
Press Council of India

Report on Paid News

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The phenomenon of "paid news" has acquired serious dimensions. Today it goes beyond the corruption of individual journalists and media companies and has become pervasive, structured and highly organized. In the process, it is undermining democracy in India. This has anguished the leading sections of the society, including political leaders, thinkers, journalists and media owners. They all have expressed their unhappiness and concern about the pernicious influence of such malpractices.

Several veteran journalists, including the late Shri Prabhash Joshi, Shri Ajit Bhattacharjea, Shri B.G. Verghese and Shri Kuldip Nayar, wanted the Press Council of India to apply its mind on the issue and come up with suggestions on how the phenomenon of "paid news" could be curbed. Various journalists' associations, including the Andhra Pradesh Union of Working Journalists and the Delhi Union of Journalists have examined the phenomenon, conducted surveys and organized discussions on the topic. The Editors' Guild of India also discussed the phenomenon and expressed concern at this growing tendency. On June 8, 2010, the Election Commission of India issued detailed guidelines to Chief Electoral Officers of all states and Union territories on measures to check "paid news" before elections, that is, advertising in the garb of news.

The phenomenon of "political paid news" became particularly noticeable during the 2009 general elections and thereafter during the elections to the assemblies of various states. The phenomenon acquired a new and even more destructive dimension by redefining political "news" or "reporting" on candidates standing for election – many such "news reports" would be published or broadcast perhaps only after financial transactions had taken place, almost always in a clandestine manner. It is widely believed that many media companies, irrespective of the volume of their businesses and their profitability, were "selling" news space after arriving at an "understanding" with politicians and representatives of corporate entities that were advertisers. Space in publications and airtime were occupied by advertisements that were disguised as "news".