

# One poll, two results, exit credibility

## RESPONSE AND REBUTTAL

Sir, With reference to the news item by Ms Seema Mustafa *Pollster sells one poll, two results to TV channels* (*The Asian Age*, February 16), I would like to clarify certain things, which are outlined below.

1. CMS has nothing to do with C-Fore. Many who worked at the CMS over the years had gone out and started their own companies and are doing poll surveys today in the market.
2. The data collected by CMS was exclusively given and used for Zee News.
3. My performance and accuracy could be commented upon by the media and if something deserves to be written about, you are welcome to do so in the larger interest and much needed transparency of any such survey.
4. I take this opportunity to invite you to visit us and see how, where and under what conditions and with what kind of transparency, we conduct such polls. Please let us know your convenience.
5. Incidentally, Dr N. Bhaskara Rao, founder of CMS, is no longer involved in the operation of such surveys, nor does he deal with channels for such assignments.
6. Yes, it is true that DD approached CMS to bid for the exit polls which it had put out for open bids. CMS informed DD when its bid was still open, that CMS had entered into an agreement with Zee News.
7. The issue to do with the authenticity of exit polls certainly deserves to be discussed with the kind of understanding and attention in the media that it deserves. I would have appreciated, if Ms Mustafa could have spoken to me before going ahead with this

out in the report. Mr Surapaneni has confirmed that DD and CMS had discussed an agreement for the exit polls and that when Zee News entered the picture, CMS decided to opt for the latter. The next part of the news report was that the Doordarshan bid was then secured by C-Fore, a company with close links with CMS. I am glad that Mr Surapaneni agrees that the authenticity of exit polls deserves further discussion in the media. This was exactly the point I was trying to make in the report. As for Dr Bhaskara Rao not being involved in the surveys or channels for such agreements, I think a letter we have received from him speaks for itself.



Sir, This is in the context of Ms Seema Mustafa's banner story *Pollster sells one poll, two results to TV channels* (*The Asian Age*, February 16). I am not surprised that such a story has appeared. For it is a good story for the media and reads well. In fact, media should have written much earlier about exit polls as such. The main contention in the story is that the same agency had carried out exit polls for two different channels with two different projections. This is totally incorrect. Mr Naveen, who is in charge of these activities here has taken up this matter with Ms Mustafa. Nevertheless, I wish to reiterate that CMS has neither floated C-Fore, as is reported, nor it has anything to do with C-Fore's operations. CMS has not shared any of its services, including data on exit polls with

ed surveys, particularly exit polls. That was why we invited the media and academicians to our office during the last two general elections (1998 and 1999) to see how we go about. I have initiated opinion surveys in India, including election surveys, over the last three decades. During this period many people were trained to conduct such surveys. Many of those in the market today were either trained or worked or were associated with me at one point or the other. I think one of the competing agencies which had failed to get the DD or Zee assignment has selectively briefed *The Asian Age*. The agency in question had precisely done this — of what this article in context comes up with — in the last Assembly elections. I am sure you are aware of it. But what surprised me is that the paper has gone by such a story despite talking to me. You may like to follow up this story to a logical conclusion in the interest of the larger public.

N. BHASKARA RAO  
Centre for Media Studies  
Research House,  
Community Centre,  
Saket, New Delhi

### SEEMA MUSTAFA REPLIES:

I stand by our report. I do not think it is for Mr N. Bhaskara Rao to presume who, or who did not, speak to us about the story. The concern of the readers and those involved should be about the authenticity of the report which seeks to highlight the kind of measures that are being taken to monopolise the quick poll market.

lished in *The Asian Age* titled *Pollster sells one poll, two results to TV channels* (*The Asian Age*, February 16). While newspapers and journalists are welcome to discuss and criticise exit polls, the report casts aspersions on the professional integrity of my company.

I would like to place the following facts for your consideration and publication in the newspaper.

C-Fore is a separate entity and has no relationship whatsoever with CMS as alleged in the news item. At best it could be described as a competitor of CMS. It is a professional outfit and working for prestigious magazines like the *Outlook*.

