



Freedom of Media

For Prelims: Editors Guild of India, Press Council of India (PCI), World Press Freedom Index (WPFI).

For Mains: Freedom of Media & Democracy, Paid News, Biased Media, Fourth Pillar of Democracy

Why in News

Recently, the **Editors Guild of India** has **expressed anguish over the shutting down of the Kashmir Press Club**. It held that the shutting down of the Club sets **a dangerous precedent for media freedom**.

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

Key Points

- **Freedom of Media & Democracy:**
 - **Free Exchange of Ideas:** A free exchange of ideas, free exchange of information and knowledge, debating and expression of different viewpoints is important for the **smooth functioning of democracy**.
 - A free press can inform citizens of their leaders' successes or failures.
 - It conveys the people's needs and desires to government bodies, making informed decisions and strengthening society as a result.
 - It promotes open discussion of ideas that allows individuals to fully participate in political life.
 - **Making Government Accountable:** Free Media makes people question the decisions of the government and make it accountable.
 - **Voice of Marginalised:** The free media by virtue of being the voice of the masses empowers them with the **right to express opinions**.
 - Thus, free media is critical in a democracy.
 - **Fourth Pillar of Democracy:** Due to these attributes, the Media can be rightly considered as the fourth pillar of democracy, the other three being legislature, executive and judiciary.
- **Threats to Freedom of Press:**
 - **Fake News:** The government's pressure in the name of regulations, the bombardment of fake news and the influence of social media is dangerous for the occupation.
 - **Paid News:** Corruption-paid news, advertorials and fake news are threats to free and unbiased media.
 - **Attack Against Journalists:** The security of journalists is the biggest issue, killings and assaults on Journalists covering sensitive issues are very common.
 - Hate speech shared and amplified on social networks are targeted against journalists using social media.
 - Reports such as ['Freedom in the World 2021'](#) (Freedom House, US)', ['2020 Human Rights Report'](#) (US State Department)', ['Autocratisation Goes Viral'](#) (V-Dem Institute, Sweden)' have all highlighted intimidation of journalists in India.

- **Biased Media:** Corporate and political power has overwhelmed large sections of the media, both print and visual, which lead to vested interests and destroy freedom.
- **Press Freedom in India:**
 - **Romesh Thappar v. State of Madras, 1950:** The [Supreme Court](#) in *Romesh Thappar v. the State of Madras* observed that freedom of the press lay at the foundation of all democratic organisations.
 - **Fundamental Right Under Article 19:** The Indian Constitution guarantees freedom of speech and expression under [Article 19](#), which deals with 'Protection of certain rights regarding freedom of speech, etc.
 - **Implicit Right:** Freedom of the press is not expressly protected by the Indian legal system but it is impliedly protected under article 19(1) (a) of the constitution.
 - However, Freedom of the press is also **not absolute**.
 - A law could impose only those restrictions on the exercise of this right, it faces certain restrictions under article 19(2), which is as follows:
 - Sovereignty and integrity of India,
 - Security of the State,
 - Friendly relations with foreign States,
 - Public order, decency or morality or in
 - Contempt of court,
 - Defamation
 - Incitement to an offence.
- **Press Council of India (PCI)**
 - It is a regulatory body established under the [Press Council of India Act of 1978](#).
 - It aims to preserve the freedom of the press and maintain and improve the standards of newspapers and news agencies in India.
- **International Initiative for Freedom of Press**
 - The Paris based Reporters Without Borders (RSF) publishes annually a [World Press Freedom Index \(WPFI\)](#).
 - The index evaluates the level of freedom available to the media in 180 countries, which makes the governments and authorities aware of their policies and regulations against and for freedom of the press.
 - India has been ranked at **142nd out of 180 countries in World Press Freedom Index, 2021**.

Way Forward

- **Strengthening Institutional Framework:** The Press Council of India, a regulatory body, can warn and regulate media if it finds that a newspaper or a news agency has violated media ethics.
 - Statutory status should be given to the **News Broadcasters Association (NBA)** which represents the private television news and current affairs broadcasters.
- **Tackling Fake News:** Countering content manipulation and fake news to restore faith in the media without undermining its freedom will require
 - Public education,
 - Strengthening of regulations
 - Effort of tech companies to make suitable algorithms for news curation.
- **Adherence to Media Ethics:** It is important that the media stick to the core principles like truth and accuracy, transparency, independence, fairness and impartiality, responsibility and fair play.

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