

A national family of journalists - Founded on January 23, 1972 in New Delhi by eminent journalists

Description

National Union of Journalists (India)

A national family of journalists

Founded on January 23, 1972 in New Delhi by eminent journalists, the National Union of Journalists (India) is a national organisation dedicated to the cause of mediapersons. It has been fighting for the interests of the mediapersons and also for establishing high standards in the field of journalism. It has never been a mute spectator when the rights of mediapersons were trampled upon. It fought many battles, either alone or with others giving the lead to working journalists' movements.

The inaugural ceremony of the first national convention of NUJ (I) organised on January 23, 1972 in New Delhi was addressed by eminent jurist M.C. Chagla and one of the most distinguished editors, Frank Moraes of The Indian Express presided over the ceremony.

Mr Akshay Kumar Jain, Editor, Navbharat Times was the chairman of the reception committee. A galaxy of other leading editors, journalists and press trade union leaders participated in the two-day deliberations. They included Mr V.K. Narsimhan (The Indian Express), Mr D.R. Mankekar (The Motherland), Mr S.K. Rau (Searchlight), Mr Meenakshi Sundaram (The Mail), Mr. Prithvis Chakravarty (The Hindustan Times), Mr Baleshwar Agarwal (Hindusthan Samachar), Mr S.R. Shukla (Hindustan Standard), Mr P.K. Roy (The Hindu), Mr Somanath Bhattacharya (Anand Bazar Patrika), Mr K.N. Malik (The Times of India), Mr Hiranmoy Karlekar (The Statesman), Mr Rajendra Prabhu (Orbit), Mr Rajendra Kapur and Mr Ram Shankar Agnihotri.

Democratic Traditions

The NUJ (I) is the only trade union in India, which has always without fail maintained the highest democratic traditions, has imposed self-restraining codes on its leaders and has never compromised on principles. It was set up as a trade union-cum-professional body to keep journalists trade union movement free from political affiliation and fight for their legitimate rights and uphold freedom of the Press.

NUJ (I) ensures internal democracy by holding regular elections to its executive committee. Its constitution forbids the two main office bearers – the President and the Secretary General -- from occupying their posts for more than one term consecutively i.e. two years only. Come what may, they shall have to get elections conducted before their terms expire, hand over their jobs to the new elected incumbents and go. No one can continue however able, efficient and extraordinary he may be. Another prominent feature that places NUJ (I) in a different bracket from all others is that it does not pass any political resolution except when politics affects the rights of journalists and the freedom of the Press.

1975 Fight for Freedom of Press

Within three years of coming into existence, the NUJ (I) had to face the biggest challenge in its existence so far. In 1975 Press freedom was snuffed out under the draconian Emergency regulations imposed on the entire newspaper industry by the then government. NUJ (I) was the only one journalists union in the entire country which had refused to kneel down and had taken up the cudgels and opposed the censorship.

A delegation of NUJ (I) under the leadership of Mr. Prithvis Chakravarty, one of its founders and a president, had the guts to tell the then dictatorial Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on her face that she was wrong and had demanded lifting of censorship orders. That was the darkest time in the history of Indian democracy because the entire Cabinet was standing still and the ministers were waging their tails before the 'Madam Prime Minister'. The result was discrimination against NUJ (I). Several NUJ (I) activists were hauled up for indefinite detention under the dreaded MISA. Among them were Mr. B.M. Sinha of Indian Express and Mr. Dinanath Mishra of Nav Bharat Times. Several others like Dr. N.K. Trikha, Mr. Asim Kumar Mitra and Mr. Arabindo Ghose either lost their accreditation or were harassed in other ways. But the spirit of NUJ (I) could not be curbed.

The NUJ (I) once again refused to sign the dotted lines and endorse the hated Prevention of Objectionable Publications Act -- another expression of courage of its conviction. Then came the notorious Bihar Press Bill. In Patna NUJ (I)'s Bihar unit was in the forefront of the struggle against it. In Delhi the NUJ (I) took the

lead in organising a joint demonstration against the Bill. In 1988 came the nefarious Defamation Bill. NUJ (I) was relentless in its struggle to get it scrapped. In fact when the then Minister for Information and Broadcasting called a meeting of Press bodies, NUJ (I) refused to discuss any part of the Bill demanding that it must go lock, stock and barrel. The overtures from the government to accommodate at least the spirit of the Bill were also firmly turned down. Asked whether the organisation would like to compromise or face the doghouse, the NUJ leadership preferred to choose the doghouse. Finally the government relented and the Bill was dropped.

