

Adani's takeover of NDTV worries journalists

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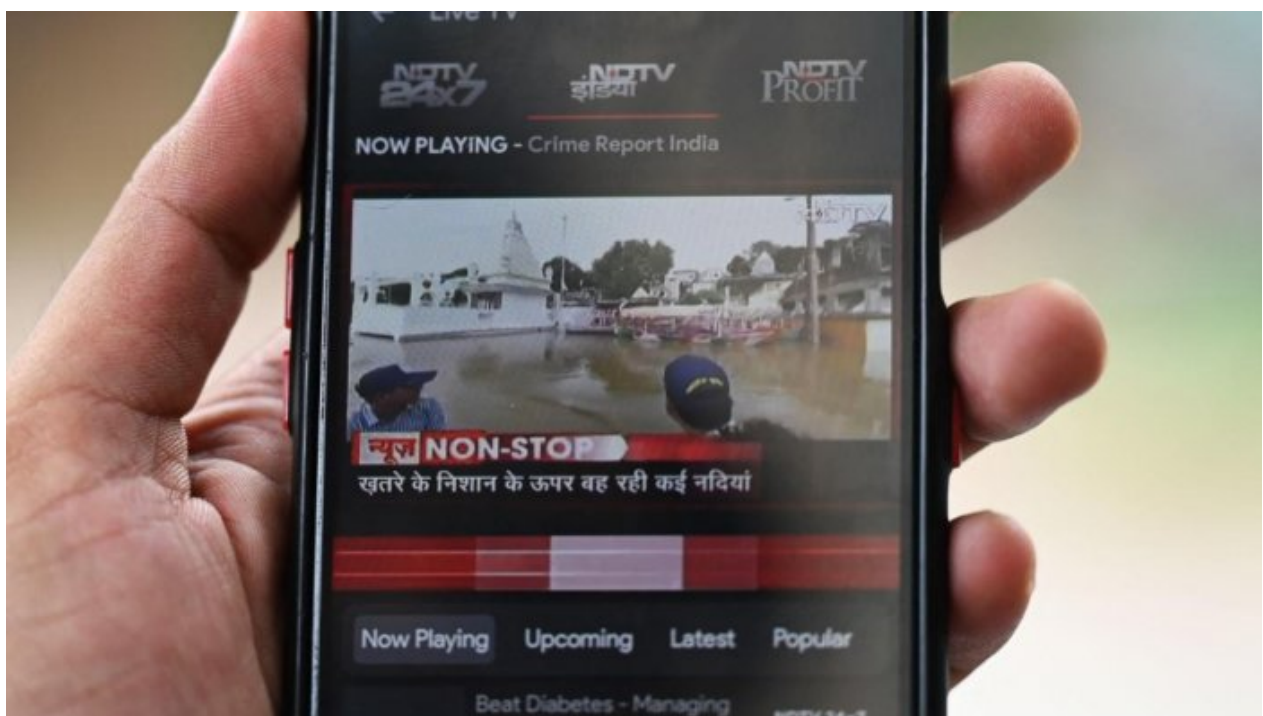
August 25, 2022

Adani Group said NDTV was 'the most suitable broadcast and digital platform to deliver on our vision'



Reuters, New Delhi,

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Representative image. Credit: AFP photo

For years, Indian television company *NDTV* pursued an independent line critical of the government even as others embraced strident nationalism. Now a proposed takeover by tycoon Gautam Adani's conglomerate has raised fears that one of the country's last bastions of free media is under threat.

NDTV is seeking to block the bid by Adani, who is India - and Asia's - richest man, citing regulatory restrictions related to what it called an "entirely unexpected" move .

NDTV, founded in 1988, blazed a trail for independent broadcasting in India as the country opened up to free market enterprise. Journalists in the country view Adani's play with trepidation.

"We all feel dejected," a current senior *NDTV* journalist, who declined to be named as employees are not authorised to speak on the issue, told *Reuters*.

"The main concern is our editorial independence which we think will be compromised" by the hostile takeover. *NDTV* runs one of India's most popular news websites along with channels in Hindi and English.

Read | Adani bid fought by NDTV amid concerns over press freedom

Adani Group said *NDTV* was "the most suitable broadcast and digital platform to deliver on our vision." A spokesperson for Adani did not respond to a request for comment on whether the channel's independence would be compromised by a takeover.

