

INDIAN JOURNALISTS UNION (IJU)

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#Press Note#

New Delhi, 3 September 2018: The Indian Journalists Union, the largest and most representative organisation of working journalists in the country, strongly condemns the harassment and week-long police custody of Assistant Editor Aasif Sultan, of Kashmir monthly magazine "Kashmir Narrator," since Saturday last. Worse, the mischievous action is based on fabricated charges as made out by the police i.e. his alleged "involvement in militancy-related incidents" in the Valley.

According to press reports, Sultan, was picked up during a late night raid at his home in Batamaloo area in Sringar on August 27-28 and produced before a court of the Chief Judicial Magistrate, which remanded him in police custody for a week. Both Sultan's family and his Editor Showkat Motta have denied the charges and in fact said the police was pressurising him to act as its "informer" as they considered him to be "a resourceful person."

Taking strong umbrage to the high-handedness of the police, the IJU said that taking Sultan into custody smacked of a bigger agenda of authorities to silence journalists and media in the troubled State. It also took note that Sultan's detention was illegal as no case had been filed against him and the police had hoodwinked the family by saying they would release him, but instead produced him in court seeking his custody. The IJU slammed the police for falsely charging Sultan for "his complicity for harbouring known terrorists involved in series of terror crimes," and said its actions were a clear attack on freedom of press. It further questioned the authenticity of its claims that "questioning and searches had led to incriminating materials."

IJU President S N Sinha, Secretary General D Amar and IFJ Vice President Sabina Inderjit said Sultan's arrest is reminiscent of the police accusing Kashmiri photo-journalist Kamran Yusuf, who had been kept in jail for long and released on bail following uproar in and outside the country. They also lambasted the police for not being able to apprehend the killers of 'Rising Kashmir' Editor Shujaat Bukhari and said instead of muzzling the press, your energy should be devoted to ensuring safety of journalists.

The IJU urged the new Governor Satya Pal Malik to look into the case urgently and ensure that Sultan is released immediately, as he should not be a party to the illegal arrest. A free press, it said is vital in the State, if his aim is to usher in normalcy.

Issued for favour of publication / telecast in your newspaper/news channel.



(Y.Narendra Reddy)

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