Owners versus Editorial Freedom

The NUJ (I) has always been in the forefront of the struggle to maintain editorial freedom and keep it above the owners' business interests. At its founding conference in 1972 it had called for a diffusion of ownership to ensure editorial freedom at the same time respecting the legitimate business interests of the newspaper owners. In 1976 a specific scheme was also submitted. But the government was never serious and interested in such a scheme. But the NUJ (I) had fought within the limits of the available laws to protect this freedom. It even brought before the Press Council of India several cases of violation of this freedom and obtained favourable verdicts.

One verdict was to strictly prohibit employers from asking any working journalist from canvassing advertisements for the newspaper for which he is working. Another case of management interference brought before the Council by NUJ (I) resulted in the Council asking the Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI) to ensure that the Editor's name goes positively in the print line of every newspaper without any appellation like Editor (Delhi market), Editor (Mumbai market) etc. On NUJ (I) intervention the Council ordered that management shall not order any editorial employee to carry out any order and that the sole authority in giving instructions would vest in the editor or his designated deputy. There are several instances where NUJ (I) had used its presence in the Press Council to strengthen Press freedom against threats from within as well as outside the newspaper offices.

After the advent of electronic media in 1990 NUJ (I) has been demanding amendments to the Working Journalists Act to bring the electronic media within the purview of the law. Over the last two years it has intensified its drive to transform Press Council into a Media Council to end the dichotomy in which the Press is regulated by an independent statutory organisation but the electronic media has no such self-discipline.

In the wake of the Bachawat report the newspaper managements had made a strong effort to get the Working Journalists Act scrapped. An affidavit signed by several editors of the Times group was submitted before the Supreme Court against the Act. However, one of the editors of the Times group publications, Dr. N.K. Trikha, refused to sign this affidavit and was marked out by the management for punishment for this defiance. Dr. Trikha had earlier been Secretary-General of the NUJ (I) and had later even headed the organisation. NUJ (I) also kept on sending its timely response to every news item that appeared suggesting scrapping of the Act.

Pressures from Within

Journalists, it is no secret these days, are generally under pressure from the management to write something, which their conscience do not permit and which they feel and know is absolutely wrong and incorrect – in fact a complete fabrication. It is not only a negation of professional ethics and morals but also discredits the reporter in the eyes of readers. Such challenges to professional integrity are being faced by journalists daily in all newspaper offices. These can be resisted successfully only if all journalists in a newspaper stand together and build a China Wall of defiance.

One more myth is being propagated assiduously these days i.e. the emoluments offered by the management to working journalists who agree to switch over to contract appointment is several times more beneficial to them from what they are entitled to get under the Wage Board. The person accepting the contract appointment is made to believe that he is getting a huge monetary benefit without the help of the union.

But the reality is just the opposite. The contract is a trap. The victim is robbed off the most vital aspect of his job and reduced to a lame for entire life -- security of job – in other words permanence of job and peace of mind. He perennially remains worried about his job. After every two or three years he faces the sword of Damocles – what will happen if his contract is not renewed? More often his emoluments are reduced instead

of being increased. The employer ignores the Working Journalists Act that assures job security and other benefits. The victim has even to agree to work merely as an employee with his job description not specified -- that means anytime the employer can keep him as a typist, a clerk or a peon with no legal protection. It is in fact a real representation or better say reproduction of the ancient Greek legend wherein a courtier who, having in sheer confidence over-praised the happiness of the tyrant Dionysius the Elder, was placed by him at a banquet, with a sword suspended over his head by a single hair to show him the perilous nature of that happiness.

The Working Journalists Act also gives the journalists the freedom to resign on grounds of conscience in which case the employer has to pay retrenchment compensation. That provision enables the working journalists to say NO to the employer without attracting disciplinary action.

