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## Media Policy

Historically, shyness and aloofness from the media were characteristic of the Audit Department right since Independence even though Media coverage of C&AG's Audit Report was always there in some measure. R.K. Chandrasekharan in his history of C&AG<sup>1</sup> has mentioned about this fact during the time of A.K. Chanda, the second C&AG of independent India. Chanda is stated to have remarked that the media attention and coverage of C&AG's Reports was the healthy trend of the developing parliamentary democracy, which added to the responsibility and need for caution on the part of government auditors. This was the position in nineteen fifties. However, there was no official policy on media interaction for many years. The position considerably changed subsequently and in C&AG Shunglu's time, several instructions were issued on the subject. The position underwent a thorough review during the present C&AG's time and now, not only an official Media Policy is there but a comprehensive Communication Policy too has been issued<sup>2</sup> very recently to guide the Audit Department's relationship with other major external agencies/ organisations it interacts with, including media.

The objective of this communication policy is 'to ensure rapid and timely dissemination of information regarding the activities of the Department; in particular the results of audit by the C&AG, to the public and the press/ media once the Audit Reports are tabled in the house'.

It now looks bit of a surprise that in the past, the Department never thought of seriously discussing its relationship with media. There is nothing in the documents to explain this approach of 'no media policy'; but, one can, perhaps, say that there was nothing surprising in this approach, because there is a very cogent well

explained reason for keeping a safe distance from media by C&AG. Given his independent constitutional position, it is no wonder that earlier Comptroller & Auditor Generals were somewhat conservative in the matter of interaction with the media since it was always a bit risky. The ruling philosophy in earlier times seemed to be that the C&AG's basic mandate was preparing reports on his audit findings for submission to the President for eventual placement in Parliament/legislature after which, of course, the Audit Reports got suo-moto referred to the PAC/ COPU. These Committees deliberated, discussed, took evidence and gave their findings and recommendations on Audit Reports to the Government for their follow-up action. The C&AG and his officers' job was limited to assisting the PAC and COPU in their discussions of the Audit Report. On the face of it, the process described above was quite in tune with the mandate of the C&AG and in this scheme of things, obviously any policy on media relationship did not exist. There was no doubt merit in the logic that C&AG's job ended with the tabling of the Audit Report in the House. It can be argued that the accessibility of the audit findings to public at large, to whom essentially the bureaucracy and the politicians are eventually accountable, is taken care of by the fact that once an audit report is placed in the House it becomes a public document available to any one and, of course, to the media. And the fact is media used to cover audit findings.

But over the years, it was becoming apparent that the audit findings really did not reach the larger public because the media or the press mostly covered the audit reports in a sketchy manner, if at all, except for their occasional enthusiasm for some odd audit findings that made news for them.

It was also being realised that the PAC/ COPU had severe time constraints to discuss and deliberate and make recommendations on most of the paragraphs of the Audit Report.

And above all, the response of the executive to the audit paras or even to the recommendations of PAC/COPU (atleast in the States) was found to be quite lukewarm.

In these circumstances, the question of wider dissemination of audit report findings to public at large through media (and any other means) was of great relevance to the C&AG. And this called for a proper evaluation of C&AG's Media Policy. Such an exercise was carried out exhaustively in the time of present C&AG Kaul who was also prompted by the recommendations made by NAO Consultants to the effect that 'The IAAD should develop a strategy

for external relations that will identify a number of key messages that it wishes to get across and the means of delivering those messages. The strategy should include a sub-strategy for dealing with the media<sup>3</sup>.

#### PRESS BRIEFS

Despite no comprehensive formal media policy in place, in the department it had realized the important role that Media could play in the dissemination of Audit Report findings to the larger public. Hence, the importance of giving press a proper 'Brief', highlighting important findings of the Audit Reports was realised very early and the system of issue of 'Press Brief' or 'Press Note', existed in the Department from very early days—in some offices from nineteen seventies but on a formal footing since 1986. These 'Press Briefs' were given to the secretariat of the PAC, which would release them to the press on the day the Audit Reports were tabled in the House. These Press Briefs were approved by the C&AG along with the concerned Audit Report. From the year 1988, a broad summary of the important audit findings and observations was incorporated in an 'Overview' at the beginning of the Report. As a logical corollary, it was decided<sup>4</sup> in 1988 that the Press Brief should be based on this Overview and since the 'Overview' had already been approved by C&AG as part of Audit Report material, there was no further need for any approval of the Press Brief from Headquarters by State Accountants General. The key emphasis was that the Press Brief should be prepared strictly on the basis of the Overview.

In August 1999, it was decided that the 'Press Brief' (which was based on 'Overview' of Audit Report) would be sent to the various stakeholders along with a copy of Brochure<sup>5</sup> on Audit Report. These were not meant for formal presentation to the Legislature but were to be circulated to the members of Legislature after tabling of the Audit Report. The Brochure was also sent to the Executive and many other stakeholders including the editors or the regional representatives of newspapers through a DO letter after the Audit Reports were tabled in the House. The document was also sent to the national dailies, leading magazines and to editors of local newspapers as also to news editors of local and national TV news channels.

