

# BRAZEN INTIMIDATION: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON THE TAX SURVEY ON THE BBC

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February 16, 2023 12:20 am | Updated 12:20 am IST

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It is difficult not to see the [Income Tax \(I-T\) department's two-day survey of the BBC's offices](#) in New Delhi and Mumbai as an attempt to produce a chilling effect on Britain's well regarded public broadcaster and also media institutions willing to hold the current regime to account for past actions. The survey's officials said they were investigating charges related to "transfer pricing" and "diversion of profits". However, the fact that the action came in the wake of the release of [the two-part documentary, India: the Modi Question](#), raises significant questions. That journalists were also subjected to what is essentially an accounting/financial survey can only be interpreted as an act of intimidation of media personnel. Besides, this also follows actions by the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, which had, not too long ago, issued overzealous [orders to online media platforms to disable links](#) to the first part of the documentary by invoking emergency powers under the IT Rules, 2021 and Section 69A of the IT Act, 2000, and later blocking tweets with links to it. The reactions by BJP spokespersons — one called the BBC a "corrupt" corporation — only adds to the impression that this is an effort at de-legitimising the work done by critical media outlets. The survey of the BBC is not an exception if similar exercises in the past are considered: [at the digital news organisation Newsland](#) in 2021, the [CBI's raid of NDTV](#) in 2017, and the Enforcement Directorate's [searches of digital portal NewsClick](#) and I-T searches of the Dainik Bhaskar group, both in 2021. Last year, the digital media-funding Independent and Public-Spirited Media Foundation and the think tank, Centre for Policy Research, [had such "surveys"](#). The unmistakable and common link is that the media organisations have published content critical of the Union government.

India's claim as a developing nation and a growing economy in a globalised world is that it is a flourishing democracy with constitutionally guaranteed institutional freedoms and separation of powers and is unlike authoritarian regimes that have promoted economic prosperity but do not play by institutional rules and values. Core to this is the idea of the freedom of the press in holding those in power to account. Even if media organisations raise uncomfortable questions, the response has to be factual, reasonable and measured. The reaction to the BBC's documentary has been anything but that. In trying to block access to the documentary, the government came across as ham-fisted and now, with this survey at the BBC offices, it comes across as intimidating. This does not augur well for India's global image, but worse, it is a clear threat to existing freedoms of the country's citizens.

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