



## PRESS NOTE

The Editors Guild's has urged the Election Commission to take strong action against both candidates and media persons who violate the disclosure norms of election expenditure in regard to media publicity. It deplored the growing trend in some quarters for political advertisements to be purveyed as news.

A delegation from the Guild, led by guild president Rajdeep Sardesai, submitted a memorandum to the commission on Friday expressing the guild's grave concern over the "paid news" phenomenon. It cited several recent investigative reports which highlight the prevalence of this pernicious practice. Sardesai said this dangerous trend threatened the foundations of journalism by eroding public faith in the credibility and impartiality of news reporting. It also vitiated the poll process and prevented a fair election, since richer candidates who could pay for their publicity had a clear advantage.

Chief Election Commissioner Navin Chawla said that while the commission did not have the mechanism to monitor the candidates in all 543 constituencies, some random samples could be examined closely. If a few candidates were made an example of it would serve as a warning to others.

Chawla pointed out that another suggestion from the guild that the expenditure limit of the candidate be raised to "a realistic level" was not in the hands of the commission, the limit was fixed by Parliament.

Election Commissioner S Y Qureshi said that the manner in which the Election Commission handles the complaints against Maharashtra Chief Minister Ashok Chavan in the recent Maharashtra assembly election will serve as a test case to demonstrate the commission's commitment to tackle the growing malaise of "paid news". Chavan has to reply by February 1 to the commission's notice forwarding complaints by rival political parties, alleging that the chief minister had paid publications for favourable publicity.

Chawla acknowledged that the commission has already received several complaints on the issue of paid news. One grievance was that candidates sometimes got blacked out by unscrupulous publications, unless they paid up. Others complained that well heeled candidates who could pay the corrupt media get write ups in their favour.

Election Commissioner V S Sampath appreciated the message brought by the Guild that the buck stopped with the EC. The commission would welcome advice on how to deal firmly with the malpractice. He suggested that the guild come forward with some concrete suggestions.

**Rajdeep Sardesai**

President

**Coomi Kapoor**

Secretary General



The Guild was represented by Sardesai, Coomi Kapoor, Mannini Chatterjee and Seema Chisti.

**Rajdeep Sardesai**

President

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