

Editorial

Imphal Tuesday, October 11, 2016

Imphal-Jirbaram road: a tool for political gimmick

Again this is about playing with the sentiment of the common people. Every move, now and then is directly or indirectly related with the upcoming 11th Manipur Legislative Assembly Election. Yesterday we in the Imphal Times had pointed out how the controversies surrounding over the establishment of National Sports University in the state of Manipur has been using as a tool for campaigning the upcoming assembly poll by both the BJP and INC. And today too it is the condition of the Imphal Jirbaram road that both the parties are considering as another effective tool.

Well, fifteen years ago, the Imphal-Jirbaram stretch of National Highway is a major issue. Nongthombam Biren, the MLA from Heingang Assembly constituency, who had recently tender resignation from the state assembly as well as the Congress party, had organized a mass movement to repair the road with money contributed from the public. At that time Mr. Biren was the Editor of a popular Manipur's Newspaper and soon after he became MLA, the mobilization was left forgotten from the mind of the people.

But each time when there is a prolong economic blockade called along the National Highway, both the government as well as the transporters started talking about this road until the blockade called ended.

Fifteen years down the line now, nothing has change to the condition of the Imphal-Jirbaram road, now NH 37. The condition is no better comparing those days.

The decision of the Transporters' and Drivers' Council to assist the government in repairing the road is a welcoming step. The congress government under the leadership of Okram Ibobi has now announced about the need for urgent repairment of the road. But one wanders why only now when election is just four or five months from now.

It is often heard that, the High Ways are supposed to be maintained by the Central government. But the people of Manipur had already heard the Central government blaming the state government for its lack of corporation. This means the BJP which is in power at the centre is playing its election gimmick to the issue of National Highway.

Every election time the condition of the road comes up in public sphere and blame game begins between political parties. But when the election days over the issue of this specific road will be forgotten and will be left as it is until another election days come to start their politics.

Web Responsive Pensioners' Service

A step towards empowerment of pensioners by improving Transparency, Responsiveness & Accountability

By: D.S.MALIK

Web Responsive Pensioners' Service is a Digital India initiative taken-up by the Controller General of Accounts which works under the administrative control of the Union Ministry of Finance. This portal was recently launched by the Union Finance Minister Shri Arun Jaitley last month. The Web Responsive Pensioners' service has been developed to provide single-point web solution for pensioners to obtain comprehensive information relating to status of the pensions and pension payments. This service will also help in speedy redressal of pensioners' grievances.

In its constant endeavor to provide better and prompt services to pensioners, Central Pension Accounting Office (CPAO) is providing various services to stake holders viz. Ministries, PAOs, Banks and Pensioners through its website www.cpaoinc.in. It has

developed a mobile responsive facility for use of pensioners for availing of various services. Pensioners can register on the CPAO website by providing Pension Payment Order (PPO) number and Date of Birth & Date of Retirement/ Date of Death. Pensioners can also lodge their grievances online and track status through this portal. The main features of this service include the facility of Login using any mobile device, facility to view the Complete Pensioner Profile and digital record of Pension & Revision Orders. Apart from this, the service will track the status of Pension Processing Grievance Redressal and its status which can also be received through SMS. The facility will be linked to Jeevan Pramaan, Bhavishya and CPENGRAMS Portals. Moreover, the pensioners will have Dashboards for banks, PAOs and ministries and departments. (PIB Feature)

Why NDTV Dropped Chidambaram Interview?

By: Siddharth Varadarajan

The Indian soldiers who attacked terror targets in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir may have returned home without any fatalities on their side but there is one casualty that the surgical strike did cause on our side of the border: Indian journalism has been left grievously injured.

Marching right behind the special forces who crossed the Line of Control to deliver "five slaps" on Pakistan - to use defence minister Manohar Parrikar's phrase - most news channels have crossed the line that separates journalism from PR and worse.

If one channel is trying to get its anchors to end their bulletins with a 'Jai Hind' sign-off, another has created a 'war room' for its staff to play soldier - complete with an anchor wearing an imitation 'flak jacket' to shield him from enemy fire as he plans his own surgical strikes on Pakistan.

India Today TV anchor in faux military gear at his channel's 'war room'. Credit: Siddharth Varadarajan. Even before the army operation, NewsX declared via its editor-in-chief that the channel would no longer be referring to Pakistan as 'Pakistan' on its prime time show but as 'Terror State of Pakistan'. On its part, Times Now has led the charge against the presence of Pakistani artists in India and has even demanded that diplomatic relations with Islamabad be downgraded.

It's too early to tell what this surge of nationalist reporting has done for the ratings of these channels but the aggressive manner in which they have led the charge against analysts and opposition politicians who suggested the government provide more information on the surgical strikes has drawn praise from Amit Shah, president of the Bharatiya Janata Party.

