MEMORANDUM TO PRESIDENT

To   June 25, 2011

H.H Smt. Pratibha Devi Singh Patilji
President of India,
New Delhi.

Subject : Demand for a National Security Legislation for protection of working journalists

The broad daylight killing of investigative journalist J. Dey in Mumbai on June 11 highlights the continuing threat to the working journalists in being true to their profession to expose the wrong doings in the society.

This is not an isolated instance either. In Maharashtra alone, over 180 attacks on working journalists have been documented in recent period. Nor is this threat to the Press in general and working journalists in particular, confined to Maharashtra. In Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, West Bengal, Bihar, Andhra, in fact in every state there are a number of instances of such attacks including killings of reporters who have dared to expose several rackets and mafias and the interconnection between those mafias and some politicians whether in power or in opposition. There are instances of even harassing and killing the families of the journalists.

The National Union of Journalists (India) and its affiliated state units have from time to time and again brought this to the notice of the authorities concerned and sought immediate redress. But the stage has come when such individual instances being dealt with as merely a law and order issue, is long past, because everyday we have land racketeers, river sand thieves, forest product smugglers, etc booming along with the boom in the economy itself. Many of these mafias are working under protection of the police or local politicians or wealthy and influential persons. In some cases, we know that these racketeers themselves start newspapers and try to misuse the privileges of being self-designated "editors" even though they have no professional standing. The NUJ(I) has worked with the International Federation of Journalists based in Brussels to highlight the continuing threat to freedom of the Press from various quarters especially the detention of journalists by authorities and killing, very often extra judicious ones, mainly to silence further dissent or exposure. In Assam, for instance, the working journalists have suffered at least one killing from among their professional colleagues every year over the last 13 years, after refusing to report as per demand either of the militants or the police. The situation therefore needs tackling at the Central Government and Parliament level. We are very clear that we are NOT asking for police protection for every journalist.

We find that when such events take place, we have to move the highest authorities of police to register an FIR and to investigate the crime with all the instruments available to the state. What is needed today is a law to mandate interference with the work of journalists and newspapers a punishable offence on the same pattern as interference with the work of a public servant. Such a National Security Act for protection of Press freedom would go a long way to improve security of working journalists. It should ensure that such interference is recorded as a punishable and non-bailable crime by the local law and order authorities and at least a Magisterial enquiry is conducted at once.

The proposed law should also ensure that investigation is done at a higher level by making the local SP responsible for directing it with report to be publicised and given to government every week. A failure to get at the culprit should be made a black mark on the responsible official. Such an national legislation would at least ensure that no attack on a working journalist who is discharging his duty as a recognised representative of the Press, is suppressed or allowed to be ignored. The NUJ (I) is determined to press for such a national legislation and will agitate for it and address Parliament, state legislatures and political parties on its immediate promulgation.

Regards,

RAS BIHARI   **MANOJ VERMA**
Secretary General   *President*
National Union of Journalists (India)   Delhi Journalists Association