What's Wrong with The Hindu?

The Hindu, one of the most credible and trusted newspapers in the country has many things to its credit. Chief among them is the appointment of an Ombudsman or a Readers’ Editor in a newspaper for the first time in the history of Indian journalism. This 127-year-old newspaper with 3.8 million readers has a different story to tell ever since N Ram, who describes himself as "An Indian who has no sympathy for the Dalai Lama's separatist and backward looking agenda", took charge as the editor-in-chief of the newspaper on July 1, 2003.

Chennai, July 31, 2007: Chairperson of Tamil Nadu Friends of Tibet Dr MR Hubert (speaking) and Dr Ramu Manivannan join activists of Tibetan Students Association of Madras (TSAM) during a protest in front of the Frontline/The Hindu office. The gathering of local Tibetans and Tibet supporters were protesting the misleading articles written by N Ram in Frontline/The Hindu after his Chinese Embassy-sponsored trip to occupied-Tibet in 2007.
Friends of Tibet has learned that the editorial board of The Hindu led by N Ram has instructed their centres not to carry any 'Tibet', 'Dalai Lama' and 'Falun Gong' stories criticising the policies of the Chinese government. Instead of depending on reliable news agencies like PTI, UNI, IANS, Reuters, AP and AFP, The Hindu has found a Beijing-based news-agency to fetch stories - The Xinhua - world's biggest propaganda agency belonging to the Chinese Communist Party. Probably The Hindu is the only newspaper in the country to reproduce Xinhua reports. Today The Hindu has virtually become a mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party.

Perhaps unique in the world because of its role, size, and reach, Xinhua reports directly to the Chinese Communist Party's Propaganda Department and employs more than 10,000 people. The head of the Xinhua has the rank of a minister. Successor to the agency, Red China that was founded by Mao Zedong, Xinhua adopted its current name in January 1937. Since October 1949, this state-run news-agency has been completely subordinate to the Chinese Communist Party and remains the voice of the sole party.

A card-holding member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) who had been to China and occupied-Tibet at least fifteen times in junkets mostly arranged by the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi, N Ram is also the mastermind behind 'India-China Association of Journalists', an embassy-sponsored organisation specialising in arranging pleasure trips for Indian journalists. This new strategy of Beijing has already won the hearts of some of our best journalists. Ironically it is only when the Tamil Nadu Police entered The Hindu office premises in Chennai, N Ram who calls the killing of a million Tibetans by China's occupying forces 'a myth', got enlightened about freedom.

We believe that it is immoral from the side of an Editor to drag some of the eminent journalists to do ethically-wrong reporting for The Hindu and Frontline and also to use a democratic forum - freedom of the press - to advance the cause of an autocratic regime.

'Save The Hindu' Campaign is an attempt to save the newspaper and also to expose Xinhua - Chinese government's propaganda agency to its readers. Let us use the opportunity to write to the newly-appointed Readers' Editor about our concerns on The Hindu policies on various issues including Tibet.
What is Xinhua?

On the eve of the 56th anniversary of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 2005, Reporters Without Borders released a report of an investigation into the role of the news agency Xinhua News Agency in the system of propaganda and censorship put in place by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Perhaps unique in the world because of its role, size, and reach, Xinhua reports directly to the Chinese Communist Party's Propaganda Department; employs more than 10,000 people.

With less than three years to go before the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, the worldwide
press freedom organisation called on the Chinese government to reform the state-run media. Although it is more and more regularly cited as a credible source - nearly one third of the news reports on China selected by Google News originate from the agency - Xinhua, the head of which has the rank of minister, is the linchpin of control of the Chinese media.

Successor to the agency, Red China that was founded by Mao Zedong, Xinhua adopted its current name in January 1937. Since October 1949, this state-run news agency has been completely subordinate to the CCP. The Reporters Without Borders’ report includes accounts from several Xinhua journalists who agreed, on condition of anonymity, to explain how the control imposed by the CCP's Propaganda Department operates on a daily basis. With the help of former French journalist on Xinhua, Reporters Without Borders exposed the distortion of facts, hatred for its enemies and its support, through the treatment of international news, for the world's worst regimes.

Despite a certain economic liberalisation of the media sector, Xinhua remains the voice of the sole party. Hand-picked journalists, who are regularly indoctrinated, produce reports for the Chinese media that give the official point of view and others - classified "internal reference" for the country's leaders. After being criticised for its lack of transparency, particularly during the Sars epidemic, Xinhua has for last few months been putting out news reports embarrassing to the government, but they are designed to fool the international community, since they are not published in Chinese.

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**The Hindu-Xinhua Nexus**

Zhang Yan, Chinese Ambassador to India (second from right) with Mr N Ram (centre), Editor-in-Chief of the Hindu after a meeting to discuss the media cooperation between the two countries on November 27, 2009. According to the Chinese Embassy website, Zhang Yan "highly appreciated the Hindu in the active role of objectively reporting on China, 'China's Tibet' and the Sino-Indian relations and expressed his sincere thanks on the support and cooperation provided for holding the Photographic Exhibition on China’s achievements in the past 60 years." And N Ram "thanked the Chinese side for inviting him to China for several times so that he can deeply understand China and introduce China and China's Tibet to India."

"Freedom of the press is important. So is its social responsibility, which must begin with interaction with and accountability to readers. For a daily newspaper this must happen on a
Friends of Tibet spoke to journalists working with various centres of The Hindu in India and we've learned that a good number of them are ignorant about what Xinhua is all about. They carry Xinhua stories simply because they are asked to do so. They are even instructed not to touch 'sensitive' stories on Tibet, Dalai Lama and Falun Gong criticising the policies of the Chinese government. Today The Hindu becomes the only newspaper in India to reproduce Xinhua stories.

