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## **PRESS RELEASE**

**07<sup>th</sup> September, 2024**

The Press Council of India set up a sub-committee to study the impact of Covid-19 on journalists. The committee submitted its report titled 'retrenchment of journalists by media groups during the Covid-19 period', to the Press Council of India, which was adopted by it on August 5, 2024. Press Club of India rendered its venue for hearing.

The members of the sub-committee met with the affected journalists at the Press Club of India in Delhi and two other cities, including Mumbai and Kolkata.

A total of 51 journalists representing 17 unique news organisations across English, Hindi, Marathi and Bangla languages, and 12 journalist unions and associations deposed before the committee.

Nearly 80% of those who deposed were from three major publishers the BCCL (19), HT Media (14) and The Hindu Publishing Group (THG) (8).

Among the languages, journalists from English language news media based in New Delhi and Mumbai represent a bulk of those who deposed before the committee. The Press Council of India's sub-committee in its report found 80% journalists were forced to resign, opt for voluntary retirements, and terminated from their positions by their news organisations.

Further, only 17, or 37%, retrenched journalists reported receiving severance pay. Among those who deposed, 44, or 80%, reported being impacted financially, 34 reported dipping into family savings, while 17 were forced to take loans and 12 journalists were forced to relocate. The retrenchments emotionally affected 40, or 80%, journalists who deposed before the committee.

Retrenchments also impacted the self-esteem and the confidence of 40 (80%) journalists. Depression was reported by 30 (60%) journalists and 27 (54%) experienced social withdrawal. Senior journalists, in particular, were emotionally most affected. Most among those affected were men aged between 35-years and 60-years. Only five women journalists deposed before the committee. Among those who deposed, only 15 (29.4%) are currently employed in full-time journalism jobs. Majority (70%) journalists who deposed reported being either unemployed—14 (27.5%)—or being self-employed—22 (43%)—in various other professions, including engaging in occasional freelance journalism.

Freelance journalism was described as unsustainable by those who are self-employed and continue to be unemployed. Retrenchments were accompanied by arbitrary cuts in wages beginning April 2020. Wage cuts ranged from 20% to 50%. In an effort to ensure better security for journalists, if Covid-19 like situation again arises in the future, the PCI sub-



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committee has suggested a slew of measures that the government, industry and media organisations may emulate:

The committee, suggested the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and the Ministry of Law and Justice to introduce a Model Contract for journalists with certain mandatory clauses which may inter alia include minimum tenure of service—7 to 10 years, provision of giving PF, Gratuity, ESI in applicable cases, provision for leave, yearly increment in salary etc.

The committee also advised the Ministry of Law and Justice to involve journalists and their representative bodies when drawing up the model contracts. The committee recommended that the Union government, through central and state labour departments, and bodies representing journalists, widely disseminate a checklist that can be used by journalists to identify commonly misleading, unlawful and unethical clauses in employment contracts.

The committee urged news media companies to work closely with banking and insurance companies and regulators to ensure journalists are insured against *force majeure* events such as global pandemics and natural calamities. The committee was also of the view that health insurance should be extended by employers to journalists and their dependents for six months to one year from the date of termination, if they are retrenched for reasons other than related to their quality of work.

The committee observed that a large number of journalists and unions had filed complaint letters as well as initiated legal proceedings before labour commissioners and Industrial and Labour courts and they must be taken up on a priority basis. The committee also urged the government to provide safety gear as and when such pandemic takes place. Union and state governments must consider relaxing the accreditation requirement for accessing government benefits.

The committee further observed that as technology alters means of news production, and in order to avoid legal repercussions, news media organisations have been wrongly categorising journalists as 'content editors', 'producers', 'managers', etc. Further, their workload and work descriptions have changed significantly over the years with the rise of digital media and integrated newsrooms. The Sub-Committee therefore recommends that the Union government should conduct a comprehensive study on the working and socio-economic conditions of journalists, which seems to be particularly grim outside metropolitan cities.

**FOR**

**Managing Committee  
Press Club of India**