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Title: Regarding concern over increase in customs duty of Newsprints - laid.

**SHRI T. N. PRATHAPAN (THRISSUR):** Most of the newspapers in India are struggling to meet their daily expenses. The reason they are still striving to stay afloat is for accomplishing their great duty to serve the community in the communication process. Newspaper still has an incredible space among all the media which is the Fourth Estate of Democracy. But the current Union Budget has pushed the newspapers into a tough situation by increasing customs duty by 10% for importing newsprints. There was another condemnable situation that media persons were allegedly prohibited to enter inside the Ministry of Finance which decides all these things. The price hike of fuels will hit the Newspapers in a big way. Actually, people want to know whether there is any alleged agenda from Government's side to control media like this by leaving them to carry all the burdens of expensive productions and printings. There are 17,000 newspapers and more than 30,000 periodicals. The newsprints and printing materials which they use would be around 25,00,000 tonnes. But the domestic production is 40% only. This situation compels the publishers of newspapers and periodicals to import newsprints and printing papers. Importing is the only way to get high quality papers like glazed and light weights. By knowing all these circumstances, why did the government increase the import duty of Newsprints? If we add GST, then it would be like 10.5%. It is quite disappointing that a surcharge would also be imposed. Then the situation is very pathetic. The decline in the economic growth of the country due

to the problems of GST and demonetization badly affected Newspapers. Many of the Newspapers and Periodicals are seeing a shutdown threat due to the financial crisis.