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MONOPOLY ON AIR & TV CHALLENGED

From Our Staff Correspondent

BOMBAY, Sept. 10.—Former MP Mr. Minoo Masani, and the former Director General of AIR Mr. P. C. Chatterjee, have filed a writ petition in the Bombay High Court challenging the Government monopoly on broadcasting.

The petition says that the total restriction on any broadcasting agency other than AIR and Doordarshan, is ultra vires Article 19(1) (A) of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees freedom of expression to all citizens of India.

The petitioners claim that the freedom of self-expression given through Article 19(1) (A) includes expression through radio and television just as it includes freedom of the Press. They claim that there is no legislation which permits or authorizes a Government monopoly over radio and television, as exists in the case of AIR and Doordarshan. The monopoly has been established through an administrative fiat only and is therefore null and void in law.

The petition was filed after the Union Government rejected an application by Mr. Masani and Mr. Chatterjee which requested permission to set up an independent radio and television broadcasting station with medium power transmitters in Bombay.

The petitioners urged that such a station was required because AIR and Doordarshan often relay biased newscasts. In proof of this allegation, the petitioners referred to a study conducted by the Indian Liberal Group (of which Mr. Masani is a leading member) and the Indian Committee for Cultural Freedom some time ago, which sought to demonstrate "the biased manner in which news is broadcast and suppressed".

The petition has requested the court not only to permit an independent broadcasting station, but also to declare the Government's monopoly over radio and television as ultra vires the constitution. It will come up for hearing shortly.

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