Also critical of the opposition Congress party when in power, the network has been at loggerheads with Modi and his brand of Hindu nationalist politics since long before he became prime minister.

After taking office in 2014, Modi cast the media as part of an out-of-touch elite and India fell in media freedom rankings. Outlets owned by industrial families have aligned themselves with the government, Reporters Without Borders said this year.

Adani has previously said he is not close to Modi. While his rapid ascent of the Forbes' rich list has taken place in tandem with Modi's political fortunes and both hail from the state of Gujarat, there is little evidence of strong links between the two men beyond the politician's use of Adani-owned private jets before he became prime minister.

Regardless, media observers say that ownership by corporate titans has had a negative effect on journalism in India.

Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries controls Network18, another of India's largest media houses.

"Media ownership for many corporates has been a way of creating favours so that other businesses can grow. That cross-ownership is a huge problem," said Hartosh Singh Bal, the political editor of the Caravan magazine, one of India's few remaining independent media publications.

"In terms of independence the other channels don't even come close. Not only is government's view propagated through them, but any counter-narrative, any fact challenging the government is dismissed, and I see that the same thing will happen."

Saba Naqvi, a veteran freelance journalist and visiting lecturer at India's Jindal School of Journalism and Communication, said *NDTV* was one of the few networks in India with the size and credibility to hold the government to account.

"It is the last influential outfit ready to take on the government," she said

"It's a crown jewel in the media landscape."

Owned by husband and wife team Prannoy Roy and Radhika Roy, *NDTV* has been criticised by Modi supporters for bias against him. Fans compare it favourably to other networks, where split-screen debates crowded with panelists regularly descend into chaos.

"It stands out as the one place you can occasionally get a sensible debate," Naqvi said.

The proposed takeover comes amid a worsening landscape for independent journalism in the county.

India fell to 150 out of 180 countries ranked in Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index this year, its lowest position ever.

The government rejects the group's conclusions, pointing to a lack of transparency and objectivity, and says it protects the rights of journalists in the country.

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Southwest monsoon likely to start withdrawing in first week of September: IMD

The normal date for withdrawal of the southwest monsoon is September 17



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The Southwest monsoon is likely to enter its withdrawal phase in the first week of September, nearly a fortnight ahead of the normal date, the weather office said on Thursday.

The normal date for withdrawal of the southwest monsoon is September 17. However, the actual withdrawal of the southwest monsoon usually happens either earlier or later given the dynamic nature of the weather systems.

"Conditions are likely to become favourable for the commencement of withdrawal of southwest monsoon from some parts of northwest India during the week beginning September 1," the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said in the extended range forecast released on Thursday.

Monsoon rains have been nine per cent above normal for the country as a whole, but states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Manipur have reported deficit rainfall of over 40 per cent of the long period average, leaving the farmers in a lurch.

Uttar Pradesh and Manipur have reported 44 per cent deficit rains each than the long period average, followed by Bihar (41 per cent), Delhi (28 per cent), Tripura and Jharkhand (26 per cent each).

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As of August 18, farmers had sown rice on 343.7 lakh hectares, which was 30.92 lakh hectares below last year and 53.36 lakh hectares below the normal sowing for the period under review.

The less coverage for area sown to rice has been reported from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana and Chhattisgarh, regions considered the rice bowl of the country.

The sowing of pulses, particularly arhar or tur, and groundnut too has declined due to the truant rains.

For the weather office, the monsoon season begins on June 1 and ends on September 30.

Last year, monsoon entered the withdrawal phase on October 6, a good 19 days after the normal date of September 17.

According to IMD data, the monsoon withdrawal started on September 28 in 2020, on October 9 in 2019, September 29 in 2018, September 27 in 2017 and September 15 in 2016.

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NEET-UG medical entrance results to be declared by September 7: NTA

About 95% attendance was recorded in the exam, which had received record 18.72 lakh applications this year



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The results of medical entrance exam NEET-UG, which saw the highest number of applications ever this year, will be announced by September 7, according to National Testing Agency (NTA) officials.

NTA will upload the provisional answer keys, scanned images of OMR answer sheet and recorded responses for NEET (UG) – 2022 on its website by August 30, they said.

