

way of construction of gas turbine is solved early so that the people of Barak Valley are relieved of the serious problem of electricity.

(vi) Need To Introduce Metro Rail System In Delhi

[*Translation*]

SHRI B.L. SHARMA PREM (East Delhi): Mr. Speaker, Sir, due to the heavy increase in the road traffic in Delhi over the last 10-15 years even the movement of pedestrians has become difficult. Pollution in the National Capital Region of Delhi is also increasing in comparison to other states of the country. If the increase in the road traffic in Delhi is not checked, then the people in Delhi would have to wear face masks while moving out from their houses. Heavy traffic is also the cause of thousands of accidents every year.

Therefore, I would request the Central Government to introduce Metro Rail system in Delhi as early as possible. This would not only check traffic congestion but would also keep the environment pollution free.

[*English*]

(vii) Need To Take Measures For The Development Of Mica Industry In Kodarma Area In Bihar

Dr. MUMTAZ ANSARI (Kodarma) : I wish to bring to the notice of the Government that mica industry is fastly decaying in Kodarma area of Bihar. It provided employment to four lakh people earlier and 1200 mines were operating there. But hardly ten to twelve industries are working now. It is an export oriented commodity which used to earn Rs. 70 crores of foreign exchange earlier.

I, therefore, request the Central

Government to take concrete measures for the revival and development of mica industries of this area.

[*Translation*]

SHRI ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE (Lucknow): Mr. Speaker, Sir, when will the statement on 'Agni' and 'Prithvi' be given?

[*English*]

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE AND MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS (SHRI MALLIKARJUN): I have given the notice.

[*Translation*]

13.07 hrs.

MR SPEAKER: At 4.30 p.m

The Lok Sabha then adjourned for Lunch till Fifteen minutes past Fourteen of the clock.

14.25 hrs

The Lok Sabha re-assembled after Lunch at Twenty Five minutes past Fourteen of the clock

(MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*)

PRESS COUNCIL (AMENDMENT)
BILL

As passed by Rajya Sabha- Contd.

[*English*]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: The time allowed to this subject is two hours and it is shared amongst the different political parties.

Congress Party gets 48 minutes, BJP -11 minutes, JD -8 minutes, CPI- 7 minutes like that.

SHRI SANTOSH KUMAR GANGWAR (Bareilly): Sir, this is a very important Bill. Please extend the time.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER: Small political parties get two minutes. For example, AIADMK gets 3 minutes, JD(A) - 2 minutes. Telugu Desam-1 minute, JMM - 1 minute and so on. We can adjust if the early speakers have some sympathy towards the smaller parties.

Shri. Chandrakar was on his legs yesterday. He may continue now.

[*Translation*]

SHRI CHANDULAL CHANDRAKAR (Durg): Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, the basis of the detailed reply given by the concerned Minister of State of the Ministry on the Press Council Amendment Bill is that small, medium and big newspapers have been categorised on the basis of the circulation of newspapers. But who will determine the circulation? There is a provision in the Bill according to which the Press Registrar of India would determine the circulation of each newspaper. The total number of papers published in India is about 35000 out of which the number of daily papers is 3606, bi-weekly and tri-weekly 339, weekly 10647, fortnightly magazines 4471, monthly magazines 10586 and others is 5447. All these papers and magazines make the total number to 35096. The Registrar of Newspapers has adequate resources and staff. But they do not have the capacity to determine the circulation of more than 1200 newspapers per annum. When they are hardly capable to determine the circulation of this much number of newspapers then how long they would take

to determine the circulation of 35000 papers. The Hon. Minister may please clarify the situation in this regard. It is on the basis of the findings of survey to this effect that small, medium and big newspapers would be categorised. The Government have fixed a quota for the newspaper publishers to import newsprint paper from abroad. This criteria is not practically useful for them. The Registrar should be provided more staff and resources so that something concrete may be done to determine the circulation of newspapers. Wage Board fix the salary of the staff according to the circulation of Paper whereas the Wage Board should keep in view the property of the newspaper companies to fix the salary, it is not justified to consider the circulation as the only medium.

Foreign televisions have also started working in our country due to which Doodarshan is in problem, rather they are repenting that they have suffered a lot. A number of foreign newspaper companies are interested in publishing newspapers in India because they do have adequate resources. However, the newspapers in our country which have been working since the independence movement would lose their identity in that condition. Therefore, foreign newspapers should not be allowed to be published in this country, this is my opinion. The Government should take a firm decision not to allow the foreign newspapers to come to India even though some of the Cabinet colleagues are in favour of it. The Government must adopt a clear policy in this regard. The Union Minister of Information and Broadcasting is capable enough to persuade all to take measures so that foreign newspapers do not come to this country.

Press Council of India is not empowered to take action on the complaint against any newspaper, though it investigates the matter

and also gives order but the orders are never complied with. Because they do not have the power to enforce them strictly. The Government have not provided any machinery to them for this purpose. If the Government gives the right to investigate but not to implement the findings, it is of no use. Press council of India attend to the complaints regarding newspapers and investigate the cases of defaulters, it also decides the punishment. But the final stage is not implemented. Therefore, I would request the Government to give statutory powers to Press Council of India.

Doordarshan cover political news, business news, sports news and also weather forecast but not the agricultural matters or the problems of farmers. It is a major drawback. Majority of the people in this country are engaged in agriculture or agricultural business. Therefore, this aspect should also be covered.

So far as the question of constituting Wage Board for journalists is concerned, the concept has been approved but why the constitution is being delayed is something very confusing. The Government should set up the Wage Board as early as possible. Besides this, there are many other problems of journalists. For instance they have to sit late upto 10.00- 12.00 p.m. at night to cover the proceedings of the House, therefore, adequate facilities should be provided to them. Their primary problem is that of accommodation. No decision is being taken to provide housing facilities to them. At least those who are entitled, should be allotted accommodation.

I repeat my points again that Wage Board should be constituted, Statutory powers should be given to Press Council of India and foreign journalists should not be allowed to come to this country. The

Government should make a clear announcement in this regard. With these words I conclude.

SHRI CHANDRA JEET YADAV (Azamgarh) : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Press Council Act had been enacted in order to have a society or a Board which would help the news-papers of our country to work independently and impartially and exercise moral pressure and provide guidance to them so that, keeping in view that democracy is a very important organ of our country, they could work in a concerted manner to keep the public well informed as to what is happening within the country and abroad. As it is a fundamental right of every citizen to be well informed as to the happenings within the country and abroad. That is why, this organisation had been constituted which would be able to guide and monitor the newspapers. I feel that there was no need to introduce this Bill. The only purpose of introducing this Bill is that the Government want to keep this power with themselves only to decide the categories of newspapers and magazines and publish a press communique to this effect as to which newspapers are small, middle or big ones. The press council Act had so far maintained that the newspapers having a circulation of less than 15000 are to be considered small newspapers and those having 15 to 50 thousand in Medium newspaper category and those having more than 50 thousand in the big category. But now the Government has become incursive towards the Press Council Act as it wants to take over this power. Now, the Press Council feels the Government will change the category whenever they feel like, by issuing a Press communique. I feel that this Bill is anti-small newspapers and magazines because now the Government will decide that the newspapers having the circulation of 25000 will be considered small newspapers. As a

result thereof, the newspapers published from small villages and townships will be adversely affected. As the Hon. Minister has also admitted that the number of newspaper and journals has increased 400% in the last 25-30 years and their circulation has also increased 500%. It means that an interest has been created in people and they are beginning to know and understand more. It is a good sign for democracy but some districts which are bringing out or trying to bring out 25-30 newspapers, journals will fall victim to this Bill when the Government decides to increase the circulation limit. Thus, I demand that this Bill be withdrawn and the Press Council Act be made more comprehensive on the basis of suggestions put forth in both the Houses and experience gained through Press Council Act, 1978 to ensure that it functions more authentically and independently. It's section 26 empowers is that it can impose levy for the services rendered to avoid depending on the Government and to be able to work independently. If the Government goes on increasing the circulation limit for this category, then, the journals having the circulation of 20-25-30 thousand will not get advertisements and only the big journals will get the advertisements. It has come to the notice of the Press Council on many an occasion that there are some undertakings in the Public Sector who have limited resources and they have stopped giving advertisements to the small newspapers. The small newspapers made a submission to the Press Council that this is an assault on them. But the Press Council expressed its helplessness that since they do neither have a budgetary provision nor any means, they are not able to help. In place of augmenting the means of advertisement and helping the small newspapers and journals more, the Government has brought this amendment which is going to create a very big problem

for them.

