

(22/5) Eternal vigilance they say is the price we have to pay for democracy and the media's role as the watch dog has been highlighted. But when this media is controlled by the government or functions as a governmental department then its role has been perverted. The lenient use of the scissors to delete items which are detrimental to the image of the government is a 'hallowed' practice when it comes to Doordarshan. A survey of the news broadcast on five days selected from our study period, reiterates this point.

17.5.86.

The T.V. broadcast totally omitted any news on Belgaum and the border conflict. Neither did Tripathi's pleadings for Pranab and others find a place in the broadcast. Both these items made it to the front page in the T.O.I.

Further ignored items were a report on how the Arnal firing was pre-planned and on the Talcher fire : how danger signal have been ignored. Doordarshan on the other hand tells us about a Conference on how to deal with drought, Kidwai having inaugurated a machine at AIME, her having been the chief guest at the Convocation of a medical college in Delhi and a passenger train having de-railed in Bangladesh all of which was accompanied with film footage.

Report on the Arnal firing in Bihar in which a number of Harijans were massacred, a blot on any government which calls itself a democracy, found no mention in the broadcast on 17.5.86. The report revealed that the police - action was pre-planned. Here was an issue that was totally blacked out. Why? It would have made the viewer aware of being perpetrated, the between the rich and the organs of law and order.

The newspaper reports tell us that the Karnataka Maharashtra border conflict was brewing in the early days of the month of May. It finds no place in the news broadcasts of those days. When it made front page news in the newspaper T.V. did not think it deserved a mention.

15.7.86.

The lead item on the news broadcast is TULF discusses problems with President Jaywardene. Then there is a news report on R.B.I. introducing machinery for speedy clearance of cheques, some news on tree plantation, another report on Sir Aurobindo Ashram handicraft centre, on the importance of the national integration committee under Venkatraman. But the broadcast excludes any mention of Chinese intrusion into Indian territory - headlines for every newspaper. It was one of the deepest intrusions since 1962 war. They penetrated 6 to 7 km into Indian territory in Arunachal Pradesh.

Why is the news on Doordarshan cluttered with the most irrelevant events? Out of the 19 items, among which were railway line introduced, a report on the crocodile pond in Madras, making statues: livelihood of people in Pondicherry, only 3 or 4 had any news value. They conveniently omitted any on A.P. Government, hiking B.C. quota to 44%, on Gulam Naisi Azad's visit to Goa to evolve a consensus among the ruling Cong. MLA's, on how a new power base of young Congress men was sought to be established to fight the old guard, on "Protected" U.S aid for Pakistan, all these reports appeared on the front page in the T.O.I.

17.7.86.

The broadcast begins with monsoon session of Parliament - P.M. expressing sorrow on the death of Le Dhan, Jagjivan Ram and Chandra Shekar with other leaders expressing similar sentiments. Then there is an announcement, by the P.M. again, on India observing solidarity with S. Africa, then an item on how it is forty years since India banned trade with South Africa. (officially may be, Sunday Observer had carried an article on how trading in diamonds continued, of course that never did find a mention) The next item was Howe to visit South Africa, followed by Kapitra's meeting with the P.M., Ershad's paying homage at Ajmer. It goes on ad nauseum. The papers on the other hand are full with how a terrorist admits to Pak training, U.S. vows to shield Pindi (Reagan at a banquet), C.M. of Arunachal Pradesh says that China's claims are baseless.

There is an indepth analysis on the language game Congress plays in Goa in the T.O.I. One is definitely not asking for an indepth analysis but atleast a sense of priority. Doordarshan seems more interested in broadcasting "harmless" news.

20.7.86.

Any news item which would be a blot on the image of the ruling government or a State Congress (I) Govt. is promptly suppressed. So in the broadcast we find news on India's withdrawal from Commonwealth games, President's visit to Kathmandu, inauguration of a film festival, crisis faced by OPEC countries, all in that order, but no mention is made on M.P.'s panel raps Amarsinh'. The five member parliamentary delegation led by Mr. Dandavate assert that inept handling of the situation on rath yatra day by both police and political leadership triggered the lawlessness witnessed in Gujarat.

27.7.86.

Why did the news that the Army was called out in Kalimpong, a 42 cms news item on page one of the T.O.I find no place in the T.V. -news broadcast of that day?

Suppression and Censorship of inconvenient news seem to have become ingrained when it comes to Doordarshan broadcasts. T.V.'s failure to mention Sobhraj's escape, its failure to mention ~~Sobhraj's~~ the Chernobyl disaster when the newspapers did, its postponing coverage of the Gurkhaland issue, the Ahmedabad clashes, the Karnataka Maharashtra border conflict, the Arnal firing, contribute to the lack of credibility of its news broadcast with the viewer. V.N. Gadgil may think that capacity for Public Relations is the mark of a good Indian, the T.V. broadcast of news reflects it in poor taste, but, I am afraid many a sensible & good Indian will disagree with him.