In July 2000, N Ram, the 'editor' of Frontline visited occupied-Tibet for five days in a trip organised by the Chinese Embassy in New Delhi. His regurgitation of Chinese communist propaganda was splashed over 36 pages of the September 15, 2000 edition of the Frontline. Unusually for a professional Indian journalist, N Ram makes his bias clear right from the first paragraph.

Excerpts from N Ram's article titled 'Tibet: A Reality Check':

- "The sky is turquoise, the sun is golden, The Dalai Lama is away from the Potala, Making trouble in the west. Yet Tibet's on the move." For an Indian in Tibet who has no sympathy whatsoever for the Dalai Lama's separatist, revanchist and backward-looking agenda, this passable adaptation of an old Tibetan song seems to fit contemporary realities.
- "As the pre-eminent Tibetan Buddhist leader, 'His Holiness' has a hold among the faithful and a wider influence that must not be underestimated. But, as the Chinese official view makes clear, given the protracted experience of dealing with him, he cannot be treated merely, or even primarily, as a religious leader. He is a consummate politician leading a movement that seeks to take 'Greater Tibet' away from China - an anti-communist and separatist political figure masquerading as a compassionate man of religion and 'art of happiness' guru."
- In 1989, as anti-Chinese political feelings intensified on the world stage, the Dalai Lama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize by a politically-minded Norwegian Nobel Peace Prize Committee.
  - If the Dalai Lama were not an extremist, not a separatist, and not a revanchist in his political agenda, but a genuine upholder of the 'middle path', he would have no problem working within Tibet's regional autonomy framework and space. But time does not appear to be on the side of Tibet's former 'god-king'.
  - The wise future course for India's policy on China's Tibet will be to rein in the Dalai Lama, expel the Dharamsala-based 'government of Tibet in exile' from Indian soil, and do its best to promote the return of the Dalai Lama, many of his followers, and thousands of Tibetan refugees to their homeland on a voluntary, but principled basis - by abandoning the pipedream of separating Tibet from China.

Above 'observations' by N Ram on HH the XIV Dalai Lama, the spiritual and temporal leader of six million Tibetans are enough to know who N Ram is and how is won over
and influenced by Beijing.

**Xinhua Propaganda: An Example**

Let us have a look at a classic example of how a Xinhua story is being prepared favouring the Chinese government and distributed internationally.

"China Parades 'Panchen Lama' at Religious Meet" is a story published by the Times of India edition dated April 13, 2006 on the five-day-long World Buddhist Forum which was held in China (See: Image 1). Here the Times of India editorial team compares reports filed by various news-agencies for authenticity and finally comes out with a story based on facts. The story talks about China's rejection of the Gendun Choekyi Nyima, the 11th Panchen Lama chosen by HH the XIV Dalai Lama. The term 'Panchen Lama' is highlighted as most Tibetans inside and in exile refer the Chinese-appointed Panchen Lama as 'Panchen Zuma' or 'the fake Panchen'.

On the same day, The Hindu reproduced an unedited Xinhua news-item with the headline: "Panchen Lama Calls for Harmony" (See: Image 2). The Xinhua story projects Chinese Govt-appointed Gyancain Norbu as the 11th Panchen Lama and talks nothing about the real Panchen Lama and his mysterious disappearance on May 17, 1995.

A reader is easily fooled and denied right to information.
Panchen Lama calls for harmony

Stresses self-cultivation at world Buddhist meet

Panchen Lama participates in the opening of the five-day World Buddhist Forum in Hangzhou, China, on Thursday. — photo ap

Panchen Lama participates in the opening of the five-day World Buddhist Forum in Hangzhou, China, on Thursday. — photo ap

How Xinhua Exaggerates

Let us see how a Xinhua exaggerates a story.
Here a Xinhua story reproduced by The Hindu edition dated April 16, 2006 (See Image: 3) says that China's economy has grown by 10.2 percent. This report was greeted with skepticism as to respond to the release of GDP figures from China with doubt and uncertainty. It is impossible to calculate true GDP expansion without complete access to growth statistics across the entire country in a wide variety of segments - especially in a country like China.

National Statistical Bureau of China has been struggling over the past many years to upgrade its system of calculating growth. While annual GDP figures normally rely on a combination of figures such as consumption plus government spending plus investment plus net trade,
China arrives at its numbers only by gathering statistics on production from local managers. And it is a routine in which local officials set their production targets at the beginning of the year and falsify figures at the end to misinform Beijing that they have met their goals. Many economists believe that China’s economy boom is more hype than reality.

**Image 9:** "Party Membership Grows to 71 million in China" (The Hindu, June 20, 2006)
"How The Hindu Stories Overshadow the Real Ones"
Let us see how trade-centric stories of The Hindu divert a reader's attention from the real issues around.

The Hindu edition dated April 19, 2006 (See Image: 4) carries a story on Hu Jintao's visit to Microsoft Headquarters in Redmod, Washington and his meeting with Bill Gates, world's richest man. No one else carried this report as they found it irrelevant to the readers in the Indian subcontinent. Pallavi Aiyar's story on '2.6 Million Square Meter-Long Yiwu Market in Southern China' on April 15, 2006 and the 'Top Rating of the Three Gorges Dam' of China
were among the top international stories The Hindu carried that week.