Sir, I would like to say that the regional language newspapers and journals are the worst-affected. The means of news-papers and journals have become important these days. Now, the journals etc. are having coloured pictures and even the daily newspapers are also having coloured pages, especially, the editions on Saturdays and Sundays. Some daily news papers in India cost as much as Rs.5. This is a dangerous trend. I agree with Shri. Chandrakar ji. Now, the Government is talking about star T.V and now they have the access to the Prime Minister also. They came and promised that they would also work in Hindi and other regional languages hereon large scale. The CNN officials also came. The newspapers have made a submission. The foreign newspapers and journals have very few news-items and these contain 90-95 % advertisement. The same trend is going to start here. Our newspapers and journals will not stand chance against them. That is why, I support this demand that since we have several prestigious dailies in our country there is really no need to invite foreign newspapers here. It should be totally banned otherwise the freedom of our news-papers will be at stake and our traditions will also be at stake. Because those newspapers will only contain news about foreign countries and they will not bother about the news which are related to our public. The efforts are being made in the new economic policy to cater to the needs of only the 10 percent or may be 5 per cent population belonging to the elite class and manufacture things keeping in mind their interest and entertainment. I feel that it is dangerous for the democracy and it has become imperative that the Government considers it in a detailed manner.

Yesterday our Hon. Minister had

convened a meeting. Women Members from both the Houses took it very seriously that today standard of our cinema is speedily going down and there is a lot of vulgarity and obscenity and it is going to have a very bad impact. That is why this meeting had been convened. It is a good thing that a meeting was held to know the opinion of the people. I feel that these things need to be given a serious thought. It needs to be considered as to how much freedom should be given, how much effort should be made, what should be their direction, what should be their standard etc. It should not be restricted to films alone but to magazines, radio and Doordarshan also. There should be a national policy in this regard. We have entered an era which is creating new ideas, new problems and new facts. Science and technology, communication etc. have started a new revolution in the world. It should not be treated lightly. It will not solve the purpose by first bringing an amendment and then starting something new. Until and unless a policy is formulated by seriously considering it from a basic point of view it cannot stop.

Sir, I would like to say one thing, though it does not directly concern the Information and Broadcasting Minister, it is related in a way that it directly concerns the reporters working with the newspapers. There has been a long-standing demand to constitute a Wage Board for journalists. All the Journalists of the country demanded it. The Government repeatedly assured that the journalists have many requirements, they face many difficulties and some times in the process of doing fair reporting their life faces several kinds of dangers, they have a security problem and are under the unjustified pressure of their bosses also. They are not able to work independently due to several limitations. The wage Board is yet to be constituted. Only the promise remains. It is not taking place because the journalists

have two organisations. One organisation has outnumbered its membership so its representatives will be included in the Board and the Government wants the representation of only those journalists who are Pro-Government. That is why, the work is pending. I demand this also that since the 'journalists' wage Board is related to their life, their work and their requirements, so, the Information and Broadcasting Minister should expedite this work in consultation with the Labour Minister.

Sir, if the minimum circulation limit is extended, then, the small newspapers and journals will stop getting the advertisement and they will be forced to close down. Several Hindi, Urdu or regional language newspapers and journals closed down on large scale during the last 4-5 years.

Some closed down for want of means/funds and some could not stand the competition, that is why, they had to close down. Some had to close down due to the vindictive attitude of the administration. Some departments mete-out step motherly treatment to them and they do not even get advertisement.

I hope and demand that the Information and Broadcasting Minister should withdraw this Bill and introduce a new Bill by including certain other points.

Unfortunately, I will not be present at the time Schedule for the Hon. Minister's reply but I want that the Hon. Minister must give a reply to my question that when he had decided to introduce the present amendment in the House had he consulted the Press Council and asked for their opinion and does it not constitute an assault on the Press Council. If the Government introduces a Bill without consulting them and without taking into account several factors affecting

them and without informing them of the proposed amendment then, it amounts to incursion on the freedom of the Press Council and an assault on their functioning. This will restrict the Press Council in some ways and as a result thereof, they cannot work independently if the Government decide to work arbitrarily. When the Government has made it into an autonomous body then it was essential to consult the council before bringing in the amendment but the Hon. Minister did not mention it anywhere in his speech as to whether the press council had been consulted or whether the council had recommended that such an amendment should be made. I would like the Hon. Minister to elucidate this point while replying.

[English]

SHRIMATI MALINI BHATTACHARIYA (Jadavpur): Sir, the Amendment which has been brought to the Press Council Act is a small one. I entirely agree with Mr. Chandra Jeet Yadav that the Amendment should have been brought with the agreement of the Press Council. The change is being sought in the criteria for small, medium and big newspapers. I would like to know whether there was any demand from the newspapers themselves for changing the existing clause. With this question, I would go on to ask the Minister that while they were bringing one amendment to the Press Council Act, would it not have been better if they had looked at the Press Council Act as a whole and tried to find out whether other Amendments also would not be in tune for improvement of the Press Council.

As the Press Council stands today, we find that certain powers have been given to it. It has been given the powers of a civil court calling for evidence and scrutinising complaints and so on. But we find that, first of all, the powers that have been given to the

Press Council are not being fully utilised. There is a certain lacuna in the working of the Press Council. Its work does not have as much impact on our society as we would expect it to have. Why is this?

In this connection, I would remind the Hon. Minister of the commitments that they have kept on making regarding the implementation of Prasar Bharti which has also a Broadcasting Council attached to it. When I look at the Press Council and the way in which it is unable to use the powers that have been given to it, I also feel certain questions coming to my mind regarding the working of the Broadcasting Council if and when the Government implements Prasar Bharati.

What are the duties of the Press Council of India? I feel that it has a two fold duty. On the one hand the Press Council has the responsibility of protecting the people who are in the journalistic profession in our country, and on the other hand encouraging them to go in for investigative journalism and encouraging them to collect news which will be worthwhile. I think the journalistic profession is not of much use unless the journalist is inspired by a passion for truth. And, I am very happy to say, Sir, that in our country we do find investigative journalism of a very high standard.

As a matter of fact it was on account of investigative journalism on the part of certain enterprising journalists that we got to know about the bank scam. The same is the case with regard to Bofors. We do have some of the finest investigative journalists in our country and I am proud to say that so far as investigative journalism is concerned, many of the journalists who are at the top of their profession who have passion for truth, are women like Chitra Subramaniam of The Hindu and Mani Mala of the Navbharat

Times. I am very proud that we have such journalists.

However, the point is that the situation in our country is such that this kind of journalism will be fraught with certain dangers. We do find journalists being attacked. We do find on various occasions when the journalists go to collect news they are harassed in various ways. I think it is the duty of the Press Council to look after the interests of the journalists.

However, we also find that there is another kind of journalism also. It is a part of the duty of the Press Council to watch out for this kind of journalism. We find that there is the very lowest kind of yellow journalism also. We do find that in the name of journalism there is personal vilification. There is an effort at character assassination. This kind of journalism is also to be found in our country. And, I think it is the responsibility of the Press Council to protect the citizens from this kind of journalism.

I would just give one or two instances. One is, the communal riots which had been there in the wake of Babri Masjid demolition. We found that certain journalists played a very bad role.

