



## Research Foundation for Governance: in India

### *Summary of the public debate*

#### **Role of media post CWG**

Media, a Fourth Pillar of our democracy?

27<sup>th</sup> October, 2010, 6:00 pm to 7.30 pm, AMA

On Wednesday, 27<sup>th</sup> October 2010, Research Foundation for Governance in India (RFGI) held an open debate at Ahmedabad Management Association to discuss the topic of role of media in shaping the governance systems in India post the Commonwealth Games. The event was attended by a cross section of the society, including distinguished members of the media fraternity.

The debate began with discussion about the economics of the privately owned media houses. An independent candidate of the Lok Sabha elections commented that the increasing reliance of the media on advertising sways them from sticking to objectivity. A law student suggested that rather than filling up time-slots, the news channel could actually think of showing the news only for 12 hours a day, instead of 24 hours. Even during the commonwealth games the run after the TRPs and increasing advertising revenue contributed to a colossal mockery of the country in front of the entire world. To this, a media professional replied that in this day and age of 24 hour news channel, this proposition was unlikely to work.

A young politician suggested that in order to improve the quality of news, the impetus would have to come from the people themselves. Unless people start demanding better stories and quality news, things will not improve.

One of the participants, who has had to face tough battle against the court system and the political system became emotional while narrating his story and suggested that his only hope to get justice now lies with the media. Media is the only fraternity which is still accessible to general public compared to the government machinery.

To this, some participants agreed to the notion that like everything in life, even media has its own pros and cons. In the larger scheme of things, media does play a



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major role in pushing people to think, acting as a link between the people and the government and thus, its positive role should not be undermined. In a free democracy like India, media has indeed played an important role as the fourth estate and kept a watch on the three pillars of governance.

However, other participants retorted against this view giving examples of ordinary people who tried fighting defamation battles against big media houses and ended up running their lives in the process. Paid news allegedly exists in almost every media house and that news agencies can go to any extent to obtain higher TRPs for their channels. Media cannot be considered the fourth pillar as they are not accountable to anyone. Many a times, important news never comes out in public as they get conveniently swept under the carpet. They must show more responsibility towards what they air as people do tend to rely on the news. A suggestion was offered, which was to allow the government to run its own news channels and allow people to sack the chief(s) in case of poor performance.

A media person replied to this by saying that a suggestion like this would simply end up creating a mouth-piece of the government. In this country, everyone loves to hate the media. Media is indeed the fourth pillar as its basic ethos is to continuously question the establishment. CWG, no doubt, glorified the corruption but it also glorified the players when they performed exemplarily. To run a 24 hour news channel or to run a daily is a huge task and that media is the strongest pillar of our democracy. The news channels have to balance themselves between TRP seeking ventures and genuine news. Information & Broadcasting Ministry as well as the Editor's Guild now increasingly try to keep a check.

In the final phase of the discussion, the moderator Ms. Kelly Dhru asked for concluding remarks from everyone. Most of the participants agreed on the note that the media ethics will change automatically if people themselves start demanding more objective and transparent news broadcasting.

The debate was another proof of importance of discussions/debates around issues that concern common citizens. RFGI would like to thank all those, who decided to take part in our event and who showed their different views on the discussed issue. We also thank the Mr. Arun Jagatramka and AMA for providing us with the venue.