## PRESS CONFERENCE/ INTERVIEW

Generally no formal press conference was to be held by the Accountants General after tabling of the Audit Report in the Legislature. However, some Accountants General did invite the press for an informal chat and clarifications, if any, needed by them on the basis of Press Brief that had been given to them already. The question of holding a formal press conference with the media was taken up in the XIX Conference of Accountants General held in November 1996. The Conference recommended that the Accountants General may call for a press conference after the Audit Report is tabled to apprise the media about the highlights of the Report. It also suggested that Accountants General could also arrange for a panel discussion on television on the topics not selected by PAC/ COPU.

On a review of these recommendations by the C&AG Shunglu, it was decided (August 1997) that Accountants General should not hold press conference as a matter of routine. Holding a panel discussion on television was ruled out. The decision, however, allowed Accountants General to brief the press under exceptional circumstances (not defined) but after obtaining prior clearance for the same from the concerned Deputy Comptroller & Auditor General / Addl. Dy. Comptroller & Auditor General. These decisions were conveyed to field offices in August 1997. These orders, however, did allow the Pr. Accountant Generals/ Accountants General to entertain the individual reporters/ editors who seek any clarification, etc. after the laying of the Audit Report 'on informal basis' and no formal press conference was to be held in any case.

In yet another review of the matter in 2004, it was decided that Pr. Accountants General could call a press conference to apprise the media of the highlights of the audit reports, immediately after the tabling of the reports. It was also enjoined that other Accountants General posted at the station should also be present on the occasion. The instructions, however, elaborated very clearly that comments on policies and discussions on Chapter-I of the Audit Report on matters relating to financial management of the government were to be strictly avoided.

A thorough review of the existing orders on the policy on interaction with the media was done in January 2005, which resulted in the issue of 'Media Policy' for the Indian Audit & Accounts Department on January 13, 2005. The media policy essentially dealt<sup>6</sup>

with the procedure to be adopted at Headquarters and in field offices in their dealings with the print/ electronic media.

As regards interaction with the media, the policy stated that at Headquarters office, the C&AG was the nodal officer, and in his absence the senior most Dy. C&AG, would interact with the media:

- ❖ on a specific request from the media;
- ❖ for dissemination of information to the media; and
- ❖ for issuing clarifications, if any, needed by the media.

Pr. Accountant Generals/ Accountants General (Audit) were the designated officers to deal with the media on similar lines in the field. They were required to keep the Headquarters office informed of the developments.

It was reiterated that no regular press brief or conference was to be held by any officer other than the C&AG in Headquarters. In the States, press conference by Pr. Accountant General/ Accountant General for the respective States could be held after obtaining prior approval from the C&AG. An important development was that Media Advisor was required to be associated with Accountant General's press conference as far as possible. In fact, as a result of this order the Media Advisor was associated with the Accountants General for their press conference in Mumbai, Goa and Guwahati during the year 2005–06.

But press conferences have led to some risks as the case below would highlight:

A writ petition was filed in the High Court at Madras in 2004 against the C&AG and his AG, Tamil Nadu by a member of Rajya Sabha who was also leader of All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam Parliamentary party. The petitioner made the complaint<sup>7</sup> against the C&AG/ the AG (Audit), Tamil Nadu for calling a press/ media conference and giving a brief to the press criticising the State Government as if the Chief Minister of the State was responsible for a loss of several crores during 2001–02 and 2003–04'. The petitioner also alleged that the AG (Audit), Tamil Nadu, by holding press conference infringed the privilege of the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly. The allegations were denied by the C&AG/ the AG Tamil Nadu. The Honourable Judges while dismissing the writ petition, had a word of advice for the petitioner. The judgment said that his making untenable allegations against the AG, Tamil Nadu in a vituperative language without any basis, did not sound well. This should have been avoided. The

Honourable Judge was not impressed with the Petitioner rushing to the court without approaching the C&AG or the AG, Tamil Nadu in the matter of giving a press statement supposedly criticising the State Government. He observed that it was clear that impressions gained by the petitioner were imaginary and illusory as also clearly stated in the counter affidavits of the C&AG. The judge was of the view that the petitioner ought to have availed of other remedies before approaching the court.

He had a word of advice for the AG (Audit), Tamil Nadu too and the judgment said 'the statement made by the AG (Audit), Tamil Nadu to the press in pursuance of the instructions given by the first respondent (C&AG) giving the particulars criticising the functioning of the Government in such a way which facilitated the opposite political parties to use the same as weapon to attack the Government does not augur well. This also should have been avoided'.

The lesson that is clear from this judgement is that while the Accountant General has a right to hold a press conference to disseminate the information given in the Audit Report of the concerned State, he should be factual in his presentation and should not make any comments or qualitative statements on policy etc. Similarly, he should not criticise the Government functioning nor discuss the economic achievements or financial performance of the State Government. Keeping these in view, the C&AG issued detailed guidelines for holding press conferences in March 2006.

#### GUIDELINES ON HOLDING OF PRESS CONFERENCE BY OFFICERS OF IA&AD

In March 2006, in supersession of all previous instructions on the subject, the Headquarters. prescribed fresh guidelines for interface with media.