They played a very nasty role, particularly certain regional newspapers played a nasty role in lighting the fire of communalism in certain States. The Press Council took a very strong stand against it. The Press Council passed certain strictures against these newspapers. I would like to know from the Government what steps the Government has taken to bring such papers to book.

In West Bengal, we have a Left Front Government. There, we find that a section of the press is engaging everyday, in the

lowest kind of personal vilification and character assassination. Even no less a person than the Chief Minister of the State of West Bengal is not immune from this kind of yellow journalism. I know that in certain States for much smaller offences, either the Government or the Legislature had taken very strong steps against the journalists. We do not agree with that. We think that the States should only intervene in these matters when there is a law and order problem or when the journalism is of a kind which is likely to create a communal hatred or to incite tension among different sections of the people. Except in such cases, I think it is not the duty of the State but is rather the duty of the Press Council to call these journalists to look and prevent them from engaging in this kind of yellow journalism. What does the Press Council do? They give recommendations to the Government. One thing is that the Government does not take steps as per their recommendations. And the other thing is that sometimes the Press Council itself does not take the kind of steps that would be necessary for prevention and control of such situation. Why? I think this is because in our country - now I am coming to my final point - while the Press is the Fourth Estate, it is still a very young press and the need of the hour today is for decentralisation and democratisation of the press. Whereas what we find is that in accordance with the overall economic policies of the Government, it is only the monopoly houses - now we find this has been mentioned by other Hon. Members also and I am not going into it - and now we find that permission is sought by foreign newspapers to enter into our country.

Only yesterday, at the meeting that we had with the Hon. Minister, we had the information that now foreign Television is broadcasting uncensored Indian filthy songs and dances in Singapore and places like

that. The Government apparently has had to rebuke them for this. If the foreign newspaper, come in, what kind of power would they wield? So, I entirely agree with what the other Hon. Member have said that the entry of foreign newspapers is something which should not be allowed but also at the same time, the monopoly powers which have been given to a number of newspapers, the kind of influence which they wield over the public mind, I think in order to break this monopoly, much more importance has to be given to the medium newspapers and to the smaller newspapers. And with the lifting of cross media restrictions- I think that this has been compounded- there has been a further monopolisation of information. The same houses which are running the newspapers are now allowed to have time on Television and also we find another trend that there seems to be a great exodus of editors from various big national newspapers these days. We find, side by side, that these owners of newspapers are appearing as editors.

1500 hrs.

[SHRIMATI SANTOSH CHOWDHARY *in the Chair*]

What will be the result of it? As we know, according to the composition of the Press Council, there are to be seven journalists and six editors. If out of six editors, three editors are also the owners of big newspapers, then where would the autonomy of the Press Council to act in accordance with its conscience be? The same monopoly over the information that is there, will be compounded by the massive presence of editors, who are, as a matter of fact, not editors but owners really. This monopolisation will be compounded.

Therefore, in order to establish the presence of the autonomy of the Fourth

Estate, it is necessary to look at the Press Council Act in toto once again and see that with the power that have been given to it, they are able to utilise them properly; and the autonomy of the Press Council is further enhanced so that they can really act as a kind of control over this monopoly information. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

SHRI KRISHAN DUTT SULTANPURI (Shimla): Madam Chairman, I support this Bill.

The Press Council Act, 1978 provides for setting up of a Press Council, which would ensure freedom of Press, newspapers and news agencies. As is stated in the Bill, classification of newspapers is a right step. It can help us to find out the number of small, medium and big newspapers as well as the circulations thereof. This Bill was introduced in the Rajya Sabha in December, where it was passed with a voice-vote.

This Bill deals only with India and there is no such provision which speaks of entry of foreign newspapers into India. However, the opposition looks at every step of the Government with suspicious eyes. Even if the Government does a right thing, they would suspect that the Government is going hand-in-glove with foreign countries. They want that the Government only consult them and it should not care for the wishes of the people of the nation. If this Bill is passed, it would give encouragement to small newspapers and their number and circulation will increase further. Thereafter they could become big industries and will be able to bring out big newspapers.

Shri Chandrakar has rightly said that there should be restriction on entry of foreign newspapers into the country. To know

about the various newspapers of the nation, we have Bangla newspapers brought out from West Bengal, Tamil newspapers from Tamilnadu, Malayalam newspapers from Kerala, hill language newspapers from different hilly regions, Punjabi newspapers from Punjab and other small newspapers from all over India. Among the big newspapers, there are 'Navbharat Times' and 'The Hindustan Times' which have their circulations all over India. On the other hand, there are other newspapers like 'The Tribune' which has no branch but its circulation is wide.

The employees working with the newspapers published from the capitals of States as well as other places should be given some basic facilities like house etc. so as to enable them write appealing and constructive articles. The opposition accused us for every scam, whether it was Bofors, Dunkel or Bank scam. However, whatever they say, the Government look into them. the Congress Government even constituted a Joint Parliamentary Committee to inquire into the allegation and it has since presented its report in the House. A discussion can take place on this Report according to the rules. The opposition see every action of the Government in such a way as if nothing has been done by the Government. Three no-confidence motions moved by the opposition were defeated in the past but still they do not know what the people of India want. Today, some big and powerful leaders are going to participate in the Dharna on the issue of using Indian languages as medium in IFS and IAS examinations. They are trying to raise such issues at this time because the elections are slated to be held in the next two years. In my opinion, we all should take a united stand on such issues. The newspapers should come out with constructive headlines which could augur well for the country. I read a

newspaper, published from Uttar Pradesh. It is written therein that something is being done or is likely to be done but instead, we see that atrocities are still being committed on poor women. In 'Sunday', news appeared on dacoities. It shows that they try to divert the attention of countrymen towards such happenings in our country. They should rather contribute to the welfare of the country. Their contribution can only be constructive when editors of these newspapers do good reporting. There are intellectuals also sittings in this House. They should criticise the Government with constructive mind. If the opposition suggest something right, it should be looked into. The Government should itself monitor the work which does not go on smoothly. Further, it should see that how many big or small newspapers have poor circulation. Similarly, it should mointor that how many newspapers come from foreign countries. I agree with their views that we should have more staff and we should take every step with due caution. The Government has no intention to takeover the management of such newspapers and print the material of their own choice. The Union Government or any State Government has not imposed restriction on journalists. If there is something wrong with the journalism, the Press Council will sort it out. In this Council, there is a provision of six members, which among others, would include Members of this House also. However, small newspaper journalists should also be included in it so that they could also raise the matters concerning them.

So far this Bill is concerned, we should pass it unanimously. We should see to it that how the nation could progress. As regards the jurisdiction, that must be there because if we constitute a committee, these things should also come under its jurisdiction. If somebody does anything wrong or indulges in wrong press reporting, the council must

take action against him. It did not happen even after inquiring the matter. The result remained nil. Therefore, I would like to request the Hon. Minister that he should pay attention towards this. Whatever programme is chalked out, that should be time-bound. Once this provision is included in the Bill, only then something concrete can be expected.

Madam, while supporting this Bill, I believe that the issues raised by the Members of ruling as well as opposition parties deserve to be pondered upon. Wherever, unfounded allegations have been levelled, I strongly deny them. However, I would like to emphasize that the nation can progress only when there is unanimity amongst us. Further, our newspapers, newspaper-owners or editors can be constructive reporting also contribute in the prosperity of the nation. Our nation can march ahead only. When we would think of the progress of our nation. With these words, I support this Bill.

[*English*]

SHRI SUSHIL CHANDRA VARMA (Bhopal): I personally feel that the amendment has not come a day too soon and it is not the fault of the Government. I will not blame them for delaying the amendment. But the fact remains that it has been under consideration for the last two or three years.

