

CHAPTER VI

NON-VERIFICATION OF NEWS : PRINCIPLES

The following principles emerge out of the cases decided by the Press Council with regard to non-verification of news :

1. Verification and checking of news before publication is necessary, particularly where giving out news and expressing views could create complications like incitement of communal passions in a state at a time when communal tension is prevailing there.¹
2. When the news is of a slanderous nature, the editor is required to ensure its veracity. A vague defence that the correspondent got the information from a source close to the institution about which the news pertains is not enough.²
3. In relation to publication of false or distorted news or stories or versions, received from its accredited correspondent, a strict view ought not to be taken, if on finding it to be not truthful, the newspaper publishes an unequivocal contradiction, as the newspaper had made whatever amends it could. While it is difficult for editors to verify the veracity of every story, errors should be avoided by newspapers and in the event of their occurrence, regret must be openly expressed. In considering the matter the following factors are relevant for the Council in not taking action against a newspaper; that action has been taken against the concerned correspondent; and that criminal proceedings launched against the newspaper have been withdrawn.³
4. The editor is entitled to rely on respectable informers and correspondents and cannot be held to be retrospectively guilty of a breach of journalistic ethics where on account of subsequent investigations by a Commission of Inquiry, the facts turn out to be incorrect. The primary consideration "is the state of affairs at the time of the publication of the article", and in respect of a matter of public concern, the editor does not contravene journalistic ethics, if at the time of publication the truth of the story is backed by sufficient materials.⁴
5. Publication of a news-item on the ground of its representing a cross-section of public opinion, which merely signifies a rumour

1. Case of *Dainik Asom*, April 1982 P.C.I. Rev. 58.

2. Case of *Hindu*, 1973 Ann. Rep. 49.

3. Case of *Sunday Standard*, 1981 Ann. Rep. 160.

4. Case of *Ranaberi*, 1969 Ann. Rep. 47.

- circulated by some people, is unjustified. The editor should publish news of this sort only after proper scrutiny. The plea that the news-item has not been distorted cannot be sustained, if it is found to be the only newspaper carrying such a news-item.⁵
6. A newspaper report may be justified even though it is alleged that it was unfounded in the following circumstances : It has appeared in several other newspapers without any contradiction by the government, the newspaper concerned has published a press note issued by the government on the subject and simultaneously carried an editorial which purported to be a reply to it.⁶
 7. Newspapers have the right of publishing statements by responsible leaders of political parties at press conferences as well as public statements made by recognised leaders even though they are of a damaging nature. In such circumstances, journalistic propriety does not demand of editors an independent investigation into the truth of the matter. This is an extension of the principle that it is quite proper to report a press statement on behalf of members of government or the ruling party without any scrutiny.⁷
 8. Though the editor has the right to publish speeches delivered at a meeting, it is not in good taste to overplay one of the sentences in a speech, place it in the form of banner headlines on the front page, thereby creating a misleading impression.⁸

5. Case of *Navasakthi*, 1973 Ann. Rep. 90.

6. Case of *Statesman*, 1971 Ann. Rep. 16.

7. Case of *Dinamalar*, 1973 Ann. Rep. 88; case of *Nathigam, etc.*, 1973 Ann. Rep. 91.

8. Case of *Maratha*, 1971 Ann. Rep. 50.