

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

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:3982
ANSWERED ON:15.12.2009
ETHICS IN JOURNALISM
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Will the Minister of INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government has any mechanism/proposes to set-up any regulatory body to monitor cases of violation of journalistic ethics including abuse of right to speech and expression and cases of allegations of irregularities and corruption; and

(b) if so, the details thereof and steps taken in this regard along with the manner in which action can be taken against journalists acting contrary to journalistic ethics?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING (SHRI C.M. JATUA)

(a) & (b): Under the Press Council Act, 1978, the Government has set up Press Council of India (PCI). The Press Council of India (PCI), as a quasi-judicial body receives complaints of yellow journalism, corruption and blackmailing by journalists. The PCI conducts hearing into the complaints through its inquiry committees. The inquiry committees, after written and oral submission of the parties, submit its recommendations in the matters to the full Council for action. Under Section 14 of the Press Council Act, 1978, the Council can warn, admonish or censure the newspaper, editor or the journalist as the case may be.

The Press Council of India, through its guidelines and adjudications has counseled reporters/ financial journalists/ newspaper establishments to refrain from receiving any gifts/ grants/concessions/ facilities, etc., either in cash or kind which are likely to compromise on free and unbiased reporting. A copy of recommendations of the Council on Financial Journalism is annexed at Annexure-A. A copy of the guidelines on 'Undue favours to journalists' is annexed at Annexure-B.

Further the Council has recently taken cognizance of reports of alleged payments taken during recent Lok Sabha Elections for favourable coverage and has constituted a Committee for examining the phenomenon of 'paid news'.

ANNEXURE AS REFERRED TO IN PARTS (a) AND (b) OF LOK SABHA UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 3982 FOR ANSWER ON 15.12.2009 BY DR. RAGHUVANSH PRASAD SINGH REGARDING ETHICS IN JOURNALISM

ANNEXURE-A

Financial Journalism – 1996

The Press Council of India has counselled reporters/financial journalists/newspaper establishments to refrain from receiving any gifts/ grants/concessions/facilities, etc., either in cash or kind which are likely to compromise free and unbiased reporting on financial matters.

2. The Council in its Report has observed that the financial journalists today enjoy considerable influence over readers' minds and, therefore, they owe it to them to present a balanced and objective view of the financial dealings, status and prospects of a company. It observed that some companies are given excessive news coverage in the newspapers/magazines because they have issued advertisements to that print media. Sometimes, adverse reports are published of those companies which do not give advertisements to the newspapers or magazines. Again, when a media is not happy with any company/ management for whatever reason, the negative aspects of the company are highlighted, while in the reverse situation, no negative aspects are brought to light. Some companies are also known to give gifts, loans, discounts, preferential shares, etc., to certain financial journalists to receive favourable and positive reports of the companies. At the same time, there is no mechanism for investors' education or for raising public opinion against such unhealthy practices.

3. The Council feeling concerned over the malpractice in the Corporate Sector and after holding detailed deliberations and discussions with the representatives of financial institutions and journalists, has recommended the guidelines enumerated below for observance by the financial journalists:

- 1) The financial journalists should not accept gifts, loans, trips, discounts, preferential shares or other considerations which compromise or are likely to compromise his position.
- 2) It should be mentioned prominently in the report about any company that the report is based on information given by the company or the financial sponsors of the company.
- 3) When the trips are sponsored for visiting establishments of a company, the author of the report who has availed of the trip must state invariably that the visit was sponsored by the company concerned and that it had also extended the hospitality as the case may be.
- 4) No matter related to the company should be published without verifying the facts from the company and the source of such report should also be disclosed.

- 5) A reporter who exposes a scam or brings out a report for promotion of a good project should be encouraged and awarded.
- 6) A journalist who has financial interests such as share holdings, stock holdings, etc., in a company, should not report on that company.
- 7) The journalist should not use for his own benefit or for the benefit of his relations and friends, information received by him in advance for publication.
- 8) No newspaper owner, editor or anybody connected with a newspaper should use his relations with the newspaper to promote his other business interests.
- 9) Whenever there is an indictment of a particular advertising agency or advertiser by the Advertising Council of India, the newspaper in which the advertisement was published must publish the news of indictment prominently.

ANNEXURE AS REFERRED TO IN PARTS (a) And (b) OF LOK SABHA UNSTARRED QUESTION NO. 3982 FOR ANSWER ON 15.12.2009 BY DR. RAGHUVANSH PRASAD SINGH REGARDING ETHICS IN JOURNALISM

ANNEXURE-B

GUIDELINES ON UNDUE FAVOURS TO JOURNALISTS-1998

The power of the press has prompted the policemen through the ages to try to cultivate and curry its favours through overt, and more often than not, covert means.

It is only if the press accepts its responsibility of serving the public interest as an independent observer, informer and educator of people as a watchdog of the interest of the society that it can discharge its true role as a mass communicator. Ultimately the strength of the moral fabric of the press itself shall decide whether or not to be swayed by the inducements and enticements thrown in its way by those in power. The media persons must realise that the burden of whether favours and facilities they receive, whether they are showered on them by the public or the private organisations or the individuals in authority, is ultimate borne by the people. The private organisations recover their costs by adding to the cost of the products and services they sell. The ultimate allegiance of the press has therefore to be of the people and not to immediate benefactors.

To distinguish between the facilities made available to the members of the fourth estate for due discharge of their professional duties and favours granted with a view too influence them, is not always easy. However, the simple and intelligible demarcation may be a uniform profferment of help to journalists in discharge of their professional duties made within the parameters of well laid down policies, without discrimination from person to person constitutes facility but when it is restricted to any or some individuals or establishments, it becomes a favour.