The Act was legislated after a prolonged struggle by the working journalists unions and realisation by the founding fathers of our Republic that such legislation was needed to protect the freedom of the Press. In fact the First Press Commission specifically recommended such a step equating such freedom to job security of journalists, freedom from firing at will, proper wages and other benefits.

But the best legislation is only as good as it is implemented at the ground level. NUJ (I) has been at the forefront of fighting for the freedom of the Press and for getting the Act implemented assuring the working journalists security of job, better working conditions and decent emoluments. It is true that the NUJ (I) has not always succeeded. But who has? The struggle must go on. But it cannot go on unless all working journalists stand together or in other words are unionised.

Wherever and whenever two journalists meet, they are invariably found complaining about their employers not observing even basic human decencies in dealing with them. Ask them what they will like to do to counter this and you will find the hapless smile of a dying man on their faces. And, if asked specifically whether they would join a union, you will see strange blankness.

This is the area of huge weakness of working journalists as against huge strength of newspaper and news agency employers. Working journalists tend to remain in fools' paradise and believe that they can manage their relationship with their employers without being part of a union till they are rudely shaken out of their slumber when they find their jobs in risk zones and are pressurised to work against their conscience or find their dues withheld to get them toe the lines of their employers.

Better Working Conditions

Struggle for better working conditions for journalists has always been the core of NUJ (I)'s existence. NUJ (I) was kept out of the Palekar Wage Board by a clandestine conspiracy of some persons in power but despite that it had consistently and constructively supported the conduct of the Board. The Government did not enforce the Board's recommendation for an interim relief. Taking advantage of the general elections in March 1977 NUJ (I) called upon the political parties to commit themselves to implementing the interim relief recommendation. The Janata Party responded and issued a public statement committing itself to implement it within eight days of coming to power. The NUJ (I) followed up the Janata Government's formation urging it to notify the interim relief. And it did.

During the Emergency imposed by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi the working of the Palekar Board was suspended due to non-cooperation of employers' representatives. After the new Government came to power in March 1977 the NUJ (I) insisted on the renewal of the Board or formation of a Tribunal. Accordingly the Janata Government passed an Act of Parliament to constitute a tribunal. NUJ (I) provided massive evidence before it and its legendary leader, the late Meenakshi Sundaram, himself appeared before the Tribunal to argue the working journalists case. Later on in the open court Mr. Justice Palekar had acknowledged the contribution of the NUJ (I).

In 1984, the NUJ (I) called for a new wage board. Its agitation compelled the Rajiv Gandhi government to announce a new wage board under Mr. Justice Bachawat in 1985 with NUJ (I) representative Meenakshi Sundaram, one of its founding members. Unfortunately he died a year later while working on the wage board papers late at night. Arun Bagchi, who had distinguished himself in fighting for the rights of Anand Bazar Patrika workers earlier and had almost risked his life, replaced him. Mr Bagchi was also then president of the NUJ (I).

In presenting the working journalists' case before the Bachawat Wage Board NUJ (I) set new standards of excellence and quality. Using audio visual techniques for the first time ever before a wage board, NUJ (I) presented financial analysis of newspaper economics that stunned even the newspaper managements. Ironical it may seem but the fact is that even the newspaper managements' representatives present at the Boards' sitting could not but applaud the NUJ (I)'s presentation. The NUJ (I) team for the wage board presentation made a deep impression. Mr. Rajendra Prabhu, who was later President of the union, had led the team.

While Palekar Board brought part-time employed working journalists into the net of wage security and determination, the Bachawat Board attacked the newspapers' tendency to divide their companies into different organisations in order to avoid paying the just wages. In a historic recommendation it used the doctrine of lifting the corporate veil as suggested by the NUJ (I) to go into the motive behind these sub-divisions and ruled that all such entities would be considered as one single establishment for the purposes of wage determination. The Board also expanded the allowances to include house rent and CCA.

In both the post-Palekar and post-Bachawat period NUJ (I) demonstrated its leadership qualities to the hilt. It was NUJ (I) that had approached Labour and Industries Minister Narayan Dutt Tiwari then to get an ordinance issued to amend the Working Journalists Act to stop the retrenchment of journalists employed on part-time basis that newspapers were resorting to in the wake of the Tribunal's recommendations covering them.

