

June 2024

**BREACHES OF ABC EDITORIAL STANDARDS IN “SPIES, SECRETS AND THREATS:
HOW THE MODI REGIME TARGETS PEOPLE OVERSEAS” FOUR CORNERS, 17 JUNE
2024**

ABC Editorial Policies

The ABC’s Editorial Policies provide relevantly:

Accuracy

Standards

2.1 Make reasonable efforts to ensure that material facts are accurate and presented in context.

2.2 Do not present factual content in a way that will materially mislead the audience. In some cases, this may require appropriate labels or other explanatory information.

Issued: 11 April 2011, Revised: 25 September 2014

Impartiality and diversity of perspectives

Standards

4.1 Gather and present news and information with due impartiality.

4.2 Present a diversity of perspectives within a reasonable timeframe, aiming to reach a similar audience, so that no significant strand of thought or belief within the community is knowingly excluded or disproportionately represented.

4.3 Take care in the presentation of analysis and commentary. Do not present them as the editorial opinion of the ABC.

4.4 Do not misrepresent any perspective.

4.5 Do not unduly favour one perspective over another.

Issued: 11 April 2011, Revised: 13 December 2023

Spies, secrets and threats: How the Modi regime targets people overseas, Four Corners, 17 June 2024: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mg78a0yXzFI&t=1403s>

The story is replete with inaccuracies, bias and misinformation; and in breach of ABC standards. Here are some examples:

1. This is a story about the journalist (Avani Dias), rather than a story about India. The story starts with, and large chunks of the story are, from the perspective of the “victim” Dias, rather than about the subject-matter of the story. Dias’s subjective opinions about her “victimisation” are interspersed with other content all with the intent of inviting the viewer to form a negative view of Modi, Hindus, Hindu organisations and the BJP. This contravenes standards 4.1, 4.3 and 4.5.
2. The RSS is described as a far Right paramilitary Hindu nationalist organisation, inspired by Nazism and Fascism. Some basic research would have revealed that the

RSS is no such thing (See for example: <https://www.rss.org/>; Sharda Ratan, *RSS 360°- Demystifying Rashtriya Syamasevak Sangh*, Bloomsbury 2007). There is no evidence that the RSS operates as a paramilitary organisation. Anyone with even a basic understanding of India would be aware that India is a democratic state governed by the rule of law which does not permit paramilitary organisations to operate. This description contravenes standards 2.1 and 2.2.

3. The story claims that the RSS rejects secular India and wants it to be a Hindu state. There is no evidentiary basis for this assertion. Refer to the RSS constitution (<https://archive.org/details/the-constitution-of-rashtriya-swayamsevak-sangh/page/111/mode/2up>) and <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/rss-believes-in-constitution-and-doesnt-want-any-other-power-center-says-mohan-bhagwat-6224336/>. This assertion contravenes standards 2.1, 2.2, 4.1, 4.2, 4.4 and 4.5.
4. The story claims that a RSS Founder - MS Gowalkar said that Muslims were a threat to India. However, even a cursory reading of Gowalkar's work would reveal that this was not representative of his views:

"....Hindu philosophy and systems of living one's life have been present in this country, when Islamic and Christian communities did not even exist in this world. One may ask then, how can Hindu mean to be anti-Muslim? Similarly, Sikh and Jain sects etc. come within the purview of Hindu. If one were to think about opposing them when one speaks of 'Hindu', it would be akin to cutting one's own limbs. Then, how is Hindu against them? All these are falsehoods. 'Hindu' is not against anybody. This is a completely emotional thought, not against anybody at all"