So far as I know, being a Member of Press Council myself, the amendment now being brought by the Government has the concurrence of the Press Council. Also, as a Member of the Press Council I welcome the amendment, but with a rider that whenever the Minister or the Government feels like changing the figures in regard to the circulation he should consult the Press

Council of India and whatever the decision he takes the entire matter, should be placed before the House, so that everyone here gets an opportunity to know what norms have been adopted in identifying the small newspapers, the medium newspapers and the bigger newspapers. I hope that the Government would accept this suggestion.

Madam, a lot has been said about the performance of the Press Council. It has been said that it should be given more teeth, that it is not very effective. But then, what do people mean by saying that it should be given more teeth? The day the Press Council becomes a punitive authority, it starts imposing punishment, taking some kind of a punitive action, then it would be exposing itself to the acts of the courts. According to our Constitution, before we take action against anyone or before we decide to take action against anyone, that person has a right to go up in appeal. That is the basic foundation of our Constitution. Therefore, if the Press Council of India, as it is constituted, exercises its moral authority, on the functioning of the Press in this country. It is that moral authority which is the most important factor in the functioning of the Council. The day we give power to the Press Council to impose punishment in regard to advertisement and other matters, the moral authority of the PCI would be in jeopardy.

And the PCI shall be subject to all kinds of litigation. And the day that happens, the Press Council of India would lose the moral authority that it enjoys today. I do not know how an impression has been created that it is not effective. In fact, its popularity, its effectiveness can be gauged by the fact that the number of complaints that we are receiving, that the PCI is receiving from year to year is actually on an increase. Nearly 1,000 complaints are received by the Press

Council on an average every year. Press Council looks into those complaints. The people are heard. As already mentioned by some colleagues there, it enjoys the powers of Civil Court. The parties are summoned; they are heard even the lawyers appear and then a decision is taken whether a right thing has been done or a wrong this has been done. And of course, the maximum punishment that the Press Council can pronounce is that of censure. I think that is enough. If the people have the sensitivity in this country, censure is enough. When you send people to jail or impose some pecuniary loss on somebody could that only be considered punishment? I do not accept that plea. Censure should be enough so far as the newspaper section is concerned. This matter has been discussed a number of times in the Press Council and the consensus was that the present position as it obtains should continue. Madam, the primary objective of constituting the Press Council is to protect the freedom of expression and speech, that is enshrined in the Article 19(1)(a) I think, that objective is being fulfilled by the Press Council of India.

There are some matters which I would like to bring to the notice of the Government. One is about the assaults that are being made on the journalists and also on the press photographers. This is not a situation which obtains only in this country. But even in the foreign countries, we read quite often in the newspapers that the photographers and the newsmen have been assaulted and sometimes they lose their lives. The other day I read in the Newsweek that they have formed an international body to monitor the assaults on the journalists and press photographers. And if I remember correctly, during 1992-93, nearly 20 press photographers and journalists lost their lives in various parts of world. This is the matter of a great concern. We talk of freedom. but

then we find the increasingly the State Government and the Governments in general do not take newspaper reporting in a sporting spirit. If that is any criticism, they should take it seriously. They should examine it and find out whether the criticism appearing in the Press is correct or not, instead of getting vindictive. One of the steps that they take towards their vindictiveness, in the fulfillment of their vindictiveness, is to stop or to reduce the advertisement to the newspapers. This is very unfortunate, But even such cases come to the Press Council. The matter is taken up with the State Government and we ask them, why has the advertisement been stopped or reduced; When we get a reply, we even summon the people in the State Government, who are concerned with this matter and the Council takes a decision on those matters.

Madam, I would like to make one last point. People talk of providing facilities to the journalists. I joined service in the IAS in 1949. I know that for 10,15 years, no State Government allotted any quarter, any residential accommodation any land to any journalist.

All this started after 15 to 20 years. Why was this done? This was done primarily and I need not say that but to earn—I do not know how to express in the best words—the good wishes or the goodwill of the Press and to somehow attract the sympathy or to bring Press in line with what the Government thinks. I think, as a matter of principle, the journalists should refuse any concession which the State Governments or the Government of India may offer them because then only they will be able to maintain their independence. I have seen myself in my capacity as Chief Secretary of the State Government that so many applications are received for allotment of quarters. What

kind of attitude the Press people adopt and what postures they assume? I think, to a normal person. It should appear very humiliating. Why should the press people beg the State Governments for land, for quarters or for houses? I understand that if anything is connected with journalism per se, that is if they want to go somewhere, if they wish to see some place or if they want to visit a place, the facilities must be provided by the Government for the sake of transparency, for the sake of fulfilling the objectives of the constitution, that is, under Article 19. But then asking for physical facilities, I think, is against the ethics of good journalism.

Lastly, I would like to say that there are some matters in which I would request the Hon. Minister to pay his particular attention. Some of the proposals which are sent to the Ministry by the Press Council of India need greater attention and more expeditious action. I am told that the regulations which were sent more than a year ago are still not finalised by the Ministry. Then there is also a constraint to resource. This year, there was a suggested budget of Rs. 82 lakh. We all considered it is the Press Council. But I am told the budget has been reduced to Rs. 69 lakhs.

Matters regarding service conditions, promotion policy and all such matters come to the Ministry. I would request the Hon. Minister who is a very dynamic person and I have known him for years to ensure that whatever matter are pending in the Ministry are disposed of as early as possible.

SHRI SYED SHAHABUDDIN (Kishanganj): Mr. Chairperson, at the outset, I would like to compliment the Press Council of India under Justice Sarkaria for doing their job efficiently in spite of all the handicaps. I do appreciate the point raised by colleague

who just spoke before me. Shri S.C. Verma that perhaps if the Ministry acted faster and more expeditiously, the Press Council would have been able to do much more than what they have been doing.

I know that under Section 23 of the Press Council Act, certain rules were to be framed and I understand that many rules have been framed and some have been drafted. But even those are still pending. One of the reasons is that the Ministry's concurrence is required.

Madam, having said this I feel that 15 years have elapsed since the Press Council was created. And when I approached this Bill I approached it with high hopes that it would reflect a considered view of the Government gathered in the light of the fifteen years experience over the entire spectrum of the working of the Press Council which has elicited many comments in the House and outside and also in the media.

Unfortunately, this Bill is disappointing in that respect. I appreciate the point made by the previous speakers that a more comprehensive Bill is called for. I do hope that the Minister shall, at the first opportunity, consider presenting a more comprehensive Bill to the House, and I would like to submit a few words points he may like to take into consideration while framing that Bill.

The first thing I would say is that the Press Council indeed is a toothless tiger. Here I beg to disagree with my colleague. Mr. Verma. It is not a question of whether it can punish anybody. But I do feel that in the circumstances that we are living through in our country, with the mighty tide of fascist forces sweeping the country, strictures and censors cannot be adequate. That is why the Press Council is losing its moral authority. I do not accept the view that if the

decisions of the Press Council had to be subjected to an appellate forum above them. It would detract from the moral authority or the legal authority of the Press Council. There is a Supreme Court whose appellate jurisdiction not detract from the moral authority of the High Court. Therefore, I still feel that even if the person who feels that he has been wronged by the Press Council and wants to exercise his right of appeal, even then the Press Council Act should vest sufficient power in the Press Council that the wrong doers, who are doing it again and again, should be curbed. I am for freedom of information but there are situations in which total freedom cannot be permitted, particularly in a country like ours where mass media can be used to excite people, to incite groups to create hatred and bitterness between different communities, between different regions and between different languages. That is why I feel that some thought must be given to providing some more power to the Press Council, call it teeth if you like, so that the Press Council can be much more effective than it has been so far.

I know that there is a voluntary code of ethics. I am afraid that it is not being applied in actual practice. People do not take it seriously. There are newspapers which just lightly shirk it off. therefore, I think that a certain amount of punitive power is absolutely essential.