Deeply concerned over the plight of part-time correspondents and photographers who remained the most exploited section among journalists, NUJ (I) is striving to get the Working Journalists Act amended so that they are not denied the benefits that accrue to them from the revision of wages notified by the Government of India. It has demanded full-time status for part time correspondents in a phased manner.

Again it was NUJ (I) that had taken the initiative to convene an all unions meeting to get the amendments to the Working Journalists Act suggested by the Bachawat Board passed through a stalled Parliament. The meeting of NUJ (I) activists with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had led to the constitution of a committee to re-examine some of the recommendations of the Board and substantially improve them. At all important meetings of Government functionaries since then the NUJ (I) representatives did not fail to raise the issue of proper implementation of the recommendations thereby projecting the issue on the public scene.

The constitution of the next wage board came five years after the Bachawat Board had given its recommendations in 1989. NUJ(I) was represented by Arun Bagchi once again but he passed away in Delhi even as he was to meet the Union Labour Minister to expedite the formal holding of the board's first meeting. NUJ (I) then nominated Mr. Shyam Khosla, bureau chief of The Tribune then, to represent it in the board.

It was NUJ (I) team that alone made the maximum impact with a three-day long presentation explaining the case of working journalists before the Board. NUJ (I) also worked with other newspaper/ news agency employees unions to coordinate the workers' response to the delays and indecisions in the Board and some of the anti-employee stands that the employers were forcing the Board to take. The coordination with NUJ (I) participation in it was also useful to present the working journalists' case before the Government and Parliament. Several industrial actions were organised to oppose employers' tactics to resort to court action to stall the board.

The Wage Board's recommendations though an improvement over previous wage boards, fell short of working journalists' expectations, who had waited for long for a substantial increase in their wages. NUJ (I) again pursued the matter vigorously and canvassed its case with several Union Ministers including the Home Minister L.K. Advani. Despite strenuous efforts by the employers to confuse the issue, the Cabinet made eight improvements in the recommendations to undo the injustice to the employees. Certain elements in the Labour Ministry, however, interpreted the Cabinet decision on equal rate of increment for journalists and non-journalist employees in an arbitrary manner thereby introducing distortions in the pay scales of journalists.

Pension for Working Journalists

Since its inception, the NUJ (I) has been demanding a pension scheme for working journalists. In 1980, Kapil Verma, one of its former presidents, who was then a member of Rajya Sabha had lobbied vigorously and effectively for pension for working journalists. Consequently Finance Minister Narayan Dutt Tiwari had included a pension scheme for journalists as a government initiative in his Budget speech in 1988. The report of a committee constituted for proposing the scheme with NUJ (I) representation in it was adopted by

the Labour Ministry to create a pension scheme for all employed newspaper/news agency people. While all benefited from the scheme, it was not satisfactory to working journalists. The refusal of successive Finance Ministers to include any governmental support for the scheme as originally intended has robbed it of much of its attraction.

This social security needs to be created by way of pension fund exclusively intended for the journalistic profession. The present arrangement is related to Provident fund and from out of which the measly pension is benefiting a very small section of journalists and that too very insufficiently. It is therefore necessary that the Government should consider allocating adequate funds from out of its own resources and build a pension fund which will cover all journalists and also give them a pension commensurate with their status, contribution to the society at large by working as journalist and promoting subsistence of democratic rights, human values and other ennobling values.

The Government of Karnataka has formulated a scheme which can be likened to a pension scheme but that is totally inadequate because of the stipulation does not help the journalists in any way because of the eligibility clauses and the limitations prescribed thereon for instance a journalist will get around Rs.500, which is inadequate. The Government of Kerala has also introduced a pension scheme for journalists. NUJ(I) demands that instead of each State creating a pension scheme of its own different from the other States' a uniform pension scheme for all journalists be formulated and for that the Government of India should create a National Fund from which it should be paid.

