

# ht think!

# REFLECTIONS

chanakya



## SMART POLICING CAN TACKLE RUMOUR MILLS

Which is the best-known newspaper in the country? stand-up comedian and social-satirist Sanjay Rajoura of Aisi Taisi Democracy (ATD) asked the audience at Kamani Auditorium during a recent sell-out show. The audience laughed lightly, expecting a bazooka of an answer from the three-member ATD team. "You don't know!" Rajoura challenged us again. And added in the same breath: "It's WhatsApp!"

A roar of laughter swept through the auditorium. The ATD team went on to give examples of the kind of 'news' that goes viral on messaging and social media platforms. While some were hilarious, others were capable of inciting trouble. This increasing popularity of messaging and social media platforms is a double-edged sword. While on one hand, these platforms work wonderfully as positive pressure groups, on the other, unverified news that travels seamlessly through its sinews has led to violence on the web (trolling) and on the streets.

Recently, seven men were lynched by a mob in Jharkhand on the suspicion that they were child kidnappers. The message, written in Hindi and circulated on WhatsApp, said: "Suspected child lifters are carrying sedatives, injections, spray, cotton and small towels. They speak Hindi, Bangla and Malayali. If you happen

to see any stranger near your house immediately inform local police as he could be a member of the child lifting gang". This news — rather this rumour — provoked villagers of three districts to take the law into own hands.

This is not the first time that rumours masquerading as news have led to such a heinous reaction. Even the humble, old world SMS has a history of creating law and order problems. In 2012, scores of people from the Northeast fled the technology hub of Bangalore, driven by online rumour-mongering of violence against them, without a single incident being reported in the city. Then in 2013, a video clip showing a Muslim mob lynching two boys led to riots in Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh. The video was later found to be fake — it showed an incident in Pakistan — but the riots that resulted killed over 60 people and displaced 50,000.

In many cases, the State's reaction to such social media-influenced violence has been blanket bans on these popular platforms. But such actions are useless. Look at Kashmir. Every time there is violence in the Valley, the first reaction of the state government has been to clampdown on social media. Yet, people find out ways to circumvent such bans, thanks to virtual private networks (VPNs). A recent story in Hindustan Times said despite the ban on Internet in the state, the who's who of Kashmir were continuing to post on Facebook and Twitter. Besides, by banning social media the State

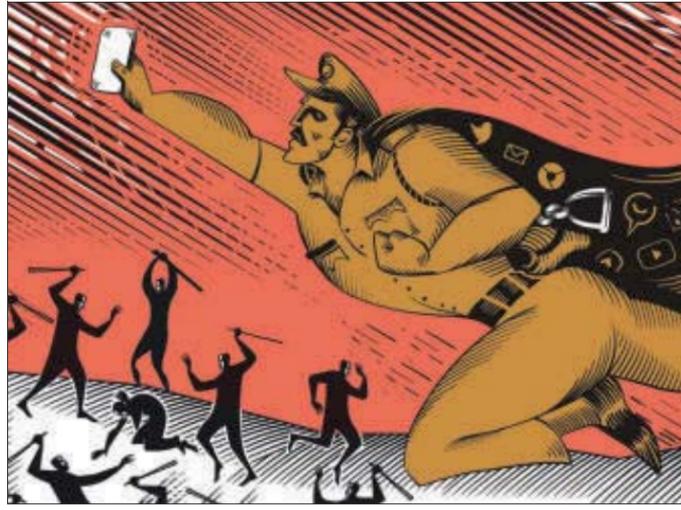


Illustration: MOHIT SUNEJA

is also blocking a channel of quick communication with the people for itself.

What passes as social media 'news' is many a time are actually rumours. The technology-based medium can be new but this social phenomenon of rumour being taken as truth is hardly new. In 'Rumors That Changed the World: A History of Violence and Discrimination' Eugen O. Chirovici, member of the Romanian Academy of Sciences, writes in antiquity, the Romans and Greeks believed that the gates of Hell were to be found on Cape Tenara, and Europeans of the Middle Ages were convinced that the entrance to the underworld was via the yawning crater of Mount Etna in Sicily and when the first travellers returned from the New World, they tried to convince their contemporaries that the natives they had seen

there had eyes in their chests or walked around holding their heads under their arms. "For reasons that still puzzle scientists, the human psychological world still includes what is known as magical thinking, and this type of thought is the perfect ecosystem in which rumours can evolve and multiply," he writes.