The second point I would like to come to is the heart of this Bill, that is, the composition of the Press Council. While I have complimented the Press Council for what it has done, and this report is indeed a valuable report, particularly for what they investigated during the year under report, that is, 1992-93, e.g. the case of assault on journalists in Ayodhya and that report forms part of this Annual report, frankly, when I

look at the composition, forgive my ignorance, Madam, I fail to recognise the members. this is a national body, an apex body, the very top. Each person should be eminent in his own right, each person should have a representative character. Here we have Members of Parliament, here we have eminent journalists like B.G. Verghese, and a retired Judge of the Supreme Court at the head. I would not name any person; I am sure that Mr. Chandulal Chandrakar knows everybody because he belongs to the biradari. But, I am afraid as a common man I do not recognise everybody, nor do I understand the significance of some Papers, which are represented here. they are to the best of my knowledge, just brought out in some no-fuss towns. They have hardly any circulation. Only because of the system that happens to be in force in our country, they reach the apex. To what extent do they represent their biradari, their profession, just wonder. Therefore, I think much is to be said about working out a proper manner of composing the Press Council and electing the members thereof.

Now, as far as the proposed circulation figures are concerned, to my knowledge, I do not read a malafied into them. I think the Minister has given a very good reason for raising the limits of circulation, for defining the small, medium and large papers. After all the readership is increasing in our country. But I would like to caution the Minister on one thing. Does he know, does he realise, does he appreciate how the R.N.I is functioning? Does he know that inspectors can be bribed to produce a figure of circulation which has got absolutely no relationship to the actual fact of life? And are those figures going to be used in composing the Press Council? Then we would have exactly the same result whether you raise the level or you do not raise the level. There is something rotten in the State

of Denmark, Mr. Minister, and you have got to look into it. The figures that you are getting as far as the circulation of papers are concerned, are absolutely outlandish.

I know, for example, by my own personal knowledge, something. In my city of Patna, in my language Urdu, 25 paper are being published from Patna. Some of them have a circulation of not more than 100 or 150. Yet they have been published only for the sake of securing Government patronage, whatever Government it might be. They are listed as having circulating of 10,000 and above. Is it fair? And I am sure that the Urduwalas are not the only sinners. I am sure that the Patnawalas are not only sinners. I am mentioning them because I happen to know them.

Therefore, I would like to say some better system has to be evolved for enumerating these or conducting censure or checking the circulation. Otherwise all your exercises will be totally meaningless. This amendment that you have brought here will be totally meaningless.

Madam, I would like to say that the Press Council of India, which is a national body, does not have sufficient and adequate stock of linguistic proficiency in its office. For example, if you send them a clipping in English that is fine. If you send them a clipping in Hindi it is good enough. But if you send them a clipping from Gujarati or Malayalam or Marathi or any other national language of India, it would plead ignorance. Therefore, the Press Council of India is not in a position to take suo motu action, which it should be, which is its duty. It should not depend only upon the complaints that it receives. The law provides that it should act suo motu. And how can it act suo motu if it does not have the necessary linguistically proficient staff covering all the national

languages of India? And that is why, I plead to the Hon. Minister, through you Madam, to please give sufficient funds and sufficient staff to the Press Council of India so that it can perform its task well, so that it can monitor the press throughout the country, at least the leading papers in all languages.

And then only it shall be able to keep a watch on the conduct of the press, act as a real watchdog for our democracy and for our people. Today it is not in a position to perform that function.

Thirdly, it functions based in Delhi. Of course, now it has adopted the procedure of sending out team of members to hold court, if I may say so, in various parts of the country. I feel that what is required is that the Press Council must have regional bases and regional offices. I do not know whether the Press Council has made this suggestion and made this recommendation to the Government. But I still feel that you must have a small nucleus office in the Press capital of every linguistic area in order to have real good contact with the papers in that language which are largely published in that area and also to keep a watch and then to report to headquarters.

It may come a time when you might even have regional Benches so that at least some members know the language of the paper which is under examination. So, in my view, the Press Council should have regional offices and even regional Benches and the, perhaps, the appeal can come before the full Press Council itself. Of course, for languages like English, Hindi and Urdu which are more widely spoken there are Hindi papers, there are Urdu papers and there are English papers published from, perhaps, all over the country - perhaps the central Bench will have to apply its mind. But for others they can create regional

Benches.

SHRI A. CHARLES (Trivandrum): The largest is Malayalam.

SHRI SYED SHAHABUDDIN: Madam, I would not go into any other questions which are outside the purview of this Bill. I have my views. I certainly support some of the suggestions that have been made here about our curbing the sort of unpalatable programmes that are being projected on the electronic media and the pressure that are being brought to bear on us for the unrestricted entry of the foreign press which can, perhaps, annihilate our indigenous press.

But I shall not go into these matters. I would like to, once again, submit a final view for your consideration. I feel that with all the handicaps the Press Council of India is doing a good job and it deserves our support. It deserves our goodwill, it deserves our encouragement and it deserves more and active support from the Government in order that it can function really as a watchdog of democracy. I hope the Hon. Minister will agree to the suggestion to bring before us a comprehensive Bill, as soon as possible. Subject to that, I would be happy to support this Bill. Otherwise, I think, this Bill is meaningless and there is no point in passing this Bill today.

SHRIMATI GEETA MUKHERJEE (Panskura): Madam, Chairperson, this Bill that has been brought has a very limited purpose of altering the criterion or classification of newspapers, big, small and medium. I am in a difficulty because I enquired from the Press Council's Secretary yesterday whether this is a recommendation of the Press Council itself. But both myself and Mr. Chandulal Chandrakar at least did not have any occasion to attend any meeting

which has passed this proposal. So, I am not yet clear from the reply as to whether it is a recommendation of the former Press Council. If it is not from the meeting, I would say that this classification is not favourable to the small newspapers. If there was no meeting, then a meeting should have been held and this should have been thoroughly discussed there. I would like to know the position though I am one of those who go very regularly to the Press Council. But somehow or the other I could not make it out. Therefore, this point has to be taken into account.

Madam, I shall not repeat the point made by my friends and I will briefly mention the points which I want to raise. I consider the question of entry of foreign newspapers into our country to be a very important one. They must not be allowed entry into our country. Inside the Press Council there was a big debate on it and after a lot of higgling haggling it was decided that at least for three years from the date of that meeting no foreign newspapers will be allowed to come. But, I understand that the Government is very keen in allowing the foreign newspapers. I would request the Government not to go in for it because already our Press is in a difficult position and the entry of foreign newspapers with all their wealth will dislodge our journalists, dislodge our Editors and some of the owners and particularly, the working journalists will face a very serious problem. Therefore, I think the Government will change its mind if it is thinking of giving entry to the foreign newspapers into our country.

Secondly, there is a peculiar situation with regard to the powers of the Press Council. The Press Council itself does not want to have more teeth. I do not know what can be done about this. They themselves do not want to have more teeth. I have seldom

seen an organisation which does not want to have their own powers. On this also, we have differences because some of us think that there must be some more powers. But, after a log of higgling haggling again, a compromise was reached and it was decided that if the Press Council censures a paper for two times in a year, then that paper's name will be sent to the Government for appropriate action.

This much was there even though they did not say, what that appropriate action should be. But as I understand, about 10 cases have been referred to the Government, where the newspapers have been censured twice. I would like to know what has been done by the Government. I think, in only one case, the Government has moved.

Undoubtedly, we are all for Press freedom and some of our Press people have done very good job, bringing out the Scam, bringing out the Bofors and all that. We definitely want that the freedom of investigation by the Press Reporters should be defended. They are being attacked by the police, by the anti-socials. This is a very serious situation. I hope, the Government will take care of this because the Press Council really does not have any teeth. The Government has to take some action. I would expect, irrespective of the political opinion, the Government will stand by those who have gone in for investigative journalism without fear or favour and behave with them accordingly.

