

Indian Link

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Linking Australia with India

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Free

Murdoch's Star dips over India.

From our correspondent

New Delhi. The Aussie media magnate, Mr Rupert Murdoch's bid to become one of the main players in the Indian pay Television market has received a major setback. Two days before Murdoch's Star television was supposed to launch its pay T.V. channel in India the government promulgated an ordinance making it mandatory for the cable operators to be citizens of the country and restricting foreign equity in such ventures to only 49 per cent.

The problem that Mr Murdoch faces is not in relation to the equity participation or the need for the cable operator to be an Indian national, but, Star television's woes are of a completely different nature. The ordinance promulgated by the government has an added provision which prohibits any channel to show pictures without getting a certificate of clearance from the Indian Central Board of Film Certification. This section of the ordinance has jeopardised the scheduled launch of Star television's English Movies Pay channel. The channel which was supposed to be launched in the first

week of October now has been postponed. This had to be done because Star television would now require a censor certificate for every English film shown. The network had also promised Hindi sub-titles for all the films showed between 7 am to 7 pm.

According to industry observers clearance of the proposed films by the Indian censor board would take a minimum of a month and a half. Sources also point out that Star can possibly circumvent the ordinance, because it has the option of switching to the direct home broadcast system through its KU band transponder on its Asiasat-2 satellite, which becomes operational mid-next year. Apart from the long delay, the other handicap which star faces in this is that the KU band signals are weaker and cannot be uniformly distributed over a vast area.

In India, most programmes are distributed through cable operators who receive signals through C band transponders and a large sized dish antenna.

Sydney Uni: Centre for Indian Studies faces closure ?

From our Correspondent

Sydney.

The Centre for Indian Studies at Sydney University is facing a threat of closure. In a bid to resolve the crisis that has almost crippled it, the Centre is now looking at the Indian community for financial support. To keep it alive one of the proposals under consideration is that it split its activities into two -- language and history in the Department of Indian Sub-Continental Studies in the School of Asian Studies under the Faculty of Arts, and economic development and business studies in the Faculty of Economics.

Dr Mukherjee, director of the Centre, complains that there never has been adequate funding to run the Centre properly and that it has been increasingly hard to manage with the meagre resources available. But the real problems began when last year, Sydney Uni's Faculty of Arts, the largest faculty in the country, was asked to reduce in size; the faculty would need to

review its courses, and those with small intakes would have to be cut. Indian Studies, being a small centre, felt the sting of "formula-funding" (whereby a stipulated number of students determines the number of teachers appointed) when its Hindi course was terminated earlier this year. The Hindi lecturer, Ms Devaleena Ghosh, had completed her three-year-appointment last year. Dr Mukherjee, frustrated at what he claimed was the University's constant neglect of Indian Studies, resigned in protest. In an interview with Campus Review in January this year, he claimed that Sanskrit was retained because of its classical status and that Indian Studies was scapegoated because it did not have tenured staff. He told Indian Link that other courses such as Semitic Studies and Ancient Greek which have permanent staff have been retained despite having lower enrolments rates.

Dr Mukherjee has called a

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Plague: India fought alone, while a scared world turned away....

- Rahul Jalali

The world not only turned away, but it was liberal in its condemnation, generating fears bordering on panic and painting the image of India as a third world cesspool where a medieval scrouge had returned to wreak havoc. Subsequent events have proved these prophets of doom wrong. India has not only managed to control the envisaged disaster, but, in the process of doing so proved that the international press has once again gone wrong in its assessment. In hindsight it has shown that most of their assessment was based more on a lack of knowledge and often their reports bordered on being hysterical, where each paper tried hard to beat its competition, and the only yardstick to judge journalistic merit was sensationalism. Basic tenets and yardsticks of journalism were thrown overboard

with facts being replaced by fiction. A case in point is Mr James Walsh, a senior writer for the Time, magazine. The gentleman sitting in a place long removed from the scene of action wrote a story describing that plague is 'regarded today as a fable' and a pestilence which stuck India in this century.

Later on Mr Walsh acknowledges that the plague microbe has never died out. But while painting a picture of India as a pestilence ridden nation, he conveniently forgot to tell the readers about where plague had stuck last. Perhaps, his memory needs to be jogged a bit. According to the WHO, 1993, 1308 cases of plague were recorded worldwide and out of these 151 died. Interestingly, the WHO report shows that plague is a regular occurrence in the

heartland of the advanced world, the USA. In 1992 and 1993 nearly 22 plague cases were recorded in the States and a total of 3 people died of the disease. Mr Walsh while, admitting that plague microbe was not gone, forgot to check his own backyard and report on it. Yet this kind of reporting was not restricted to Time alone. Sample this: 'World cuts off plague-hit India'. This one is major headline in Sydney Morning Herald. And incidentally what does the world comprise of, thirteen countries and the Gulf states. We wonder whether its a case of bad geography or bad journalism. Or take another one, this time the Australian: 'Medieval scourge rocks modern India image'. A bad knowledge of facts or a total

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