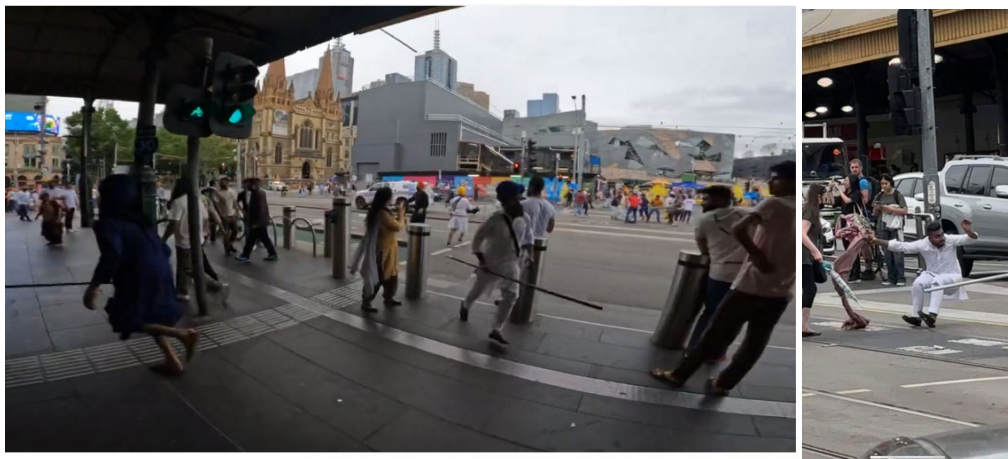
[Quote from Gowalkar extracted in RSS 360°]

5. The story shows *dandas* (sticks) being used by HSS children in their shakas. Visuals are then shown of *dandas* allegedly being used by Hindus against Muslims in India. There is absolutely no connection between the HSS shakas in Australia and Hindu-Muslims fights in India. The two images have been deliberately and subtly used to plant in the mind of the viewer a narrative that children training with *dandas* at HSS camps will use *dandas* to attack Muslims. This breaches standards 2.1, 2.2, 4.1 and 4.4.
6. Further, the story deliberately and subtly shows visuals of a riot allegedly instigated by Hindus. It fails to mention the numerous occasions when riots have been instigated by Muslims against Hindus. (<https://www.opindia.com/2022/04/list-of-attacks-carried-out-by-islamists-against-hindu-processions/>) It is consistent with the entire narrative of the story of Muslims (and Sikhs) being victims and Hindus being the perpetrators. This breaches standards 2.1, 2.2, 4.1, 4.4 and 4.5.

7. The story shows visuals of a random incident of Indian police action against protestors. This is part of a deliberate but subtle narrative to paint the Modi government as authoritarian and intolerant of dissent. The story conveniently omits to mention the long rope given to both lawful and unlawful protests in India, such as the anti-CAA protests (2019-2020) and the Farmers protests (2020-2021). See for example: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/caa-rules-notified-a-timeline-of-events-101710170195496.html>; <https://www.opindia.com/2021/11/the-sudden-repeal-of-farm-laws-lessons-govt-should-learn-narendra-modi/>. This breaches standards 2.1, 2.2, 4.1, 4.2, 4.4 and 4.5.
8. The story claims that Modi pushes for “Hindu supremacy.” There is no evidentiary basis for this assertion. No “Hindu supremacy” or favourable treatment of Hindus can be found in the BJP’s election manifesto: <https://www.bjp.org/bjp-manifesto-2024>. This breaches standards 2.1, 2.2, 4.1, 4.2, 4.4 and 4.5.
9. Visuals of the alleged demolition of the home of a Muslim family are shown in the story. There is no evidence that the home was demolished because its owner was a Muslim. Hundreds of homes of Hindus have been demolished for various reasons, such as illegal encroachment or for infrastructure development. See for example: <https://swarajyamag.com/politics/after-jodhpur-pakistani-hindu-camp-demolished-in-jaisalmer-women-lathi-charged-children-left-without-water>. This breaches standards 2.1, 2.2, 4.1, 4.2, 4.4 and 4.5.
10. Australia based academic - Priya Chako is given considerable time in the story to convey her virulent anti-RSS and anti-Modi views. However, the views of persons having a different perspective about the RSS or Modi have not been given the same space. This breaches standards 4.1, 4.2, 4.4 and 4.5.
11. The story gives considerable air time to a disgruntled former HSS member - Arjun Nidigallu to present negative views about HSS. Despite showing that there are large numbers of HSS members attending camps in Australia, the programme fails to give similar time for the expression of the views of persons who may have alternate views about HSS. This breaches standards 4.1, 4.2, 4.4 and 4.5.
12. An entire segment was devoted to what can only be described as propaganda for the Khalistan movement; laced with misinformation. It subtly, but deliberately, portrays Sikhs as victims. This includes:
 - a) It is asserted that Sikhs For Justice are calling for Punjab to break away from India and become a separate state of Khalistan. This is factually incorrect. The demand of Khalistanis is for large chunks of India to become Khalistan. See map below:



