

Editorial

Thursday, January 18, 2018

Media credibility matters to uphold its sanctity

Media today no longer is just the fourth Pillar in the running of parliamentary democracy. It is today an indispensable pillar of parliamentary democracy. Even the Judiciary these days believe in the power of Media. That is the reason why the four high profile top justice of the Supreme Court - the highest court of the country comes out and brief to the media just some few days back. First time in the history of the country, the four top judge of the Supreme Court - Justice J. Chelameswar, Justice R. Gogoi, Justice M. B. Lokur and Justice K. Joseph brief the media about the problem of Supreme Court. The last word Justice J. Chelameswar told the media is that it is the people that will decide on the issue. Leaving aside the controversial issue surrounding over it, the main motive of this editorial is to remind all our fellow citizens the emerging power of media. It is today an indispensable pillar of democracy.

Everyone knows that those reported or views in newspaper or electronic media cannot be even an exhibit to the court of law until the report was accompanied by materials demanded by the court. Reporters reporting the specific news and the editor need to give their statement if the very report has to be submitted as exhibit of a certain case. On the other hand media does not have any legal power punish or judge a person on his act. Neither is it bestowed with power like any statutory body of the government. And above all there is nothing called "absolute Freedom" to anybody including those in the media and the expression through media is bounded by certain self regulatory mechanism called code of conducts or ethics.

Then how comes media today become an indispensable pillar of democracy?

Well, it is the sacrifices and integrity of those who are working in this profession that media today has been emerging. It is because the journalists of yesterday who keep on following the code of ethics of journalists and many today who still is governed by these code of ethics that media is emerging as the only indispensable platform for all citizen. If the journalists of today follow the path of the journalists of yesteryears in term of maintaining the code of ethics, media will continue to uphold its status in the coming days. However, a mere mistake or say unethical practice for self gain will only leads to the devastation of this profession. People of tomorrow will lose trust to the media. So it is important that journalist today follows the code of ethics.

Some in this field today started selling themselves and acted as according to the desire of those paying them which is not ethical at all. Some started creating debate in the interest of few groups particularly for some specific political party. The kind of development is not a good sign for the future society.

Everyone in this profession needs to follow the code of ethics of journalists because it enhances credibility, reliability and reputation of the media. This will also ensure freedom and responsibility besides giving professional satisfaction and most importantly it will limit the government intervention.

As for the state of Manipur, many people now started talking about media's nexus with government as many have stopped acting on the ground reality. The credibility is at stake with the submerging of people's trust to this unit. These are understood by everyone working in this profession knowingly or unknowingly. It is time that we in the media change our way of working and started focusing on our objective of being in this profession. It is only through this means that media can become more credible in the coming days. And without credibility people will lose trust and media of the state will become another mockery.

Name Changed

I, the undersigned, **Thiyam Sunita Devi** (New name) previously called **Thingujam Ongbi Sunita Devi** (old name) doing Nursing Sister and wife of Thingujam Achouba Singh of Uripok Bachaspati Leikai Imphal, West, Manipur, solemnly declare that, I Wholly renounce/relinquish and abandon the use of my former name **Thingujam Ongbi Sunita Devi** and in place thereof, I do hereby assume from this date the name **Thiyam Sunita Devi**.
Sd/-
Thiyam Sunita Devi

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Reporting in Conflict Situation and Communal Harmony

By: Dr. A. Ibomcha Sharma, IIS News Editor & Head, Regional News Unit, AIR, Imphal

Introduction: The history of laws of war and history of the professional hazards of journalists in an armed conflict situation are often intertwined. Even if the laws of war clearly spared the messengers/peace communicators from time immemorial, they were not absolutely free from the menace of war or armed conflict. The risk associated with journalists in an armed conflict situation can be traced back to the Vedic Age in Indian context, Saint Narada is a glaring examples of it. Chanting "Narayana, Narayana", he reached to the Gods and to the Demons, informing thereby the ambition and evil designs of war each group planned against the other. He was considered as a trouble monger and many a time had to invite wrath of one section or both and hence had to face the music.

Reporting armed conflicts:

The combatants of an armed conflict try to control and manipulate the media with subtle and no so subtle propaganda and misinformation messages. Sometimes what the military authorities brief during armed conflicts is not news but illusion of news. Information is tightly controlled in such circumstances and for best known security reasons; distortion of news is seen at times.

