

# '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 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 NEELABH RAJ, SABYASACHI SENGUPTA, TRISHA BHATTACHARJEE, SOUNITA SARMA CHOUDHURY, SHUHAM CHOUDHURI, KRISHNANISH DAS GUPTA, SREYOSHI CHAKRABORTY, BARNALI MITRA, SRAMAN BANERJEE, SOMALI MUKHERJEE.