

distrustful of the performance or the attitude of the press, more so of the electronic media. One highly reliable study found that three-fourths of all adults have some problem with the credibility of the media and one-fifth of them deeply distrust the news media. "Many people feel that the press is a self-serving, powerful and frightening institution", it said.

A study showed that 57 per cent of the newspaper readers "do not believe that newspapers in general are usually fair." Also, 42 per cent of them feel their own newspapers attempt to manipulate them and 53 per cent think that the press is too easily manipulated by others.

Things have since become worse. After a more recent survey a senior editor Bob Evan has said, "Real people hate us, and we can't stand to be hated". I think it is a serious warning for journalists everywhere as, thanks to the universal march of the dubious Murdochian values, similar trends are fast engulfing the media in all parts of the world.

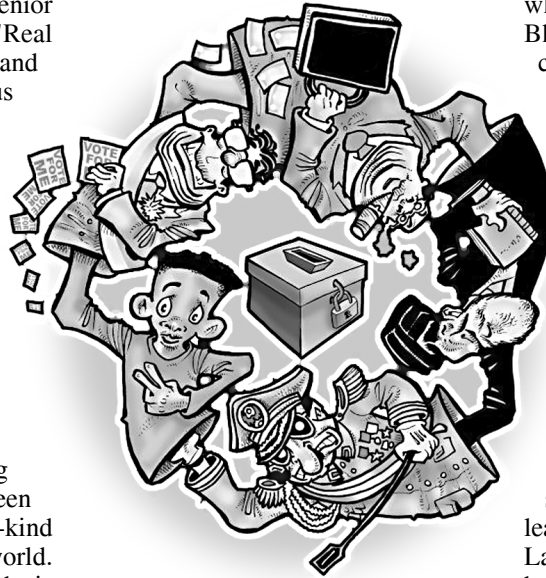
In his well-researched article "The Age of Murdoch", James Fallows has described media Moghul Rupert Murdoch as "a power-mad, rapacious right-wing vulgarian, who has indeed been relentless in building a one-of-kind media network that spans the world. "What really drives him, though, is not ideology but a cool concern for the bottom line and the belief that the media should be treated like any other business, not as a semi-sacred public trust....Rupert Murdoch has seen the future and it is him," says Fallow.

Murdoch is usually happy with whichever show on his *Fox TV* or headline in the *New York Post* or topless Page 3 model in *The Sun* draws a big audience, he adds. Andrew Heyward, a former head of the *CBS News* said, "Murdoch has been shameless about using his journalism for the advancement of

his business interests."

What saddens here is the awful spectacle of a growing number of newspapers and media channels throughout the world adopting Murdoch and his not too honourable operations as a role model. This is already getting so very widely reflected in all media-newspapers, magazines, Web portals and electronic news channels. Much against the time-honoured ideal of public service which the press had cherished and nurtured throughout its history, crass commercialism and naked pursuit of bottom lines is its watchword today.

The communication function of



the press is being unashamedly subordinated to its profit-making practices. Gandhiji had, perhaps, foreseen this situation long time ago when he observed: "When a newspaper is treated as a means of making profits, the result is likely to be serious malpractices."

While it must be accepted that no media can survive and remain independent without being economically viable, crass commercialism and consumerism cannot be allowed to be the order of the day, as it is so very evident today. With the truly independent editor

becoming a rare species, the scenario in regard to a virtuous press is getting bleaker by the day.

Wanton intrusion by the commercial interests in the newsroom decisions is no longer a guarded secret. Newspaper owners, brand managers and advertising executives often participate in and even direct coverage and display of news and comments. Cases of such glaring lack of professionalism and illegality have been taken to the Press Council in India which has unreservedly condemned these practices.

Increasing public resentment against the performance of the Indian electronic media can be seen from what a concerned citizen Prof. Bhoomitra Dev, a former Vice-chancellor of three Indian universities, so painfully wrote in a leading English newspaper a couple of years ago, Prof. Dev said: 'A neat comparison can be made between a deft surgery and some of the electronic media presentations, particularly covering a programme. While a good surgeon chooses a minimal incision, a channel may show the worst to grab maximal viewer-attention. While the first quickly stitches the wound, the latter may leave it open and forever 'unstitched.' Lastly, a surgeon strives for quick healing of the wounds, while an electronic media may leave several festering sores for the social agony.'

Prof. Dev's description cannot and must not be swept under the carpet as the opinion of a single individual. It is for everyone to see how large sections of the media are giving a go-by to the age-old values of the news. Truth is treated as expendable. Facts are not always considered sacred. Comments can be wholly unfounded, provocative or downright irresponsible.

While traditional norms of media ethics must remain eternally relevant, it must face the news