Press Council chief for curbs on 'fake news'

Justice C.K. Prasad

Though the Information and Broadcasting Ministry on Tuesday withdrew its order under which a journalist's accreditation could be cancelled if found guilty of spreading "fake news", the Chairman of the Press Council of India (PCI), Justice C.K. Prasad, endorsed the Ministry's measures.

Justice Prasad told *The Hindu* , "Is there fake news or not? If the answer is 'yes', why should anybody support spread of fake news? And if the government takes steps to remedy this wrong, what is incorrect about it."

The now-withdrawn order had given the PCI and the National Broadcasters Association (NBA) the responsibility of adjudicating on complaints of "fake news".

Curbs on portals

While Justice Prasad did not say if the PCI was specifically "consulted" on the order, he said he had had discussions on "media ethics" with Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Smriti Irani and Secretary, I&B, N.K. Sinha.

Pointing out that the I&B order would only have affected accredited journalists, Justice Prasad said various news portals were not covered by the government's accreditation policy. He said the PCI had recommended a few months ago that news portals be regulated.

Reacting to questions on provisions to control "fake news" in news portals on Monday night, Ms. Irani tweeted that they too would be regulated through other departments of the Ministry. "Will put information in public domain soon," she said.

Justice Prasad said that even if the order had not been withdrawn, the PCI would not have lent a hand to gag the Press.

Annie Joseph, Secretary-General of the NBA, refused to answer questions on whether the Ministry had consulted it. The organisation issued a brief statement welcoming the decision of the Prime Minister's Office to withdraw the new guidelines. "NBA also welcomes the decision to let industry bodies that is NBA and the Press Council of India (PCI) decide all issues relating to 'fake news'," it said.

END