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New Delhi: December 18, 2007 —The News Broadcasters Association (NBA) has noted with concern the suggestion of the Delhi High Court that the I&B Ministry set up a committee to vet sting operations and issue no objection certificates on being satisfied that they serve the public interest, before the stories are telecast.

NBA President G Krishnan said, “We condemn motivated reporting and attempts to fabricate news, to attempt to gain popularity at the cost of journalistic integrity. Such acts risk discrediting television news, and indeed the news media, as a whole. But this does not mean that sting operations are wrong in principle. The NBA believes that sting operations are a legitimate journalistic tool and means of investigation, but like all powerful tools they have to be used with care and responsibility.

“We are all aware that events of the recent past have called sting operations to question on grounds of authenticity, but stray incidents do not warrant such interference, which is totally against the tenets of democracy, free speech and the freedom of the press.”

The suggestion that a telecast of news receive prior permission of the Government would constitute censorship of news and would, for that reason, constitute “content control” and thereby an unacceptable restraint on the right of free speech. As much as stray incidents of irresponsible reporting cannot constitute a basis for imposing censorship upon the print media, such incidents of abuse of ethics cannot constitute a basis of imposing censorship upon the electronic media.

The NBA is in the process of formulating a code of self regulation for news and current affairs channels. Mr Harish Salve, Senior Advocate and former Solicitor General of India, is helping the NBA in finalizing the self regulation guidelines and grievance redressal mechanism.

Mr Krishnan said, “The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has been encouraging of our endeavour towards self-regulation. We trust the government will view the present suggestion in the same supportive spirit and resist attempts and suggestions to interfere with the press.

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