Attacks on Journalists

NUJ (I) has taken up innumerable cases of attacks on working journalists and in many cases has been able to get redress also. To counter police harassment of journalists in Punjab its delegation had met the Governor and top officials including the police chief and had worked out a strategy that helped many a member. It had also taken a Mission to Assam and organised protests wherever the journalists were harassed without fear and irrespective of how powerful the perpetrators of attacks were. The fight of Journalists Association of Andhra Pradesh, an important unit of NUJ (I), to get a ruling party MLA prosecuted for attacking a newspaper office and manhandling a journalist has gone into the annals of history. So too have several events in this connection in UP, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Bihar. It organised protests in Mumbai against the then ruling party's harassment of working journalists.

A recent phenomenon is that more than the governments and political groups, militants and insurgents have become a greater threat to the independence of the Press as they seek to impose their views at gun point. The NUJ (I) has suffered loss of many workers and leaders who were physically assaulted by self-appointed political police of the ruling party in Kolkata and powerful mafias in several parts of the country. Some years back NUJ (I) lost a district unit president in Haryana who was assaulted for exposing the illicit activities of a so-called religious group's head by his supporters trying to teach him what to report and how to report. NUJ (I) and all its units have always stood against all such assaults on any journalist anywhere.

Law to Protect Journalists

For past few years, journalists have started facing threats to their lives if they do not toe the lines of those in power not only in the official corridors but also those involved in illegal and anti-social activities. Unfortunately it has become a global phenomenon. The almost daily astonishing exposes of corruption and wrongdoings of influential people have escalated the frequency of attacks on journalists by politicians, administrative authorities, police and mafia groups. These forces skip no chance to dent the media activism. This year three journalists have been killed in different parts of the country. The entire media fraternity is now worried over the reported involvement of underworld in the killing of Mumbai based Mid Day journalist J. Dey. Earlier, two journalists were killed in Chhattisgarh.

NUJ (I) on June 25, 2011 staged a countrywide agitation and organised protest meetings demanding enactment of a Journalist Protection Act. A memorandum to this effect was also presented to President of India, Mrs. Pratibha Patil. The dharna organised at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi was attended by hundreds of senior and veteran journalists including NUJ (I) secretary general Ras Bihari, Delhi Journalist Association president Manoj Verma, NUJ treasurer Manohar Singh, vice president Subhash Nigam, former NUJ (I) president Dr. N. K. Trikha, Rajendra Prabhu, Aurabindo Ghose, M.D. Gangawar, Harsha Vardhan, Vinay Rai (Zee News), Dinesh Sharma (Punjab Kesari), Ravindra Singh (ETV), Anshuman Tewari, Ramnarayan Srivastava,

Rajkishore, Rajsekhar Singh, Nitin Pradhan (all from Dainik Jagran), Kumar Gajendra Chauhan (president, Crime Reporters Association), Satendra Tripathi, Keval Tewari, Ajay Pandey (all from Nai Dunia) and Pramod Saini (DJA Secretary).

NUJ (I) secretary general Ras Bihari urged the Union Home Minister P Chidambaram to ensure an adequate security cover to the journalists covering life-threatening events. Demanding the enactment of a National Security Act, he said the proposed Act should ensure that the attack on journalists is registered as non-bailable offence and at least a Magisterial Enquiry is conducted in every case.

The question arises why the enactment of such a law is necessary? Media has been described in India the Fourth Pillar of democracy. But the media does not enjoy the rights and privileges that have been granted to the other three pillars i.e. the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary in the Constitution.

With the enactment of Journalist Protection Act the definition of 'journalist' will also be decided. Presently, there is Working Journalist Act, but it has not properly been implemented so far. The proposed Journalist Protection Act will distinguish between a 'journalist' and a 'non-journalist'. It will also help curbing the misdeeds of some people who in the guise of journalists are found indulging in wrongdoings and thus defaming the entire media fraternity.

Demonstration at Pak High Commission

NUJ (I) and the Delhi Journalists Association demonstrated in front of Pakistan High Commission on June 2, 2011 to express their anguish over the brutal killing of Pak journalist Saleem Shahzad, 40, who worked for an Italian news agency and an online news website registered in Hong Kong. A memorandum was submitted to Mr. Shahid Malik, High Commissioner, informing that 37 journalists have been killed in Pakistan since 1992. The quick burial of Shahzad strengthens doubts of the involvement of State actors. NUJ (I) called upon the international media community to demand an international enquiry commission to investigate into this brutal killing.

