



Standing Committee Report Summary

Ethical Standards in Media Coverage

- The Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology (Chair: Dr. Shashi Tharoor) presented its report on ‘Ethical Standards in Media Coverage’ on December 1, 2021. As of January 2020, there are 1.45 lakh newspapers, 387 news and current affairs channel, and 495 radio stations operated by All India Radio. The Committee has recommended forming a Commission to cover all aspects included in this report and submit their findings within six months. Key observations and recommendations of the Committee include:
 - **Restructuring PCI:** The Press Council of India (PCI) is a statutory body under the Press Council Act, 1978 for regulation of press. The Committee noted that PCI does not have the power to enforce compliance as advisories issued by it are not enforceable in a Court of Law. Further, it noted that different segments of the media have different standards, while some have none. The Committee recommended restructuring the PCI, and establishing a media council to cover all types of media (print, electronic and digital). The council shall have statutory powers to enforce its orders wherever required. Further, the Committee recommended increasing the membership of PCI (currently it consists of 20 members).
 - **Complaints against media:** On violation of ethical standards by print media, the PCI directs newspapers to issue directions to publish the version of the complainant. In some cases, the papers are censured. In such cases, these decisions are forwarded to the Bureau of Outreach and Communication (BOC) and concerned state governments. The Committee observed that newspapers continue to violate the ethical standards, till action is taken by the BOC. Further, it noted that BOC takes almost a year to come out with their orders. The Committee recommended the Ministry to prescribe a certain time period for BOC to act on the decisions of the PCI.
 - The Committee noted that private news and non-news channels are governed by mechanisms of self-regulation by industry associations. These include: (i) News Broadcasting Standards Authority, set up by the News Broadcasters Association (NBA) and is empowered to warn, censure, and levy a fine up to one lakh rupees upon the broadcaster, (ii) Broadcasting Content Complaints Council, set up by the Indian Broadcasting Foundation (IBF) to examine and redress complaints, and (iii) Consumer Complaints Council, set up by the Advertising Standards Council of India to consider complaints in respect of advertisements. The Committee observed that from 2015-19, action has been taken against 141 cases of violation of programme and advertisement codes. Out of these, 119 cases pertained to non-members of either NBA or IBF. In these 119 cases, action was taken against 87 cases only in 2019, while 51 cases were disposed by the ministry. It recommended disposing off the cases in a time bound manner to have the desired impact and encouraging self-regulation in all private satellite television channels. Further, the Committee recommended the Ministry to amend the Cable TV Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995, so that action on any complaint should be by rule instead of being by an executive order.
 - **Definition of Anti-national attitudes:** The Cable Network Rules, 2014 prohibits those programmes from being carried in the cable service which promote ‘anti-national attitudes’. However, the term ‘anti-national attitudes’ has not been defined. The Committee recommended that ‘Anti national attitude’ should be properly defined to remove any ambiguity.
 - **Television Rating Points (TRP):** Currently, television audience measurement mechanism is done in the form of TRP (metric used to evaluate viewership through a communication device, such as, a television set). It records the time and the programme that a viewer watches on a particular day. In 2015, Broadcast Audience Research Council (BARC) was granted registration as a television rating agency by the Ministry for a period of 10 years. It is a self-regulated, not-for-profit body and covers 44,000 households across India. The Committee noted that there have been recent cases of manipulation of TRPs by some television channels by rigging the devices used by BARC. Further, it observed that the current TRP system is heavily biased towards urban areas. The Committee recommended: (i) creating a more transparent system for measuring TRPs, (ii) changing the system of measurement by giving equal weightage to rural and semi-urban areas through increment in the sample size, and (iii) studying global practices adopted for TRP.
 - **Grievance Redressal:** The Committee noted that at present, there is no grievance redressal mechanism for an individual to register a complaint for redressal of his grievance, if something is written against him. It recommended: (i) including grievance redressal mechanisms at all levels (i.e. , district, state, and centre), (ii) providing in-house grievance redressal mechanisms in all forms of media, and (iii) constituting a media helpline number to maintain the standards of ethics in media.

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