



PRESS CLUB OF INDIA

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PRESS RELEASE

The Press Club of India (PCI) is deeply anguished by the manner in which the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY) notified the Digital Personal Data Protection Rules under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023 (DPDP Act, 2023).

PCI, the largest collective of journalists, along with 22 other press bodies, representing thousands of working journalists from across the country, submitted a Joint Memorandum¹ in June 2025 to MEITY in an attempt to engage with the Government of India by flagging serious lacunas in the DPDP Act, 2023, that impinge upon press freedom and directly hit Article 19 (1).

The intention of submitting the Joint Memorandum was two-fold. The first, was to engage with the government in the most constructive and democratic manner to help it come out with a model code of implementation (Rules) that did not strangle the functioning of journalists and media organisations in the world's largest democracy.

The second, was to demonstrate that some of the sections of the DPDP Act, 2023, were riddled with serious ambiguities due to their sweeping definitions and scope. The loosely drafted sections open up numerous possibilities of weaponisation of the law with the purpose of curtailing press freedom. The Joint Memorandum provided real-world scenarios, based on the professional experiences of thousands of journalists, where the provisions of the law are potentially in conflict with their functioning.

The intention of this exercise was to provide the Government of India with a rational and coherent case for carving out exceptions for people and organisations performing journalistic duties. We at no stage asked for repealing the law. We are quite aware of the necessity of a law for protecting personal data of citizens in the digital age.

Subsequently, Mr. S. Krishnan, Secretary, MEITY, called for a meeting on July 28, 2025, with representatives of press bodies to discuss the issues raised in the Joint Memorandum. At his behest, the press bodies submitted a set of 35 questions in the form of FAQs² on August 22, 2025, further elaborating the real-world scenarios, for seeking clarification about the application of Sections 2, 5, 6, 7, 10, 17, 28, 33, 36 and 37 and their sub-clauses to journalistic work. The ambiguity and open-ended scope of these clauses escalates the potential for weaponisation of the law manifold.



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At the meeting with Secretary MEITY, the representatives of press bodies provided a copy of Article 85 of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which provides explicit exemption for journalistic purposes. This too was submitted at the request of officials. For preparing the FAQs, the PCI along with the Indian Women's Press Corps and the Delhi Union of Journalists called for a public meeting of journalists to solicit inputs. All suggestions and inputs incorporated in the document that was submitted to the Government of India through MEITY.

Both the Joint Memorandum and FAQs also held that the dilution of Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act, 2005,—via Section 44 of the DPDP Act, 2023—was detrimental to the functioning of the press. The RTI section in its original form was a vital tool for journalists and media organisation for accessing information in public interest.

Far from being confrontationist, as the sequence of events demonstrates, thousands of journalists walked the extra yard to perform a valuable democratic duty by flagging some of the serious issues with the DPDP Act, 2023, and the Draft Rules that impact the functioning of the free press. No less than Prime Minister Narendra Modi has repeatedly exhorted the citizens to be mindful of their duties, while seeking protection of rights. This was exactly the intended purpose of submitting the Joint Memorandum and FAQs—the journalists were performing their duty of strengthening the democratic process and their right to freedom of expression. Instead, they were met with a wall of obfuscation put up by the Executive.

It's worth reiterating that the Press Club of India has a long and distinguished history of expanding and upholding press freedom and has resisted all attempts to curtail them. Just two examples should suffice. In 1975, members of the Press Club were at the forefront of opposing the censorship laws during Emergency. Some of our members were even imprisoned for their acts of defiance.

A little more than a decade later, in 1988, illustrious journalists and editors, who were proud members of the Press Club of India, such as Kuldip Nayyar, H.K Dua, Hiranmay Karlekar, Pritish Chakravarty, and many others, led the protests against the infamous Defamation Bill, 1988. Hundreds of journalists marched from the Press Club of India to the India Gate to register their dissent. The impact of the protest was such that better sense prevailed and Rajiv Gandhi's Congress government, which enjoyed a super-majority in the Parliament, was forced to withdraw the Bill despite being passed in the Lower House.

On multiple occasions in the past, the Press Club of India has expressed grave concern over the weaponisation of laws, including the use of some of the most draconian criminal laws, to target journalists and media organisations. Until now, the media fraternity has not seen any demonstrable evidence from the Government of India that it's willing to provide legally binding assurances that the clauses regarding data gathering, informed consent, data processing, and data storage under the DPDP Act, 2023, for journalistic purposes won't be weaponised to hamper or curtail the functioning of the press.



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The fundamental problem with the DPDP Act, 2023, is that the Executive has donned the mantle of the judge, jury, and executioner. Unchecked powers have been placed in the hands of the Executive without any semblance of checks and balances.

We hope that better sense prevails and the government provides clear cut exemptions for journalistic purposes from the ambiguous provisions of the DPDP Act, 2023.

Gautam Lahiri
President
Press Club of India

Neeraj Thakur
Secretary General
Press Club of India

References:

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1. Joint Memorandum: <http://pressclubofindia.org/Memorandum-2025.pdf>
 2. FAQs: <http://pressclubofindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/List-of-FAQs-from-MEITY-On-DPDP-Act-2023.pdf>