

Kashmir Times

Journalists across India at receiving end of official wrath

**Young Journalists League—a public meeting on February 11, 2008 at the Press
Club of India to oppose this draconian trend and to collectively decide the future**

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NEW DELHI, Feb 11 [2008]: India may boast a most powerful and free press in the developing world. But, the situation in changing fast with over past few months many journalists mostly in countryside being arrested and put behind bars for their alleged links with Left Wing extremists.

Prominent media persons including Kuldeep Nayar, Vinod Mehta, Praful Bidwai and Rajendra Bisht converged here and lamented at the attitude of main stream media for not speaking against the harassment of their peers in the countryside. The meeting was held at the Press Club of India to protest arrests of prominent journalists like Prashant Rahi in Uttarakhand, Praful Jha in Chattisgarh, Srisailum and Indian Journalist Union (IJU) national council member and former president of Warangal Working Journalist Union Pendyala Venkata Kondal Rao from Andhra Pradesh and P. Govindan Kutti (People's March) from Kerala and filing of charges against Sunita, writer and owner of Daanish Books of Nagpur. Gobind Kutty is on a hunger strike since December 19, 2007 and was now being force fed by the administration. He has been booked under the draconian Unlawful Activities Prevention Act and his magazine has been banned.

Speaking at protest meeting Kuldeep Nayar said that the situation was worse than the Emergency period in 1975. "Journalists in Pakistan were also facing repression but they are heard and supported in their country but here in India we are not even aware as to what is going on," he regretted. He lamented that over past decade corporate sector had become too powerful and had been influencing as to what should go in press and what should not.

Vinod Mehta, editor of Outlook weekly, called upon the Editors Guild of India to create a register to document attacks on journalists and freedom of expression throughout India. "We based at Delhi have no idea about the goings on in the length and breadth of the country," he said. Mehta said that the freedom of expression was the basic issue and there could not be any compromise. Linking the attacks and arrests of journalist with the liberalization and globalization, senior journalist Praful Bidwai said that these journalists were paying the price for raising their voice against the forced eviction of millions of people in the name of development.

He alleged that more than 20 lakh people were being uprooted to pave way for Special Economic Zones

throughout India. According to him, commerce ministry itself had admitted that only 59000 jobs would be created by these SEZ. "Around 3.5 to 4.5 crore people have uprooted in India in the name of development since independence which is the size of an average European country," Bidwai said. Rajendra Bisht, a senior journalist, that the danger to the press freedom also come from journalists who paint their persecuted colleagues in bad light on the basis of what was said by the official agencies. The meeting also condemned use of Unlawful Activities Prevention Act and other state laws like the Chattisgarh Public Security Act to curb legitimate protests.