These guidelines included instructions such as holding of press conference by the designated officers only immediately after the presentation of Audit Reports. The venue of the Press Conferences could be either within the Parliament House or State Legislature or the offices of the IA&AD. It was emphasised that designated officers should, in the beginning of the press conference, invite attention to the provisions of Article 151 of the Constitution under which C&AG submits his Audit Report to President or the Governor and also mention that his Reports are discussed by PAC in the case of Reports relating to other than public sector undertakings and by COPU in case of Reports relating to public sector undertakings. The guidelines were emphatic that no comments

directly or indirectly should be made during the press briefing on the functioning of the Committees of Parliament/ State Legislature including the factual position about selection/ discussion and issue of Audit Reports, etc. The press conference was to be confined to the dissemination of the contents in tabled Audit Reports and for this purpose, a press brief shall be prepared and specific approval from the controlling DAI/ ADAI obtained. The press brief contents should, as far as possible, be, as per the 'Overview'; and if 'Overview' is not intended to be used as press brief, specific approval of the Headquarters should be obtained.

It also enjoined that care should be taken during the Press Conference to ensure that the statements were factual and confined to what had been stated in the Audit Reports. No opinion on the Government and its policies were to be given during the Press Conference. It also stated that press brief should be non-partisan and without any political slant or comment. There should be no reference to the names of the executive authorities involved in the transactions included in the Audit Reports. One of the important instructions was that matters included in Chapter-I of the State Audit Reports and Chapters in Report No.I on the accounts of Union Government containing overview of accounts shall not be discussed in such conference except factual information given in various paragraphs therein.

Regarding press briefs on the Union Audit Reports, these are to be conducted by report controlling DAI/ ADAI and the DG (Audit) is to be kept informed of the schedule for presentation of Audit Reports and date and time of press conference. It was also suggested that assistance of OSD (Communication policy) and Media Advisor may be obtained by the DAI/ ADAI if required by him. Regarding press brief on State Audit Reports, the Principal Accountants General are to preside over the press conference as the designated officer and all other Accountants General are to be present at the State level press conference and are to 'independently clarify' matters relating to their Audit Reports. In other States, the Accountants General incharge of Audit were to hold the press conference. The instructions also enjoined that the Principal Accountants General and Accountants General to make it convenient to be present in their Headquarters for press conference on the day of the presentation of Audit Reports relating to State Government. In exceptional circumstances, if AG could not be present specific approval of the report controlling ADAI would be obtained who may approve alternate arrangements.

### RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN STRENGTHENING THE MEDIA WING

Some of the notable developments in strengthening the media wing at the Headquarters have been:

- (i) appointment of a Media Advisor at Headquarters; and
- (ii) creation of a post of OSD (Communication Policy)

In addition, there are designated officers of the Department to deal with the media. The XIX Conference of Accountants General in November 1996 had suggested that there should be a PRO at Headquarters to act as interface between the media and the department. This was given shape in November 2004 when a Media Advisor was appointed from one of the retired Indian Information Service officers. The Media Advisor joined in November 2004 and is now the Principal Advisor on Media Policy to the C&AG. Amongst the various functions entrusted to Media Advisor are:

- ❖ to act as a focal point to process all media requests for formal interviews (except those coming directly to the C&AG). He will be the C&AG's interface with the media and after consultations with Senior officers arrange suitable replies to the queries from the Media;
- ❖ to be associated with AG's press conferences as far as possible;
- ❖ to arrange all press meets for the C&AG along with Director (P). In the States, the Accountants General will arrange the press meets;
- ❖ to keep information of the activities of various departments. To this purpose, Heads of the Departments upto the level of DGs/PDs, will provide him with suitable calendar of forthcoming events, backgrounds, agenda notes and recommendations of any conference/ seminar which they deem fit to be disseminated to the media;
- ❖ to be a part of all conferences participated by C&AG as far as possible;
- ❖ to be given tabled Reports from all the wings; and
- ❖ to coordinate with Senior Administrative Officer Incharge, PPU Section in Director General (Audit) regarding feedback on reports published/ telecast or broadcast in the media on C&AG's activities/ Audit Reports, etc.

The other development was the creation of a post of Director General and Officer on Special Duty (Communication Policy) to coordinate all activities relating to the media. This officer also drafted a comprehensive Communication Policy for the Indian Audit & Accounts Department. The Communication Policy as approved by C&AG, was issued for the use of Department in 2007.

The foregoing developments have streamlined the Audit—Media relationship in a formal manner and, as a result, Department's interaction with the media has grown considerably during the period of the present C&AG. In many ways, this could be considered a welcome step. For one, it has facilitated the Department to be more open and accessible to the general public via media and, in the process, it has helped in wider dissemination of audit findings. In 2004, two special interviews were held by the senior journalists with Comptroller & Auditor General. From January 2005 when the media policy was formalised, the C&AG has personally interacted with senior journalists on several occasions. During 2005, the C&AG gave four special interviews to the senior journalists of leading newspapers. In September 2005 the C&AG gave interviews to Doordarshan and All India Radio. Besides, the C&AG also interacted with the media during the coverage of various functions/ activities like Accountants General's Conference which were widely covered by Doordarshan, All India Radio and several newspapers. Besides, media also interacted freely with the senior officers of the Department in March 2006 and May 2006 after the presentation of Central Report to the Parliament. Two more press conferences were held in August 2006 for the same purpose. Press conferences were also held by various Pr. Accountants General/ Accountants General in the States. These included Pr. Accountants General/ Accountants General, Chennai, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Assam in 2004, Assam and Goa in 2005 and Pr. Accountant General, Andhra Pradesh in 2006.

