

BRIHANMUMBAI UNION OF JOURNALISTS

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Brihanmumbai Union of Journalists (BUJ) expresses grave concern at two recent instances of police investigation against the media in Maharashtra, both of which serious doubts about the impartiality of investigation, independent of political interference.

In the first instance, journalist Prateek Goyal of Newslandry faced [harassment](#), a defamation notice and an FIR under the Trademarks Act for his report about the sacking of around 15 staffers from the Sakal Media Group entitled “The future is very bleak’: Sakal Times staffers say they have been sacked in violation of Maharashtra order’ [published](#) on March 27, 2020.

On Nov 1, police from Vishrambaug police station in Pune, visited the reporter’s residence to seize his laptop, though this is patently illegal and violative of his privacy. The FIR, which says the report bore the logo of Sakal Media Group and therefore violated Sec 103 of the act, is preposterous. Sakal Media Group is a company owned by Pratap Pawar, brother of NCP leader Sharad Pawar. The latter’s daughter Supriya Sule is a director in the company.

Clearly, the objective of the case was to intimidate and harass the reporter. Regrettably coming from a newsmedia company, it betrays a poor understanding of newsroom processes. The logo was clearly used to bring in some visual element into the report, a common enough practice in editorial page-making. At best, the media house could have just asked for its removal instead of filing a criminal case against the reporter.

The second instance, that of the arrest of media owner of The Republic, Arnab Goswami on Nov 4, 2020, follows an investigation into the death by suicide of interior designer Anvay Naik and his mother Kumud Naik in Alibaug in May 2018. According to reports, Naik’s suicide note named Goswami and the owners of two other companies, Feroz Shaikh of IcastX/Skimedia and Niteish Sarda of Smartworks who owed Naik’s company Concorde Designs Pvt Ltd, varying amounts of money for work he executed.

Disturbingly, Raigad police closed the case in April 2019 and Naik’s daughter alleged that police had acted under pressure from the then BJP-led government of Devendra Fadnavis to close the case. In May 2020, she petitioned the State Home Minister Anil Deshmukh to seek a reopening of the case. Under the Sena-Cong-NCP government, the case was investigated afresh.

The arrest has sparked a raucous chorus of protest from BJP leaders at the Centre. Indeed, Goswami’s arrest comes in the wake of multiple FIRs and cases filed against him and his channel for two distinct issues – that of allegations of

fixing TRP readings to favour The Republic channel and two, the inflammatory programmes on the Palghar lynching and the assemblage of migrants at Bandra railway station. The channel played a leading role in the shocking media circus that followed the tragic death of actor Sushant Singh Rajput and its programmes were marked by an oppositional stance against the Shiv Sena-led Maha Vikas Aghadi.

The BUJ deplors this precipitous decline of journalistic ethics at the hands of media outlets, including The Republic and does not endorse Goswami's conduct in stalling investigation and arrest. However, the BUJ is deeply concerned at the partisan deployment of various law-enforcing agencies to further and protect political interests, as illustrative in the case against Goyal. Such acts affect the rights of all citizens and cast a cloud on all investigations, jeopardizing all voices of dissent and ultimately weakening the struggle for justice.

The BUJ demands :

1. that the case against the Newslandry journalist Prateek Goyal be quashed and all harassment against him be stopped forthwith.
2. that the sacked employees of Sakal Media Group be reinstated immediately with full back wages.
3. that the Maharashtra government ensures that working journalists are accorded all protections guaranteed under law.
4. that all the investigations against Arnab Goswami of The Republic, be conducted in a transparent manner, leaving no room for any charge of vindictiveness or vendetta.
5. that the complaint filed by the family of Anvay Naik is investigated thoroughly without any interference so as to ensure justice and a sensitive and dignified closure.

Sd/-

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Gen Secretary
BUJ