Interestingly, there were two important reports The Hindu didn’t want their readers to know: 1) British Transplantation Society’s findings on the organ harvesting of thousands of executed prisoners from China and the horrific news of removing organs from living Falun Gong practitioners in jails 2) AFP/AP/Reuters report based on the 2005 Amnesty International Annual Report accusing China for the majority of executions in the world. According to the report, about 1,770 executions were reported in China although Amnesty said it suspected that the real figure was higher. (See Image: 5 & 6)

The purpose of carrying trade-centric stories is to divert the attention of 3.8 million readers of The Hindu from the real issues around.

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Image 5: “China Executed Most People in 2005” (AFP, April 20, 2006)
Image 6: “China Harvesting Prisoners’ Organs for Transplant” (Reuters, April 19, 2006)
"The Hindu-Chini-Bhai-Bhai"
Gone were the days when a KGB agent delivers a suitcase at your New Delhi residence for 'planting' stories in a newspaper. Let us see how The Hindu gets rewarded for publishing pro-Chinese government reports.

Image 7: "The Return of the Hong Tou A-San" (The Hindu, May 03, 2006)

In one of the travelogues by Pallavi Aiyar (Beijing Correspondent of The Hindu) titled 'The Return of Hong Tao A-San' published by The Hindu edition dated May 03, 2006 (See Image: 7), she reports that the Sikhs, known for their red turbans, are back in China since the Indo-China war. For about a month, she continues to file colourful stories on both China and occupied Tibet.

Exactly after three weeks Prof Qui Yonghui, Secretary General of Chinese Association of South Asian Studies writes an article in The Hindu edition dated on June 6, 2006 (See Image: 8). In his article, Prof Yonghui 'discovers' that "the quality of media coverage in both India and China has improved."

Excerpts from Prof Yonghui’s article titled "Seeing India and China through fresh eyes":
"We used to read all the boring reports, most of them covering catastrophes, road accidents, conflicts and so on for whatever reasons they might have been. Later on, we could only read the arguments and talks concerning the Sino-Indian border conflict of 1962, which were later
followed by news stories perhaps on the doubts about the reforms and opening up in both
countries. In one word, we really did not know what was happening in our neighbourhoods.

In The Hindu, only recently in May 2006, in their reports both Pallavi Aiyar and Harish
Khare have commented on almost all aspects of the leading developing country in the world.
Their stories covered different places in China: the sandstorm-suffering capital; the shops on
Huai Hai Road in the commercial city Shanghai; a huge market in a small town called Yiwu
in Zhejiang; a Buddhist Temple called Shaolin in Henan. They even commented on the
Indians working in China ("The Return of the Hong Tou A-San" - the Sikhs with their red
turbans - and "Made in China-Indian Doctors"). It's really a wonderful experience having
seen these two Indian journalists covering lots of interesting topics. As far as I am concerned,
such Indian newspaper reports have undoubtedly enriched my discovering of India."

"Seeing India and China through fresh eyes" (The Hindu, June 06, 2006)

"Big Brother Fascination"
By Ramachandra Guha (Historian and Columnist)

In 1980, the respected left-wing editor, Nikhil Chakravartty, made a trip to Afghanistan. He
was invited by the Soviets, who, the previous year, had invaded that unhappy country. On his
return, Chakravartty wrote a multi-part essay in the journal he founded and edited,
Mainstream. The burden of that essay was that the progressive communists were bringing the
fruits of modernity and science to a backward and feudal land.

Twenty years later, another senior left-wing editor has provided a willing whitewash of a
totalitarian regime. The cover story in the latest issue of the Chennai fortnightly, Frontline,
written by N Ram, provides an extended and lavishly illustrated brief for the Chinese
occupation of that country. The Chinese, claims Ram, have brought hospitals, roads and
schools to a previously deprived land. He minimizes the attacks on Tibetan cultural
institutions and religious beliefs that the Chinese have so demonstrably carried out.

He also dismisses the reports by others of a demographic shift in Tibet. Relying on official
Chinese census data, he rejects independent evidence of the largescale settlement of the
region by the Han people. In any case, Ram has little sympathy for pre-colonial Tibet. He
thinks that before the Chinese came the land was a reactionary backwater. The dalai lama,
revered by the Tibetans and regarded also by millions of non-Tibetans as a leader of dignity and courage, is characterized by Ram as a man with a "separatist, revanchist and backward-looking agenda". The editor ends his essay with a message from the Chinese government to the Indian government, asking it to "put an end to the Dalai Lama's virulently anti-Chinese, separatist, and revanchist political activities in India".

Ram's case is made with complete confidence, on the basis of a stay of five days. It is safe to say that the editor's movements in those five days were closely monitored by his host, the Communist Party of China. For, as is always the case in authorized travels to totalitarian countries, the visitor is only allowed to see or talk to what the rulers want him to see or talk to. It is in keeping with what we know of how and why Ram's article was written that it carries the Orwellian title: "Tibet: a reality check".

The curious thing about Nikhil Chakravartty and N. Ram is that at home they have been vigorous defenders of political and intellectual freedom. In 1975, five years before he visited Soviet-ruled Afghanistan, Chakravartty closed down Mainstream rather than subject it to the censorship imposed during the Emergency by Indira Gandhi. And Ram's Frontline has sometimes championed unfashionable causes. For instance, it refused to join the super-patriotic acclaim for the nuclear blasts in the summer of 1998. What then explains these double standards? Why would these champions of freedom at home so energetically support brutal dictatorships abroad?