Meeting the Challenge of Technology

NUJ (I) as a professional organization has taken several initiatives to help its members meet the challenges of new technologies in journalism. In 1998 Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had launched its Cyber Journalism Initiative mooted by Mr. Rajendra Prabhu. To familiarise journalists in remote places with new technologies and improve their professional caliber NUJ (I) and its regional units have frequently been organising workshops, seminars, discussions and classes. Some of these events got sponsors from private agencies as also from the government. NUJ (I) has trained journalists in reporting on new areas like nuclear energy, developmental journalism, crime reporting, human rights, child rights, problems of gender equality, discrimination and empowerment, corporate reporting, public health awareness, environmental problems etc. Some of these events were organised in collaboration with International Federation of Journalists (IFJ).

Changes in the journalistic world are forcing multi-dimensional challenges before journalists. The multi-party governments have reduced governmental pressure on the Press. It is now the business pressures -- there are attempts to reduce newspapers to consumer goods advertisement sheets. Newspaper owners are attempting to strip journalists of their privileged position as purveyors of truth and make them mere promoters of slanted information. The pressures to bring journalists under contracts limited to two or three years sans Provident Fund and gratuity are under way. There is a concerted conspiracy amongst newspaper managements to ensure that journalists remain under their thumb bereft of any privilege.

Twenty-first century has dawned on journalists with new threats, new dangers and new concerns. With technological advances making many job requirements redundant resulting into mass retrenchments with killing effect on families on one hand, there have been constant attempts to trivialise newspaper reporting; to report serious events as if they are entertainment episodes and to generally move away from hard news to soft porn. This trend aping Western developments also pose a cultural challenge to society. Worse, there is a growing media monopoly with newspapers coming to own television stations, Internet sites and Internet newspapers. Predatory pricing, building large circulations by offering gifts thereby tightening the noose around middle level small and local newspapers with the sole aim to eliminate them has been the focus of NUJ (I)'s attention in the past four years.

FDI in Print Media

NUJ (I) has steadfastly opposed foreign direct investment (FDI) in print media as it is fully convinced that

it poses a serious threat to the very existence of the Indian newspapers, particularly regional and small ones. The NDA Government's attempts to allow foreign investment in print media through the backdoor has met with stiff resistance from NUJ (I) for it believes that the newspaper industry deals with information and not consumer goods and that what is at stake is national security and cultural identity of India which cannot be bartered away

Ties with Global Fraternity

NUJ (I)'s relationship with IFJ has been a fruitful one the ramifications of which were noticed in the neighbouring countries also. NUJ (I), it must be recalled, had rejected the overtures of the (now defunct) IOJ as it was considered too close to the Soviet regime to be of any comfort to working journalists fighting for freedom of Press. In 1988 NUJ (I) had applied for membership of IFJ – the first Indian organization to join this great international family. IFJ General Secretary Aidan White visited India two years later at NUJ (I) invitation marking a widening of its role in South Asia.

Relationship with IFJ resulted in a two-way traffic in ideas, campaigns and concrete achievements. One such area of success was the holding of a workshop for trade unions in the changing environment that IFJ sponsored and NUJ organised bringing in even those unions not affiliated to IFJ to its platform. NUJ (I) played a major role in the IFJ- sponsored event in Dhaka soon after and subsequently in Nepal.

The workshop on child rights and the media and reporting on poverty-related issues (sponsored by UNDP) were the additional dividends coming out of this relationship. NUJ (I) as a member of the IFJ delegation of working journalists to the ILO-sponsored conference in 1991 made a significant contribution to the conference under the leadership of Mr. Christopher Warren. It also contributed to Asian Journalists Conference in Tokyo and the Women Journalists Conferences in Tokyo, Kuala Lumpur and Seoul organised by the IFJ.

The NUJ (I)-IFJ relationship helped the IFJ to carry its mission forward in South Asia and reach out to journalists in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Pakistan. NUJ (I) took the lead in inviting rival unions to IFJ sponsored workshops thereby enabling wider representation for working journalists within the IFJ fold, disregarding the often stormy attack we had suffered at various points of time from these very organisations that once were part of the Soviet sponsored IOJ.

