Paid News

Why in news?

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The Election Commission disqualified Narottam Mishra, Minister in the Madhya Pradesh government from membership of any State legislature and contesting polls for the next three years **for filing wrong accounts of election expenditure.**

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What happened?

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- The EC's order cites **the issue of "paid news."** Mr. Mishra had paid for favourable coverage in newspapers during the course of the elections but had failed to mention expenses incurred for the same.
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- The candidate denies authorising the publication and takes the plea that he or she could not possibly account for something that was not paid for.
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- So, in this case, the EC has taken the view that even if it were true that he made no payment, he should have included a notional amount in his accounts.
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- Also, as long as the intention to boost someone's prospects was clear (and there was no objection from the candidate), the EC can rule that there was **'implied authorisation'**.
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What is paid news?

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- Paid news or paid content are those articles in newspapers, magazines and the electronic media, which indicate favourable conditions for the institution

that has paid for it.
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- The news is much like an advertisement but without the ad tag.
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- This kind of news has been considered a serious malpractice since it deceives the citizens, not letting them know that the news is, in fact, an advertisement.
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- Secondly, the payment modes usually violate tax laws and election spending laws.
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- More seriously, it has raised electoral concerns because the media has a direct influence on voters.
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Is paid news an electoral offense?

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- Paid news is **not an electoral offence yet,** but there is a case to make it one.
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- The EC has recommended that the Representation of the People Act, 1951, be amended to make the publishing or abetting the publishing, of **paid news to further a candidate's prospects or prejudicially affect another's an electoral offence.**
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What should be the way forward?

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- Mr. Mishra's case pertains to the 2008 election, and by the time the Commission has given its verdict he is into his next term.
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- It is difficult not to notice that the enormous delay and is often created by candidates approaching the courts to stall inquiries.
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- A legal framework in which electoral issues are expeditiously adjudicated must also be put in place if election law is to be enforced in both letter and spirit.
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Source: The Hindu

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