General Studies-2; Topic: Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability

Challenges to Freedom of press

1) Introduction
- Mahatma Gandhi said that “The press is called the Fourth Estate. It is definitely a power but a misuse of power is criminal.”
- A free press is the cornerstone of a vibrant democracy.
- Freedom of the press and journalistic ethics is an important topic today
- Freedom of the press has been treated as part of the freedom of speech and expression guaranteed by Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution
- For a proper functioning of democracy it is essential that citizens are kept informed about news so that they form rational opinions.

2) Role of Media
- The media have played a historical role in providing information to the people about social and economic evils.
- Media makes us aware of various social, political and economical activities happening around the world.
- Educating rural illiterate masses in making them aware of all the events in their local language.
- Exposes loopholes in the democratic system. A democracy without media is like a vehicle without wheels.
- Responsibility to fight against casteism, and help the people in their struggle against poverty and other social evils.
- The role of the media in giving voice to the voiceless
- The media has added great strength to ‘Swachh Bharat Mission’ and effectively furthered the message of cleanliness.
- The rise of social media and news being consumed through mobile phones make the media space even more democratic and participative.

3) Role of Press in Freedom Struggle
- Freedom of the press was of utmost importance as it was a powerful tool to propagate political ideas.
- Many newspapers emerged under distinguished and fearless journalists.
- These included The Hindu under G. SubramaniyaAiyar, Amrita Bazar Patrika under Sisir Kumar Ghosh, Kesari and Maharatta under BalgangadharTilak etc.
- The main aim of these newspapers was not to make profit but to serve the public.
- Chief instrument for carrying out the main political tasks.
- Political propaganda, education, and formation of nationalist ideology to awake, train, mobilize and consolidate nationalist public opinion.
- The Government had enacted many strident laws to curb the newspapers, such as Vernacular Press Act and Section 124 A of the IPC.

4) Concerns / Challenges
- The 2017 National Press Day was observed with the theme as ”challenges before the media”.

• Paid news and making “credibility” a casualty in the pursuit to sensationalise news.
• Corporate and political power has overwhelmed large sections of the media and distorting facts to further their interest
• Experts say there are threats of violence from vested interests and pressure from political parties
• Defamation cases against journalists.
• Excessive coverage or hype of sensitive news has led to communal riots at times.
• Commercialization has created a stiff competition in media.
• Attacks on journalists. Recent murder of Kannada journalist Gauri Lankesh
• Investigative reporting is increasingly becoming a dangerous occupation.
• News censorship. NDTV – which came under fire for its coverage of the Pathankot operation
• Vulnerability of RTI activists has increased.
• The Criminal Laws (Rajasthan Amendment) Ordinance, 2017, puts restrictions on the media. To register its strong opposition 'Rajasthan Patrika' leaves its editorial blank.

5) **Way Forward**
• Setting up a media body to look into guidelines and regulations on its working.
• Media houses must take extra effort to maintain credibility and use the editorial freedom wisely for public interest
• Media should take utmost care in airing or publishing sensational news.
• Implementing the recommendations of TRAI with regard to media ownership and investment disclosure norms would help in maintaining transparency
• Disclosure, in bold letters, of paid-for news or any reporting at the end of each print article or visual programme
• Need for political will in improving India's ranking on the Press Freedom Index as they do towards the World Bank’s Doing Business Rankings.