

'There is no ombudsman for the electronic media'

BY SPJS STUDENTS

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"The Indian media is now robust, vast and reflects the diversity of the nation," said ambassador Krishnan Srinivasan, former foreign secretary, at the welcome dinner on the eve of the 7th Editors' Conclave, jointly organised by the C R Irani foundation and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung at Vedic Village near here, which began today. India has the world's biggest newspaper market because only 20 per cent of the people have internet connections. There are about 70,000 print newspapers in the country, he said.

"Different viewpoints are ignored. So we have views masquerading as news," said Mr Srinivasan. Commercial consideration influences the selection of panels and airing of points of view. There is no ombudsman for the electronic media and not even the equivalent of the toothless Press Coun-



Dr Michael Andreas Luders(left), veteran journalist and author and Mr Pankaj Madan of Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung, New Delhi, during the inaugural session of the 7th Editors' Conclave, at Vedic Village in Kolkata on Thursday. ■ SNS

cil, he said.

In the past two decades the media in India had grown so rapidly in power and influence that it would be foolhardy for any government to interfere with it, said Mr Srinivasan. They want to keep the media on the right side and befriend it when they could and keep their hands off it when they could not.

Delivering the keynote address, Dr Michael Andreas Luders, veteran German

journalist and author, pointed out that critical journalism has become a matter of the past. The world in a way is a village and we need to understand and appreciate each other's perspectives and global politics, he said.

The topic of discussion was, 'Media: A crisis of credibility', which is undoubtedly a statement than a question. As the first session of the seminar dealt with the possible causes

behind the erosion of credibility of the media, Mr Siddharta Bhaita, one of the founding editors of The Wire, confessed that at time when journalists are termed as 'prostitutes' by politicians, the situation is really grim. He said that the platform is changing but the process is not, and calls for better journalistic integrity to save the already faltering fourth pillar of democracy.

Ms Kalyani Shankar, senior journalist, criticised the electronic media for sensationalising news at the drop of a hat. Mr Sam Rajappa, founder-Director of SPJS, brought into notice that most of the media houses are owned by big corporates which takes away much of the independence of the editor. According to the one of the newspaper barons, "News is what you put in the space between advertisements," he said. In no other country newspapers are subsidised by the advertisers as much as

it is in India, which lets the advertisers influence contents.

Speaking about coverage of the media in the North-East, Mr Pradip Phanjoubam, Editor, Imphal Free Press said, "Newspapers in the North-East function differently from other Indian newspapers."

The discussion picked up pace in the second session which focused on media and regulation. Mr Raj Kamal Jha, Editor-in-Chief, Indian Express, voiced his opinion against any regulation. "We are already regulated. Those who ask the media to be regulated is usually the government," he said. Mr Mukund Padmanabham, Editor, The Hindu Business Line, said, "A lot of regulations already exist like the law on criminal defamation. Self-regulation is a non-controversial idea."

Mr Ravindra Kumar, Editor, The Statesman, put out the idea of peer review. He considered regulation in

any form is interference. If professional talents are higher in standards, there is no need for such laws, he said.

Dr Luders discussed about his experience in journalism in Germany that scribes try to be part of the political system instead of writing about it. Mr Shah Hossain Imam, Associate Editor, The Daily Star, said, "Regulation within the system is more important than regulation by the government."

Answering questions Mr Jha said that no regulatory body can make anyone a better editor. Mr Kumar rounded up the session saying no dynamic production house can be subjected to any kind of judicial intervention, as outside intervention is more harmful than internal regulation.

WITH INPUTS FROM NEELACH RAJ, SABYASACHI SENGUPTA, TRISHA BHATTACHARJEE, SOUNITA SARMA CHOUDHURY, SHIVAM CHOUDHURY, KRISHNANISH DAS GUPTA, SREYOSHI CHAKRABORTY, BARNALI MITRA, SRAMAN BANERJEE, SOMALI MUKHERJEE.

EDITORS' CONCLAVE DAY-2 ~ 'PRINT JOURNALISTS SHOULD GO THE EXTRA MILE'

News beyond brands

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"Before the reporter reaches the place of incident, the story is over. So, the five W's (who, where, what, which, when) and one H (how) has been already informed by the electronic media. Print journalists have to walk that extra mile and should concentrate on investigation and explanation," said Mr Raj Kamal Jha, Editor-in-Chief, Indian Express, on the concluding day of the Editors' Conclave held jointly by C R Irani Foundation and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, near here.

Mr Jha also pointed out that sustainable eco-



(From left) Arvind Kurian Abreham, Kruthika N S, Arindrajit Basu (students of NUJS), Shameek Sen, moderator and Neelabh Raj, Trisha Bhattacharjee, Shraman Banerjee (SPJS students) take part in the panel discussion on the second day of the Editors' Conclave. On Friday. *SNS

nomics would always be in play but that should not hinder the story teller to convey the message to the reader in a compelling way.

Commenting on the

topic of the session, Mr Mukund Padmanabhan said, "People want news and not just follow any brands. The question should be if brands are going to die and not the

newspapers."

Mr Sam Rajappa was in total agreement that print media will survive unlike contrary to what is being foretold. He advised, "If we raise the

price of newspapers, at first, there will be decline in circulation but later it will pick up pace and grow."

The second session of the seminar had the students of the Statesman Print Journalism School (SPJS) and National University of Juridical Sciences (NUJS) participate in a panel discussion in which the law students felt that there is a need for a regulatory body, one that will not be monitored by the government. The students of journalism contradicted, saying that such a body would infringe on the freedom of press.

As the discussion progressed, moderator Mr

Shameek Sen, said that regulation does not necessarily mean restrictions, it can also be a liberalising tool. One of the NUJS students pointed out the need for a uniform code of ethics which would govern the media, which was agreed upon unanimously.

The conclave concluded with both sides agreeing that there was indeed some need for regulation provided it is constituted internally and stays unaffected by external factors.

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