The show's makers affect an inside knowledge of Pakistani and

American statecraft that borders on the ludicrous.

Only Manu Rishi Chadha, superb as Musharraf, and Vinay Pathak, suitably befuddled as Nawaz Sharif, benefit from the unconvincing scenes set in Pakistan.

Sharif is portrayed as a political nepo baby, his strings pulled by his father. Chadha's Musharraf is entirely effective, his eyes reduced to icicles as he carries on a personal, increasingly untenable war. Chadha's performance has correctly judged restraint and sinister depth.

On the Indian side, Siddharth, the always dependable Jimmy Shergill and Adil Hussain bring professionalism and purpose to their roles. Abhay Verma has the most noteworthy arc among the fighter pilots, his Dhali channelling Maverick from Top Gun all the way through.

A squadron of actors fills up the other roles. Barun Sobti is somewhere there, as are Danish Husain, Sanjay Suri and KC Shankar. Everyone plays their part in a team effort that gives Operation Safed Sagar its wings and lets it soar. 

— Courtesy Scroll.in

The Industry Definition Dilemma



The new definition of 'industry' by a nine-member Supreme Court Constitution Bench, headed by the Chief Justice of India, resulted in a fractured verdict, taking away the right of legal recourse against employers' unfair practices. At the centre of the debate lies the definition of "industry" under the Industrial Relations Code, 2020, which determines the reach of industrial relations legislation and the mechanisms available to employees for resolving disputes. Following the repeal of the Working Journalists Act, journalistic work, increasingly shaped by corporate ownership, digital platforms, contractual employment and newsroom restructuring, risks being left at the mercy of government officials.

For decades, the meaning of "industry" under the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947, was shaped by the Supreme Court's landmark 1978 judgment in *Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board v. A. Rajappa*, delivered by Justice V. R. Krishna Iyer. The judgment adopted a broad "Triple Test" under Section 2(j), recognising that an organisation's character could not be determined merely by whether it was profit-making or commercial. This interpretation mattered for workers in organisations that did not fit the traditional image of a factory.

The Industrial Relations Code, 2020, introduces its own definition of "industry" in Section 2(p). The concern is whether its wording and implementation will adequately protect workers in different establishments, including media organisations. In August 2026, the Supreme Court addressed the legacy of the 1978 judgment, distinguishing disputes governed by the repealed Act from interpretation of the new Code. The established test continues to matter for pending cases under the former legislation, while the new Code must be interpreted on its own terms.

In her dissent, Justice B. V. Nagarathna emphasised that the broad definition of 'industry' remains important for protecting workers' rights in an increasingly privatised economy.

She supported Justice Dipankar Datta's views; his independent opinion, shared by Justice Ujjal Bhuyan, found the reference against the 1978 verdict unwarranted and not maintainable.

Uncertainty over the definition could have serious consequences for journalists in small newspapers, regional publications, digital news portals and independent media organisations. They need accessible remedies against dismissal, retrenchment, non-payment of wages and unilateral changes to service conditions. Uncertainty over a media establishment's legal status could make seeking justice slower and more expensive.

Employment insecurity is increasing. Many media houses rely on fixed-term contracts, outsourced reporting, stringers and other non-permanent arrangements. Journalists may work regularly for an organisation without the security of permanent employment. Labour legislation must address these realities rather than leave vulnerable workers navigating complicated legal distinctions. Insecurity can pressure journalists to avoid stories that displease owners, advertisers or powerful political interests.

The Working Journalists Act recognised journalism's distinctive position in a democratic society. Its protections reflected the understanding that those who inform the public should not be left entirely at the mercy of commercial pressures.

The new Labour Codes aim to simplify legislation and modernise employment regulation. But simplification must not come at the cost of substantive rights. The central issue is whether journalists can secure fair wages, reasonable working conditions, protection against arbitrary dismissal and effective remedies when employers violate their rights.

Free media requires more than freedom from censorship. It requires journalists to work with dignity, financial security and professional independence. Labour reform will fulfil its democratic promise only when working journalists' rights and welfare remain firmly protected.

THE LAST PAGE



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