An important consequence of increased C&AG—media interaction is that journalists are using C&AG reports as important source of information and quoting these extensively in their reports/ articles. Since January 2007, 551 clippings on different C&AG Audit Reports and issues connected with them were identified by the media advisor. Similarly in the States, nearly 76 clippings from selected newspapers were identified.

Using C&AG's Audit Reports as a source offers unique advantages since these Reports contain a wealth of information, authentic data and massive but very objective analysis on important

development schemes, programmes, etc. and also on individual transactions. In fact, C&AG Reports can be a gold mine for the newspaper journalists and TV media persons.

Besides the press conferences, C&AG's office is now issuing a number of press releases on the activities of the C&AG. In 2004, five such press releases were issued. In 2005, the number went upto 14 press releases and in 2006, this number was 31. Overall, therefore, it is a quantum jump as far as interaction with the media is concerned over the past years.

Apart from viewing the C&AG—Media relationship from the angle of facilitating the dissemination of the important audit observations made in the C&AG's Audit Reports, there is another aspect to this relationship which needs elaboration. This aspect of C&AG—Media relationship concerns the views of the C&AG regarding going to media when he is faced with somewhat hostile and personal comments and comments on his audit jurisdiction and authority from politicians or others. Generally, such hostile comments are made in the case of Audit Reports which generate often for wrong reasons, a political debate which also includes personal attack and a general criticism of the institution of the C&AG by some politicians. Three such instances easily come to mind for the period covered in this book. The first one was the C&AG's Report on the Bofors deal which was presented in the Parliament on July 18, 1989 and which generated a kind of storm and strong reactions from the opposition as well as the ruling party, unusual till then on an Audit Report. What happened after the presentation of this Report, was equally unusual. First, the Report, which is normally not discussed in the House but is automatically transmitted to the PAC for their deliberations and recommendations, was discussed in the full House on the demand of the Opposition. Two, the debate in the Parliament, was as expected totally on party lines but sadly, the kind of language and the remarks used in criticising the report and in launching personal criticism of the then C&AG were something that stunned many sensible persons.

The media however gave unequivocal support to the C&AG and came down heavily on the critics. All the leading newspapers came out with editorials on his issue.

This was an occasion when C&AG had two choices: (i) just to keep quiet despite the malicious and wrong tirade launched against his Department or, (ii) he could go to the public via the media to clarify the matter. Generally, C&AGs are shy of going to the press

for such clarifications. In this case, however, the C&AG decided to give his view point via the media in the form of various interviews through leading newspapers. R.K. Chandrasekharan in his book has, in his unique style, described it as follows:

'...there was a slight shift in the earlier conventional self effacing practice – like the ostrich burying its head under the sand, even when attacked virulently by vested interests or affected Departments/ Ministries/ Governments. With his long and mature experience in Administration, and later Audit, Shri T.N. Chaturvedi, in his own dignified, pragmatic, and suave but firm manner defended the institution and the Reports presented by him, which added lustre and goodwill to the SAI. Viewed from all angles, it was a healthy development, which not only helped the C&AG to vindicate himself against the blitz of orchestrated propaganda and negative publicity but also added a new dimension to Government Audit, as professed and practiced in India without stooping to seek it...'<sup>8</sup>

This was an exception to the general practice in the Department. In fact, two subsequent events will testify to this. In the case of C&AG's Report on Review of Procurement for OP Vijay (Army) (Kargil Operations) presented to the House in December 2001 there was an outburst in the media and among the politicians. The opposition was trying to make political capital out of it and the media was vehemently criticising the Government on the findings of the Report. Fortunately, this time the Report was not discussed in the House but, as is the practice, was referred to the Public Accounts Committee. However, the then Defence Minister launched a frontal attack on the C&AG inside the House and outside. Not only this, a private individual claiming to be a journalist brought out a small booklet for which all assistance was provided by the Defence Ministry. In this booklet, the author<sup>9</sup>, summarily dismissed all the findings of the C&AG. The Report, which was devoted to the purchase of Aluminium Caskets in the C&AG's Report<sup>10</sup> was also sent by the Defence Ministry to the MPs—a rather unusual step that did not escape PAC's notice. The redeeming feature was that the PAC took an exception to this and the then Chairman spoke very strongly against these practices of the Defence Ministry.

And yet despite these happenings, the then C&AG V.K. Shunglu chose not to go to the press in his own defence or in the defence of the Audit Report. He was categorical that his job was to send his Report to the President who got it placed in the Parliament from where it gets suo-moto referred to the PAC, which

is the final authority to decide on the merits or demerits of the Report and make suitable recommendations to the Government.

The third instance is of a more recent time, in fact, in the time of the present C&AG V.N. Kaul. The report<sup>11</sup> in question was on sale of the Centaur Hotels in Mumbai that was placed in Parliament in May 2005 and another report<sup>12</sup> on disinvestment in 9 PSUs placed in Parliament in August 2006.