Based on the report given out by the Council in January 1998 in favour extended to journalists by various authorities over the period 1985 to 1995, the Council has framed the following guidelines for future guidance:

1. Accommodation-houses/flats/land:

The Government is not obliged to provide accommodation to the journalists as it is the responsibility of the newspaper establishment to provide accommodation to their employees. Whenever such a facility is provided to the journalists by the authorities it should be gradually phased out.

Land allotments at concessional rates to the newspaper establishment /individuals for the purpose of installing printing presses should not be a source of undue/illegal enrichment of the allottees. Therefore, the proposal of allotment of land to newspaper establishment/ individuals should be scrutinized by the authorities very carefully. No land should be allotted to newspaper establishments/individuals at concessional rates if the land is proposed to be put to commercial use as well along with its use for press purpose by the allottees.

2. Allotment of Shares in Companies:

The shares allotted at a special price or given under any quota is a favour.

Bus Travel/Rail Travel/Transport:

This is a favour so far as big and medium newspapers are concerned. Further the journalists attached to the newspapers which are in profit have no justification for availing free bus/ rail/transport facility. Such costs must be borne by the concerned newspaper. However, in the case of small newspaper this may constitute a facility.

4. Foreign travel:

Extending the facility of air travel by companies, corporations and airlines is an inducement to write favourably about their products and services. As regards official foreign tours undertaken by the President, the Vice President, the Prime Minister and the External Affairs Minister or any other Minister, only eligible journalist should be nominated for coverage once the newspaper has been selected on the basis of the criteria laid down. The management personnel of the newspapers should not be selected/ nominated for coverage of such tours.

5. Free Air Tickets by Domestic Travel Airlines and Others:

It induces journalists to write favourable reports to commercially promote the airlines and the commercial enterprise offering such tickets and should not be accepted by the journalists.

6. Cash Disbursement from Chief Minister's Discretionary Fund:

Disbursement of money from the Discretionary Fund of the Chief Minister other than by way of relief to the indignant and helpless journalists encourage unfaithfulness to the mission of journalism and promotes corrupt practices. This could be discouraged by the Chief Ministers.

7. Cash Disbursement Financial Assistance:

The financial assistance, even if given for medical treatment, constitute a favour, unless, medical aid is given under a clear cut policy uniformly applicable to the destitutes or sick persons who cannot afford the medical treatment, and the journalists happens to be one of such beneficiaries. Extending CGHS facility to journalists is illogical since this facility to its employees is the responsibility of the newspaper establishments and should be provided by the authorities.

8-9. Funds for media centres and grants to journalists associations is favour and should be discontinued, unless it is given for promoting the journalistic skills.

10. Gift cheques including those given by the advertisement agencies for publication of material relating to their clients or otherwise is a favour and deserve outright condemnation. The journalists should not accept them.

11. Gifts in any form, irrespective of their value, are to be condemned.

12. Free parking is a favour, if journalist uses this facility for the purpose other than his professional work.

13. Guest Hospitality

The working journalists, as a rule should not be treated as State Guests. However, when Press teams are invited to a place to discharge their professional duties, making due arrangements for them would be an exception. The stay in government guest houses by accredited journalists, is permissible if it is for discharging professional duties.

14. Import of duty free cameras and computers:

It is the duty of the newspaper establishment to provide cameras/computers to its personnel. Allowing duty free cameras and computers to a particular class of persons by the Government is a favour. However, this facility may be extended to the accredited freelance journalists, small newspapers, provided it is not misused.

15. Insurance Premium:

It is not for the governments to pay premium of the insurance of the journalists. The newspaper establishments or the individual concerned should make the payment of the same.

16. Giving jobs to journalist's relatives, for considerations, and other than on merits is an outright attempt to induce and should be curbed.

17. The grant of loans within the ambit of a policy already laid down for all citizens is permissible. But when the loan is given only to journalists or at reduced rates of interests or when the interest due or the principal amount is waived/written off/condoned, such a practice amounts to undue favour and should be stopped.

18. Nomination on Committees:

In some states the journalists are nominated on some organisations and institutions like Public Service Commission and are also given the status of State Minister or Cabinet Minister, which is a wrong practice. Except for nomination by professional organisations on Committees, which have a quota to represent the various professions, this practice constitutes a favour and should be stopped.

19. Allotting PCO/Fax/Phone booth or centre to a journalist is a favour. This practice should be stopped.

20. Pensionary benefits:

Since the media is not part of the government, the benefit given only to media persons constitutes a favour when extended by the government.

21. Press Clubs-Donation of Funds:

This practice is prevalent all over the country and funds are being donated lavishly by Chief Ministers/Ministers, political leaders, companies and corporations not only to genuine Press Clubs but also to the Press Clubs of dubious nature. In the latter case it constitutes an attempt to induce the journalists to give favourable reports about the donors. This should be stopped.

22. Prizes:

The practice of giving spurious awards has to be curbed. There are instances of sale of awards and prizes by the racketeers making money out of it. Not only the racketeers but the awardees often contribute towards the value of the prize.

23. Allotment of shops to persons for reasons of their position as journalist is a clear cut favour and should be stopped forthwith.

24. The grant of Accreditation Cards, Government and Public Authority Advertisements according to rules, facility during election meeting, expenses for journalistic conventions, seminars, etc. providing press rooms, inviting press parties, giving publication material, providing for training of journalists do not constitute favours. They are essential facilities offered to journalists for the discharge of their professional duties.