An answer of a kind is provided in a classic work by the British writer and historian David Caute. Called The Fellow Travellers, it was first published in 1975, and reappeared in an expanded edition 12 years later. The book is a superb history of Western apologists for communist regimes. It starts with the authors and scholars who supported Joseph Stalin, such as the American writer, Lincoln Steffens - who famously said, after a week in Russia, that "I have seen the future and it works" - and The New York Times correspondent in Moscow, Walter Duranty, who consciously suppressed, in his reports, the evidence of millions of deaths caused by collectivization.

But, as Caute shows, American leftists have had a monopoly on deceit and credulity. All the great British Fabians, including George Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells, lined up to support Stalin and his ilk. Sidney and Beatrice Webb even wrote an 800-page book with the wonderful title, Soviet Russia: A New Civilization? That apologetic question mark was, however, removed in the second printing. The one and sterling exception to this shameful trend was Bertrand Russell, who very early saw Soviet communism for the monstrosity it was. Russell has never been given proper credit for his 1918 book, The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism, the first serious exposé of Leninist politics.

After the Fifties, it was no longer possible to defend Soviet Russia. So the Western writers went in search of a substitute Utopia. One group settled on China, a second on Vietnam, a third on Cuba. But, as Caute remarks, these intellectuals would not, of course, trade their own life in a free country for life under the boot. His explanation of this paradox was two-fold. On the one hand, these men practised an unconscious racism: they believed the British needed democracy, but not the backward Georgians or Chinese. On the other hand, they displayed
the intellectual's endemic love of power. The commisars, aware of their propaganda value, would shamelessly flatter them. Thus the Webbs or Wells would get an audience with Stalin, and Edgar Snow an audience with Mao, while being denied an interview with Roosevelt or Churchill. Naturally, they would be disposed to writing well about their foreign hosts.

Caute's book can also help explain why Indian Marxists have so zealously supported foreign communist regimes. Fortunately, they do not have the field all to themselves. Thus N. Ram's account of Chinese rule in Tibet must be contrasted with the account provided by another Indian writer, Vikram Seth. Unlike Ram, Seth speaks fluent Chinese; and unlike him again, he hiked and hitchhiked through Tibet rather than whizzing through the country by official car and aeroplane. In his book, From Heaven Lake, Seth provides chilling details of the destruction and degradation of Tibet at the hands of the Chinese. With his linguistic gifts and a novelist's empathy, he was able to obtain from ordinary Tibetans a direct, unmediated account of what they thought of their rulers. If Ram at all spoke to Tibetans it would have been through interpreters, and with Chinese colonial officials standing by.

The Indian Marxists's admiration of foreign dictators is a curious thing indeed. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) is the only party in the world which still worships Stalin, putting up his portrait alongside those of Marx, Engels and Lenin in their annual congresses. Yet the party has long ago abandoned armed struggle, and is happy enough to participate in the routine processes of Indian democracy.

Admittedly, hypocrisy of another kind is practised by parties of the Indian right. The founders of what is now the Bharatiya Janata Party were fervent admirers of Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. And Bal Thackeray admires those fellows still.

This writer is just about old enough to recall a time when Indian politics and intellectual life were both dominated by men who were consistently unwavering in their support to freedom and democracy. I was interested to read in the obituaries of the recently deceased Congressman, S Nijalingappa, that he and Indira Gandhi parted ways over the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. As president of the Congress, Nijalingappa wanted our government to condemn the invasion, but as prime minister, Indira Gandhi refused to do so. Nijalingappa was reared in the tradition of MK Gandhi and C. Rajagopalachari, who loathed Hitler as much as they loathed Stalin, whose life's work was the winning of democratic freedoms for their people, and who would not be so arrogant as to deny other people those same freedoms.

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**N Ram Threatens Friends of Tibet**

An Email we received from N Ram, Editor of The Hindu

Date: Mon, 12 Jun 2006 18:27:42 +0530
From: N. RAM < nram@thehindu.co.in >
To: "Friends of Tibet (India)" < friendsoftibet.india@gmail.com >
Subject: Notice to "Friends of Tibet Campaign"

Notice to 'Friends of Tibet (India)' Campaign

I find that several of the communications sent to me and others in your so-called 'Save the Hindu Campaign' relating to Tibet are highly defamatory against me and The Hindu. You are liable for both criminal and civil defamation. You will be hearing from our lawyers soon about the legal action we are taking. Be on notice that will be required to provide the full coordinates and other relevant particulars about the Indian parties behind your campaign and all those liable for defamatory action that we are planning to take.

Aside from that, you will note that your campaign is out of line with Indian official policy by advocating secessionism for Tibet. Be aware that Indian participation in "the Global Movement for an Independent Tibet" is comparable to participation in international campaigns that advocate secessionism for Kashmir. It is also well established that the Dalai Lama and his Tibetan supporters have been allowed to stay in India on condition that they do not indulge in political activities, including pro-'independence' activities, on Indian soil.

N. Ram
Editor-in-Chief The Hindu

The Hindu Editor Sacked For Exposing Paid News
(Tehelka Bureau, April 21, 2011)

New Delhi: The family feud of the owners of The Hindu daily has intensified further, with N Ram, the editor-in-chief of the newspaper, teaming up with some directors to keep his cousin N Ravi away from the post of the next editor-in-chief. Ram has appointed Siddharth Varadarajan in Ravi's place, who till now was the strategic affairs editor of the newspaper. Varadarajan also headed the national bureau of the newspaper in Delhi.