The Financial Express in its editorial of 9 May 2005 commenting on the Report regarding sale of Centaur Hotel, Mumbai gave a tribute to the C&AG for his work. It said 'In the backdrop of the steady debasement of our institutions witnessed in the past few years, it is heartening to have a few like the office of the Comptroller & Auditor General (C&AG) that continue to do us proud. Over the years, C&AG's Reports have, time and again, exposed the rot in the system. The latest report, tabled in Parliament on Friday, is no exception'. Similarly, the Times of India in their edition of 20 May 2005 carried<sup>13</sup> an analysis of the C&AG report and Government's reaction on the sale of two Centaur Hotels in Mumbai and made the substantive point that 'would all the original bidders for this property have walked out of the bidding process—leaving the field wide open for one player—if they knew they would be granted at least three extensions of the deadline for payment and the Disinvestment Ministry and the Minister would persuade a consortium of public sector banks to loan funds to facilitate the purchase?'

The Audit Report of the C&AG on Centaur Hotel generated considerable media coverage and invited adverse comments from the then Disinvestment Minister, Arun Shourie and his Cabinet colleague Arun Jaitely. Arun Shourie defended his action by writing an article in a newspaper rebutting C&AG's observations point-wise, and even described the methodology adopted by the C&AG of computing notional losses as 'idiotic'. Despite these, the C&AG kept silent and did not issue any rejoinder to the outburst of Shourie. This was in keeping with the long tradition of the Department not to react to such remarks made by the ministers or politicians or MPs on the C&AG's report.

The media, of course, over the years, has started giving much more coverage to Audit Report findings. Media had always been active in picking up any incident or event that significantly affected the C&AG.

## MEDIA COVERAGE OF C&amp;AG's AUDIT REPORTS

There is a visible increase in the media coverage of C&AG's report or audit related matters after the steps taken by C&AG Kaul to refurbish the media—C&AG interaction process within the Audit Department. The increased media coverage is also an outcome of the creation of a communication policy cell, specially the posting of a Media Advisor in the Department to oversee and coordinate media related activities. An important point in this connection is the emphasis by Department that it is not merely a faultfinding agency but its more important role is promoting good governance. The Audit Reports are better geared towards this approach. It is important to convey this message as Audit is mostly projected as a fault-finding agency. The message that has gone now from the C&AG is that while looking into the irregularities, wastages etc. is an important function of C&AG, he is also, simultaneously a constructive critic who not only diagnoses the shortcomings but also offers good suggestions to remedy the things.

Some of the important Audit Reports findings and other important matters connected with audit that received prominent attention in the media in the recent past are mentioned below.

- ❖ C&AG's report on the sale of two Centaur Hotels hogged the limelight in the press after the audit report was placed in the Parliament in May 2005 with Arun Shourie running a tirade against C&AG in the press. But the media highly commended the C&AG report as revealed through their reporting and in their editorials.
- ❖ C&AG in his review report on 'Excise Duty on Motor Vehicles for Transport of Persons and Goods (Report No. 11 of 2005)—Indirect Taxes—Central Excise & Service Tax' was again widely covered because the central point of the audit was that benefit of reduction in excise duty was not fully passed on to the consumers which resulted in about 38 per cent of revenue foregone being retained by the manufacturers. This item was prominently reported by the Pioneer and the Financial Express.

Another Report that attracted media attention on C&AG Reports in 2005 was Avoidable Expenditure on creation of the office of the Ambassador-at-large for Non-Resident Indians and Persons of Indian Origin in New York. Findings on Defence purchases also attracted good deal of attention of the press.

Some of the more prominent Audit Reports and audit related matters that attracted media attention in the earlier times were:

- ❖ Review on Public Debt in C&AG's Audit Report on Union Government (Civil) in 1994. There were editorials in leading economic newspapers.
- ❖ Report on Bofors Guns Purchase in C&AG's Report on Defence Services in 1989. In this case, while the media covered the audit report findings but more space and attention of media was given to the wide reaction, often adverse, to the audit para by some MPs and even the Minister.
- ❖ More recently, C&AG's Report on 'Review of Procurement for OP Vijay (Army)' attracted lot of coverage from media.

What is Audit Department's current policy regarding reaction if a newspaper carries an erroneous and factually incorrect report concerning Audit Department? In this context, a case that happened in February 2005 gives the answer. The newspaper 'Hitavada' Nagpur edition in its issue of February 16, 2005 (in 'Cityline') published a news item with the heading 'Even AG Spares Political Big Shots' concerning irregularities committed by the Nagpur Improvement Trust where the paper cast a doubt on the role of AG (Audit), Nagpur vis-à-vis 'the political big wigs' allegedly favoured by the Improvement Trust. When the AG saw this item, he was furious because, not only the facts in the news item were all wrong as far as AG's role was concerned, the correspondent had not checked up with the AG about these facts before writing the column. The AG therefore, wrote to the C&AG office giving the facts and seeking permission for a press release to clear the matter. The Headquarters advised him to issue a rejoinder to the news item. AG therefore, issued a rejoinder, which was duly published by the paper 'Hitavada'.

This instance of press reporting falls in the category of 'irresponsible reporting' because the paper did not take the views of the concerned authorities commented upon and the fact that whatever was alleged in the report about the AG was factually incorrect. Fortunately, this was an odd case and there are not many cases like this.

