

**“Stop giving meaningless praise and start giving meaningful action.” Steve Maraboli****NATIONAL****PUBLISHING POLL CANDIDATE'S PROPAGANDA IS PAID NEWS: ELECTION COMMISSION**

Repeated publication of propaganda lauding the achievements of a candidate in an election is nothing but “paid news”, the Election Commission of India has told the apex Court.

Politicians cannot say that it is part of their fundamental right to free speech to spew out “motivated propaganda”.

The EC has asked the court to declare whether it amounts to “paid news” if widely circulated daily newspapers cover statements issued by, and in the name of, a candidate.

Such news are not only laudatory of his or her record and achievements but also are a direct appeal to voters by the candidate.

If such motivated propaganda is allowed in the name of free speech during the election period, candidates with a strong network of connections will exploit their sphere of influence in society.

The commission has moved the court in appeal against a decision of the Delhi High Court to set aside the disqualification of a MP in Madhya Pradesh.

ECI's National Level Committee on Paid News found that five newspapers, with a wide circulation, had published 42 news items that were biased and one-sided and aimed at furthering the prospects of the leader.

Some of the reports were advertisements in favour of him. The committee concluded that the items fitted the definition of “paid news”.

**Way Forward:**

The conduct of the eager supporters, whose extensive coverage, as in this case, being dubbed as freedom of expression cannot be termed news.

This is so because ‘news’ is expected to be unbiased and characterized by dispassionate coverage and proportionate space to other contenders.

If the court shut its eye to this case, “the assertion of freedom of speech would become a stock pretence or plea by the service provider and the beneficiary candidate”.

**PANEL APPROVES NUTRITION NORMS**

The National Technical Board on Nutrition (NTBN) has approved guidelines proposed by WCD Ministry for severe acute malnutrition.

India's top nutrition panel has recommended that severely malnourished children must be fed freshly cooked food prepared from locally available cereals, pulses and vegetables.

This is to be distributed by anganwadi centres, as part of the country's first-ever guidelines for nutritional management of children suffering from severe acute malnutrition (SAM).

The measures are part of the community-based health management of children suffering from SAM.

The government had, till now, only put in place guidelines for the hospitalization of severely wasted children who develop medical complications.

The guidelines outline the role of anganwadi workers and auxiliary nurse midwives (ANMs) in identifying severely wasted children.

They have to segregate those with oedema or medical complications and sending them to the nearest health facility or nutrition rehabilitation centres.

This includes provision of nutrition, continuous monitoring of growth, administration of antibiotics and micro-nutrients as well as counselling sessions and imparting of nutrition and health education.

Importantly, the government has also revised the method to be used to measure wasting and advised calculating weight based on the height of children instead of the mid-upper.

**INDIA CONDUCTS SUCCESSFUL INTERCEPTOR MISSILE TEST AT NIGHT**

India successfully conducted an interceptor missile test off the Odisha coast on Sunday night, achieving a major milestone in developing a two-layer Ballistic Missile Defence.

**Prithvi Defence Vehicle (PDV) Mission:**

This PDV mission is for engaging the targets in the Exo-atmosphere region at an altitude above 50 km of the earth's atmosphere DRDO.

Both the PDV interceptor and the target missile were successfully engaged.

In an automated operation, radar-based detection and tracking system detected and tracked the enemy's ballistic missile.

The interceptor guided by high-accuracy Inertial Navigation System (INS) supported by a Redundant Micro Navigation System moved towards the estimated point of the interception.

**SC CONSTITUTED A THREE-MEMBER COMMITTEE TO LOOK INTO PRISON REFORMS**

The Supreme Court has constituted a three-member committee to look into the problems of jails in India and suggest reform measures. The committee headed by former SC judge Justice Amitava Roy will look into the aspect of jail reforms across the country and suggest measures to deal with them.

The committee's duties will include looking into the problems of jails across the country including overcrowding in prisons, issue of human rights of prisoners and issues concerning women prisoners languishing in cells for years.

After studying the problems, the committee would be required to suggest measures to deal with them.

The SC had expressed its displeasure saying that the government had collected a huge amount under the orders of the apex court but the funds were not being utilized properly.

NHRC figures show that prisoners cut off from family and friends had a 50% more chance of committing suicide than those outside. The average suicide rate among the general public for this period is 11 (per 100,000) whereas the average suicide rate in prison is 16.9 (per 100,000). In other words, the average suicide rate in prisons is over 50% more than in normal conditions.

Indian prisons face three long-standing structural constraints: overcrowding, thanks to a high percentage of undertrials in the prison population, understaffing and underfunding. The inevitable outcome is sub-human living conditions, poor hygiene, and violent clashes between the inmates and jail authorities.