Ram was supposed to have retired last May when he turned 65, and Ravi was to take over from him as the new editor-in-chief. But, now Ravi finds himself in the wilderness. He points out how Ram had earlier tried to remove another family member, N Murali, as the managing
director of the company. Ravi also points out the Ram had thrown out another family
member Malini Parthasarathy, who held the post of the executive editor, from the newspaper.

Ravi has shot out a letter to all employees of the newspaper, protesting against his removal
by the board of directors in a "supposed" meeting held on Monday. Following is Ravi's letter
titled "The recent happenings in The Hindu" and written on April 20:

"Even as we are entering the second, and what might turn out to be a prolonged, phase of
conflict and turbulence in the institution, I write to seek your understanding.

"In a shocking display of bad faith that has left me deeply anguished, N. Ram and some of
the directors at the meeting of the Board on April 18, 2011 have sought to remove me and
appoint as editor Siddharth Varadarajan who joined The Hindu in 2004.

You are all aware that I have been working in a wholly professional capacity for several
decades ever since I joined the newspaper as a reporter in 1972. During this period, I have
been fortunate to enjoy your cooperation and help in taking the newspaper forward. After
1991 when I took over as editor, our team transformed The Hindu from a Chennai-centred
daily with just one page of local news to a well recognized national newspaper with
extensive local and state coverage spread over four pages, and attractive features. We started
a lively engagement with the leading issues of the day with extensive coverage and diverse
viewpoints. We sought to uphold editorial integrity, seeking accountability from institutions
and public officials without fear or favour.

"Though the economy then was not so buoyant as during the later period, between January
1991 and June 2003, the circulation of The Hindu increased from 4,52,918 copies (July-
December 1990) to 9,33,458 copies (January-June 2003) or by 4,80,540 copies or 106.1%. In
the more recent period, The Hindu has been losing market share, and from being level with
the Hindustan Times, it has now fallen far behind that newspaper. Findings from the most
recent market survey present a depressing picture of reader perception of unappealing content
and a pronounced bias towards the left.

"It is a matter of public record that N Ram, Editor-in-Chief, was to retire on May 4, 2010 on
turning 65 and I was to take over as Editor-in-Chief under the arrangement agreed upon.
However, in a shocking display of bad faith, Ram went on to renege on his commitment to
retire and the whole process of editorial succession came to a standstill.

"During the conflict created by Ram’s breach of faith, Ram and a group of directors on the
Board removed the powers and responsibilities of N. Murali, Managing Director in a
vindictive move that was overturned by the Company Law Board, Chennai Bench that also
came out with a severe indictment that their action was lacking in probity, good faith and
fairness. Barely four months after the indictment, Ram and his group of directors have turned
on me with the same lack of probity, good faith and fairness and have sought to remove me
and impose a plan of editorial succession that is totally at variance with the longstanding
tradition and practice in the institution and is also contrary to the directions of the Company
"Almost a year past the agreed retirement date, his position having become untenable in the face of the Company Law Board order, Ram seems bent on taking all the editorial directors—most are in their 50s—into retirement with him with a scorched earth policy to ensure that no one in the family succeeds him. Instead of coming up with a succession plan, he and some of the other directors have come up with a plan of wholesale removal. In a sudden change of rules and under the specious plea of separating ownership from management, along with my removal as editor, Nirmala Lakshman is to be forced to 'step down' as joint editor and Malini Parthasarathy as executive editor.

"Apart from the basic unfairness of the removal, the move seeks to entrench several of the distortions that have crept into the editorial framework since 2003 when Ram was appointed Editor-in-Chief by stealth over the protests of four of us. Among the issues that I have raised with the other directors during the discussions in the Board and outside are: the unmerited coverage of certain political favourites on specific directions; excessive coverage of the activities of the left and some of its leaders; for reasons that are bound to emerge sooner rather than later, turning the newspaper into an apologist for A. Raja through the 2G scam coverage, remaining deafeningly silent on his resignation in the face of mounting evidence even when demanding the resignation of Suresh Kalmadi, Ashok Chavan and Yeddyurappa in similar circumstances; pronounced pro-China tilt, blacking out or downplaying any news that is less than complimentary to the Chinese Communist regime; and contrary to the practice in any mainline newspaper, the Editor-in-Chief indulging in an unceasing self-glorification campaign, publishing his own ribbon cutting pictures and reports of his activities and speeches with a regularity that would put corporate house journals to shame.

"The Hindu as an institution had in the past valued its editorial integrity over all else. In the recent period, editorial integrity has been severely compromised and news coverage linked directly to advertising in a way that is little different from paid news. A meaningless distinction has been sought to be made between walls and lines, and the walls between editorial and advertising are sought to be replaced by “lines” between them. Very recently, those of us who were not privy to the deal making learnt to our shock that a major interview with A. Raja in defence of the telecom licensing policy published on May 22, 2010—that was referred to by the Prime Minister in his press conference—involves a direct quid pro quo in the form of a full page, colour advertisement from the Telecom Ministry that was specially and hurriedly cleared by the Minister personally for publication on the same day in The Hindu. The contrast between such a deed and pious editorial declarations including the campaign against paid news cannot be starker. To continue with such practices, the editorial structure is sought to be changed, with the editor being made subordinate to an executive board comprising a majority of business side executives. The undermining of the primacy of the editorial function is an attack on the very soul of The Hindu. In the context of these distortions that have crept into actual practice, the high sounding code of editorial values that is sought to be publicized now would seem no more than empty rhetoric.