## NEW COMMUNICATION POLICY

The new Communication Policy sets out its objectives as follows:

- ❖ create awareness about the role, vision and mission of the IA&AD;
- ❖ create awareness about the impact and influence of Audit on good governance;
- ❖ convey in a timely manner facts contained in the Audit Reports tabled in the legislatures and highlight important audit findings; and
- ❖ indicate that Audit is responsive to meeting the diverse information needs of the stakeholders in a transparent, objective and timely manner.

It has further laid down the following guiding principles for the IA&AD's Communication Policy:

- ❖ that all communication is consistent with the vision, mission and guiding principles of the IA&AD;
- ❖ that all communication is complete, reliable, accurate, clear, candid and easy to understand;
- ❖ that Audit is accessible to the stakeholders and there are effective and clear communication channels for publicising the substance of the Audit Reports, and the services rendered to the government servants by way of authorizing pensions and maintaining their provident fund accounts;
- ❖ that guidelines are available for dealing with or responding to special or emergent situations;
- ❖ that all communication is fact based, non-partisan, objective, fair, non-ideological and balanced;
- ❖ that up to date information about the Department is available at all times on the website of the Department.

## NOTES: CHAPTER-19

<sup>1</sup> R.K. Chandrasekharan (1990) The Comptroller & Auditor General of India Analytical History 1947–1989 (New Delhi, Ashish Publishing House) Vol. I

<sup>2</sup> Compendium titled 'External Communication Policy of the IA&AD' (For Departmental Use) May 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Paragraph 11 of Summary of conclusions and recommendations (serial no. 5) of the report by National Audit Office of the UK, January 2003

<sup>4</sup> C&AG's General Circular No. 25-Rep(S)/88 issued vide No. 1321-Rep(S)/97-87 dated 30 November 1988.

<sup>5</sup> Brochures were introduced from the year 1997 containing brief summary of more important audit findings and have an attractive format and are drafted in a more userfriendly and attractive language.

<sup>6</sup> C&AG's office letter No. 180/Con/Med/01/04 dated 13 January 2005

<sup>7</sup> Writ Petition No. 23408 of 2004 and Writ Petition No. 28349 of 2004

<sup>8</sup> R.K. Chandrasekharan, op. cit. Volume I, page 345.

<sup>9</sup> R.V. Pandit

<sup>10</sup> Para 4.12, page 13 of C&AG's Report for the year ended March 2001 No. 7A of 2001 Union Government (Defence Services)

<sup>11</sup> Paragraph 7.1 of Report No. 2 of 2005, Union Government (Civil)

<sup>12</sup> Audit Report No. 17 of 2006, Union Government (Civil) Performance Audit

<sup>13</sup> Editorial by Paranjoy Guha Thakurta in Times of India dated 20 May 2005 captioned 'C&AG raises issues of valuation, procedure'

LIST OF KEY EVENTS

- 30 November 1988 Instructions were issued to all State AsG (Audit) that press briefs should be prepared strictly based on the overview and approval of Headquarters for such a brief was not required.
- 5 August 1997 DG (Audit) issued instructions that only under exceptional circumstances AsG should brief the press after approval of DAI/ADAI concerned.
- 5 August 1999 Principal AsG/AsG were asked to send press brief along with a copy of Brochure and the Audit Report (s) through a DO Letter to Editors or regional representative of news papers, PIB and Secretary Legislature. Press Conference not to be held.
- 13 November 2003 DG (Audit) issued instructions that all press notices/ releases issued from Headquarters should be approved by C&AG.
- 24 February 2004 DG (Audit) issued instructions that Pr. AsG may hold press Conference after tabling of Audit Reports in presence of other AsG of the State. Comment on policy and discussion on Chapter-I was to be strictly avoided.
- 9 July 2004 DG (Audit) issued instructions that press notes issued from Headquarters on the highlights of Audit Reports may be cleared by the concerned DAI/ADAI and copy may be endorsed to Secretary to C&AG.
- 13 January 2005 Broad framework of media policy communicated by PD (Staff). A media advisor appointed.
- 8 September 2005 Media Policy reiterated by PD(Staff) for greater compliance in future.
- 16 March 2006 General Guidelines and guidelines for press briefs for the Union Audit Reports and State Audit Reports for interface with media were issued by DG (Audit).

## DOCUMENTS

## 1

DO. No. 472-Audit (MOM) 217-97OP

Date – 5/8/1997

Sub.: Reporting cases of fraud and corruption to Vigilance and Investigative authorities and Holding of Press Conference after the Audit Report is tabled: Recommendations No. 2.1.1 and 3.1.6 of the XIX Conference of Accountants General

Dear

Kindly refer to recommendation No. 2.1.1 of the XIX conference of Accountants' General held in November 1996 regarding extension of co-operation and assistance to vigilance and investigative authorities by reporting cases of fraud or corruption noticed during the course of audit.