- b) It omits to mention that hatred of Hindus lies at the heart of the Khalistan movement. See for example: <https://www.hinduamerican.org/issues/khalistan>
- c) The story sympathetically portrays Melbourne Khalistani - Harjinder Singh as a peaceful, scared family man. Remarkably, he is not questioned about the attack by his own group on Hindus at the Melbourne Khalistan 'Referendum' in 2023 or the multiple attacks by Khalistanis on Hindu temples in Melbourne and elsewhere. See sample photos and links below:



<https://twitter.com/austhindu/status/1628275546064039941?s=20>

<https://twitter.com/austhindu/status/1624597352114950144?s=20>

<https://twitter.com/MargeshRaval/status/1624377586242691072?s=20>

<https://www.opindia.com/2023/01/australia-indians-drive-out-khalistan-supporters-in-melbourne/>;

<https://www.australianhindu.com/another-sword-attack-by-khalistanis-in-australia/>

- d) Dias repeats the unsupported Canadian claim that Khalistani sympathiser and “plumber” - Hardip Nijjar (see photo below) was assassinated by the Indian government. She makes no mention of:
 - i) The fact that it has also been alleged that the real reason Nijjar was killed was because of rivalry between Canadian crime figures;

- ii) Nijjar being accused of being the leader of the pro-Khalistan militant group Khalistan Tiger Force;
- iii) The fact that two Interpol red corner notices were issued against Nijjar at the Indian government's request;
- iv) The fact that three Sikh men have been charged with the murder of Nijjar and that no evidence has been found linking them to the Indian government: <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/canadian-police-have-made-arrests-case-killing-sikh-leader-nijjar-says-cbc-2024-05-03/>;
- v) Why a plumber needed to carry a gun.



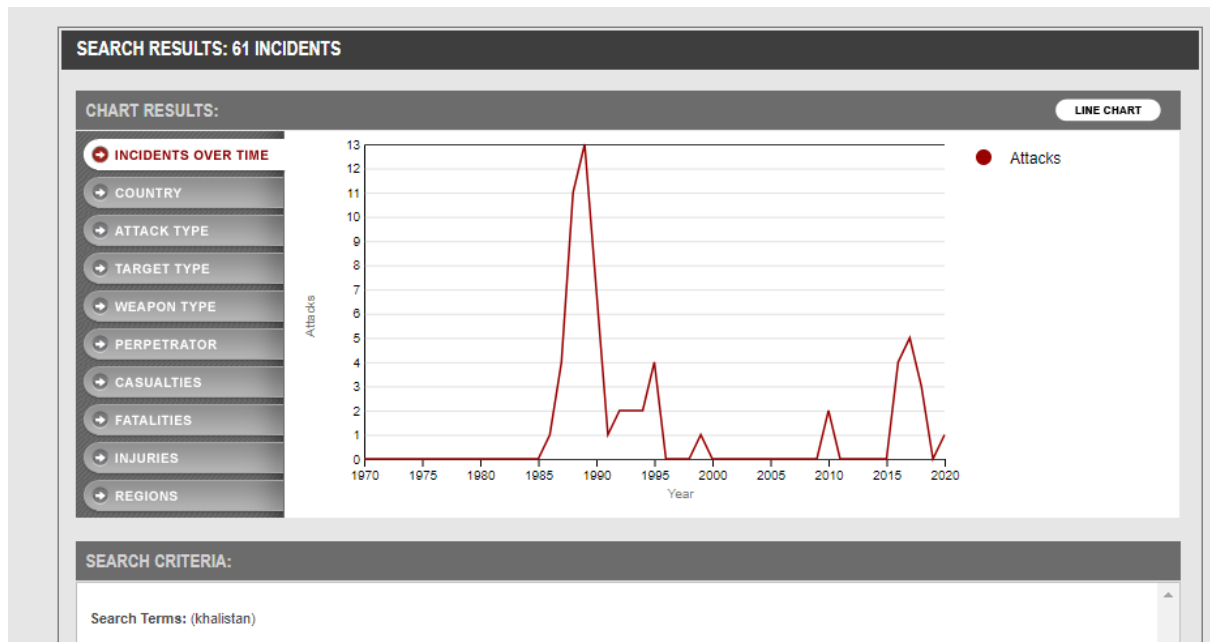
- e) Dias fawns over “close friend” of Nijjar – Maninder Singh. Remarkably, she does not press Singh about the serious allegations against Nijjar or question the Australian authorities as to how a person with such connections is freely entering Australia.
- f) Dias describes Gurpatwant Pannun as a “leader” of Sikhs For Justice. She glosses over some significant facts, such as:

