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## Maharashtra Bill to Protect Mediapersons

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### Why in News

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The President of India has given assent to the **Maharashtra Media Persons and Media Institutions (Prevention of Violence and Damage or Loss to Property) Bill, 2017**.

**Maharashtra** is the **first state** to pass legislation which ensures **protection for journalists**.

### Key Provisions

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- The bill considers **violent attacks on media persons a non-bailable offence**.  
The offence shall be **cognizable** (police officer has the authority to make an arrest without a warrant and to start an investigation with or without the permission of a court) **and triable** by a **first-class judicial magistrate**.
- Anyone who commits or attempts to commit any act of violence against **journalists or media houses** shall be punished with **jail terms up to three years** or with a **fine up to Rs 50,000 or with both**.
  - **A media institution** has been defined as any registered newspaper, news channel, news-based electronic outlet or news station establishment.
  - **A media person** means a person whose principal vocation is that of a journalist, who is employed as a journalist, whether on a **regular or contract basis**.
- Any offence against a media person will be investigated by a police officer **above the rank of a Deputy Superintendent of Police**.
- The **assailant** would also be liable to **reimburse the medical expenditure** incurred by the media persons in the attack.
- The **offender** is also liable to **pay compensation for damage or loss** caused to the property of the media person or the media house as **determined by the court**.

### Significance

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- The act will ensure the **safety of journalists in exercising freedom of speech and expression.**
- It ensures the implementation of the **“Safety and Security of Journalists” advisory (2017)** by the **Ministry of Home Affairs.**

The advisory was issued days after Bengaluru-based journalist Gauri Lankesh was shot dead in 2017.

- It will help to improve ranking under the **World Press Freedom Index.**
  - India **ranked 140<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries** in this index released by ‘Reporters Without Borders’.
  - According to the report violence against journalists including police violence, attacks by Maoist fighters and reprisals by criminal groups or corrupt politicians is one of the most striking characteristics of the current state of press freedom in India.

**Source: TH**