

January 13, 2012

PRESS STATEMENT

Jaypee and Mahyco as Indian Express sponsors: There is conflict of Interest here, Sir

On January 10 and 11, 2012, half page advertisements in the Indian Express (IE) newspaper (at least in Delhi edition) announced that on Jan 16, 2012 the IE Excellence in Journalism awards will be given. The advertisement also said that the main sponsor is Jaypee Group and among other sponsors include the Mahyco Monsanto.

One may recall (for details see: <http://www.thehoot.org/web/home/story.php?storyid=4901&mod=1&pg=1§ionId=21&valid=true>) that Indian Express has been on a campaign mode advocating big dams in general. It has been specifically campaigning against the movements like the Narmada Bachao Andolan. In March April 2006 the paper specifically ran a campaign against NBA and also against the then Union Minister Prof Saifuddin Soz¹. In Oct 2010 the paper ran a campaign for large hydro projects in the North East India when the then Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh held an open public hearing on these projects in Guwahati and then wrote to the Prime Minister, raising concerns about so many hydro projects being taken up in NE India and the impacts thereof.

Now it is well known that the Jaypee group is India's largest dam building contractor, largest private sector developer and plans to develop many more including in the North East India, which was the subject of Indian Express campaign in Oct 2010. Jaypee group is also the contractor for the largest of Narmada Dam, namely Sardar Sarovar Project. The group is planning to develop the 2700 MW Lower Siang and 500 MW Hironong Hydropower projects in Arunachal Pradesh, for example. It may also not be irrelevant to mention here that the Jaypee group has pathetic records in terms of social, environmental and human rights issues² in the projects it is involved in. More recently, in January 2012, India's market regulator Sebi fined Jaypee Group Rs 6 million for illegal practice of insider trading³. All these facts are very much relevant for any business group to sponsor awards for excellence in journalism, particularly when the awards are also for "ethics in reporting"⁴.

The Indian Express campaign in Oct 2010, *willy nilly* helped the Jaypee groups' interests. And now Jaypee is sponsoring the IE Journalism award. Shall we call this conflict of interest or quid pro quo? Should a media house accept such sponsorship from a group that has directly benefited from the campaign that was run by the media house? And when the business group has such abysmal reputation?

Earlier in January-February 2010, when Jairam Ramesh held a series of public hearings to get a cross section of views on Bt Brinjal, Indian Express had launched a campaign⁵ against Jairam Ramesh and FOR GM crops. It is clear that the campaign hugely benefited GM crop companies and the biggest among them in the world (Monsanto) has an Indian arm Mahyco Monsanto, which is the biggest GM seed company of India. Mahyco Monsanto now is one of the sponsors of the Indian Express Excellence in Journalist awards.

¹ See for example: <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/muddying-the-waters-soz-passes-the-narmada/2594/>, <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/narmada-dam-hike-after-all-proposed-soz-wants-to-dispose/1126/2/>,

² For some photographic evidence of violations by Jaypee projects, see: http://www.sandrp.in/hydropower/Violations_of_Environment_Norms_by_Four_Big_Himachal_HEPs-Photographic_Evidence_Feb_2011.pdf

³ <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/markets/regulation/sebi-slaps-rs-60-lakh-fine-on-senior-jaiprakash-associates-executives-for-insider-trading/articleshow/11396444.cms?inttarget=no>

⁴ <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/time-to-celebrate-the-finest-in-indian-journalism/899201/>

⁵ See for example: <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/ramesh-faces-public-fury-over-bt-brinjal/573660/>, <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/govt-refuses-permission-to-bt-brinjal/577715/>, <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/ramesh-said/583749/>, <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/panel-which-cleared-bt-brinjal-to-meet-today-to-discuss-ban/580805/> to list only a few.

So the same set of questions that arise about relation between Jaypee group and IE also arise for Mahyco Monsanto: Is this conflict of interest or quid pro quo? Is this not intellectual dishonesty? Should not the lobbyist media groups like Indian Express keep away from getting sponsorships from the organisations that their lobbying helps? This is particularly true if media group wants to retain any credibility to the effect that it is still speaking in public interest, which we assume they should be.

We would like to clarify that we are not raising any doubts about the genuineness, independence and excellence of the jury or those journalists who may get this award.

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