As the frontline journalists are covering incident after incident, it becomes next to impossible for them to please both the warring parties and sometimes it happens that the group a journalist is embedded with becomes so furious that its armed personnel target him or her in the garb of mistake. Killing the messengers in the crossfire is a regular case. Taking them into hostage and intentionally targeting them while they were performing their duty of informing the common populace are not rare actions cases. On the part of journalists also, some of these actions were against their own professional ethics thereby causing irreparable damage to the credibility of the profession.

In an armed conflict situation, both the warring parties try to mould public opinion favorable to them. With that goal in view both try to use the media to their advantage either through persuasion or direct coercion. Herein starts the problem of an independent media trying to cover the prevailing situation in an objective manner. Covering such situation also raises both moral and professional issues for the journalists. As per journalistic ethics, the fundamental function of the press is to report fairly, accurately and objectively about the newsworthy events. And the news value of an armed conflict is irresistible. So, there is a great need of reporting the news pertaining to the armed conflict on the one hand and on the other side, the maneuverings of the conflicting parties to use the media to serve vested interests.

Covering militancy and the PCI organizations:

In a bid to curtail propaganda of the proscribed secessionists' organizations through local print and electronic media and curb their oxygen of publicity, the government of Manipur clamped an official order on August 2, 2007 under Section 95 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973. The order says that any printed material, i.e. either newspapers or books or document whether printed or in electronic form shall be forfeited to the state government if they contain any material which are directly attributed to unlawful organizations, organised gangs, terrorists or terrorists related organizations considered to be subversive an a threat to the integrity of the state and the country.

The order of the State Home Department further forbids obituary notices of slain militants that would be glorifying them as martyrs of a freedom struggle. Publication of articles of any sort by terrorist

organizations or unlawful organizations, publications of any code of behavior, dress code of social practice decreed by such organizations, publication of any justification for the killings, causing injury, assault, kidnapping, imposition of fines or warnings by such organizations, publication of notices for payment to terrorists related organizations or unlawful outfits in cash or kind and publication of items in the form of invitation to the aforementioned organizations to settle or solve disputes are all together banned by the official order.

Opposing the move vehemently, the All Manipur Working Journalists Union (AMWJU) served an ultimatum to the state administration demanding it to withdraw the suppressing order on or before 9 August, 2007. In a memorandum addressed to the Chief Minister, Okram Ibobi Singh, the Union flayed the government of trying to gag the freedom of expression in democratic India by clamping a stringent restriction. The union further argued that if the order is allowed to prevail the national level television news channels would have to be banned from airing in Manipur and national level newspapers are to be stopped from circulating in the state, and the state will suffer a total cut off of communication from other parts of the country. The Press Council of India sent one of its members to study and address the genuine grievances of the local journalists of the state in the first week of October, 2007. The PCI member discussed the issue with the AMWJU.

Acknowledging the gravity of the pressure journalists faced in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab (during the height of Khalistan movement) and the Northeast states, the Council conducted an enquiry in 1991 into the pressure the press in Punjab was facing. A special committee was constituted to examine the problems and its report "Overcoming Fear" was adopted by the Council.²⁰⁵ It extended full support to the press in Punjab in its effort to inform the people truthfully and impartially of the events taking place in their state by reflecting all parties of an event with due care and self censorship and in resisting any dictates from terrorist groups.

In Kashmir also, the Council conducted more than one enquiry. In one enquiry in 1991 that covered both Kashmir and Punjab, the Council accepting its special committee's report "Crisis and Credibility", said the critical importance of information and communication in the complex and difficult situation in the state had not been adequately appreciate either by the government or the media. It suggested a series of measures to respond effectively to the complex situation. In suggested a series of measures to respond effectively to the complex situation. In 1993-94, the Council conducted another enquiry into the problems facing the press in Kashmir and adopted a report entitled "Threats to the media from militant organizations". In this report, the Council asked the government to provide institutional and area security to media personnel who faced threat from the militants for taking an independent stand.

Arising out of complaint against publication by newspaper of Assam of some press handouts and threat notes issued by the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), the PCI enunciated some general principles for the guidance of the press in this regard in September 1992. The guiding principles say that diktats or press notes commanding newspapers to publish them under duress or threats of dire consequences, emanating from elements wedded to violence constitute the gravest assault on the freedom of the press

which is one of the surest guarantors of a democratic a plural society. Generally, such diktats or press notes are not newsworthy per se. Publication of such contents not only compromises the freedom and independent functioning of the concerned newspaper but also constitutes an offence against the standard of professional ethics and responsibility of the fourth estate of democracy.