NUJ (I) believes that the challenge of organisations could only be met by global alliances of unions in the multi-media arena. Therefore, there is a global as well as local context in which the journalist unions will have to build issue-based unity of action. NUJ (I) fully endorses IFJ's draft positions on all these global concerns. NUJ (I) also believes in going forward to help the neighbouring countries' journalists to organise themselves.

Journalists Welfare Foundation

It was at the NUJ (I)'s biennial conference at Surajkund, near Delhi, that Information and Broadcasting Minister Sushma Swaraj had announced the setting up of a Journalists Welfare Corpus. As part of its welfare activities NUJ (I) has introduced a scheme for group insurance of its members. Beneficiaries of the scheme will have to contribute Rs 50 per year only while the Journalists Welfare Foundation set up in 2002 pays the remaining part of the annual premium.

NUJ (I) secretary general Ras Bihari at a meeting of office-bearers and senior members held at Himachal Bhawan in New Delhi on March 13, 2011 had suggested that the Journalist Welfare Fund should contribute a percentage of the interest they are earning on the amount deposited in their account, to meet the office expenses of NUJ (I). Mr. M.D. Gangwar suggested that one-third members of the Journalists Welfare Foundation should be replaced. Some members wanted regular elections of the Foundation. A committee comprising Mr. Rajendra Prabhu, Mr. Gangwar, Mr. Manoj Verma and Mr. Sanjay Rathee was formed to plan for its future administration. This meeting also decided to form a Review Committee consisting of Mr. Asim Kumar Mitra, Mr. Rajendra Prabhu, Mr. Prasanna Mohanty and Mr. Manoj Verma to review NUJ (I) Constitution and suggest appropriate amendments keeping with the times.

Delay in Wage Board Notification

The National Executive of NUJ (I) at its meeting in Ujjain from July 30-31, 2011 expressed grave concern at the continued delay in the notification of the Wage Board even after the Union Cabinet had discussed its report and endorsed it. It expressed its apprehension that there could be collusion between sections in the Union Labour Ministry and the employers in causing this delay on one pretext or another. It expressed

satisfaction that the Confederation of Newspaper Employees Federation which includes the NUJ (I) has been aggressively pursuing the issue of notification and had organised countrywide agitation on June 28, 2011 and had also taken the issue to the Prime Minister. This meeting congratulated the Confederation General Secretary Mr. M.S. Yadav in keeping journalists' demand at the forefront of the government and all political parties who came forth with their public pledge to support it.

Monopoly and Unacceptable Media Practices

The National Executive of NUJ (I) held at Ujjain from July 30 to 31, 2011 after analysing the recent events in the West that led to the exposure of the Media monopoly and the unacceptable practices forced on working journalists of the media empire of News Corporation leading to public disgust at the Press and closure of mass circulation tabloid in Britain 'News of the World', drew attention to the grave danger to public interest if monopolies were allowed to grow in the media world. That the cross ownership of the Western media involving print, TV, publishing and cable was mainly responsible for the malpractices exposed in the last three months in the leading media organisations in the Western democracies including Prime Ministers eating out of the hands of a media mogul, is an object lesson for our government and public leaders also about the growing unhealthy trends in the media in our democracy too.

A significant revelation in this murky event was the competitive militancy forced on journalists working in leading newspapers to go for exclusive and prurient items that violated all canons of good journalistic practices. Even reputed publications like New York Times, fell a prey to such machinations in the competitive muck racking. That after getting the illusive benefits of these practices to build mass circulations and boost profits the owners of the News Corporation have distanced themselves from responsibility for these practices, itself exposes how irresponsible and cowardly are these owners who parade their so-called ability to turn round loss making newspapers.

It is also significant that these corporate owners were able to push their despicable agenda over the protests of the working journalists mainly because they first destroyed the newspaper unions through enforcing individual contracts as against the long existing collective contracts through the unions with political leaders helping in the process in return for critical support from these owner's publications.

The newspaper owners in India who are also seeking to weaken editorial responsibility and independence and destroy working journalists' unions therefore pose a grave danger in their aim to Indian democracy itself. There has to be a strong and rising public demand for legislative and other steps to prevent this devil of media monopolies from raising their heads in India too if a repeat of Murdoch and his unbecoming practices are not to take roots in our country.

