

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

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:3169

ANSWERED ON:29.08.2013

PAID NEWS

Alagiri Shri S. ;Singh Shri Ratan;Venugopal Shri P.

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

- (a) whether the Government proposes to take more stringent steps to check paid news as recommended by a panel in this regard;
- (b) if so, the details thereof;
- (c) whether the Press Council of India (PCI) has failed to fulfil the role expected from it in curbing the paid news;
- (d) if so, whether the PCI was able to dispose of only 11 complaints out of 40 complaints due to lack of pursuance;
- (e) if so, the details thereof along with the reasons therefor; and
- (f) the steps taken/proposed to be taken by the Government in this regard?

Answer

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

(a) & (b): The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Information Technology, in its 47th Report on 'Paid News' has made following major recommendations: -

(i) There should be statutory body viz. Media Council having eminent persons as its members to look into all media contents both from print media and electronic media (TV as well as radio) with powers to take strong action against the defaulters. Under this process PCI shall be wound up, OR

(ii) PCI should be re-vamped/re-cast with powers to take care of print media and a similar statutory body is set up for electronic media.

In both the situation, as expressed in

(i) and

(ii) the Committee recommended that the media owners/interested parties should not be a part of the proposed Media Council/body including revamped PCI.

(iii) Election laws/rules should be reviewed and strengthened to curb the 'Paid News' menace in election process. While reviewing the Election laws/rules, the Election Commission should be empowered with not only dealing with the cases relating to suppression of expenditure in the election on account of 'Paid News' but for also taking action against the defaulting candidate as also the concerned Media entity found to have indulged in 'Paid News'.

(iv) Ministry and Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) to consider the issue of Cross Media Holdings/Ownerships on priority basis and act promptly so as to prevent monopolistic trend in the media.

The recommendations are being examined in consultation with concerned agencies and stakeholders. Besides, 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.

(c) to (f): The Press Council of India (PCI) is a statutory autonomous body set up under the Press Council Act, 1978. The PCI suo motu took cognizance of the phenomenon of paid news and released its 'Report on Paid News'. During the years 2009-10 to 2012-13, the PCI has received 58 complaints of paid news, out of which 18 were disposed of by the Council. The PCI has adjudicated upon the complaint of Shri Yogender Kumar, Ex-MLA, Badayun against the newspapers, Amar Ujala and Dainik Jagran and held both newspapers guilty for publication of paid news. The Election Commission of India, having considered the decision of PCI in the matter, disqualified Smt. Umlesh Yadav, an MLA from 24-Bisauli Assembly constituency in Uttar Pradesh. Besides, PCI has also adjudicated upon 10 other cases of paid news and 'Censored' the respondent newspapers.

The Council has a notified procedure to deal with the complaints under Press Council (Procedure for Inquiry) Regulations, 1979. Since the complainants did not file requisite documents to pursue the complaint the same were closed for non-pursuance/non-compliance of requirements of Inquiry Regulations, 1979.