

Journalism is a service and journalists must be allowed to function freely



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Guwahati: Journalism is a service to society and the nation. Anyone wanting to make money should not be in the profession. Only those who have the flair, the passion and the right attributes should enter, for only such people can take on the challenges and survive in the long run,” said Sashi Nair, Director of the Press Institute of [India](#) and Editor of its journals, Vidura and Grassroots, while addressing the ‘Meet the Press’ programme of Guwahati Press Club on Friday.

While stressing the watchdog role of Press Council of [India](#) to ensure ethics and quality in news presentation, Nair agreed that the PCI's ambit could be expanded to include electronic and online or social media as well because print and digital were two parts of one whole entity. With [National](#) Press Day lending a special significance to the programme, Nair spoke from Chennai at length about media issues during his interaction with city-based scribes here via video conferencing. "[India](#) still remains a country of newspapers. Most Indians continue to trust newspapers as conveyors of factual information," Nair said, pointing out that the circulation of newspapers in [India](#) was healthy compared to downward [trends](#) in other parts of the world and that this was a good [sign](#). He agreed that it was in rural [India](#) where the newspaper reading habit flourished and where people were often seen gathered around one newspaper and sharing information.

Do today's editors retain the influence of the ones of earlier generations? Nair felt that today's editors of newspapers are no longer the giant-like figures of the past; it was a reflection of the changing times and things, in any case, were never the same after the invisible [wall](#) between editorial and advertising had crumbled several years ago, he said.

[One](#) of the main challenges for journalists in the days ahead would be tackling fake news or misinformation, Nair pointed out. Listing out various examples, he said there was no solution in sight yet to tackle the malaise and the onus was on editors and journalists to double-check at every stage.

Nair spoke about the hardships journalists in [India](#) today faced, especially if they were investigative journalists. He said [India](#) ranked low on the Press Freedom Index (compiled and published by Reporters Without Borders), that journalists often faced threats and intimidation, and that the killings of journalists who were just doing their [job](#) (Gauri Lankesh, Shujaat Bhukari, Santanu Bhowmick, Sudip Datta Bhaumik and others) had cast a [dark](#) shadow and created [fear](#). It was not right that this should happen in the largest democracy in the world, he said, adding that journalists must be allowed to function freely and be protected.

When asked about the woeful coverage of subjects such as health and agriculture by newspapers, Nair said that indeed it was true save for a few newspapers and that a lot more attention was being paid towards politics and entertainment than hard issues that concerned the common person.

To a question relating to some publications inflating circulation figures to attract government advertisements, Nair said that [publishers](#) of repute would not resort to such a practice and that such instances must be reported. He was all for transparency within the media and for news publishing houses publishing their accounting figures yearly. “When editors and journalists report on the need for transparency and want individuals and companies to adhere, they should [lead](#) by example, he said.

Nair said news publishing houses and their managements must pay their journalists reasonably well and provide them the necessary facilities to function. For, after all, the financial and social security of journalists mattered a lot.

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