



Media Council is the remedy

There has been quite an unprecedented brouhaha for some time to bring media under the purview of the proposed Janlokpal Bill. Nobody has any objection against ensuring accountability in media, but those who are consistently laying the demand on a trowel should not forget that any such move would only be like a fly in the ointment in view to burgeoning pressures on media-personnel. It will also throttle the freedom of press, which basically helps it work as watchdog in a democracy. In such febrile circumstances, media will certainly not be able to discharge its duties unto the expectations of the people. Moreover, if brought under Janlokpal, mendacious politicians exposed by media would subsequently approach the Lokpal to hound mediamen. Will it set a healthy precedent in the democracy? Will, thereafter, the media be able to expose the misdeeds of the wrongdoers?

Keeping in view the prime objective of the Janlokpal Bill as curbing rampant corruption mainly in administrative echelons, media's prime role is also to help in cleaning Augean stables by upholding democratic voices. Since the media is not a government agency with any government appointed staff, such a move would be equally quixotic. Whereas other professionals like doctors, advocates, chartered accounts, etc have been kept away from the ambit of Janlokpal, why there is unwarranted insistence only on the media inclusion? Undoubtedly, the media should be accountable, but the question is to whom—the people who are supreme in a democracy, to the wrongdoers or to sleazy leaders who misappropriate public funds.

There may be veracity in the fact that such issues are raked up by different people and agencies against the coverage of certain events by electronic media. The cause celebre is being addressed at different levels including the people in electronic media themselves. The recently formed Broadcast Editors Association (BEA) has formulated a Code of Conduct for news channels and it is the agency to whom anybody can knock on against the news telecast by news channels. What we want to argue is that if there is any grievance, a meaningful remedy is also being traced. Both electronic and print media have formulated similar codes of ethics for self-regulations to cure any degradation soon as it is noticed. In pursuance of excellence in media practices and accountability, the NUJ (I) adopted a code of ethics known as Agra Declaration as far back as 32 years ago. Nevertheless, a slew of regulations is to be formulated in case of emerging needs. But arresting freedom of media through any legislation will only serve the vested interests of those who are bent upon sabotaging the vibrant democratic system of India. Basically, those ignominious lobbyists whose malpractices have been exposed by the media over the past years are now crackling to bring media under the Janlokpal Bill.

Meanwhile, any step that needs to be taken to redress unethical practices observed in both print and electronic media is to go for a strong Media Council. For the sake of argument, anyone, who has any objection/complaint regarding any programme telecast by news channels /aired by online media or published by newspapers, may raise the issue before this proposed Council. Not only the public but also the media-personnel should be encouraged to register their complaints before this Council. The action, if any, should be taken only under the due process of the law. We already have Press Council of India but over the years it has proved to be a toothless tiger. There is a need to empower it or upgrade it to a new Media Council in order to stiffen its sinews for exemplary action against the guilty. There is also a need on the part of the Government to strictly implement half-a-century tested Working Journalists Act and extend it to all media-personnel.

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