"To facilitate the candidates, a scanned image of the OMR answer sheet will also be sent on the registered e-mail address given by the candidates at the time of submission of the online application form of NEET (UG) – 2022," according to a senior NTA official.

Candidates can apply for answer key and recorded response challenges from August 30 for a cost of Rs 200 for each answer key and Rs 200 for per question respectively.

About 95 per cent attendance was recorded in the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test, NEET (UG), which had received record 18.72 lakh applications this year.

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Breaching the 18-lakh mark, a total of 18,72,329 candidates had registered for the largest entrance exam in the country of which 10.64 lakh were female.

This was the first time that the number of registrations for the NEET medical entrance exam surpassed 18 lakh, a considerable increase of over 2.5 lakh from 2021.

Last year, the NEET-undergraduate exam was held on September 12, with over 95 per cent of the registered candidates appearing for it. Over 15.44 lakh candidates appeared for the exam, which was conducted at 3,858 centres. Of these, at least 8.70 lakh students had qualified.

NEET-UG is the qualifying entrance exam for admission to Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS), Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS), Bachelor of Ayurveda, Medicine and Surgery (BAMS), Bachelor of Siddha Medicine and Surgery (BSMS), Bachelor of Unani Medicine and Surgery (BUMS), and Bachelor of Homeopathic Medicine and Surgery (BHMS) and BSc (H) Nursing courses.

The exam was conducted at 3,570 centres in 497 cities, including 14 cities (Colombo, Kathmandu, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur, Singapore, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Muscat, Sharjah, Kuwait City, Doha, Manama, Riyadh, Lagos) outside India on July 17 in 'pen and paper' mode.

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A 42-year-old software engineer was arrested in Uttar Pradesh's Greater Noida on Thursday for creating a Twitter account in the name of President Draupadi Murmu's daughter, officials said.

The accused, who works with a leading multinational firm, had created the fake social media account in order to exert influence on his neighbour with whom he had a personal conflict, they said.

Accused Shailendra Shukla, who lives in the Chi Fi sector of Greater Noida, was held by officials of the Beta 2 police station from the local market, a police spokesperson said.

"The accused is a cyber criminal who was harassing people using a fake Twitter account in the name of President Murmu's daughter Itishree Murmu. He used this fake account to exert influence on a neighbour of his with whom he had a personal conflict," Beta 2 police station in-charge Anil Kumar said.

Three mobile phones, including the one used to operate the fake social media account, were seized from his possession during the arrest, he said.

Shukla has been booked under Indian Penal Code sections 504 (intentional insult to provoke breach of public peace) and 507 (criminal intimidation by anonymous communication), the official said.

He has also been charged under relevant provisions of the Information Technology Act, the official added.

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India on Thursday rejected China's objection to an Indo-US military exercise in Uttarakhand in October.

India's reaction came after China's defence ministry, referring to the planned exercise, said it was firmly opposed to any third party "meddling" in the border issue.

The 18th edition of the exercise "Yudh Abhyas" is scheduled to take place from October 14 to 31 in Uttarakhand's Auli.

"I do not understand the reference to third party interference. The India-US exercise is something completely different and I do not know what colour has been given that it is targeted there or it is violating any existing agreement," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said.

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His comments came when asked at a media briefing about the remarks on the exercise by a spokesperson of China's Ministry of National Defence (MND).

In his remarks, Senior Colonel Tan Kefei, also hoped that India will abide by the bilateral agreements not to hold military drills near the Line of Actual Control (LAC), the very pacts it has been accused of violating in eastern Ladakh leading to a prolonged standoff.

"The two sides should stick to the agreements (signed) in the past and obviously that did not happen," Bagchi said, in an apparent reference to China violating the agreements triggering the face-off in eastern Ladakh.

Indian and Chinese troops have been engaged in a standoff in a number of friction points in eastern Ladakh for over two years. The two sides carried out the disengagement process in several areas in the region as a result of high-level military talks.

India has been consistently maintaining that peace and tranquillity along the LAC were key for the overall development of the bilateral ties.

Asked about India's vote at the UN Security Council to allow Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to deliver a virtual address, Bagchi suggested it was not against Russia.

"My understanding is that we have not voted against anybody. It was a proposal to allow him to speak virtually and we supported it. I think it was the third occasion when he spoke virtually. There were two occasions in the past when he spoke virtually," Bagchi said.

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