The BJP's position is that it was the army which decided to go public with the news about the strikes and that asking for more information would lower the morale of the army and undermine national security.

As a news organisation that always kept its head when others around them lost theirs, NDTV was one of the few channels willing to discuss the strikes rationally - with several of its studio guests making a case for the government to release more information. But in a dramatic turnaround which suggests the channel has bought into the BJP's arguments about the danger of asking questions, NDTV has now declared that it would no longer air "any remarks that risk security for political advantage."

On October 6, the channel decided not to telecast an interview with Congress leader P. Chidambaram - who as a former home minister and finance minister was a member of Manmohan Singh's cabinet committee on security for a decade - because he was critical of the Modi government's political handling of the surgical strikes the Indian army had conducted across the Line of Control in Kashmir last week.

In extracts that played out on the channel on Thursday morning, Chidambaram criticised statements made by defence minister Manohar Parrikar in the aftermath of the September 29 surgical strikes and noted that even Prime Minister Narendra Modi had since cautioned his ministers against thumping their chests on the issue. The full interview, which Chidambaram had recorded with NDTV's star anchor Barkha Dutt, would be broadcast in the evening, viewers were told. Except that it wasn't.

Dropping Chidambaram's interview wasn't the only act of censorship at the channel that day. Editors were instructed that Congress vice president Rahul Gandhi's statement in Uttar Pradesh about Modi trading in the blood of Indian soldiers was not to be run on the channel either. In an email on October 6 to all of the channel's journalists across the

country, NDTV's editorial director Sonia Singh explained the new editorial policy:

Dear all, Across the NDTV network, we have decided we will not give space to the bizarre political bickering that has broken out on the surgical strikes...no debates, no airtime of my strikes vs yours, give proof etc...whether it is opposition or the gov...only the army...to explain this... here is a gfx we should carry today as the lead in our bulletins.....[name redacted], please can this be designed...here is the text....

INDIAABOVE POLITICS

National security cannot be compromised by politics. Our Army cannot be doubted or questioned or used for political gains.

The current political debate threatens to do this.

NDTV will not air any remarks that risk security for political advantage. The 'gfx' was prepared and highlighted at the top of the 9 pm news bulletin on Thursday night. For some reason, the second point - about not questioning the army - was dropped from the graphic (see above).

In keeping with the new editorial policy, the channel will no longer allow politicians and other guests to question the strikes on air. The Wire sent a series of questions to Radhika Roy, co-founder and chairperson of NDTV, and Sonia Singh, on Friday afternoon - right after BJP president Amit Shah's press conference was telecast on the channel.

1. What prompted NDTV to announce a new editorial policy as mentioned in its message 'India Above Politics'?

2. Was it true that the decision to not air Rahul Gandhi's remarks was taken pursuant to the new editorial policy?

3. Extracts of P. Chidambaram's interview to Barkha Dutt were played during the day on October 6 but the full interview was finally never broadcast. We understand that this decision was also taken in keeping with NDTV's new editorial policy. Is this true? Was Chidambaram saying things that compromise national security?

4. Doesn't NDTV's refusal to telecast statements by a former home minister or by the leader of the main opposition party amount to censorship of the news on your part?

5. Contrary to your stated policy of not encouraging politics and political debate to compromise national security, NDTV showed BJP leader Amit Shah's press conference today live. Is this because, in your channel's view, his remarks do not constitute a politicisation of the surgical strikes, and of national security?

6. Raksha mantri Manohar Parrikar recently made a statement about how the Indian army realised its strength only after the current government came to power: "Indian troops were like Hanuman who did not quite know their prowess before the surgical strikes," Parrikar said. In your view, is this an example of political debate that does not threaten to compromise national security?

7. NDTV sent an email to its staffers yesterday which had a fourth bullet point as part of the channel's advisory: "Our Army cannot be doubted or questioned or used for political gains"

Why was this line deleted from the final advisory?

8. Is it NDTV's view that reporters and editors (not to speak of the public at large) cannot question the army any more, or even express doubts about what the army says? Or has this part of the original advisory sent by Sonia Singh to all staffers been withdrawn internally as well?

9. Will NDTV henceforth not permit on air guests who criticise the government's handling of the strikes

and their aftermath, or question their military efficacy?

