

Inclusion of 'Paid News' information broadcasting industry

†1138. SHRI RAJ MOHINDER SINGH MAJITHA:

SHRI SHIVANAND TIWARI:

Will the Minister of INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Editors Guild and the Press Council have expressed their concern over inclusion of 'paid news' in information and broadcasting industry of the country;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Government have carried out an enquiry regarding the aforesaid allegation and gathered information on the matter; and

(d) if so, the details thereof and whether on the basis of the statement of editors Guild, Government would bring in a bill to address the apprehensions of information and broadcasting media?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING (SHRI CHOUDHURY MOHAN JATUA): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. The Press Council of India and the Editors Guild of India have expressed their concern over inclusion of paid news by the newspapers. A copy of the Press Release by the Editors Guild of India is given in Statement (See below).

(c) and (d) The Government follows a policy of non-interference in the functioning of Press. However in pursuance to its policy of upholding the freedom of the press, and of maintaining and improving the standards of newspapers and news agencies in India and to inculcate the principles of self regulation among the press, the Press Council of India (PCI), an autonomous body, was set up under the Press Council Act, 1978. The PCI having been seized of this matter has constituted a two-member Sub-Committee to enquire into the matter. The Sub-Committee has interacted with Election Commission of India and the various stakeholders including the Editors Guild of India, Indian Newspaper Society, etc. on this issue. As part of evidence gathering exercise, the Committee has also visited Hyderabad and Mumbai to meet various stakeholders. The report of the Committee is likely to be ready by March end.

At present there is no proposal to bring out any bill on this issue.

Statement

Editors Guild of India email: editorsguildofindia

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PRESS RELEASE

The Editors Guild of India is deeply shocked and seriously concerned at the increasing number of reports detailing the pernicious practice of publishing "paid news" by some newspapers and

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

television channels, especially during recent elections. The Guild, at its Annual General Meeting held on December 22, 2009 has strongly condemned this practice which whittles the foundations of Indian journalism and calls upon all editors in the country to desist from publishing any form of advertisement which masquerade as news.

The Guild noted that it had always stood for publication of news which is in public interest; news which has been gathered due to the professional efforts of journalists; and news which is not influenced by malice, bias, favouritism or monetary influence. The Guild recognises that news media in print and electronic form, has a genuine right to publish and broadcast advertisements on all issues, subject to the voluntary Advertising Standards Council code and the News Broadcasting Standards Code.

It is imperative that news organisations have to clearly distinguish between news and advertisements with full and proper disclosure norms, so that no reader and viewer is tricked by any subterfuge of advertisements published and broadcast in the same format, language and style of news. It is disturbing that this "paid news" practice is also being used by companies, organisations and individuals, apart from political parties.

The Guild further deplors the practice of "private treaties" where news organisations accept free equity in unlisted companies in lieu of promoting these companies through news columns and television news programmes. The news organisations should disclose their commercial and equity interests in such companies to the readers and viewers in a transparent manner.

The Guild decries the unsavoury and unacceptable practice of some political parties and candidates offering payment for "news packages" to news media and its representatives to publish and telecast eulogising and misleading news reports on the political parties. Both the media organisations and editors who indulge in it, and the customers who offer payment for such "paid news" are guilty of undermining the free and fair press, for which every citizen of India is entitled to. Such irresponsible acts by a few media organisations and journalists is discrediting the entire media of the country, which has a glorious tradition of safeguarding democratic rights and exposing all kinds of injustices and inequities. Editors and journalists have been at the vanguard of the movement for creation of a just society, both during the days of colonial rule and Independent India. The ugly phenomenon of "paid news" will be a blot on the country's democratic fabric.

The Guild calls upon publishers, editors and journalists of media organisations to unitedly fight this creeping menace of commercialisation and bartering of self respect of the media. During the coming months, the Guild will join hands with other media organisations to sensitize the media and civil society, including political parties and the Election Commission, on the need to eliminate this unacceptable practice.

The Guild will be shortly unveiling an initiative to encourage transparency regarding "paid news" and "private treaties." We appeal to all stakeholders to join us in pushing for a dean, transparent media.

Mr. Rajdeep Sardesai, President of the Guild announced the formation of an Ethics Committee headed by Mr. T N Ninan, Editor in Chief, Business Standard, The members are Mr. B G Varghese, Editor & columnist; Mr Sumit Chakravarty, Editor, Mainstream and Ms. Madhu Kishwar, Editor, Manushi

Rajdeep Sardesai

President

K S Sachidananda Murthy

Secretary General

Rohit Bansal

Treasurer