

The growing role of the modern means of



The recent advances in the field of science and technology have led to an entirely new kind of dispensation which is going to change relations among nations and peoples. The information revolution has also brought about unprecedented transformations, changing the very social, cultural, economic and political fabric of the world.

Revolution in science and technology and the intensifying struggle on major international issues have brought about a colossal increase in the role played by the information media in international relations. The intensifying ideological struggle throughout the world reflects the rapidly growing role of the modern means of communication which have become key instruments of ideological manipulation in the new era. All political streams, all groups of states, individual countries and their organised forces are busy mobilising their resources to expand and improve the information systems at their disposal. It is hardly surprising that, with the increase in international news flow, we find the world population covered by a blanket of propaganda. There is positive correlation between the total mass media content and the total propaganda outpouring. Even a casual observer of the media cannot fail to notice that man's mind is being subjected to a ceaseless and clever bombardment of messages.

These messages are calculated to influence and control. Information is treated as a weapon of low-intensity warfare—people's perception of a situation derives man from the conscious and the rational to the irrational and the obscure. Never before in history have the basic educational and cultural needs of humanity been so widely appreciated. But while the

resources to satisfy these requirements are physically available, they are directed to other ends.

A small group of transnational and mostly American companies control approximately 80 per cent of the dailies of industrial and developing capitalist countries as well as 90 per cent of radio and 95 per cent of television stations. On a global scale, the USA controls 60 per cent of the international market of television programmes while American television broadcasts only one per cent of foreign programmes. The four largest Western news agencies—UPI, AP, Reuters and Agence France-Presse—supply news to 140 countries of the world, totaling more than 50 million words a day. They control over 90 per cent of international news flow.

The contents of their coverage project a Western vision of the world. Data concerning the scale of the United States' ideological expansion into foreign countries are in sharp contrast to the figures of the import of cultural products and information from abroad by the United States itself. According to available data, not more than 3 per cent of the information disseminated inside that country is derived from foreign sources. An analysis of the news items which Western radio stations and news agencies send to the developing countries today shows that 65 per cent of the information is related to the USA and only 8-10 per cent is devoted to the developing countries. What is more, the coverage given to the developing countries is largely determined by its impact on the political and economic interests of the West.

The information about these states is generally sensational and scandalous and often prejudicial to the interests of the developing countries. At the same time, there is hardly anything relating to economic and social problems. The advance in communication has created an entirely new situation where it is not so much the consumers as the producers who decide what the market “ requirements” can be created by distorting priorities of a society. The issue as to who decides research and development policies and priorities has to be critically questioned and analysed—who decides, for what, for whom, on whose terms, on what basis, with what principles and with what effects? A lot is being said and written about the so-called information society into which some of the highly developed countries are poised to enter. The main feature of the transition is the increased relevance of resource called information. In information society this resource is basic to all processes. The processing of information is seen to be major contributing factor to the economic developments of societies.

The “ information society”, as the name suggests, can at least if not at best be expected to keep citizens better informed. What is actually happening is a rapid growth of misinformation and disinformation. Witness Donna Demac’s book *Keeping America Uniformed* or Henry Porter’s *Lies Damned Lies*.

The powerful resource—information— is controlled by and managed by the same world system which is unjust and unfair. The key questions here are: What is the image of other countries and regions as received through the news and what other factors shape the quality and quantity of flow? The mainstream of news is “ hard news” oriented: politics and catastrophies get more attention than culture or social processes, “ elite countries” and “ elite

personalities” are better covered than non-elites. The uniformity of results is partly a reflection of the uniform methods used. But there is no reason to doubt the main line of the results. What is surprising is that the uniform results have not encouraged researchers to study more the concepts of news and news criteria as such. The terms on which news selection is made are developed by the dominant news transmission structures. What is less apparent, though no less real, are negative characteristics of the media imagery that is being introduced in poorer communities across the globe. Whereas public service broadcasting is hardly visible, a tidal wave of commercial material is flowing over the earth.

Everywhere local culture is facing submersion from the mass produced outpouring of commercial broadcasting. Television in the United States is tailored almost exclusively to fit the market needs of consumer goods producers who sponsor and finance the programming. The programme material is assigned especially to secure and hold mass audience in thrall to the delight of consumerdom. The basic role of the media is to inform and develop understanding of other nation’s political, economic and social systems, their histories, their leadership and simply what their people are like.

Preferably, this understanding should be as accurate and complete as possible. But the images of people and nations as projected by the dominant Western media are quite contrary. Their coverage of the Third World countries is generally confined to coups, disasters and wars. Against this background, it has become very important that one sees beyond the information images the media has created. In most of the cases, these

images are a distortion of reality. In a historical process, news values and selection norms are shaped to cater to news market needs as they are perceived by the dominant media. The communication revolution has led to a situation in which a person may be over-informed about certain subjects who do not conform to his information needs and at the same time, he is kept in the dark about a number of other issues on which he requires to be informed.

The biggest challenge is to evaluate images created by media and consequently chalk out a strategy to change these images by creating alternative information packages.