



To,
Mr. Sitaraman Shankar,
Acting CEO, TPML,
Editor, Deccan Herald

CC: Mr B.S Arun, Deputy Editor

15 July 2021

Sub: Offensive Advertisement in DH Visual Connect on 15 July 2021

Dear Mr Shankar,

The Network of Women in Media, India (NWMI) is a country-wide network of media professionals working to promote media awareness and ethics, and work for gender equality and justice within the media and society.

It was with shock that we opened the Deccan Herald this morning to find on Pg 5 an extremely objectionable advertisement for DH Visual Connect for the purpose of winning vouchers on Amazon or a 43" LED TV. The visuals in the ad, the first of the memorial for the fallen soldiers who fought in the battle of Bhima Koregaon; the second of Advocate Sudha Bharadwaj, an accused in the 'Bhima Koregaon case'; and the third the logo of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) encourage the readers of your esteemed paper to literally make connections that do not exist.

The tag line 'Connect to a person who recently passed away' read in conjunction with the visuals, is a clear reference to recently deceased Fr Stan Swamy, the octogenarian Jesuit priest who worked with adivasis in Jharkhand. Fr. Stan Swamy died in detention under tragic circumstances amid wilful delays and denial of bail on medical grounds, long awaiting trial under the draconian Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act where charges have not even been framed, leave aside proven. To invoke his name for a frivolous contest, so soon after his death, is disrespect to his memory and to those who are fighting to bring justice to him and others like him who have been wrongfully incarcerated in the 'Bhima Koregaon case'.

Likewise, linking Sudha Bharadwaj, who has spent decades working for the human rights of adivasis as well as for journalists killed and attacked on duty in Chhattisgarh, with the other two visuals amounts to defamation, a media trial and verdict of guilty with no evidence whatsoever. She has stressed repeatedly that neither did she have anything to do with Bhima Koregaon, nor is she a member of any political party. The imputed connections between the visuals are false, unsubstantiated and based on unverified allegations of the State. The trial has not yet commenced, charges have not yet been framed, hence the court has not done even a prima facie scrutiny of the state's allegations. In fact, digital forensics have strongly challenged the authenticity of the material on which this case rests and the same is pending before the High Court.

The *Deccan Herald* has built up a reputation for its ethical and in-depth reportage and editorials. We believe that an ad such as this controversial one, can have the effect of

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A forum for women in media professions to share information and resources, exchange ideas, promote media awareness and ethics, and work for gender equality and justice within the media and society.



shaping public opinion in a manner contrary to the balanced editorial stand of the newspaper.

Instead of providing the so-called 'correct answer' in the designated space in tomorrow's newspaper, an apology and retraction would send a strong signal of the high traditions to which your esteemed newspaper adheres and to which its readers look forward.

Thanking you,

Sincerely,

The Network of Women in Media, India

Signed:

Ammu Joseph
Ankita Anand
Aparna Vedapuri Singh
Ayswarya Murthy
Geeta Seshu
Gita Aravamudan
Jyoti Punwani
Kalpana Sharma
Kamayani Bali Mahabal
Laxmi Murthy
Nandita Kaikini
Padmalatha Ravi
Prachi Pinglay

Preeti Edakunny
Rajashri Dasgupta
Ranjona Banerji
Revathi Siva Kumar
Riddhi Dastidar
Rina Mukherji
Riti Mandhyam
Rupa Mehta
Sameera Khan
Shahina KK
Sharda Ugra
Sreya Urs