National Press Day – the Press Council of India at 60

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Why in news: 16 November is observed as National Press Day because on that day in 1966 the Press Council of India began functioning; in 2026 the Council completes 60 years as the watchdog of the print media.

Key points

- Origin: the Council was first set up in 1966 under the Indian Press Council Act, 1965, on the recommendations of the First Press Commission. It was abolished during the Emergency, and re-established in 1979 under the Press Council Act, 1978 – the law in force today.
- Nature: a statutory, quasi-judicial body that preserves the freedom of the press and maintains and improves the standards of newspapers and news agencies in India. It deals with the print media; it does not regulate television news.
- Composition: a Chairman and 28 members – 13 working journalists (6 editors and 7 others), 6 representatives of newspaper managements, 1 of news agencies, 5 Members of Parliament (3 nominated by the Lok Sabha Speaker, 2 by the Rajya Sabha Chairman) and one nominee each of the UGC, the Bar Council of India and the Sahitya Akademi. By convention the Chairman is a retired Supreme Court judge, chosen by the Rajya Sabha Chairman, the Lok Sabha Speaker and a person elected by the members.
- Powers: under Section 14 of the 1978 Act it can warn, admonish or censure a newspaper, news agency, editor or journalist that violates the 'Norms of Journalistic Conduct', and its decisions cannot be questioned in any court; it cannot impose fines. Under Section 13 it also takes up complaints from the press about threats to press freedom. It is funded by fees collected from newspapers and a grant from the Union Government.
- Related law: freedom of the press is part of freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a) (Romesh Thappar v. State of Madras, 1950). The Press and Registration of Periodicals Act, 2023, in force from 1 March 2024, replaced the colonial Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867; the Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI) became the Press Registrar General of India (PRGI), and registration is now online through the Press Sewa Portal.

In the exam: TNPSC – National Press Day (16 November), Press Council of India (1966; Press Council Act, 1978; Chairman + 28 members), freedom of the press under Article 19(1)(a); UPSC Prelims – statutory vs constitutional bodies, powers of the PCI (censure, no fines, print media only), the Press and Registration of Periodicals Act, 2023 and the PRGI.

Questions

1. National Press Day is observed in India on 16 November because on that day in 1966

A. the first issue of Hicky's Bengal Gazette was published

B. the Press Council of India began functioning

C. the Press and Registration of Books Act came into force

D. the First Press Commission submitted its report

2. Consider the following statements about the Press Council of India:

1. It is a statutory body functioning under the Press Council Act, 1978.

2. It can impose fines on newspapers that violate the Norms of Journalistic Conduct.

3. By convention, its Chairman is a retired judge of the Supreme Court.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

A. 1 only

B. 2 and 3 only

C. 1 and 3 only

D. 1, 2 and 3

Answers with explanations

1. **B) the Press Council of India began functioning** – 16 November marks the day in 1966 when the Press Council of India, set up under the Indian Press Council Act, 1965, began functioning. Hicky's Bengal Gazette, India's first newspaper, appeared in Calcutta in 1780; the Press and Registration of Books Act dates from 1867 (replaced by the Press and Registration of Periodicals Act, 2023).

2. **C) 1 and 3 only** – Statement 2 is wrong: under Section 14 of the 1978 Act the Council can only warn, admonish or censure, or disapprove of conduct; it has no power to fine. The Council was re-established in 1979 under the Press Council Act, 1978, and its Chairman is by convention a retired Supreme Court judge.

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