

SIMCON 2009

ADDRESS BY CHAIRMAN PRESS COUNCIL OF INDIA
HON'BLE JUSTICE G N RAY 5th December, 2009 at Vigyan
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Hon'ble Minister of Information & Broadcasting, Smt. Soniji, the Ministers of State Shri Jatuaji and Shri Jagathrakshakanji, the State Information Ministers, representatives from the media industry and from the Information departments, it gives me great pleasure to be addressing this august gathering from this platform that brings together the representatives of the State and the media giving them an opportunity to discuss their expectations and constraints across the board. The result can only be positive for the democracy and for free functioning of the media. It also establishes that the media and the authorities are not adversaries in the task of nation building. They are in fact partners in trying to promote a better society and give an improved administration to this country in the interest of the public that is the ultimate sovereign in a democracy.

For this, it is necessary that the government should accept critical evaluation of its functioning by the media as a means of good governance and the media should ungrudgingly accept reasonable restrictions and institutionalized self regulations as essential mechanism of retaining the liberty and the support extended to it by the civil society.

The media scenario has undergone a sea change in the last 62 years. Globalization is a major factor that has shaped this growth. In

media scenario this is not merely an economic phenomenon but is also impacted by powerful social outlooks and cultural changes shaped by inseparable intertwining of advertising, television and the internet. Therefore, I have always emphasized that the progress and shrinking of the world into global village may not be equated with the surrender of the values and ethics dear to each country and its society.

I hope the discussion today will also bring into limelight the role and responsibilities of both the authorities and the media in the field of information dissemination. This is again an area where the authorities need the media to convey information on its policies and actions to the public and the media needs to act as mouthpiece of the citizenry in conveying its requirements to the government. The mutual need is often met through the advertising sector and while it is clear that advertisements cannot be claimed by any media as a matter of right it is also axiomatic that the administration ensures that the authority at its command is used in accordance with laid down policy parameters and never as a tool towards compliant media.

At the same time a caveat for the small and media newspapers or the regional media is necessary to strengthen the grass root base of our democracy. The small newspapers operating in remote areas are already battered and tormented by the competition being faced by them from big newspapers. These newspapers being conduit between rural masses and urban population need liberal and sympathetic treatment in the advertising policy of DAVP and other institutions.

I shall also urge the government to give special attention to some issues whose reverberations may be felt only when much water has flown down the Ganges. These are primarily the extent of foreign equity in the media, standardization of media education and a relook at the media laws drawn up in the pre independence India with a totally different intent and purpose in mind.

The examination of the PRB Act 1867 that is on agenda today is a positive step in this direction and I hope that not just the central government but even the states will examine the legislations in their respective states that may make the laws more relevant and contemporary.

In the television media sector, films have for long broken the barriers of language and regionalism and the sector's contribution to social integration of the country certainly deserves the special incentives and protection as proposed to be discussed today. The Press Council will extend its whole-hearted support to these measures.

Insofar as Broadcast Bill is concerned, suffice it to say that license regulation and content regulation belong to two different *genre* and the content regulation needs to be in tandem with constitutional guarantees, though with accompanying obligations and reasonable restrictions

I would like to conclude with some suggestions for future action where the media and the governments may join hands to:

1. Develop a regulatory frame work that will promote self regulation in the electronic media either by converting the Press Council into media Council, and simultaneously, incorporating the changes

suggested in Press Council Act or creating a similar authority for the electronic media that may be independent of the pressure and pulls of both the industry and the authorities.

2. Take steps for standardization of media education and infrastructure in journalism institutes.

3. Sensitization of media professionals in social and developmental issues and administration of justice.

4. Develop a responsive frame work within the government so that the media, starved of information does not pass on half baked information to the citizenry.

Other issues for which the SIMCON may not be the proper forum but which greatly impact media standards and performance are “Trial by the Media”, “Sting Operations”, “Trivialization of news”, “Glorification of the terrorists either overtly or covertly” and “Paid brand promotion of business entities as well as individuals and public persons” and most disturbing phenomenon of ‘Paid News Syndrome’ in election process.

Another aspect of media functioning needs immediate attention i.e. ever increasing tendency to monopolise media by big corporate houses, the problem being further aggravated by cross media ownership. Appropriate legislative measures necessary to check and prevent monopoly in media and cross media ownership are to be ensured without any delay.

The media is today setting the political, economic, social and cultural agenda of the country and unless the issues relating to these areas receive serious consideration with focus on their relevancy the

media may be feeding us what has been called “Spinach with ice cream”.

The answer may lie in drawing up a National Media Policy after consultation with all stake holders. I may humbly suggest for constituting a Media Commission without any delay so that paradigm shift in media functioning in recent years in the context of globalisation and technological changes may be studied in-depth by the expert body and remedial measures may be suggested by the Commission.

To conclude, as I said before, in the task of nation building the media and the Government have to support each other as constructive partners. Media being Fourth Estate has a solemn duty to act as a mirror of the society and focus on issues needed to be addressed by the Government and Civil Society in a dispassionate manner.

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