The matter has been further examined. It has been held that if a particular case of fraud/ irregularity is considered serious enough to merit attention of the investigative authorities, it ought to find mention in the Audit Report and as the Audit Reports are published and available to all concerned, sufficient dissemination and information is available to the public. It has been decided that Accountants General/Principal Directors of Audit etc. shall not report on their own any case to vigilance or any investigative authority nor will they endorse a copy of extracts from the Inspection Report to any such agency. While forwarding the Bond Copy of the audit report to Headquarters, the Accountant General/Pr. Directors of Audit would suggest to respective ADAI cases which ought to be brought to the notice of an investigative agency. Only such of the cases which have the concurrence of ADAI will then be brought to the notice of investigative agencies like CBI/CVC/State Vigilance and Intelligence Agencies/ Lok Ayukta. While forwarding the cases to the investigative agencies Accountant General/Pr. Directors would appropriately state the subject and may also, where necessary, send details of the case indicating names of individual firms addresses etc which may be available in his office but not mentioned explicitly in the audit report. The entire exercise may be completed without waiting for the availability of printed audit reports. Similar procedure may be followed in respect of audit reports relating to Railways and Commercial Wings.

Reference is also invited to item No. 3.1.6 of the recommendation wherein Accountants General were advised to call for a Press Conference to apprise the media about the highlights of the report and to arrange panel discussion on television after the Audit Report is tabled. After reconsideration it has been decided that Accountants General etc. should not hold press conference as a matter of routine or hold a panel discussion on television. Only under exceptional circumstances the Accountants General etc. should brief the press after obtaining prior approval from the Headquarters by approaching the DAI/ADAI concerned. However, existing practice of issuing a press brief based on the

'Overview' of Audit Reports in terms of Headquarters circular letter No. 1321-Rep(S)/97-87 dated 30 November, 1988 will continue.

With regards,

Yours sincerely,  
SD/-  
(Sudha Rajagopalan)

**2**

No. 180/Con/Med/01/04

Dated: 13 January, 2005

Sub.: Media Policy for Indian Audit & Accounts Department

Of late, a need was felt to devise a proper media policy to interact with the print or the electronic media and dissemination of information to the masses in a positive manner regarding the activities of the Comptroller & Auditor General of India. A Media Advisor has since joined the headquarters office. A broad framework media policy, is given hereunder for compliance.

1. The C&AG will be the nodal officer, or in his absence, the senior most DAI, to interact with the media on (i) specific requests from the media, (ii) dissemination of information to the media considered largely essential for mass consumption and (iii) issuing clarifications, if any needed to remove distortions or misrepresentation of facts by the media or an individual or a group. Media Advisor will handle this work under the direct supervision of the C&AG/ DAI in close coordination with their Secretaries/Personal Staff.
2. Media Advisor will act as a focal point to process all media requests for formal interviews, except those coming directly to the C&AG. He will be the C&AG's interface before the media and after consultations with the senior officers arrange suitable replies to the queries from the media.
3. No press release/press note or a formal reply will be issued to the media without the express approval of the C&AG. It will apply even if the C&AG is abroad or on tour. After approval, the press notes/releases will be faxed/e-mailed/dispatched through special messengers to local media offices through normal channels.
4. No regular press meet/press conference will be held by any officer other than the C&AG and in case of a state by the AGs for their respective states after obtaining approval from the C&AG. Media Advisor should be associated with AG Press Conferences as far as possible.
5. The frequency of the regular press meet/press conference could be one a year after presentation of bulk report to Parliament /state legislatures, highlighting the main aspects of the report. If necessary C&AG may hold regular press meet more than once a year. All such press meets for the C&AG will be organized by the Media Advisor and Director (P) and for the AG's by the AG's themselves.
6. Departmental Heads upto the level of DGs /Principal Directors will keep the Media Advisor informed of the activities of their departments. They will provide him with suitable calendar of forthcoming events,

- backgrounders, agenda notes and recommendations of a Conference / Seminar which they deem fit to be disseminated to the media.
7. Media Adviser will be part of all conferences participated by the C&AG, as far as possible.
  8. Media Adviser will be given tabled reports from all wings.
  9. Accountants General will keep the C&AG informed of the media developments in their states and e-mail/fax copies of any media reports published/telecast in local media relating to their/C&AG functions or regarding state reports.
  10. The Sr. A.O. Incharge of the Section in the DG (Audit) wing will coordinate with the Media Adviser regarding feedback on reports published/telecast or broadcast in the media on C&AG activities/reports.
  11. The landline office telephone number of Media Adviser is 23230834 and PABX Extension No. 211.

Sd/-  
(P.J Mathew)  
Principal Director (Staff)

To  
All DAIs/ADAI's/DGs/Eco Advisor  
/Pr. Ds/ All AGs Directors/  
Secretary to C&AG/PPS to C&AG/  
All Dy. Directors at headquarters  
Media Adviser

3

Office of the Comptroller and  
Auditor General of India  
Date: 16 March 2006

To

1. All Directors General/Pr. AsG/AsG (Audit) by name
2. All Pr. Accountants General/Accountants General (A&E) Offices.  
(As per mailing list)

Sub.: Media Policy—Holding of press Conference by the officers of IA&AD  
Sir/Madam,

The Media Policy of IA&AD is intended to facilitate dissemination of the information contained in the Audit Reports of Comptroller and Auditor General of India to the Parliament and State Legislatures. The matter regarding consolidation of the instructions relating to the media policy has been under consideration for some time. In supersession of all previous instructions on the subject, following guidelines are prescribed for interface with media. A comprehensive Communication Policy, integrating the Media Policy is separately under consideration.

