



Group of Ministers: Media Strategy

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Why in News

The **Editors Guild of India** flagged the **Group of Ministers (GoM) report** on the **government's media strategy** as an example of the government's “**increasingly draconian attitude**” towards any criticism.

The GoM, whose members include five Cabinet Ministers and four Ministers of State, was set up in mid-2020.

Editors Guild of India

The Editors Guild was founded in 1978 with the **twin objectives of protecting press freedom** and for **raising the standards of editorial leadership** of newspapers and magazines.

Key Points

Recommendations from Group of Ministers (GoM) Report on Media Strategy:

- **Identifying and engaging journalists** - who had lost jobs but have been “supportive or neutral” to the present government - in various ministries so that their services could be used to project the government’s image positively.
Further, the government should have an **increased engagement with journalism schools** as part of its long-term strategy since present students are future journalists.
- **Engaging with Foreign Media and NRIs:**
 - There should be **regular interaction with foreign media journalists** as part of the government’s global outreach so that “its perspective” is put out correctly in the international forum.
 - An **effective system of communication with the NRI community** should be established so that they can raise their voice against negative narratives in foreign countries.
- **Highlighting Government’s Work:**
 - It calls for **mass circulation of positive stories** and testimonials to highlight the work done by the government and the difference they have made in people’s lives.
And **rebuttal of negative stories**, ensuring advertisements and outreach programmes in regional languages for better ‘connect with local people’.
 - Physical copies of the government magazine, **New India Samachar**, should be distributed to 6 lakh people and the e-version to 8 crore people.
 - Tasking different ministries with different outreach goals.
- **Using Social Media:**
It calls for **engaging with platforms** such as to increase the government’s outreach positively.
- **Countering False Narratives:**
Tracking **50 ‘negative influencers’** who discredit the government & encouraging **50 ‘positive influencers’** who project government work in ‘right perspective’.

Message and the medium

A peek into the strategy to finetune government communication



Action	Responsible unit
Two major public outreach programmes by each Ministry to ensure year-round coverage of government events	All Ministries
Engagement with journalism schools to tap 'future journalists'	I&B Ministry
Curbing fake news through fact check unit to counter false narratives	Press Information Bureau under I&B Ministry
Identifying a pool of 'spin doctors' for better presentation of facts	I&B Ministry
Promoting and supporting online portals to counter existing critical news portals	I&B Ministry
Regular interaction with foreign media journalists to disseminate government perspective	I&B and External Affairs Ministries

Concern of Editors Guild:

- The media strategy illustrates the government's **increasingly draconian attitude** against any critique and inquiry by the press.
The suggestions from the GoM report hint at **increased surveillance and targeting of writers and journalists** who depart from the government's narrative.
- The guild said the GoM prepared its report "with an **embedded toolkit to control the narrative** about the government in the media".
- Among the more disturbing suggestions was to develop a "strategy to neutralise the people who are writing against the government without facts and set false narratives/spread fake news".
Suggestion revealed an intention to "**muzzle any criticism of the government**", in the absence of clarity on what constitutes **fake news**.

Way Forward

- It is supposed that the **government should safeguard constitutional values of freedom of expression** for media as well as journalists and should make it clear that it is committed to the plurality of views in the media.

- Countering content manipulation and fake news to restore faith in the media without undermining its freedom will require public education, strengthening of regulations and effort of tech companies to make suitable algorithms for news curation.
- On the other hand, it is important for the **media to stick to the core principles** like truth and accuracy, transparency, independence, fairness and impartiality, responsibility and fair play so that they can gain credibility.

Source:TH