

Enactment of a law to protect journalists is must

With rapid expansion of media in India, the pressure on mediapersons is also increasing day-by-day. Daily astonishing exposes of corruption involving people sitting on top posts and the wrongdoings of influential people have escalated the frequency of attacks on journalists by politicians, administrative authorities, police and the mafia groups.

In fact, mediapersons are on the target of these forces for long and they skip no chance to dent the media activism. The situation has taken a turn that there are reports of repeated clash between the mediapersons, the administration and the police even during daily coverage. There is hardly any day when mediapersons do not face jostling. The situation is almost same in all the cities whether it is a metropolitan city like New Delhi, Mumbai, etc. or a small town. Undoubtedly, the cut throat competition between some media houses is also responsible for growing threats to the journalists.

This year three journalists have been killed in different parts of the country. The entire media fraternity is 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.

Extremely agitated over the killings of journalists and government apathy towards protection of mediapersons, the National Union of Journalists (India), on June 25, staged

RESOLUTION

countrywide dharnas and organised protest meetings demanding enactment of a National Journalist Protection Act. A memorandum to this effect was also presented to President of India Smt Pratibha Patil. The dharna organised at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi was attended by hundreds of senior journalists of Delhi and many veteran journalists addressed the gathering. The question arises why is the enactment of such a law necessary? Media is described as Fourth Pillar of democracy. But the media does not enjoy the rights and privileges that have been granted to the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary in the Constitution. The only strength behind the media is just the freedom of expression.

The blind race between different media houses to dominate each other and also to achieve higher TRP basically forces the journalists to take up new and sensational issues everyday. For this objective, they come across many kinds of people including politicians, administrative authorities, police officials as well as criminal elements. The mediapersons are threatened with dire consequences whenever they expose the corruption on high level, infighting in political parties, nexus between political leaders and mafias, etc. In such life-threatening situations the mediapersons definitely need protection so that they can discharge their duty more responsibly and freely.

The National Union of

Journalists (India) has come up with some important suggestions to be incorporated in the proposed Journalist Protection Act. Complaint should be registered in police station on intimidation, attack or torture of journalists and all such complaints should be investigated by a DCP level police official. It has also been suggested that the investigation of such complaints should be conducted within two days and action is ensured against the culprits.

This meeting of the National Executive of the National Union of Journalists (India) held at Ujjain from July 30 and 31 demands that the same action, which is taken against a person for creating obstruction in discharging official duty, is taken against those people also who attack the mediapersons during coverage. Apart from it, whenever any journalist is assassinated or attacked the case should be heard in a fast track court to ensure timely justice. It is essential today, as it has been witnessed that no action is taken against the culprits for months even after registration of FIR in police station. With the enactment of a Journalist Protection Act the definition of 'journalist' will also be decided. Though, there is already a Working Journalist Act, it has not been implemented properly 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.