"This round of turbulence comes at a time when all manner of investors are looking to gain influence and control over the media, and competition is increasing with newspapers striving
to attract the attention of readers through better, more contemporary and enriched content. As part of the journalistic team, all of you have contributed so much to the growth of The Hindu and are vitally interested in the task of moving forward in a highly competitive environment even while observing the highest standards of editorial integrity. I feel strongly that when a distorted picture has emerged based on selective leaks, information on the happenings cannot be restricted to the confines of the boardroom and all the journalists as stakeholders need to be taken into confidence.

"It is in this spirit that I am sharing my views with you all. I also write to you with the confidence that the unfair and untenable move will not be allowed to prevail. In the task of upholding the editorial principles that are so dear to all of us, I appeal for your support and understanding."

Letter from N Ravi, Sacked Editor of The Hindu

April 20, 2011

Dear colleagues,

Even as we are entering the second, and what might turn out to be a prolonged, phase of conflict and turbulence in the institution, I write to seek your understanding.

In a shocking display of bad faith that has left me deeply anguished, N. Ram and some of the directors at the meeting of the Board on April 18, 2011 have sought to remove me and appoint as editor Siddharth Varadarajan who joined The Hindu in 2004.

You are all aware that I have been working in a wholly professional capacity for several decades ever since I joined the newspaper as a reporter in 1972. During this period, I have been fortunate to enjoy your cooperation and help in taking the newspaper forward. After 1991 when I took over as editor, our team transformed The Hindu from a Chennai-centred daily with just one page of local news to a well recognized national newspaper with extensive local and state coverage spread over four pages, and attractive features. We started a lively engagement with the leading issues of the day with extensive coverage and diverse viewpoints. We sought to uphold editorial integrity, seeking accountability from institutions and public officials without fear or favour.

Though the economy then was not so buoyant as during the later period, between January 1991 and June 2003, the circulation of The Hindu increased from 4,52,918 copies (July-December 1990) to 9,33,458 copies (January-June 2003) or by 4,80,540 copies or 106.1%. In the more recent period, The Hindu has been losing market share, and from being level with the Hindustan Times, it has now fallen far behind that newspaper. Findings from the most recent market survey present a depressing picture of reader perception of unappealing content and a pronounced bias towards the left.
It is a matter of public record that N. Ram, Editor-in-Chief, was to retire on May 4, 2010 on turning 65 and I was to take over as Editor-in-Chief under the arrangement agreed upon. However, in a shocking display of bad faith, Ram went on to renege on his commitment to retire and the whole process of editorial succession came to a standstill.

During the conflict created by Ram's breach of faith, Ram and a group of directors on the Board removed the powers and responsibilities of N. Murali, Managing Director in a vindictive move that was overturned by the Company Law Board, Chennai Bench that also came out with a severe indictment that their action was lacking in probity, good faith and fairness. Barely four months after the indictment, Ram and his group of directors have turned on me with the same lack of probity, good faith and fairness and have sought to remove me and impose a plan of editorial succession that is totally at variance with the longstanding tradition and practice in the institution and is also contrary to the directions of the Company Law Board.

Almost a year past the agreed retirement date, his position having become untenable in the face of the Company Law Board order, Ram seems bent on taking all the editorial directors—most are in their 50s--into retirement with him with a scorched earth policy to ensure that no one in the family succeeds him. Instead of coming up with a succession plan, he and some of the other directors have come up with a plan of wholesale removal. In a sudden change of rules and under the specious plea of separating ownership from management, along with my removal as editor, Nirmala Lakshman is to be forced to 'step down' as joint editor and Malini Parthasarathy as executive editor.

Apart from the basic unfairness of the removal, the move seeks to entrench several of the distortions that have crept into the editorial framework since 2003 when Ram was appointed Editor-in-Chief by stealth over the protests of four of us. Among the issues that I have raised with the other directors during the discussions in the Board and outside are: the unmerited coverage of certain political favourites on specific directions; excessive coverage of the activities of the left and some of its leaders; for reasons that are bound to emerge sooner rather than later, turning the newspaper into an apologist for A. Raja through the 2G scam coverage, remaining deafeningly silent on his resignation in the face of mounting evidence even when demanding the resignation of Suresh Kalmadi, Ashok Chavan and Yeddyurappa in similar circumstances; pronounced pro-China tilt, blacking out or downplaying any news that is less than complimentary to the Chinese Communist regime; and contrary to the practice in any mainline newspaper, the Editor-in-Chief indulging in an unceasing self-glorification campaign, publishing his own ribbon cutting pictures and reports of his activities and speeches with a regularity that would put corporate house journals to shame.

The Hindu as an institution had in the past valued its editorial integrity over all else. In the recent period, editorial integrity has been severely compromised and news coverage linked directly to advertising in a way that is little different from paid news. A meaningless distinction has been sought to be made between walls and lines, and the walls between editorial and advertising are sought to be replaced by 'lines' between them. Very recently, those of us who were not privy to the deal making learnt to our shock that a major interview with A. Raja in defence of the telecom licensing policy published on May 22, 2010—that
was referred to by the Prime Minister in his press conference—involved a direct quid pro quo in the form of a full page, colour advertisement from the Telecom Ministry that was specially and hurriedly cleared by the Minister personally for publication on the same day in The Hindu. The contrast between such a deed and pious editorial declarations including the campaign against paid news cannot be starker. To continue with such practices, the editorial structure is sought to be changed, with the editor being made subordinate to an executive board comprising a majority of business side executives. The undermining of the primacy of the editorial function is an attack on the very soul of The Hindu. In the context of these distortions that have crept into actual practice, the high sounding code of editorial values that is sought to be publicised now would seem no more than empty rhetoric.