Our journalists have shown many qualities. I am also proud of our women journalists who have done very good job. At the same time, the trend of scurrilous writing, trend of writing in a way which violates the Constitutional principles, is on the increase in a very big way. We know, there are

regular blackmailing by certain Press persons of the politicians, of certain other officers and all kinds of persons. This is going on for quite some time. What will the Press Council do? A very interesting thing happened there. A case comes. Well, one party is not reporting and at some other time, the second party is not reporting. It goes on and on. By the time, we come for really recommending any action or censuring or warning, all the people forget what it is all about. Therefore, the worst possible feature on the functioning is the delay. We must frame such rules so that this delay can be avoided. Two subcommittees have been constituted to consider cases. And then, with their recommendations, the case goes to the whole Council and it takes a decision. Sometimes, it authorises the Chairman to take a decision. Justice delayed is justice denied. That is what is really happening. We must find a way as to how these can be disposed of quickly. There are various suggestions. One suggestion is like in Australia and other places, let the case be given to individual members to judge, so that it is quickly decided. I do not know whether that would be a right approach. I am not very sure whether it should be left to only individual members because that would be subjective. At least, I am sure, the present kind of thing must be altered. Otherwise, whether the Press Council has teeth, or half-tooth or no tooth, it will not be very effective. It has to be made effective because the breach has increased and the problems have increased to a greater extent.

The Press has some complaint about the provisions of the Official Secrets Act and other things. For example, defence information is denied to many of the Press people. The Press was justifiably angry about it. Ultimately, one officer has been put to do the Public Relations work for them. But uptill now, the question of transparency in

defence has not been clinched. I think these things should be clinched. Otherwise, unnecessarily there would be some other feedback. For example, Pakistan will do the job of giving its feedback and that will come to our country through the television, this, that and what not. Our Press will not be in a position to really reply to them in a befitting manner. Therefore, I think the aspect of transparency is very essential.

Now, I come to the aspect of advertisement. I also very strongly feel that some special considerations must be given to the small, medium and the language newspapers coming from different district headquarters etc. because I see that the cost of the paper has gone up very much. These newspapers cannot always be subscribed by the poorer sections of the people. They do sometimes subscribe to the small newspapers containing four sheets and like that. So, those newspapers should have some incentive in the shape of advertisement. While thinking about this advertisement policy, the Government should take into consideration these questions in collaboration with the Press Council. The Press Council is going to discuss the advertisement policy in the next meeting. We should encourage the small and medium newspapers. There is not much difference of opinion in the Press Council. So, the Government should co-operate with them and see that this is done.

There is another thing and that is about the Wage Board. The wage Board is to be set up. Some of us raised about it. Shri Chandulal Chandrakar raised it; I myself have raised it; many others also raised it that the Wage board must be formed. Now, the decision has been taken that a Wage Board for the Working Journalists would be formed. What will be the composition of the Wage Board? The Indian Journalists

Association has represented for a seat in the Wage Board. Last time, in the Wage Board for the Journalists, the Indian Federation of Working Journalists and the National Union of Journalists were represented. But the Indian Journalists Association is now a much stronger body than the IFWJ as was evident from the complete strike by the Delhi Union of Journalists which an affiliate to the Indian Journalists Association. So, I would request the Minister to consider this point. I know that this is done by the Labour Ministry. Hence, I request the Minister to talk to Labour Ministry. We will also represent to the Labour Ministry that the Indian Journalists Association must find a place in the new Wage Board which is going to be formed.

15.49 hrs.

[SHRIMATI MALINI BHATTACHARYA *in the Chair*]

With these words, I support everybody. Despite all the difficulties, some good job has been done by the Committee. For example, there is a report on Ayodhya; there is a report on Kashmir and various other things are therein recent times. The resource constraint is a very serious thing. The Press Council is going to recommend that their levy is to be increased. I hope the Press will cooperate; the Government will also cooperate in raising the resources of the Press Council. I fully agree that the staffing pattern must be changed. More and more number of persons must be there. The regional centres should also be there if this Council has to function properly.

With these words, I hope the Minister will take all these things into account. Being sympathetic to the Press generally, I hope that he will take up these cases and do the

need ful. I conclude now.

SHRI R. ANBARASU (Madras Central)
: Madam Chairman, I raise to welcome the amendment. Rather I feel it very essential to classify the newspapers into small, medium and big on the basis of circulation. As every Hon. Member has rightly pointed out, it is more important to find out the amount of circulation. On many occasions, in many cases, invariably I find that they only submit false accounts, cooked up accounts to show that the circulation of their newspaper is running into thousands and lakhs. But it is not so. Of course, the duty of checking the circulation, verifying the circulation rests with the Registrar of Newspapers. But there should some mechanism to find out what is the actual circulation of a paper.

I know in Tamil Nadu there are number of regional Tamil papers. They submit the false accounts only to carry the favour of the Government or to get the advertisement from the Government or to make money out of the newsprint. They only print a few copies. They send it to the Government officials and important VIPs and they continue to submit their false accounts and claim that the circulation is very high. Therefore, it is more important that there should be some mechanism to check and verify what is the actual circulation, what is the actual number of papers printed and circulated for the public and so on. Here I would like to bring it to your kind attention one fact. Some people only get the title and they do not even start the newspaper or a journal. They keep it pending for a long time with some ulterior objective. Sometimes, after getting the title, they sell it to somebody else and they make illegal money out of it. What I suggest here is, there should be some time limit. If an individual gets the title, he should start it within a period of say six months or one year. There should be a time limit.

Otherwise, it should automatically be lapsed. Otherwise, somebody else who is good in running a magazine or a journal is denied the opportunity to run his journal. Therefore, I urge upon the Hon. Minister to go in for a time bound programme. There should be a specific clause saying that if a title is given to an individual for starting a newspaper, it should be started within a particular time. That is more important.

We know the Press Council was constituted to curb the yellow journalism. But of late, this type of yellow journalism of maligning the political leaders, assaulting the bureaucrats, police officials, abusing ladies in public life without any basis, is on the increase. I always welcome a healthy criticism. I welcome a fair and a balanced view of a particular problem. But it does not always happen. Mostly, as the Hon. lady Member was telling, they start black-mailing. I am not talking about the national dailies at the country level. But if you see at the district level, there are certain papers and they only black-mail the leaders, black-mail the police officials, black-mail the bureaucrats only with the pecuniary interest. Therefore, I urge upon the Hon. Minister to evolve a formula to find out a solution to curb such Journals and to reduce such activities. Normally, it very painful to say that they attack the politicians. Politicians have become the target of almost every journal.

They should be free and fair, and balanced in culling out or pointing out or exposing the misdeeds of the Government or the misdeeds of a politician. But without any basis and only to malign or to damage the image of a politician they publish all sorts of sensational news thereby increasing their sales. This is really the sad part of journalism. And once the damage is caused, it cannot be reversed. The damage caused to a politician cannot be reversed. It takes a long

time. Further, the offence of libellous or the offence of defamation is not a cognizable one. Anybody can write anything against anybody. After tarnishing the image of a public figure it is very difficult to sue them also. The offence is not a cognizable one. We have to go only to the court to file a petition for defamation. But by that time so many things happen; by that time the man who was subjected on who was a victim would lose all his reputation in the public. And, therefore, what I urge upon the Hon. Minister is to at least make this offence of defamation as a cognizable one and a non-bailable one. I donot have any sinister motives against any journalist or any journalism. The only thing is that when they indulge in character assassination, say for example, if they damage the reputation or the chastity of a lady_the modesty of a lady is supreme and sacrosanct_it would be a stigma on her in the society. That stigma would never be lost and people would definitely look at her with a different notion. And, therefore, those journals which indulge in such malicious statements or character assassination should not be left unnoticed. They should be booked under the relevant provisions. Therefore, what I urge upon the Hon. Minister is to recommend to the Law Ministry to make this offence as a cognizable offence and a non-bailable one.

I welcome free and fair criticism and also a balanced criticism. Sometimes, they have been blackmailing police officials in the districts; they have been blackmailing officials in the State Governments only for monetary purposes. So, if this offence of defamation is made a cognizable one and non-bailable one, definitely they will not indulge in such malicious activities.

