

INDIAN JOURNALISTS UNION (IJU)

(Regd No.4001)

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Labour Codes threaten Press Freedom: IJU

New Delhi/Hyderabad, July 24: The Indian Journalists Union (IJU) on Wednesday gave a clarion call to the working journalists, editors to raise their voice against the nefarious designs of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) to cut into the roots of press freedom in the country by repealing two legislations that protect the unique character of the profession of journalism. In two Labour Code Bills, one on Working Conditions and the other on Wages, introduced in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday, the government proposed to repeal the Working Journalists and other Newspaper Employees (Conditions of Service) and Miscellaneous Provisions Act of 1955, and the Working Journalist (Fixation of rates of wages) Act, 1958 along with 11 other labour laws.

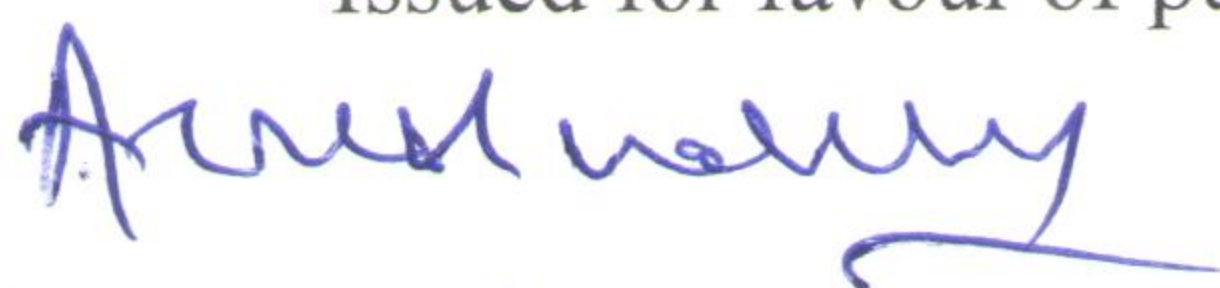
In a statement on Wednesday, the Indian Journalists Union (IJU) President and Press Council of India member Amar Devulapalli and Secretary General and IFJ Vice President Sabina Inderjit lamented that the government sought to equate 'fourth estate' with any other industry, but worse has brazenly favoured the corporate media barons who have persistently been demanding to abolish the Wage Board and do away with the Working Journalists Act. The IJU said the media houses time and again challenged the recommendations of the wage boards for the newspaper industry and the constitutional validity of the Working Journalists Act in Supreme Court unsuccessfully.

They said that "the government forgets the basic foundation for the Working Journalists Act was laid by the Press Commission in 1954 when it put into perspective the nature of the journalists' job saying "his work cannot be measured as in other industries" and that "insecurity of tenure is peculiar to this profession ...unemployment would not necessarily have that result in other professions."

The IJU leaders said that "A free and independent Press is paramount to any democratic society and any attempts to undermine the functioning of the 'fourth estate' must be fought tooth and nail as it would have adverse affect on the democratic polity. The Government is misleading the country, when it claims that it has consulted all stakeholders, for it has never discussed the proposed changes with the journalist trade unions in the country".

The IJU urged MPs, both opposition and ruling party, to ensure that the Labour Code Bills are referred to concerned Parliamentary Standing Committee or a Joint Select Committee so that the provisions of the proposed bills are scrutinised minutely. At the same time, the IJU has cautioned the journalist fraternity across the country that it does not protest and garner support against the Government's surreptitious move; it would be a death knell for independent media and rights of journalists.

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(K Amarnath)

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