The news item says "...CMS had virtually finalised a deal with Doordarshan when it was approached by Zee for the exit polls. It was then decided to float C-Fore as a separate company to handle the Doordarshan contract."

The facts are contrary to this. Doordarshan floated the tenders for an exit poll only on January 25. The fact is that we have been doing surveys for different clients much prior to that. We have done pre-poll surveys for *Outlook* for the Assembly elections which were published in the last week of January and the first week of February. Even earlier one of our surveys on top Indian schools was published as *Outlook's* cover story on December 10 with C-Fore byline. Further we have a contract with *Outlook* for their weekly opinion poll

exclusively with us for the exit polls. Also, if the paper had carefully examined the predictions given by us and the CMS the vote share predicted for different parties is substantially different for Uttaranchal and any experienced professional can tell this cannot be from the same data. I would request *The Asian Age* reporter to visit our office on any of the polling days on February 18 or 21 to see the process and verify facts.

It is true that I am an engineer but the story fails to mention that I have also done a course on research methodology from FORE school of management as part of my MBA programme. Also, that I have 10 years of experience in the field of market research, election surveys and operations research, somewhat directly connected with estimation methodologies before launching C-Fore. I wish the reporter had contacted me so that there was no factual error. The propaganda is by the company that could not get the assignment from DD or Zee for whatever reasons.

The news item has done immense damage to my professional career and to the integrity of my company.

PREMCHAND PATEY  
Director, Centre for  
Forecasting and Advisory  
Research, New Delhi

### SEEMA MUSTAFA REPLIES:

I stand by our report. There are well known links between C-Fore and CMS, well known to all in the business of psephology and telecasting. C-Fore has not been in existence for long,



was exclusively given and used for Zee News.

3. My performance and accuracy could be commented upon by the media and if something deserves to be written about, you are welcome to do so in the larger interest and much needed transparency of any such survey.

4. I take this opportunity to invite you to visit us and see how, where and under what conditions and with what kind of transparency, we conduct such polls. Please let us know your convenience.

5. Incidentally, Dr N. Bhaskara Rao, founder of CMS, is no longer involved in the operation of such surveys, nor does he deal with channels for such assignments.

6. Yes, it is true that DD approached CMS to bid for the exit polls which it had put out for open bids. CMS informed DD when its bid was still open, that CMS had entered into an agreement with Zee News.

7. The issue to do with the authenticity of exit polls certainly deserves to be discussed with the kind of understanding and attention in the media that it deserves. I would have appreciated, if Ms Mustafa could have spoken to me before going ahead with this story.

NAVEEN SURAPANENI  
Centre for Media Studies,  
New Delhi

#### SEEMA MUSTAFA REPLIES:

Mr Surapaneni's response is predictable. Of course, on the records, C-Fore is a different company from CMS and this has been mentioned in the news report. It is also true that the data collected by CMS has been used for Zee News. But the same data was used to prepare exit poll predictions for Doordarshan with variations that have been pointed

out. I am glad that Mr Surapaneni agrees that the authenticity of exit polls deserves further discussion in the media. This was exactly the point I was trying to make in the report. As for Dr Bhaskara Rao not being involved in the surveys or channels for such agreements, I think a letter we have received from him speaks for itself.

Sir, This is in the context of Ms Seema Mustafa's banner story *Pollster sells one poll, two results to TV channels* (*The Asian Age*, February 16). I am not surprised that such a story has appeared. For it is a good story for the media and reads well. In fact, media should have written much earlier about exit polls as such. The main contention in the story is that the same agency had carried out exit polls for two different channels with two different projections. This is totally incorrect. Mr Naveen, who is in charge of these activities here has taken up this matter with Ms Mustafa. Nevertheless, I wish to reiterate that CMS has neither floated C-Fore, as is reported, nor it has anything to do with C-Fore's operations. CMS has not shared any of its services, including data on exit polls with C-Fore, or anyone else. CMS is doing this round of exit polls exclusively for Zee News. Recently, the credibility of exit polls has been tarnished but otherwise also it is under question. I myself was against the publishing or telecasting of such exit polls before the polling is over and, in fact, I campaigned against it in the last three-four years and wrote to the Press Council and Election Commission. Unfortunately, poll surveys have become "commercial" with the Supreme Court ruling on exit polls. At CMS we believe in transparency in such poll relat-

