

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

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:728

ANSWERED ON:08.08.2013

PAID NEWS

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

- (a) whether the Government is aware of the phenomenon of paid news in the country and if so, the details thereof along with the average percentage that paid news accounts for in total election expenses;
- (b) whether the Government has conducted a probe into the extent of the phenomenon and if so, the names of the newspapers and persons found responsible;
- (c) the action taken/proposed to be taken by the Government to penalize the responsible parties;
- (d) the steps taken by the Government to ensure a clear demarcation between what constituted advertisements and the news;
- (e) whether there currently exists any regulation that seeks to contain the phenomenon of paid news and if so, the details thereof; and
- (f) if not, the efforts made by the Government in this regard?

Answer

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

(a) to (f) The 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 the principles of self-regulation among the press. The PCI, in view of the wide ramifications of the issue of paid news has deliberated upon the issue and has released a Report on Paid News. The major recommendations contained in the Report are at Annexure-I.

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. The list of complaints of paid news received by PCI and action taken thereon is at Annexure-II.

In furtherance of its objectives, the PCI has also formed 'Norms of Journalistic Conduct' for adherence by the media. The Norm 36

(vi) prescribes that advertisements must be clearly distinguishable from editorial matter carried in the newspaper.

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 number of cases of paid news received by the Election Commission during various elections is at Annexure-III. In addition, based on the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Information Technology, inclusion of provisions in the Press and Registration of Books and Publications Bill to check the incidents of paid news, is proposed.