

Media Opposes Government Regulation



*L-R: **R Sukumar**, Managing Editor, Mint; **Govind Ethiraj**, Editor-in-Chief, UTVi; **Tarun Tejpal**, Founder and Editor, Tehelka; Moderator: **Kishan Rana**, Professor Emeritus, Indian Foreign Service Institute/Former Ambassador of India to Germany*

It is not the lack of code or ethics or regulation but the unprecedented crisis of market leadership that is responsible for the brickbats the media, whether electronic or print, is receiving today. This emerged as a central theme at a panel discussion on '24-Hour News Media: A Re-evaluation in Order?' held here today as part of Ideas India 2008 organised by Aspen Institute India.

Proliferation of 24-hour news channels has led to unhealthy competition for eyeballs which in turn breeds sensationalism. In such a situation, code of conduct or no code of conduct, if one breaks the rules others are compelled to catch up. **Mr Tarun Tejpal, Founder and Editor, Tehelka**, was vehement in refusing to accept any government role in the regulation of media. "We are whistle-blowers. Given half a chance, the government would love to stifle our voice. It's a no-no," he protested.

He said that media in India is in a very sticky place and our model is deeply flawed – we have to depend on advertisers for survival. Nowhere in the world is a newspaper or a TV channel as cheap as in India. We have been brought to this pass by the industry leaders through predatory pricing and the others have no choice but to follow the lead or shut shop. "Today market leaders are so

compromised on ethics that they will sell editorial space to advertisers," Mr Tejpal said.

Mr Govind Ethiraj, Editor-in-Chief, UTVi! said that his channel has a young team which brings a lot of energy but it is relatively inexperienced, which is the reason for mistakes that happen. Proliferation of media is also the result of a paradigm shift: instead of a few media houses controlling the media, we now have a new breed of journalist entrepreneurs. There is a fierce competition which has led to improvement in quality of print media. This has not happened in the electronic media, he said.

Mr R Sukumar, Managing Editor, Mint, disagreed and said that this is true also of the print media. If one does not follow the rules, the others follow. The Press Council, which is supposed to be the conscience keeper of the Press, is a toothless body -- The last order it passed was in 2002. Mr Sukumar suggested that the best solution is to hit them in the pocket. "If you don't like what a channel does, pull out the advertisements switch off the TV that will hit their TRPs and thus their advertisement revenues. If you don't like a newspaper, don't buy it. That is the simple solution," he said.

Mr Kishan Rana, Professor Emeritus, Indian Foreign Service Institute/Former Ambassador of India to Germany moderated the discussion.

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