10. Will criticism of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, or the use of pellet guns against civilians by the security forces in Kashmir, be allowed on NDTV in the future? In her reply to The Wire, Radhika Roy provided a general explanation of NDTV's policy, but did not answer specific questions, especially those on Chidambaram, Rahul Gandhi, Manohar Parrikar and Amit Shah:

"Like all decisions we take at NDTV, we are driven by editorial and journalistic integrity and the belief that the political mud slinging regarding the surgical strikes without a shred of evidence was actually damaging to our national security. We do not believe that we are obliged to carry every shred of drivel that has now come to pass as public discourse. I'd also like to stress that this is part of our normal editorial policy not to provide a platform to outrageous and wild accusations that thrive only on publicity. Our statement giving our reasons is on air and I think that answers the larger question."

"As the news develops, every statement being made is run through that editorial filter. This is of course a fluid situation but the basic principle remains the same. We will investigate any story - whether it involves the army or anyone else - as long as it is based on hard evidence."

"Regarding the rest, I am astonished that internal newroom discussions and draft mails, which may change a million times (as I am sure they do in any newroom) is something that should be a matter of public interest! For us the final decision and what we stand by is what goes on air."

There is one word which stands out in Roy's reply because of the importance she places on its

presence or absence - evidence. Evidence is central to journalism. But 'evidence' is also the word on which the political debate of the past week has turned. While some of the demands for 'evidence' of the surgical strikes we have heard over the past few days are misplaced, the debate arose because the government needlessly withheld information about the operation that ought to be in the public domain in India because it is already known to the Pakistani military - such as the locations hit and the mode of attack. States that are serious welcome verification of claims that they publicly make. This is not because they are afraid their army won't be trusted but because transparency (on details that do not compromise security) builds greater respect for the capabilities of their military.

If important political leaders - whether from the opposition or the government - engage in mud slinging or make loose statements "without a shred of evidence", should journalists shield the public from them? Or should they report their remarks, with context, background and analysis, so that viewers or readers can form their own opinions? The danger in choosing the first option, as NDTV evidently has done, is that it becomes difficult to treat ruling party and opposition alike. On Friday, for example, the channel broadcast back-to-back press conferences by Amit Shah of the BJP and Kapil Sibal of the Congress. But by the evening, the channel's website had only a story on Shah criticising the Congress, with Sibal's rebuttal tagged on as two lines at the end. To be sure, both leaders played politics with national security. But only one gets his video archived prominently - Shah - while the other seems to have vanished into ether. (Courtesy: The Kashmir Observer)

National & International News

J&K: fresh offensive launched to flush out terrorists holed up inside govt building in Pampore

Kashmir, Oct. 11: Security forces launched a fresh offensive this morning to flush out the terrorists who are holed up inside a government building in Pampore area since yesterday. Quoting an Army official, news agency PTI reports that the area around the Entrepreneurship Development Institute (EDI) premises on the Srinagar-Jammu National Highway has been cordoned off and

exchange of fire was going on. Two to three terrorists who had entered the EDI complexes in the wee hours yesterday and fired upon the security forces triggering an encounter. An army jawan and a policeman were injured in the operation. The official said, security forces yesterday used mortar shells, light machine guns and other small arms to flush out the ultras but so far have not been successful.

Vijaya Dashmi being celebrated across the country today; PM to visit Lucknow to celebrate festival this evening

New Delhi, Oct. 11: The festival of Vijaya Dashmi is being celebrated across the country today. The festival marks the victory of good over evil. President, Vice President and Prime Minister have greeted people on the occasion. In his message, President Pranab Mukherjee appealed to the people to resolve, to follow the path of moral and ethical rectitude which has guided for centuries. He expressed the hope that the celebrations will bind the communities and regions of India in a true sense of brotherhood and motivate them to make renewed efforts for the unity and progress of the country. Vice President Mohammad Hamid Ansari said, the festival fills the people with the spirit of brotherhood and amity. He expressed the hope that the festival will bring peace, harmony and prosperity in the nation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a tweet greeted the country on Vijaya dashami. Mr Modi will attend the historic Aishbagh Ramliya in Lucknow this evening on the

occasion. Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh is already in the Uttar Pradesh capital. AIR correspondent reports that Mr Modi is scheduled to reach Lucknow at 6 PM. In Delhi, Police have made elaborate security arrangements to avoid any untoward incident on the occasion. Over in Karnataka, the Navaratri festivities culminate with grand Jamboo savari procession in Mysuru today. The famous 4 km procession also known as Vijayadashmi procession will be flagged off by Chief Minister Siddaramiah after performing puja to the Nandi dhawaja in front of the Mysore palace. The main attraction of the procession is herd of 12 caparisoned elephants led by 56-year old elephant Arjuna. In Assam, tight security measures are being taken in Guwahati as well as in other cities for peaceful conduct immersion of Durga. Several Brahmaputra ghats have been specially decorated. Colourful procession have been taken out by puja committees amidst chanting of hymns.

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