

Qualified journalism only way to tackle threats posed due to increase in fake news

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Social media have been imperative to the dissemination of information but fake news is decreasing the credibility of news platforms, said Krishnan Srinivasan, former Foreign Secretary of India, in his keynote address at the ninth annual Editors' Conclave, jointly organised by the CR Irani Foundation and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, New Delhi, on the topic 'Fake News, Real Threats,' at Vedic Village near here, today.

Peter Rimmel, resident representative, KAS, said that at a time when fake news have the potential to influence not just debates but even elections, qualified journalism becomes more important because it can be a sole reliable source.

This was substantiated by M K Venu, Founder Editor, The Wire, who said that the rise of digital media coincides with the rise of social media by political parties who use this platform as a means to propagate their policy. He said that fake news has always existed, but the method of disinformation has changed.

Moderating the session, Subrata Nag Choudhury, Direc-



Raj Kamal Jha (left), Chief Editor, Indian Express, M.K.Venu, Founder Editor, The Wire, Shastri Ramachandaran, Editor, The Citizen, Subrata Nag Choudhury, Director, SPJS, Ms.Tongam Rina, Senior Editor, The Arunachal Times, Pradip Phanjoubam, Editor, Imphal Free Press, Hans Christian Winkler, Head, Press and Information, German Embassy, New Delhi at the Editors' Conclave at Vedic Village in Kolkata on Tuesday.

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tor, The Statesman Print Journalism School, said that we are witnessing a tremendous proliferation of fake news which is vitiating the media environment.

"It is not a good time to be a journalist in India these days. You have to take sides and that is when journalism suffers," said Tongam Rina, Senior Editor of Arunachal Times.

She said that for a journalist it is difficult to be part of any propaganda and that we should

focus on facts instead of fake news as journalists need to fact check their stories rather than be PR agencies for the government. Pradip Phanjoubam, Editor, Imphal Free Press, elucidated that fake news had existed even in the times of the Epics, referring to the Lord Krishna's false report of Ashwathama's death. Such news can be used for propagating fear and hatred among different communities by political parties who have a particular body working

exclusively to spread fake news while remaining unchallenged, said Shastri Ramachandaran, senior journalist.

"It is not clear whether fake news is a cause or a symptom of something larger," said Raj Kamal Jha, Chief Editor, Indian Express. These thrive amid a set of factors which include a polarised political climate, one-way communication by leaders and a need to take sides in an argument, the shrinking of the moderate

space and sophisticated algorithms of social media that keep one trapped in a bubble. He said that fake news assumes greater significance given the fact that India has half a billion people under the age of 25 and most of them have not had the opportunity of an education.

"Unlike India, Germany does not have 24/7 news channels. News followers in Germany being traditional watch news once or twice a day," said Hans Christian Winkler, Head, Press and Information, German Embassy, New Delhi. He said that the major content for fake news is the refugee crisis as several unverified theories float around the issue.

The afternoon session deliberating on the threats to life, limb and liberty and how journalists confront them, was moderated by Sam Rajappa, veteran journalist and founder director, SPJS. According to Mukund Padmanabhan, Editor, The Hindu, life and limb, and liberty are two separate entities and the situations that journalists work under are terrifying.

"The legislative, executive and judiciary believe that the press is a monster that needs to be tamed," said Ravindra

Kumar, Editor and Managing Director, The Statesman. He believes in enjoying his freedom of speech and expression just like all Indian citizens and is not intimidated by any external or internal threats which prevent him from voicing his opinion.

Kalyani Shankar, senior journalist, said that the Maharashtra government enacted a legislation providing for fine and imprisonment of people attacking journalists.

"Unlike other countries where the freedom of press is prioritised, in India we have no special protection," said Ishan Joshi, Consulting Editor, The Pioneer.

He asked the audience to consider the readers whether they believe news without verifying the source.

Ajoy Bose, senior journalist, said that reporting is risky since various groups, with or without state support pose a threat in insurgency affected areas. To combat these threats, solidarity is a requirement among all journalists.

With inputs from SPJS students: Zara Maria Ryan, Shudhanta Patra, Debasmita Dasgupta, Nishat Nizami, Sunayani Manna, Neelanjana Acharya