

The recent gag order issued by a Bengaluru civil court in connection with the Dharmasthala mass burial and sexual violence allegations has become a disturbing flashpoint in Karnataka's growing crisis of press freedom. A sanitation worker's testimony about secret burials and alleged cover-ups at the Dharmasthala temple has sparked public outrage. Yet a pre-emptive injunction has barred not only the media but also the victim's family from speaking publicly. As detailed in a study, Bengaluru's civil courts have become a national hotspot for ex-parte gag orders: Over 600 defamation suits have been filed in the city, with more than 100 of them seeking to stop media reporting before publication. *Deccan Herald* alone has been named in over 500 such suits, with nearly 150 gag orders issued against it over the past decade. Caught in the midst of such injunctions, several media organisations cover such crucial topics with wariness. In a climate where legal risks are high, political power is deeply entrenched, and religious institutions command enormous influence, many newsrooms now choose silence over confrontation. Sunday story will argue that the convergence of judicial injunctions and media self-censorship poses a grave threat to constitutional democracy.