This round of turbulence comes at a time when all manner of investors are looking to gain influence and control over the media, and competition is increasing with newspapers striving to attract the attention of readers through better, more contemporary and enriched content. As part of the journalistic team, all of you have contributed so much to the growth of The Hindu and are vitally interested in the task of moving forward in a highly competitive environment even while observing the highest standards of editorial integrity. I feel strongly that when a distorted picture has emerged based on selective leaks, information on the happenings cannot be restricted to the confines of the boardroom and all the journalists as stakeholders need to be taken into confidence.

It is in this spirit that I am sharing my views with you all. I also write to you with the confidence that the unfair and untenable move will not be allowed to prevail. In the task of upholding the editorial principles that are so dear to all of us, I appeal for your support and understanding.

Yours sincerely,

N Ravi

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How The Hindu Manipulates PTI Reports

The below example shows how a Press Trust of India (PTI) report is being tampered, with the purpose of deception by The Hindu, the national newspaper of India. On April 27, 2011 PTI publishes a story on Lobsang Sangay, the newly elected Prime Minister of the Tibetan Government in Exile in India. The story was republished by major newspapers that are subscribed to the wire-agency.

On April 28, 2011, The Hindu publishes the story by adding 'unauthorised' words and sentences to defame the newly-elected Prime Minister and the Government in Exile and removes the 'Chinese Pressure' in Nepal and Bhutan in order to protect the Chinese Government. Compare the original PTI story with the manipulated report of The Hindu. Friends of Tibet learns that the practice of adding the byline of a wire-agency after the manipulation of an original report is considered unethical and a breach of agreement between a newspaper and the PTI on publishing rights.
Lobsang Sangay Next PM of Exiled Tibetan Government


Dharamsala: Harvard scholar Lobsang Sangay was today elected Prime Minister of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile and would take over the political duties relinquished by spiritual leader the Dalai Lama. 43-year-old Sangay polled 55 per cent votes out of 49189, defeating his nearest rival Tethong Tenzin Namgyal by 8,646 votes, Election Commissioner Jampal Chosang announced here. Sangay is a research fellow at the Harvard Law School. Tethong Tenzin Namgyal, a Stanford scholar, polled 18,405 votes while Tashi Wangdi, the Dalai Lama's representative in Brussels, New York and New Delhi, finished third. The election was held on March 20. 59 per cent votes were cast by the electoral college comprising over 83,000 Tibetans in exile in India, the US, European countries, Bhutan, Nepal, Russia and Japan among others. Apparently under Chinese pressure, voting was not allowed by authorities in Nepal and Bhutan.

Lobsang Sangay Chosen for Political Work


Harvard scholar Lobsang Sangay was on Wednesday elected "prime minister" of the so-called "Tibetan government-in-exile" and would take over the political duties relinquished by the religious leader Dalai Lama. A research fellow at the Harvard Law School, Mr. Sangay, aged 43, polled 55 per cent votes out of 49,189, defeating his nearest rival Tethong Tenzin Namgyal by 8,646 votes, "election commissioner" Jampal Chosang said here. Tethong Tenzin Namgyal, a Stanford scholar, polled 18,405 votes, while Tashi Wangdi, the Dalai Lama's...
representative in Brussels, New York and New Delhi, finished third. The election was held on March 20. Fifty-nine per cent votes were cast by the electoral college comprising more than 83,000 Tibetans living in exile in India, the U.S., the European countries, Bhutan, Nepal, Russia and Japan, among others. Voting was not allowed by the authorities in Nepal and Bhutan. The Dalai Lama, 75, announced last month that he would step down as political head, but would remain as religious leader and continue to advocate "meaningful autonomy" for Tibet. — PTI

"How The Hindu Readers React"
Comments from some of The Hindu readers

"This is outrageous and quite unbecoming of one of the most revered and prestigious newspapers of India. I had sensed that when Mr N Ram wrote that long article in Frontline a few years back defending China's policy on Tibet. My suspicion on Hindu's editorial judgement, as far as issue of Tibet was concerned, further proved to be true when I read the stories filed by Mr Amit Barua who happened to be an embedded journalist of the Chinese communist regime on a guided tour to Tibet organized for the "friendly" Indian media. Truely the respect that I had for the newspaper has recieved a big jolt. It's disgusting."
(Rajender Singh, New Delhi)

"I would like to express my support to the campaign of taking up the issue of The Hindu's black out of any news about Tibet and the Dalai Lama in its paper. Please put me down as a signatory to your campaign to the Reader's Editor of The Hindu."
(Jaya Jaitly, New Delhi)

"Various sources for news are healthy whether from China or from elsewhere. Single sources do not imply freedom of the press or information. The Hindu has a great tradition. Let's not lose it! Tibetan voices are as valid as other voices. Hear them!"
(Leeya Mehta, Georgetown University, Washington)

"I feel ashamed that one of the most respected newspapers of India is being hijacked by a totalitarian and colonial regime of Peoples Republic of China. Unfortunately this is happening only because the leadership of this newspaper has shifted from a highly respected chain of editors to Mr. N. Ram who as no shame in presenting himself as a stooge of the Chinese communist rulers than a self-respecting Indian, or a self-respecting Indian journalist."
"If it is true that N Ram has so decreed it is nothing short of scandalous."

(Jerry Pinto, Bombay)

"The Hindu is becoming a disgusting yellow pulp, it is not a newspaper which reports the "news" but a rag celebrating the small mindedness of its irrational, imbecilic owners and editors."

