



HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS' ALERT - INDIA

NATIONAL SECRETARIAT

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January 21, 2022

To,
Mr. C S Mawri,
Focal Point - Human Rights Defenders & Assistant Registrar,
National Human Rights Commission,
Manav Adhikar Bhawan,
Block-C, GPO Complex, INA,
New Delhi – 110 023
Email: hrd-nhrc@nic.in

Dear Sir,

Sub: HRD Alert - India - Urgent Appeal for Action- Tamil Nadu: Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting's Notice to Zee Tamil for satire on Prime Minister

Greetings from Human Rights Defenders Alert - India!

HRD Alert - India is a forum of Human Rights Defenders for Human Rights Defenders. It endeavors to initiate actions on behalf of Human Rights Defenders under threat or with security concerns.

We are writing to express our grave concern regarding the Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting issuing notice to Zee Tamil for alleged satire by children on Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi after the Tamil Nadu unit of Bharatiya Janata Party filed a complaint.

Source of Information:

Information from media

Date of Incident:

January 15, 2022

Place of Incident:

Chennai, Tamil Nadu

The Perpetrators:

Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India

About the TV Channel:

Zee Tamil is an Indian Tamil language general entertainment television channel owned by Zee Entertainment Enterprises. The channel started broadcasting on 2008 and is available internationally. Zee Tamil programming includes serials, spiritual shows, cookery, talk shows, musical shows, movies and events.

Details of the Incident:

On January 15, 2022, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) issued a notice to media company Zee Entertainment Enterprises after the Tamil Nadu unit of

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) filed a complaint against Zee Tamil alleging that “obnoxious comments” had been made about Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi in a reality show. The notice was issued after Mr. Nirmal Kumar, chief of BJP’s information technology and social media cell in Tamil Nadu, filed a complaint against telecast of reality “Junior Super Star Season 4” that was aired on Zee Tamil on January 15, 2022.

In the reality show episode aired on January 15, 2022, two child contestants performed a skit dressed as a king and his minister, modelled on characters from a popular Tamil movie *Imsai Arasan 23 M Pulikesi*. The contestants narrated a story of the king who tried to eradicate black money by demonetising currency notes, but failed in his efforts to do so. The child who played the king also portrayed him as travelling to various parts of the country, wearing different costumes.

In its notice to the Zee Tamil television channel, the MIB said that it had received a complaint about the telecast and asked Zee Tamil “to provide comments on the complaint to this Ministry within a period of 7 days, failing which further action will be taken”.

We believe that this case is an example of the right to dissent and free speech being increasingly criminalized in India. This is a violation of Article 19(a) of the Indian Constitution which provides for free speech and power to express oneself to every citizen. Any individual has the right to review the historical events, stories, to express one’s view and criticism of political establishment.

Freedom to expression is crucial to the work of media. The right to freedom of opinion and expression encompasses three different aspects: 1) the right to hold opinions without interference; 2) the right of access to information; and 3) the right to impart information and ideas of all kinds.

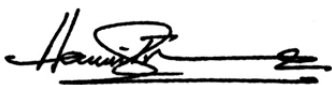
In a democracy a satire on political establishment is accepted under freedom of speech and any curbs on criticism of political establishment is against the Constitution.

Appeal:

We urge the Hon’ble Commission to:

- Independently analyse the contents of the videos within the framework provided by the Supreme Court on free speech and expression on numerous occasions and according to the provisions of national and international law.
- Issue notice to the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology for the misusing its powers and initiating actions against the channel.

Yours sincerely,



Henri Tiphagne
National Working Secretary