The guiding principles further add that if there is anything newsworthy in a press note emanating from any source, it should not be blacked out altogether self censorship may be no less dangerous than being insidious. The bottom line is that editors must exercise due caution and circumspection in considering the dissemination of such press notes. If the whole content of the proscribed outfit's press communiqué is not pernicious, than it may be edited, its objectionable portions removed and language toned down so that whatever is really newsworthy gets disseminated in an impartial and balance manner.

As per guiding principles of the Council, the fundamental criteria for selecting editorial content should be its newsworthiness and not where it emanates from. The Council advises to withhold the publication of a press note released by militants only when the newsworthy and the objectionable portions are inextricably mixed up. According to the findings and recommendations of the "Crisis and Credibility" report on Kashmir, ".....The media cannot therefore turn away from critical situations entailing danger or retreat to safe havens, depending on handouts from any quarter. The people have right to know and to seek authentic, objective and wherever possible eyewitnesses or well documented information." It further says, "Newsmen and newspapers should report all sides and aspects of events fairly and objectively, citing sources, verifying facts, providing necessary contextual background and where possible, offering their own eyewitness observations, analysis of interpretation without editorializing."

As per the recommendations of the report, the most horrific events can be narrated with moderation and should be portrayed or displayed with sobriety so as not to exacerbate tensions. The concept of objectionable writing must be clearly defined and understood. If genuinely objectionable matter is to be curbed, pre censorship is not the answer. This should be scrupulously avoided. The remedy lies in taking action under the ordinary law of the land with suitable appellate procedures. It would be desirable if the PCI were to be informed of all such cases. In the PCI report on the media crisis in Punjab, the Council recommended that the bandh

notices and press notes from ultras should be edited and played down while positive developments should be mentioned and even highlighted as the occasion demands. While exercising due caution in disseminating press notes issued by terrorist groups, the press must also be vigilant against the possibility of its being used by the government. The media cannot be anybody's handmaiden or cat's paw, because credibility is vital.

Reporting for Communal Harmony:

The Press Council of India has given the following guidelines to observe by the media in covering news which may be tagged with communal tone and texture.

1. Distortion or exaggeration of facts or incidents in relation to communal matters or giving currency to unverified rumours, suspicions or inferences as if they were facts and base their comments on them.
2. Employment of intemperate or unrestrained language in the presentation of news or views.
3. Encouraging or condoning violence even in the face of provocation as a means of obtaining redress of grievances whether the same be genuine or not.
4. While it is the legitimate function of the Press to draw attention to the genuine and legitimate grievances of any community with a view to having the same redressed by all peaceful, legal and legitimate means, it is improper and a breach of journalistic ethics to invent grievances, or to exaggerate real grievances.
5. Scurrilous and untrue attacks on communities, or individuals, particularly when this is accompanied by charges attributing misconduct to them as due to their being members of a particular community or caste.
6. Falsely giving a communal colour to incidents which might occur in which members of different communities happen to be involved.
7. Emphasizing matters that are not to produce communal hatred or ill-will, or fostering feelings of distrust between communities.
8. Publishing alarming news which are in substance untrue or make provocative comments on such news or even otherwise calculated to embitter relations between different communities or regional or linguistic groups.
9. Exaggerating actual happenings to achieve sensationalism and publication of news which adversely affect communal harmony with banner headlines or in distinctive types.
10. Making disrespectful, derogatory or insulting remarks on or reference to the different religions or faiths or their founders.

National & International News

Israel PM to address India-Israel Business Summit in Mumbai

New Delhi, Jan 18: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will visit Mumbai today during the final leg of his visit to India. He is scheduled to begin his day with a power breakfast with captains of the industry. Mr. Netanyahu will then proceed to address the India-Israel Business Summit at the iconic Taj Mahal hotel in south Mumbai, where he will also pay his tributes to the 26/11 terror attacks victims. The Israeli Prime Minister will then proceed to Chabad House, the popular Jewish community

centre run by Gavriel Holtzberg and his wife Rivka who were killed during attacks. Moshe Holtzberg, who survived the attack will accompany Mr. Netanyahu during his visit where a memorial is also likely to be inaugurated as a tribute to the terror victims. In the evening, Mr. Netanyahu will attend the 'Shalom Bollywood' event at the Taj hotel, wherein he will meet leading Bollywood personalities. Mr. Netanyahu is expected to invite them to visit and explore Israel for their upcoming movies.