*(A)General*

- (i) The press conference shall be held by the designated officers immediately after the presentation of each Audit Report in the Parliament/State Legislature. All press conferences so organized shall be Report specific for Central Reports and State specific for State Reports.
- (ii) The press conference may be held either within the Parliament House/State Legislature, after following the prescribed administrative procedures for holding of press conference by Government officers in Parliament House/State Legislature, or in the offices of IA&AD.
- (iii) The designated officers shall announce at the outset in the media briefing that in accordance with the provision of Article 151 of the Constitution of India, C&AG submits his Audit Reports to the President or Governor, as the case may be, for being laid on the Table of the Parliamentary/State Legislatures in respect of matters arising out of the audit of Union Government and State Governments respectively.
- (iv) Together with the above, it shall also be stated at the beginning that as per the procedure, the Audit Reports of Comptroller and Auditor General of India to the Parliament/ state Legislature relating to expenditure and revenue from the consolidated Fund of the Union or of the States stand referred to the respective Public Accounts Committee. The reports in relation to Public Sector Undertakings stand referred to Committee on Public Undertakings. The Committees examine the Reports of Comptroller and Auditor General of India and issue recommendations for remedial action by the Government.
- (v) Care shall be taken to ensure that no comments, directly or indirectly, are made during the press briefing on the functioning of the Committees of the Parliament/State Legislature, including the factual position about selection/discussion and issue of Reports which should be obtained by the press from the Secretariat at the various Parliamentary/Legislative Committees. The media may be advised to seek clarifications on these issues from the Parliament/ State Legislative Secretariat.
- (vi) The press conference shall be limited to conveying the contents of the tabled Audit Reports. For this purpose a press brief shall be sent for prior approval by the report controlling DAI/ADAI and specific approval to the press brief obtained. The overview, to the extent possible, may be utilized for the press brief. However, where it is not intended to utilize the overview as press brief, specific approval of the Headquarters shall be obtained. Where considered necessary, the report controlling groups may send the press brief to Director General (Audit) for vetting before putting up to DAI/ADAI.
- (vii) The report controlling wings shall send a copy of the approved Report to DG (Audit) as soon as the Reports are placed on the Table

- of the Parliament/State Legislature, indicating the date on which the Report is placed on Table of the Parliament/State Legislature.
- (viii) The designated officers holding the press conference may send a copy of the approved press brief to the editors of newspapers and other sources of media along with the information regarding the date of presentation of the Report to the Parliament/State Legislature. They may also circulate copies of the press brief on the spot to media persons attending the press conference.
  - (ix) The designated officers may seek advice and clarifications from DG (Audit) in the Headquarters office.
  - (x) Care shall be taken during the press Conference to ensure that the statements are factual and are confined to what has been stated in the audit Reports. No opinion on the government and its policies shall be given during the press conference. The press brief shall confine itself to the issues of compliance, waste, fraud and performance of programmes/projects/schemes etc. as brought out in the Audit Reports. The press briefing is an occasion for conveying factual information and removing ambiguity on issues/ findings included in the Audit Reports.
  - (xi) The press brief shall be non-partisan and without any political slant or comment.
  - (xii) No reference to the names of the executive authorities involved in transactions in Audit Reports shall be made in the press conference, as such authorities do not have an opportunity to defend themselves at the time.
  - (xiii) The matters included in Chapter I of the State Audit Reports, or the chapters in Report No. 1 on the accounts of the Union Government containing overview of accounts shall not be discussed, except highlighting factual information in the various paragraphs. In case media persons seek clarification or elaboration on the issues discussed in these chapters, it may be provided without attribution.
  - (xiv) These instructions apply to both print and audio-visual media. Participation in any panel discussion on Audit Reports or on issues relating to audit practices and their effects shall require prior approval of the Headquarters.

*(B) Press brief on the Union Audit Reports*

- (xv) The press briefing for Audit Reports, relating to the Union Government shall be conducted by the report controlling DAI/ADAI, who may take assistance of Directors General/Principal Directors at his /her discretion.
- (xvi) DG (Audit) may be kept informed of the schedule for presentation of the Audit Reports and of the date and time of the press conference. Assistance of OSD (Communication Policy) and Media Adviser may be obtained by the DAI/ADAI in charge of the concerned Report, if required by him.

(C) *Press brief on State Audit Reports*

- (xvii) The Principal Accountants General shall preside over the press conference for the States as the designated officer, where the senior most representative of IAAD in charge of audit of the accounts of the State Government is of the rank of Principal Accountant General. However, all other Accountants General shall be present at the State level press conference and shall independently clarify matters relating to their Audit Reports. In other States, the Accountant General in charge of audit shall hold the press conference.
- (xviii) The Principal Accountant General and the Accountant General shall make it convenient to be present in their headquarters for a press conference on the day of the presentation of the Audit Reports relating to the State Government. Any deviation in exceptional circumstances shall have specific approval of the report controlling ADAI, who may approve an alternative arrangement.

Please acknowledge receipt.

Yours faithfully,  
Sd/-

(A.K. Thakur)  
Director General (Audit)

Copy to:-

1. All Officers in Headquarters office
2. Secy. To CA&AG.

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

COPU	Committee on Public Undertakings
Dir. (P)	Director (Personnel)
MPs	Members of Parliament
OSD	Officer on Special Duty
PRO	Public Relations Officer
PSUs	Public Sector Undertakings