(Dr A Iyengar, Metropolitan College of New York, USA)

"How can a monopolist party controlled agency with low credibility be relied upon, while closing one's eyes and ears to other reports? Does the Hindu want to be a handmaiden of Xinhua in rewriting history to portray the victims of military invasion and violent subjugation as some kind of regressive untouchables? This smacks of expedience shamelessly trampling over truth."

(Bharat Mansata, Bombay)

"I have no quarrel with N Ram being a Communist, but to blindly print Chinese propaganda is against the norms of good journalism. Hindu is fast losing its credibility with its current policy."

(Yatindra Bhatnagar, www.internationalopinion.com)

"It is ironical that the editor of the Marxist fundamentalist The Hindu must always come from the same Iyengar family; the same hypocrisy marks this alleged progressive's love for a genocidal regime like the Chinese government."

(Pradyumna Kumar, Bangalore)

"Having worked at The Hindu as a copy editor in the 1980s I am aghast at how Mr N Ram has brought his extreme left-wing views to bear upon the newspaper. It is time that this limousine Marxist gets out of the newspaper business, and for The Hindu to reflect real Hindu ideals and vision. Mr N Ram's truck with the Chinese totalitarian regime is a shameful reflection of the vulgar Indian leftist politics."

(Ramesh N Rao, Longwood University)

"It is sad that The Hindu has become the mouthpiece of a Chinese propaganda agency. Tibetans are entitled to human rights. Media should not be blindly partisan, especially in its news columns."

(Prof B Ramesh Babu, Hyderabad)

"As a daily reader of The Hindu, I am aghast to hear that 'The Hindu' is allowing itself to be exploited by the Chinese propaganda machine - 'Xinhua'. Kindly revert to standard international news-wires for Tibet stories."

(Manu Gopalan, EartHauz: Architecture & Design)

"The Hindu's love of truth is a myth. This newspaper hasn't been honest and truthful in the last 15 years. The other papers ply frivolousness, sleaze and scandal, The Hindu doesn't. Let
us not confuse that with respect for objectivity and truth."

(Sikhivahan Gundu, Bangalore)

"Only 60 years ago, an Indian was capable to practice his culture from Afghanistan to Tibet to Burma to Sri Lanka. Today the culture is not 'divided' but effectively wiped out of half the area and the process is going on. Tibet, to me, is a case to witness the slow and sudden death of India's culture and its cultural siblings. In internal Politics of the country, left, right, or goalkeeper doesn't bother me. But you certainly cannot be more loyal to your enemies than to yourself. Sold out souls are a pity, their parents and children should feel the shame."

(Gyanendra Bartaria, New Delhi)

"It is shocking to note that a newspaper like the Hindu which has had the image of ethical, conservative journalism has misplaced its integrity and is selling its voice of conscience for some economic inducements. Hope it will wake up from its stupor and sever its connections with the CCP controlled news agency and make amends!"

(Suren Rao, Independent Film maker)

"I am a reader of the Hindu for the last 44 years. I feel sad to see its new avatar as 'Mount Road Marx'. It has become a mouthpiece for the Marxists."

(SR Ramanujan, Hyderabad)

"It's time for Ram to learn the meaning of Refugee. It means a person fleeing for fear of life. According to international law they deserve respect and support. That's why UNHCR has taken the responsibility to grant that status to Tibetans risking their lives and crossing the border from China to Nepal/India. Insulting refugees is highly condemnable. It is inhuman. And also disrespectful to the internationally accepted norms and laws. Definitely not an ethic of objective reporting. Least of all, not Tamil culture."

(Senthil, India/Australia)

"As an aspiring journalist I think it is repulsive and deplorable for journalism and its policy of truth and ethical perspective of all that it addresses to be abused in this manner. This is where the press must draw the line between what is right and what is negligible."

(Samira Obeid, Chennai)

"As a reader who thinks the Hindu is the best newspaper in India, I am very concerned about the China tilt. Even before I saw this petition I was concerned about the generally adulatory and pro-Chinese govt slant in the frequent stories that have been appearing in the Hindu. I was quite appalled by the comments of N. Ram about the Dalai Lama. They were ill-informed. Would like to see a more balanced and better nuanced editorial policy towards China, Tibet and the Tibetans in India."

(Shakti Maira, New Delhi)

"N Ram is entitled to his personal views on the Tibet issue. But it is wrong to impose his personal views on his newspaper and its readers. What is Ram afraid of? "Let a hundred flowers bloom", let the independent news agencies write their stories and let contrary views be heard. I personally believe that for India to abandon Tibet will do deep harm to Indian
civilization."

(Rusi Engineer, Bombay)

"As a reader of The Hindu, and a supporter of the cause of Tibet and an admirer of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, I had been noticing the biases in The Hindu's news reports. I switched to The Hindu because I appreciate its ethical journalism and value-based reporting. Thus this support to the autocratic and repressive measures of the Chinese regime by what I consider to be the last bastion of honest journalism in the English medium press in India is indeed sad and unfortunate. I request the Ombudsman of the Hindu to take immediate action in this regard."

(Swati Chopra, New Delhi)

Friends of Tibet, PO Box 16674, Bombay 400050, India.

Friends of Tibet is a people's movement to keep alive the issue of Tibet through direct action. Our activities are aimed at ending China's occupation of Tibet and the suffering of the Tibetan people. Friends of Tibet supports the continued struggle of the Tibetan people for independence. Friends of Tibet is also one of the principal organisers of World Tibet Day around the world.