ions. During this period many people were trained to conduct such surveys. Many of those in the market today were either trained or worked or were associated with me at one point or the other. I think one of the competing agencies which had failed to get the DD or Zee assignment has selectively briefed *The Asian Age*. The agency in question had precisely done this — of what this article in context comes up with — in the last Assembly elections. I am sure you are aware of it. But what surprised me is that the paper has gone by such a story despite talking to me. You may like to follow up this story to a logical conclusion in the interest of the larger public.

N. BHASKARA RAO  
Centre for Media Studies  
Research House,  
Community Centre,  
Saket, New Delhi

#### SEEMA MUSTAFA REPLIES:

I stand by our report. I do not think it is for Mr N. Bhaskara Rao to presume who, or who did not, speak to us about the story. The concern of the readers and those involved should be about the authenticity of the report which seeks to highlight the kind of measures that are being taken to monopolise the quick poll market. We went ahead with the report as we were sure of our facts. I did speak to Mr Rao and have quoted him in full detail. I might point out that CMS has been in the practice of floating various "independent" agencies to carry out various polls for the media and others commissioned by political parties. The same resources were used by these agencies which, for the record, claimed to be separate from CMS altogether.

Sir, I would like to draw your attention to the lead story pub-

lished in the newspaper.

C-Fore is a separate entity and has no relationship whatsoever with CMS as alleged in the news item. At best it could be described as a competitor of CMS. It is a professional outfit and working for prestigious magazines like the *Outlook*.

The news item says "...CMS had virtually finalised a deal with Doordarshan when it was approached by Zee for the exit polls. It was then decided to float C-Fore as a separate company to handle the Doordarshan contract."

The facts are contrary to this. Doordarshan floated the tenders for an exit poll only on January 25. The fact is that we have been doing surveys for different clients much prior to that. We have done pre-poll surveys for *Outlook* for the Assembly elections which were published in the last week of January and the first week of February. Even earlier one of our surveys on top Indian schools was published as *Outlook's* cover story on December 10 with C-Fore byline. Further we have a contract with *Outlook* for their weekly opinion poll called *Public Eye*. It appears every week with our byline. It's thus clear that the paper has been giving wrong information that the company has been formed only for "Doordarshan contract". The company has been in existence for a long time and has prominent persons like Dr Arjun Sengupta, Dr Vijay Kelkar and Mr Gopi Arora on its advisory board.

The story also says that CMS and C-Fore used the same survey and samples for exit poll. Nothing could be further from truth. We have a dedicated team of field staff working

company.

I would like to place the following facts for your consideration and publication in the newspaper. It is true that I am an engineer but the story fails to mention that I have also done a course on research methodology from FORE school of management as part of my MBA programme. Also, that I have 10 years of experience in the field of market research, election surveys and operations research, somewhat directly connected with estimation methodologies before launching C-Fore. I wish the reporter had contacted me so that there was no factual error. The propaganda is by the company that could not get the assignment from DD or Zee for whatever reasons.

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PREMCHAND PALITY  
Director, Centre for  
Forecasting and Advisory  
Research, New Delhi

#### SEEMA MUSTAFA REPLIES:

I stand by our report. There are well known links between C-Fore and CMS, well known to all in the business of psephology and telecasting. C-Fore has not been in existence for long, but was set up only about three months ago. It has tried to gain respectability by doing some polls for a magazine which was earlier using CMS. It stepped in for the Doordarshan contract after CMS decided to go with Zee News instead, and signed the agreement just about a day before the bid was to be closed. Until then the news in the market was that CMS had finalised the agreement, and this had kept other bidders away. As for qualifications to be a psephologist I think working in chocolate selling company do not exactly count experience.

18/2/2002