

Television found more credible by voters

N. Bhaskara Rao

Television is slowly but surely emerging as the primary source of information on politics and business and the media has higher credibility after the recent election, according to a Centre of Media Studies (CMS) survey.

Pre-poll and exit poll surveys on the eve of recent elections are viewed as a useful and essential part of the electoral process. That pre-poll surveys do influence voters, marginally or otherwise, comes out once again in this post-poll survey.

The survey was conducted among 100 voters each in Delhi and the states that had an assembly election last month. The respondents were chosen to match those who had been surveyed by CMS in earlier studies.

The CMS survey assessed media credibility in general and

then focused on newspapers and television.

Two-thirds of the voters now depend on TV as their primary source of information on politics and business or commerce.

Television has deprived newspapers of their agenda-setting role. It also brings out that TV viewership, in fact, is marginally increasing over newspaper readership, not reducing, as is popularly believed.

About one-third of those who thought that there was nothing wrong in media coverage of opinion polls, felt pre-poll surveys increase voters' knowledge and information about parties and issues. They also make voters realize the value of the vote and help crystallize campaign issues, they said. There are hardly any differences between the rural and urban populace in this regard.

Even when it comes to

media credibility, three-fourths of the respondents believed in television against less than 40 per cent who had faith in newspapers. Both television and newspapers were found more objective in their reporting of poll campaigns.

All India Radio and Doordarshan too have improved their credibility now, as compared to a similar survey done by the CMS two years ago. In fact, DD is considered better in terms of credibility than any private TV channel.

From being primarily an entertainment medium hitherto, TV in India is now competing with newspapers as a news source. Political uncertainties, frequent elections and economic turbulence have all been contributing to television's transformation as a news media.

Nearly 60 per cent of respondents have either read or

heard about pre-poll surveys conducted on the eve of the November 25, 1998 election. Of them nearly 40 per cent watched discussions on the exit poll on television against nearly 35 per cent who read about them in the newspapers.

The survey also revealed that more people know of pre-poll and exit poll surveys now than during the February 1998 general election.

A majority of those who have seen these surveys found them useful. However, respondents were divided on the influence of pre-poll surveys.

Only 15 per cent of the voters felt pre-poll and exit poll surveys should not be covered by the media and nearly a quarter of the respondents were not sure of the objectivity of these surveys. **■**

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Murdoch in trouble

A metropolitan magistrate in Delhi has declared Rupert Murdoch – the chief of News Corp. – a proclaimed offender in an obscenity case.

There have been a number of obscenity cases filed against the Star Movie channel, and the cases have been heard on many occasions in the absence of senior officials of the Star TV network. The magistrate holding the hearings has refused to exempt Murdoch from a personal appearance.

The result of the latest order is that Murdoch will not be able to enter India without a special permission. **■**

VSNL hires eight analog transponders

With the failure of the Insat 2D satellite at the end 1997 and the additional malfunctioning of the Insat 2A in March 1998, the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) had hastily moved the Insat 2A and Insat 2D users to transponders in other satellites – Insat 2B, Insat 2C and Arabsat. (see *Cable Waves* March 16-31, 1998).

Due to these ISRO failures, Videsh Sanchar Nigam Limited (VSNL) has been struggling to accommodate all its customers. It has now hired eight transponders from Intelsat, each with a capacity of carrying

two analog channels.

VSNL will be charging broadcasters \$900,000 per channel. This is nearly \$300,000 cheaper than other satellite providers, according to VSNL.

These analog transponders will now be used by eight Indian broadcasters – including Asianet, Sun, Udaya, Soorya among other South India based channels. With the addition of these transponders, VSNL now has 19 transponders for broadcasting under its belt.

These channels are currently considering digitization in the near future. VSNL has no plan for that yet. **■**

Chips for web TV

The market is gearing up for the expected demand for micro-processors that will power set-top instruments to access the internet through the television in India.

The set top instrument will arm a television with internet access facility. This facility will help cable operators enter the Internet Service Providers (ISP) market, which was opened to the private sector recently. The instruments will be imported and priced between Rs. 20,000 and Rs. 25,000. The manufacture or assembly of set top boxes in India awaits the Broadcasting Bill. **■**