Besides, while 33% of the total requirement of prison officials still lies vacant, almost 36% of vacancy for supervising officers is still unfulfilled. In the absence of adequate prison staff, overcrowding of prisons leads to rampant violence and other criminal activities inside the jails.

**Way ahead:**

Indian jails have often been dubbed as a university for grooming criminals due to pathetic and inhumane conditions. In the absence of a robust Whistleblower Protection Act and structural changes to address the issues of overcrowding and understaffing, India's prisons will continue to be heaven for politically connected criminals and hell for socio-economically disadvantaged undertrials, some regular media uproars notwithstanding.

Fundamental rights of prisoners cannot be placed in the back-burner and the Centre and the states need to be more pro-active in sensitising staff about the need to treat prisoners as humanely as possible.

**SC ASKS PARLIAMENT TO COME UP WITH A LAW TO DECRIMINALIZE POLITICS**

The Supreme Court has asked the Parliament to make a law to prevent persons with serious criminal cases pending against them from entering legislature and be part of law making.

The court observed that it cannot enter the legislative arena to provide disqualification of candidates, who are facing serious criminal cases against them. However, it asked the candidates to put in bold letter her/his criminal antecedents in the required affidavit.

The SC said each political party will put on its website the criminal antecedents of each of its candidates so as to allow the voters to make an informed choice.

Currently, under the Representation of Peoples (RP) Act, lawmakers cannot contest elections only after their conviction in a criminal case.

Section 8 of the Representation of the People (RP) Act, 1951 disqualifies a person convicted with a sentence of two years or more from contesting elections. But those under trial continued to be eligible to contest elections. The Lily Thomas case (2013), however, ended this unfair advantage.

The SC has repeatedly expressed concern about the purity of legislatures.

In 2002, it made it obligatory for all candidates to file an affidavit before the returning officer, disclosing criminal cases pending against them.

The famous order to introduce NOTA was intended to make political parties think before giving tickets to the tainted.

In its landmark judgment of March 2014, the SC accepted the urgent need for cleansing politics of criminalization and directed all subordinate courts to decide on cases involving legislators within a year, or give reasons for not doing so to the chief justice of the high court.

### **Suggested measure to curb criminalization of politics:**

Bringing greater transparency in campaign financing is going to make it less attractive for political parties to involve gangsters.

The Election Commission of India (ECI) should have the power to audit the financial accounts of political parties, or political parties' finances should be brought under the right to information (RTI) law.

Broader governance will have to improve for voters to reduce the reliance on criminal politicians.

Fast-track courts are necessary because politicians are able to delay the judicial process and serve for decades before prosecution.

The Election Commission must take adequate measures to break the nexus between the criminals and the politicians.

The forms prescribed by the Election Commission for candidates disclosing their convictions, cases pending in courts and so on in their nomination papers is a step in the right direction if it applied properly.

### **Way ahead:**

Corruption and criminalization of politics is hitting at the roots of democracy. Therefore, Parliament must take steps urgently to curb this menace. Candidates and political parties must give wide publicity to criminal cases pending against her/him in the local media, both print and electronic, after s/he files nomination to contest elections.

### **NATIONAL ORIENTATION WORKSHOP ON NATIONAL E-VIDHAN APPLICATION (NEVA)**

Inaugural Session of the two-day National Orientation workshop on National e-Vidhan Application (NeVA) and new website and app of NeVA was organized by Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs.

The focus of the workshop would be to encourage all State Legislatures to move towards e-Vidhan platform.

This will help bringing in transparency, accountability and responsiveness in their conduct of business, through the use of technology.

National e-Vidhan Application (NeVA) is a member-centric, decentralized digital application that makes information available on digital platform about day to day functioning of Legislative Houses covering various businesses of the Houses.

The application would host a secure page for each Member of the House for submitting Questions & other Notices.

The mNeVA (NeVA-mobile app) is a device neutral and user friendly app that has made information on conduct of business in Legislatures accessible anytime, anywhere to everyone.

It is a work-flow based app deployed in Cloud (Meghraj) which helps the Chair of the House to conduct the proceedings of the House smoothly and the members to carry out their duties in the House efficiently.

NeVA has made live for Rajya Sabha in respect of Monsoon Session 2018 and information in respect of Lok Sabha is being updated.

**e-Vidhan Project:**

e-Vidhan is a Mission Mode Project to digitize and make the functioning of State Legislatures paperless.

This is part of Digital India programme and Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs, being the Nodal Ministry for this project.

It desires to roll out e-Vidhan as NeVA covering all 40 Houses including two Houses of Parliament and thereby putting all them on a single platform and proving the theory of 'One Nation One Application'.

It is to be used by the Legislatures as well as all the Government Departments.

\*\*\*