NUJ (I) reiterates that working journalists' independence and collective action through their unions is a precondition for protecting the robustness and fairness of the Press and other media. This has now been amply demonstrated by the events around News Corporation.

In this connection NUJ (I) proudly recalls that it had adopted a code of ethics known as Agra Declaration 30 years ago in February 1981. Implementation of such a code requires that working journalists are able to resist the attempts of narrow minded, profit-only-oriented media-owners who have never been known for upholding what really is the public interest. In many cases they tend to mask corporate interest as public interest and seek to leverage the power of the Press to further owners' interest by manipulating political forces as has now been fully admitted in the UK example even by the current British Prime Minister as well as former holders of this august office.

Political parties in power and sometimes in opposition have managed to block critical content in news and current affairs channels in several States. The National Executive declared that any objection/complaint regarding programming on TV channels/Online media should be raised before courts of law and proposed formation of Media Council and action, if any, should only be taken under the due process of law. The proposals of several State governments to create State-sponsored or mandated monopolies in channel distribution pose a grave danger to freedom of expression which is the bedrock of a vibrant democracy.

NUJ (I) therefore demanded that the Government initiates a process for formulating legislative and other legal procedures to prevent media monopolies from arising through mergers, acquisitions and launches of new media events. Government must also strictly implement the half a century tested Working Journalists

Act and extend it to all media concerns and employees as well as follow up the recommendations of the Press Council of India which must be expanded to become a truly effective Media Council as demanded for quite some time by it.

Agra Declaration of Journalists

Following is the text of Agra Declaration for Journalists prepared and moved by Dr. N.K. Trikha and adopted unanimously at 4th Biennial Conference of NUJ (I) in Agra in February 1981:

“We, the working journalists of India, considering our calling as a trust, believing in serving the public interest by publishing news and comments in free and fair manner, holding that the freedom of the Press and the right to information are inalienable and are inherent to the democratic process and as such need to be cherished and strengthened by all; realising that the press and the society can flourish fully only when every individual freely enjoys his fundamental human rights and, therefore, we must uphold and defend these rights; recognising that the rights of journalists also enjoin upon them the obligation and duty to maintain the highest standards of personal and professional integrity and dignity; and feeling that in order not only to eschew fear or favour but also appear to be doing so, journalists must be ensured a reasonably decent living and appropriate working conditions; pledge and declare that:

1. We shall protect and defend at all costs the right to collect and publish facts and to make fair comment and criticise.
2. We shall endeavour to report and interpret the news with scrupulous honesty, shall not suppress essential facts. We shall observe and protect the rule of fair play to all concerned, resisting all pressures.
3. We shall not acquiesce in or justify the imposition of censorship by any authority in any form and we shall not ourselves try to exercise censorship on others.
4. We shall endeavour to uphold and defend the fundamental human rights of the people and safeguard the public interest.
5. We shall not let ourselves be exploited by others, nor shall we exploit our status for personal ends. Personal matters shall not be allowed to influence professional conduct. We shall seek to maintain full public confidence in the integrity and dignity of the profession of journalism and shall ask and accept only such tasks which are compatible with its integrity and dignity.
6. We shall not deliberately invade personal rights and feelings of individuals without sure warrant of public interest as distinguished from public curiosity. But, we shall not compromise our rights to report and expose in public interest the affairs of public men and other influential people. For, public affairs must be conducted publicly.
7. We shall consider the acceptance or demand of a bribe or inducement for publication or suppression of news as one of the most serious professional offences.
8. We shall unitedly and individually resist assaults and pressures from any quarter and in any form on journalists, in particular, and the Press, in general, in the discharge of professional work.
9. We shall always respect confidence and preserve professional secrecy.
10. We shall strive constantly to raise professional standards and improve the quality of work.
11. We shall try to exercise self-restraint and discretion in dealing with incidents of communal frenzy and other social tensions without prejudice to the people's right to know.
12. We shall collectively endeavour to secure higher levels of wages and better working conditions consistent with our functions, responsibilities and status. We shall not injure the economic or professional interests of fellow journalists by unfair means.