- i) Pannun has been engaging in a vicious campaign of threats and intimidation against Indian diplomats;

- ii) On 8 January 2022, the Indian Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Tribunal (an independent Tribunal), after hearing evidence and submissions from all parties, confirmed the Indian government’s decision declaring Sikhs For Justice as an ‘unlawful association’. I set out below an extract from that judgement:

86. From the aforesaid discussion it is clear that the unlawful activities of the respondent Association are disruptive in character and threaten the sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of India. The evidence brought on record also proves that the respondent Association is working in collusion with anti-India entities and forces to fulfill their objectives by indulging in unlawful activities. Thus, the Central Government had ‘sufficient cause’ to take action under Section 3(1) and 3(3) of the Act for declaring Sikhs For Justice as an ‘unlawful association’. The Notification dated 10th July, 2019 issued by the Union of India under sub-sections (1) and (3) of Section 3 of the Act declaring Sikhs For Justice (SFJ) to be an ‘unlawful association’ is hereby confirmed. The reference is answered in the affirmative.

- g) The Global Terrorism Database lists 61 terrorist attacks under “Khalistan” (<https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?search=khalistan&sa.x=25&sa.y=7>)



- h) Dias appears to justify the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards because they were “incensed” with the storming of the Golden Temple.
 - i) The story claims that thousands of Sikhs were killed in reprisal for Gandhi’s assassination.
 - j) It conveniently omits undisputed evidence that the Khalistani terrorist – Jarnail Bhindranwale had been responsible for killing over 20,000 Indians, had been involved in a spate of crimes including kidnappings and rapes and had converted the Golden Temple into a fortress and hive of criminal activity.
13. Given the above, the programme’s coverage of the Khalistan issue breaches standards 2.1, 2.2, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5.
 14. The programme gives considerable prominence to the views of a disgruntled former BJP supporter - Yadu Singh. The story does not give similar prominence to anyone with a different perspective to that of Singh. Further, it is drawing a long bow indeed to market a medical professional as a “community leader. This breaches standards 4.1, 4.2, and 4.5
 15. The story gives substantial time to a known anti-Hindu and anti-Modi (and pro-Pakistani) Australian Greens politician David Shoebridge. No alternative political voice is given this kind of air time. This breaches standards 4.1, 4.2, and 4.5.
 16. The choice interviewing and giving prominence to the likes of Shoebridge, Yadu Singh, Chako, Nidigallu, Harjinder Singh and Moninder Singh was no coincidence. The makers of the story well knew that these individuals would say things in support of the narrative that they wanted to push.
 17. Further useful information about the bias of Dias and of the story can be found here: <https://www.opindia.com/2024/06/abc-news-avani-dias-peddles-khalistani-propaganda-tarnish-india-australia-ties-extra-territorial-assassination-lies-exposed/>.
 18. Program starts with Avani stating Over 600 million people about to vote in India for their Prime Minister.–

Official eligible voter count in 2024 elections as per Election Commission Website <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2005189> is over 960 million voters, much higher than what’s aired in the program

Avani appears to be influenced by the presidential election in the United States of America scheduled later in 2024. Unlike the USA, in India the leader of the country is not directly elected by voters.

India has a parliamentary system where voters vote Member of the parliament (MP) for their constituency and MPs elect their leader. The elected leader of the largest political party or political alliance with minimum 50-percent support in the Lok Sabha i.e. 272+ MPs is then invited to form the government. Article 75 of the Indian Constitution mentions that a Prime Minister is one who is appointed by the President.