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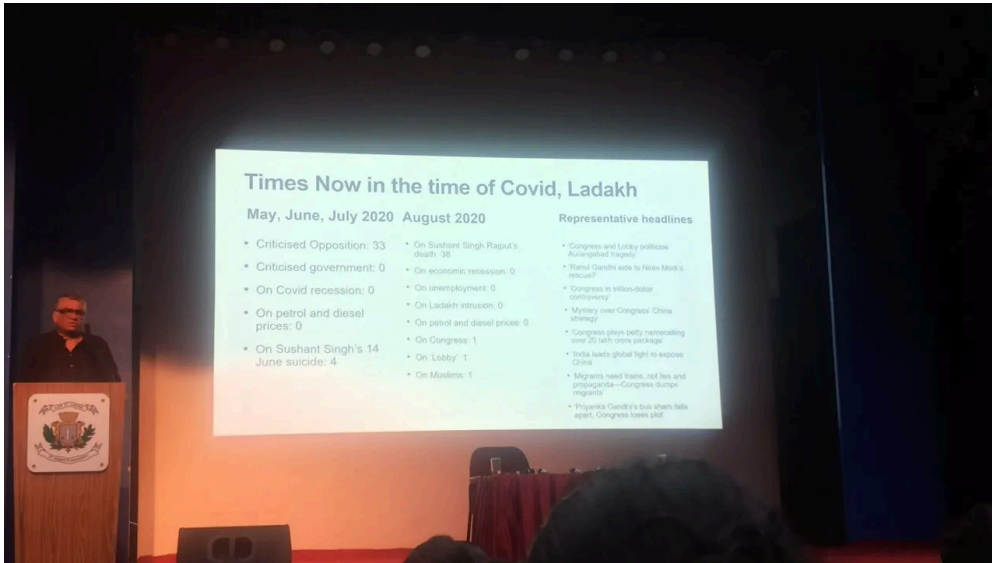
# News or narrative? State and corporate power over media

Aakar Patel highlights the erosion of news credibility in India's media landscape.



By **Deeksha Devadiga**

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Aakar Patel explores the ethical, legal, and economic challenges of journalism. (Deeksha Devadiga/South First)

At the Journalism @ Digital Crossroads conclave, hosted by the Editors Guild of India in association with St Joseph's University, Bengaluru, on 7 December 2024, one of the most insightful sessions was delivered by Aakar Patel, renowned journalist, author, and former head of Amnesty International India.

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His session, titled *'Misinformation, Fact-Checking, and the Law: The Future of News Credibility'*, tackled pressing concerns about the integrity of Indian media.

Patel's session was particularly poignant as he navigated the complex relationship between the government, corporate interests, and the media.

Patel outlined how the Indian media's role has been diminished by corporate ownership and government influence, creating a skewed narrative that often aligns more with the interests of those in power than with the truth.

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## Examining India's media landscape

He elaborated on the decline in media revenues and their impact on news coverage.

"In India, news media is shrinking, not growing. The financial model is unsustainable. Media companies are struggling with stagnant revenues, but despite this, they continue to prioritise content that aligns with government perspectives."

Patel cited examples of prominent news outlets such as Times Now and Republic TV whose coverage patterns consistently favoured government narratives and downplayed opposition voices.

"The coverage of significant issues like the national lockdown and economic downturn was minimal, while sensational stories that diverted attention, like Sushant Singh Rajput's suicide, took centre stage," Patel observed.

His analysis revealed how the media's focus often shifted away from critical discussions about governance and policy, opting instead for narratives that could serve corporate and political interests.

Patel's presentation also critiqued the government's use of regulatory bodies like the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to intimidate media houses and journalists who posed a threat to government narratives.

"I have experienced firsthand how pressure is applied on media outlets. Editorial teams are often given directives on what to cover and what not to," he shared, pointing out the erosion of editorial independence in the country.

In a passionate plea for greater media integrity, Patel emphasised the need for journalists to act responsibly in an age where misinformation can spread like wildfire.

He questioned whether the current media ecosystem could ever be reformed to serve the public interest rather than corporate or political agendas.

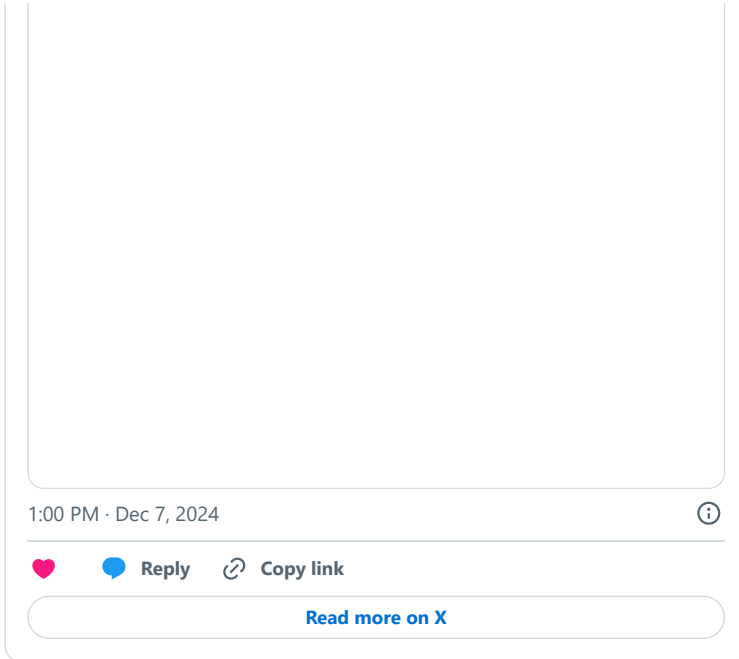
Patel concluded his session with a call to action for journalists: "We must not lose sight of the true essence of journalism – to inform, challenge, and hold power to account. It's the credibility of the media that is at stake now."

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## Session overview

While Patel's session took centre stage, other sessions throughout the day explored critical issues facing the digital media landscape.

Dr. Sudhir Krishnaswamy, Vice-Chancellor of the National Law School of India University, presented a keynote on 'Laws Governing Digital Media,' emphasising the importance of legal frameworks in the digital age.



Government representatives like Krishna Byre Gowda, Minister for Revenue, also weighed in on the role of government in safeguarding freedom of expression amidst evolving media laws.

Later in the day, Samar Harlankar of Article 14 website and Kavya Sukumar, who describes herself on LinkedIn as “Award-winning developer with a journalism habit” shared insights on ‘Creating and Running Successful Independent Media Organisations.’