Another important point which I would like to bring to your kind notice is that once it is found that a false news about an individual

or about a policy of Government has appeared and when it is brought to the notice of the editor, then what they do is that they do not give any importance to the regret news. The regret news will be printed somewhere in the corner of the journal or somewhere in the corner of the paper which cannot be noticed at all. The same importance with which the issue was projected in the paper that too a false news, a kind of character assassination news, should be given to publishing the regret news after finding that it is false. When it has been brought to the notice of the concerned editor or owner of the newspaper, they should publish the regret news in the same manner, in the same magnitude as they have projected the original news. There should be a guideline for this and the Press Council should form such guidelines. They should issue such a code of conduct to them. What I find is that if we bring it to the notice of the editor that it is false news they only put the regret news on the next day in a small corner of the paper. Therefore, I urge upon the Hon . Minister to suggest or to recommend to the Press Council to issue guidelines to treat the regret news in the same manner and that it should be given importance and published in the same manner as the false news has been published.

16.00 hrs.

Because of this yellow journalism officials are afraid and politicians are afraid of taking decisions on many issues. On many occasions, many Ministers are afraid of the criticism from the Press. The Press is such a powerful media. Therefore though I welcome the criticism, yet the criticism should be fair, in the interest of the nation and in the interest of projecting the correct view to the public. Therefore, there should be some restraint among the journalists in publishing

such news.

The Hon. lady Member was telling that the Press Council has no teeth. I admit it. Though the Government is willing to provide some teeth, I understand they are not willing to assume the powers. What are the powers vested in the Press Council on erring journalists? Ultimately they only admonish. They do not take any severe action against the erring journalists. So there is an urgent need to tone up the administration of the Press Council. The Press Council should have a code of conduct-ethos- in conformity with our national goals. If such a code of conduct is not followed by the Press Council, then there is no use of having a Press Council as a handicapped person. The Press Council should have all powers to control. The news should be very objective. Therefore, I appeal to the Press Council to come forward with their own code of conduct for the effective functioning of the Press Council.

Again, I would like to mention here, if any malicious, any defamatory matter has been published in the papers or in the journals, we are really unable to take them to the court. Though we file complaints in the court, it takes a long time. If the Hon. Minister feels that it will take a long time to make it a cognizable offence or a non-bailable offence. I will suggest that this should be brought under the Consumer Protection Council. If any malicious or unwanted character assassination is published against an individual, against a politician or against a social worker then that newspaper should be brought under the purview of the Consumer Protection Council, so that we can take it up.

Further, you may find the editors are all very important persons and they are the backbone of the journals. But of late we find

that the editors are given a back seat and the owners, the proprietors, the big business houses or the industrialists who hold the newspaper take seats on the front side and drive and the editor becomes his master's voice. He is unable to project the truth of a problem. So the objectivity of a problem is lost. He is being tutored and monitored to write and express what his master wants. Therefore, the Press Council should evolve or assume more powers to give powers to the editors of the journals. They, and not the owners, are more important persons in running a newspaper.

To curry a favour by the Government or for monetary benefit, many of the newspapers either favour the Government or they even try to buy the Government. It is a very sad state of affairs. There are some industrial houses; there are some business magnets; and they try to evolve the policy of the Government; they influence the Government by making use of their journals. This sort of an attitude should be curbed. There are some journals which only see the dark side of whatever the Government does and they only project a negative point of the issue. There are both the things and that also should be avoided.

Another thing that I find is this when they write about the Government and its misdeeds, I do not find any article against the opposition party leaders and opposition party Members. I do not want that they should write against them also. What I want to say is that their version is one-sided. In the name of free Press, in the name of liberty, they are doing so. (Interruptions)

SHRI SOBHANADREESWARA RAO VADDE (Vijayawada): They will have nothing to write about this side. [Interruptions]

SHRI E. AHAMED (Manjeri): It is like a

No-Confidence Motion . It can be moved only against the Government and not against the Opposition. [Interruptions]

SHRI R. ANBARASU: When individual person's character is assassinated, they will not talk about the opposition party leaders. What I want to say is that their views are biased; they should not take sides and they should publish unbiased news.

I would like to end by saying this. There was a poet by name 'Nakeeran' . It seems that once Lord Shiva wrote a poem about the hair of the ladies. In that poem, he described that the hair of the ladies have fragrance. That is, God wrote that poem. But the poet who was so honest and who was so straight forward said, "Nothing doing ! you are wrong: the hair of the ladies does not have fragrance. Then the God became annoyed. He was in the form of a king. Then, He said, " No, you are wrong." The poet Nakeeran said, "I know in what form you are here : you are God. But, even if you open your third eye, I will call spade, a spade." The, Lord Shiva opened the third eye and burnt him. That is how, the story goes.

What I want to say is that the journalists should be like Nakeeran. They should set up a standard: they have to set up a morale for journalism.

Hence, I urge and appeal to the Press Council of India to evolve a Code of Conduct so that the real aspirations of the people are projected. I appeal to the Hon. Minister also in the absence of any such Code of Conduct to give the Press Council more powers so that they can proceed against the erring journalists.

With these words, I conclude my speech; and I welcome this Bill.

SHRI SOBHANADREESWARA RAO VADDE: Madam Chairperson, I support the amendment that has been brought forward by the Hon. Minister to the Press Council Act, 1978.

We are all aware that freedom of Press is essential for safeguarding and strengthening democracy. Still we remember those days when the Press was gagged during the emergency where the news relating to one district was not available to the people residing just in the next district. That was the state of affairs.

There were restrictions on the Press which were not there even in the days of the British Rule. When people gave victory to the Janta Government, the Press Council Act had been brought forward. We must admit that during all these 15 years, the functioning of the Press Council is, by and large, quite satisfactory. There may be slight deficiencies also. But we find that the circulation of almost all the papers is increasing. The reading habit of the public is increasing. In Andhra Pradesh, one leading Telugu paper, Eenadu, has introduced a district edition. In all the 23 districts, separate editions are there.

SHRI E. AHAMED: What is the total circulation?

SHRI SOBHANADREESWARA RAO VADDE: It may be more than one lakh—highest circulation.

Now, several other leading Telegu papers are trying to follow the same. That means, more local news are being covered and with that, the circulation. My point is that now the electronic media is a powerful media. Because of the cost involved and because of constraint of time, the newspaper is a very useful and powerful instrument to

convey the real message to the people of this country.

The Hon. Member, who preceded me, has made very elaborate point about some of the journalists who might not be behaving responsibly. They may be very few in number. But, by and large, the journalists are also reporting very responsibly. In my experience, by and large we feel quite satisfied. We find that rather than constructive news, many a time, the news relate to squabbles within a political party or some news which are not really useful to the public. More space is devoted to such things, may be to attract more number of readers. How do we know what are their economic calculations? But we feel that more space can be devoted to news like success of family planning in a particular area and instances of communal harmony. Even where several places are burning, there may still be some places where communal harmony might be kept intact with the best responsible participation of the people from different communities. If such news and such instances are given in all the regional languages, it will have tremendous impact. We hope that in the days to come, our Hon. Minister will go through the reports given by the Press Council. Let him go through the reports and take necessary steps to further improve the working of the Press in this country for the service of this nation and for the betterment of the people.

The object of the Council is also to help newspapers and news agencies to maintain their independence. Sometimes it so happens that the local authorities have some vengeance against papers because they might try to bring out certain deficiencies and mistakes committed by the people in power. They may be politicians or political leaders or police officials or whoever they may be. In such instance the police or some

officials try to put the journalist or the reporter in a very tight spot.

There are many instances of this type. At Kozikode a journalist had brought out a series of articles on certain lapses taking place in a local area station. The journalist was arrested and harassed. A few months back all of us had expressed our deep concern over the harassment being meted out to Malai Murasu in Tamil Nadu.

