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# Karnataka House imposes one-year sentences 'Libel' jail for editors

## OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

**Bangalore, June 22:** The Karnataka Assembly has handed one-year jail terms to the editors of two Kannada tabloids for publishing articles that the House deemed "defamatory" of certain Congress and BJP legislators.

Ravi Belagere and Anil Raju have also been fined Rs 10,000 each, defaulting on which would add six months to their sentences.

Sources said Speaker K.B. Koliwad had instructed police to arrest the journalists if they failed to surrender.

Belagere edits the mass circulated weekly *Hi Bangalore*, which specialises in crime, scandals and juicy titbits about politicians and celebrities. Raju is editor of a little-known periodical, *Yelahanka Voice*.

Neither editor could be reached for comments. A call to Belagere's office was answered by an employee who merely said: "He is not available."

Koliwad had told the Assembly last night that Belagere and Raju had ignored repeated summons from the House privileges committee, which was left with no choice but to recommend the sentences.



Ravi Belagere

He told reporters today the House had unanimously accepted the recommendations. "There are set procedure and they will be followed," he said, citing the move to arrest the two journalists.

*Hi Bangalore* had in 2014 carried the articles deemed to have defamed Koliwad, who was an ordinary MLA then, and fellow Congress member B.M. Nagaraju. *Yelahanka Voice* got into trouble over an article last year that mentioned BJP member S.R. Vishwanath.

Nagaraju told **The Telegraph** that *Hi Bangalore* had carried four "extremely offensive articles packed with lies about me and my family" but refused to get

into the details.

"I took the matter before the (then) Speaker only when I realised this magazine won't even apologise," he said. Vishwanath did not answer calls.

It was then Speaker Kagodu Thimmappa who had referred the matter to the privileges committee following complaints from the three members.

Such privilege motions are not uncommon in Karnataka. Rajan Hunaswadi, group editor of the Loka Shikshana Trust that publishes the 86-year-old Kannada daily *Samyukta Karnataka* and some Kannada magazines, had twice appeared before the privileges committee in 2009.

The *Samyukta Karnataka*, which Hunaswadi then edited, had published a Congress politician's description of then Assembly Speaker K.G. Bopiah as "unfit to hold office".

"The problem was that our headline carried the word '*nalayak*' and it was about the Speaker. The privileges committee summoned me and I argued my case," Hunaswadi said.

"Although the committee warned that I might have to appear before the House, it eventually decided to drop the case."

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