

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING
LOK SABHA**

STARRED QUESTION NO:216

ANSWERED ON:12.03.2013

REGULATING PAID NEWS

Owaisi Shri Asaduddin;Singh Alias Pappu Singh Shri Uday

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

- (a) whether the Government proposes to set up a monitoring mechanism to check/control paid news;
- (b) if so, the details thereof and the time by which the same is likely to be set up;
- (c) whether the Government proposes to implement the recommendations of the Election Commission of India (ECI) as well as to amend the Press and Registration of Books (PRB) Act to check/control paid news;
- (d) if so, the details thereof along with the major recommendations of ECI and the proposed amendments in PRB Act; and
- (e) the time by which the said decisions are likely to be taken to curb/regulate the paid news menace?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF STATE (INDEPENDENT CHARGE) OF THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING (SHRI MANISH TEWARI)

(a) to (e): A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

STATEMENT REFERRED TO IN REPLY TO PARTS (a) TO (e) OF THE LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION NO. 216 FOR ANSWER ON 12.03.2013

The Government, in pursuance of the objective to preserve the freedom of press, does not interfere in functioning of the press. However, Press Council of India (PCI), a statutory autonomous body has been set up to maintain and improve the standards of newspapers and also to inculcate principles of self-regulation among the press. In furtherance of its objectives, the PCI has formulated 'Norms of Journalistic Conduct' and guidelines for adherence by the media. The PCI, in view of the wide ramifications of the issue of paid news, has also deliberated upon the issue and has released a Report on Paid News. The major recommendations contained in the Report are at Annexure. The PCI takes cognizance, suo moto or on complaints of contents in print media which are in violation of the norms and which also includes cases of paid news. The PCI adjudicates upon such cases under section 14 of the Press Council Act, 1978.

As regards the electronic media, all TV channels are required to comply with the Programme & Advertisement Codes failing which action can be taken as per the terms and conditions of permission/registration. The Programme Code prohibits carriage of programmes containing anything deliberate, false, suggestive, innuendos and half-truths and if a violation is established, the Ministry may take action which may include taking the channel off-air either permanently or for a limited period. The Government has set up a state-of-art Electronic Media Monitoring Centre (EMMC) to monitor and record channels on a 24x7 basis. The EMMC can monitor 300 Channels at a time on a random basis.

The Election Commission also has taken cognizance of the PCI's Report on Paid news and has initiated measures to check incidents of election time paid news. The Commission has issued instructions to Chief Electoral Officers of all the States to constitute District level and State level Media Certification and Monitoring Committees (MCMC) for scrutiny of paid news. These Committees have been instructed to do vigorous scrutiny of electronic media, print media and other modes of mass communication in order to locate political advertisements in the garb of news coverage appearing during the election period. In addition, the Commission has also constituted a Committee at its own level to examine references from State level MCMCs and to support policy formulation for issues related to paid news and those related to usage of electronic and print media for campaigning by parties and candidates.

The Election Commission of India has forwarded a proposal for amendment in the Representation of People Act, 1951 and Conduct of Election Rules, 1961 to include publishing and abetting of publishing paid news for furthering the prospects of election of any candidate or prejudicially affecting the prospects of election of any candidate as an electoral offence with exemplary punishment. The issue of paid news has been included in the agenda for all party meeting on issues relating to electoral reforms. Besides, the issue of electoral reforms in its entirety has been referred to the Law Commission of India for consideration and to suggest comprehensive measures for changes in the law. Before initiating any legislative measures, the issue requires to be examined on the basis of recommendations to be made by the Law Commission and also in consultation with the stakeholders.

In addition, based on the recommendations of the Standing Committee, inclusion of provisions in the Press and Registration of Books and Publications Bill to check the incidents of paid news, is being considered.

ANNEXURE

ANNEXURE REFERRED TO IN REPLY TO PARTS (a) TO (e) OF THE LOK SABHA STARRED QUESTION NO.216 FOR REPLY ON 12.03.2013

Major recommendations made by the Press Council of India, in its 'Report on Paid News' are as follows,

Representation of the People Act, 1951, be amended to make incidence of paid news a punishable electoral malpractice.

The Press Council of India must be fully empowered to adjudicate the complaints of 'paid news' and give final judgment in the matter.

Press Council Act be amended to make its recommendations binding and electronic media be brought under its purview, and

Press Council of India should be reconstituted to include representatives from electronic and other media