Many a time the Government in power favour certain newspapers which give more coverage to Government news other than being impartial. My suggestion to the Government is the a clearly demarcated criteria should be followed. Advertisements from the local authorities should be given to the newspapers on some fixed criteria. Small newspapers must be given a higher priority for the regional news. At any point of time advertisement should not be denied to a particular Paper because it is writing against a political party in power either at the Centre or in the States. The Government should take strict measures to protect the independent functioning of the Press.

The Hon. Member, Shrimati Geeta Mukherjee mentioned about the official Secrets Act. We can understand that information regarding sophisticated defence equipment of a very recent purchase should not be leaked out. In other words, we can say that almost all the activities undertaken by the Ministry of Defence are secret and come under the Official Secrets Act. Madam, we have come to know that a lot of wastage is going on in the purchase of defence equipments. Many a time under the garb of this Official Secrets Act the Press is denied certain information. I would suggest that the Government should bring an amendment to this Official Secrets Act so that the public money is not allowed to be wasted.

We have the freedom of Press in our country. This freedom has been guaranteed in the Constitution. But, this freedom is not there for the foreign journalists. It is natural because definitely there will be a difference between a person who is a citizen of this country and a person who has come from abroad. A citizen of this country may have in his possession certain information which may be prove good for the country but he may not share it with the public keeping in mind the interest of the nation. But, we cannot expect the same thing from a foreign journalist. Precisely because of it. the Press Council of India has expressed its reservations regarding giving permission to the foreign Press in our country. In this connection I would like to say that the Government should take a very careful decision in this regard.

Finally, I would like to make one small submission to the Hon. Minister. At present we have a scheme of Concessional Postal Registration for Newsletters. Some days back a local institution of engineers at Vijayawada published newsletters relating to various meetings that were taking place every week or every fortnight. They circulated it to the Press and at various other places.

There was a concession in regard to this postal tariff. I do not know why it was withdrawn. My suggestion to the Government_of course I will also personally contact the Hon.Minister—is that the objective of these newsletters is to transmit information to various places, particularly, to the educational institutions. So, this practice should be started again. Almost all the voluntary organisations cannot afford to bear the increased postal tariffs.

So, with these few words, Madam, I

thank you for giving me an opportunity, to say few words on this Press Council (Amendment) Bill.

[*Translation*]

SHRI BALRAJ PASSI(Nainital): Madam, Chairman, this amendment seems to have been brought in a haste. It should have been quite comprehensive. Journalism was introduced in India during freedom struggle. Several persons devoted their entire lives to journalism. We have reached the present position after 45-50 years of efforts but now, foreign newspapers are trying to take over Indian newspapers. Any Indian newspaper or journalist can have ideological differences with the Government but when it comes to country's interest, he will perhaps prefer country's interest than his own, whereas the foreigners' only interest will be to earn more and more and they will not be bothered for the interest of the country.

It is a matter of regret that for sometimes, journalists are being attacked in the country. A few days back a decision of the Court regarding the murder of Mahesh Dobhal, the local journalist of Dehradun was given. It is really very sad that criminals involved in the murder have escaped easily even after the CBI inquiry. The Government should make arrangements for providing protection to journalists as their work is risky. They have unearthed several scams risking their lives, be it security scam, Bofors scandals or any other thing. We all know that Newspapers were closed throughout the country during Emergency, Who had refused to write in favour of the Government. Journalists were imprisoned. Several of them were imprisoned for 19 months, many of them died but they refused to bow before that decision of the Government.

Press Council was set up in 1978 under

an Act. Now, we are going to make amendments in it. Several newspapers in the country work contrary to the interests of the country. There should be some provision for taking action against them to keep a check on them. Some newspapers, particularly in Jammu and Kashmir are supporting terrorists. They publish mainly those news which are in the interest of terrorists. The Government should take this matter seriously. Government takes action against newspapers which publish new items against them or bring out some facts contrary to their interests.

Madam Chairperson, newspapers have been classified through this Bill. It should be taken seriously because there is doubt whether medium and small newspapers will be given protection. This Bill will impose Inspector Rule on them as inspectors will be responsible for determining their circulation. Inspectors will provide them concessions only after getting bribe. This matter should be discussed thoroughly.

Madam, Chairperson, this Bill has made a provision that editors of newspapers will be the members of Press Council, but in our country mostly newspapers have link with big industrialists or Industrial houses. It will be difficult to differentiate between the editors and the owners of newspapers because in most of the cases owners are the editors of newspapers. Their presence in Press Council will create problems later on. The Government should give its clear opinion on it.

16.27 hrs.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Speaker, Sir, Wage Board should be constituted for the people working in the field of Press and media because it has

been demanded time and again. The Government should solve this serious matter properly with the help of the leaders of all the political parties. With these words I conclude.

[*English*]

SHRI RAMESH CHENNITHALA (Kottayam): I rise to support the Bill which has been introduced by the Minister of Information and Broadcasting. The Press Council Act was enacted by this very House in 1978. This is a small piece of legislation. The only purpose is to review the classification of the big, marginal and small newspapers time and again when the Government feels.

This Bill is for a limited purpose. My request to the Minister is that he should come forward with a comprehensive legislation so that all the points in this discussion should be reflected in that. This is a vast subject. I do not want to go into the details of it. I will mention only two or three points.

The sole purpose of the Press Council to protect the freedom of the press and maintain and improve the standard of newspapers and news agencies in our country. The Press Council should be given punitive power to ensure greater sense of responsibility. Fair comment to protected but unfair, scurrilous writings have to be controlled.

Now-a-days, a lot of character assassination efforts are taking place against the political leaders, against the political parties and against the individuals.

Sir, this should be checked.

The second point I wanted to raise is

Statement by Minister

regarding the foreign newspapers and agencies which are likely to be allowed. In 1956, a decision was taken to allow the foreign agencies and newspapers to operate only through the Indian agencies. That is the freedom of the press, as guaranteed in the Constitution, is available only to the Indian citizens. So I wanted to know from the Hon. Minister, how we can extend this freedom to the foreign agencies, which is enshrined in our Constitution.

The next point is regarding the selection of members of the Press Council. There are certain criterion for selection of members for the Press Council. There should be some mechanism so that the regional newspapers are very much in number in our country and they have large circulation also. So adequate representation should be given to the representatives of the regional languages. For that some mechanism should be found out because they are reaching out masses more effectively.

Lastly, I wanted to remind that this criteria which is going to be reviewed, time and again, by the Government, should be made very clear. Total transparency should be there, otherwise, the officials can play in this. So I request the Hon. Minister that there should be total transparency so that we may be able to avoid bogus figures which some newspapers are quoting about their circulation.

Some newspapers are projecting that they have a huge circulation. But actually speaking, the truth is that they have only a very little circulation and in spite of that they are getting all the benefits enjoyed by the largest circulated newspapers or magazines. In the Press Council, adequate representation should be given to the magazines also. That is the suggestion I wanted to make.

Regarding Wage Board, cutting across party lines, we have all demanded for the setting up a Wage Board and the Government is seriously attending to it. Journalists have been demanding this time and again and the Cabinet is considering this. It will be definitely helpful for the working journalists in our country who are contributing a lot for preserving our democracy and strengthening the fourth estate.

With these words I congratulate the Minister for coming with this piece of legislation and once again I request the Hon. Minister to come forward with a comprehensive legislation so that we may be able to avoid all the lacunae which are now present in the case of Press Council and we may be able to give more teeth to the Press Council.

16. 33 hrs

STATEMENT BY MINISTER
PRITHVI PROJECT

[English]

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (SHRI MALLIKARJUN): Mr. Speaker, Sir, the Prithvi project is a Surface-to-Surface Missile System designed and developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation. The programme commenced in July, 1983. The final phase of trials commenced in April, 1994. These trials will take place in sub-phases. They are scheduled to be completed by July 1994.

In this connection a note was received from the PMO by SA to RM that the trials be postponed till after the period of PM's visit to US between 14-21 May. This has been done. Generally, major missile launchings