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to newsdesk

4:13 PM (45 minutes ago)

This has reference to the "sting operation" claimed to have been done by Cobrapost with two marketing staffers of The New Indian Express group. We would like to make the following points:

1) Cobrapost cannot talk about editorial compromise in TNIE since its interaction was limited to a couple of ad executives and the discussion centred on ad campaigns alone. The voiceover on Mahesh accepting the deal is also wrong. Mahesh was just trying to understand the contours of the arrangement, to enable him to brief his higher-ups. His responses in the form of "ok, ok" or "Hmm" -- whether it is about cash component or nature of content -- should, therefore, be viewed in that context and not as the deal having been sealed as it is sought to be portrayed. Also, nowhere does the marketing official say that the so-called campaign proposed by the journalist in question will be run in the newspaper as news. It is a clear case of a proposed advertisement campaign and on multiple occasions during the conversation, references have been made only to carrying "advertisements." To paint it otherwise is being dishonest. In the conversation with the marketing staffer of the digital arm, cash component has not even come up in the conversation.

2) What has also been conveniently buried is the specific point made by the marketing staffer that usage of words (references to Lord Krishna etc) even in the form of an advertisement has to be legally vetted. Therefore, to come to a conclusion that it is a "done deal" is erroneous.

3) It is only natural any marketing staffer will meet a client when a campaign is proposed. However, to infer that it has been accepted, more so when person in question, is not the final authority, is to say the least, jumping the gun. To set the record straight, we have turned down efforts by the Cobra journalist to meet higher-ups including the undersigned following the first conversation with Mahesh, clearly indicating our lack of interest in the proposal.

4) Advertisements of a communal colour or those intended to create communal tension in the society are not accepted in TNIE. It is our stated policy, made clear in our internal communication as well. The same has been reiterated by the undersigned in a communication that was sent out in November last year, and pasted here for your ready reference.