So for the State, the real test is now to not just quell rumours but do it quickly so that it does not further amplify through social media. And to beat the furious pace of the social media, the administration and police have to be incredibly proactive and nimble, almost like a tech startup. An interesting study by Onook Oh of Warwick Business School and two others on the use of social media in three major incidents, including the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attack, shows that authorities or organisations involved in a

disaster or terrorist attack, need to set up an emergency communication centre to provide speedy, relevant information on the unfolding crisis and to confirm or dispel misinformation circulating on social media.

Jharkhand obviously fell short on that count. And why blame Jharkhand? Most police and administrative set-ups in India are in the same boat. But the demands of the times are such — steep rise in crimes in India and information explosion — that it needs new-age policing and administration: Transparent with information but also has to have the structure to counter flare-ups on a real time basis. Some have proactively engaged with the public to ensure that rumours are nipped in the bud.

Take for example the Bangalore Police. It has adopted "tech policing" and is using social media in a big way to interact with people.

A NITI Aayog paper talks about ways in which policing needs to be reformed: First improvement in capacity and infrastructure of police forces, second revisiting the constitution of police forces through legislative/ administrative changes, and third technological scaling-up. Technological reforms includes modernisation of the control room, fast tracking the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and System pushing for NATGRID and pushing for incorporation of new technology into policing. To enable police stations to exchange information, they need to be connected through a seamless network. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has often spoken about 'SMART' Policing, which means "S for strict but sensitive, M for modern and mobile, A for alert and accountable, R for reliable and responsive and T for tech-savvy and trained". The task — reforming the police force — is not easy but has to be done to stop Jharkhand-type savagery.

chanakya@hindustantimes.com

sundaysentiments



KARAN THAPAR

## WHY MODI OF 2017 IS NOT MODI OF 2014

As he completes three years in office there's no doubt that the prime minister is a colossus among politicians. Not only is this obvious, it's probably unchallenged. However, that still leaves open the question do you admire the man at the top or do you have concerns about his behaviour and statements? Each of us has his own answer and few would deny it divides us.

As I ponder over the significant impact the PM has made I'm struck by a revealing, if not also novel, paradox: Mr Modi's strengths also metamorphose into his weaknesses. This means the same evidence can often lead to opposite conclusions. What I dislike someone else will, perhaps, admire and what they find regrettable I, probably, see as a boon. Now let's explore this a little further. The vast majority of the Indian people

believe in Mr Modi. They feel he understands their needs and are confident he'll deliver. Not since Indira Gandhi has such faith been invested in the ruler of the country. As it was for her, this is one of his great strengths.

The flipside is that often Mr Modi gives the impression he knows best. It's said he's a good listener but frequently his mind is already made up. Demonetisation is the best example of a needless decision forced through because of his personal conviction. But not for a moment will the PM accept that.

A second strength is Mr Modi's capacity to take bold and radical decisions. We may have seen more in the foreign policy arena than in the handling of the economy but each time they've captured the imagination of the country. They suggest a strong, even courageous, leader. People like



Narendra Modi's strength is his gift for easy and fluent communication

that. The smack of strong government is for many reassuring.

The obverse is that Mr Modi can be authoritarian. He is the government. The Cabinet are just the supporting cast surrounding him. A few, in fact, are no better than the gravediggers in Hamlet! But, again, wasn't this true of Indira Gandhi? Indeed, of all bold and decisive rulers?

Mr Modi's third strength is his gift for easy and fluent communication.

It's not just that he speaks well but he also has the capacity to convey complicated concepts or politically awkward positions in simple and appealing terms. I cannot recall any previous PM possessed of the same skill.

Yet this is also why Mr Modi's carefully chosen and deliberate silences provoke criticism. He's a natural talker so when he doesn't speak his reticence is viewed as crafty strategy. His critics, therefore, believe he is complicit in the darkening mood of the country. For many this is perhaps the greatest fault they find in him.

Meanwhile, in one important respect the PM is a different man to the one sworn-in three years ago. He no longer identifies himself with aspiration and the fulfilment of suppressed ambition. That, of course, was the promise that swept him to power but he now seems to have cast it aside. Instead, today, he's become a tribune of the people. He identifies with the poor and the downtrodden. They are, of course, the majority and this explains the repositioning of his image. And who can say it doesn't make undoubted political sense?

But I, at least, am sorry to see the old Mr Modi fade away. In 2014 his vision had a strong moral content. Three years later transformation has ensured it endures but it's also become pragmatic.

The views expressed are personal

## THE BIG TOBACCO INDUSTRY IS THE EMPEROR OF DECEIT



VIKRAM PATEL

In the feverish climate of fake news in which we find ourselves these days, considered by many as an existential threat to the foundations of democracy, it is becoming impossible for an average reader to distinguish the authentic stuff from the paid variety. The latter is, of course, just a euphemism for advertising, but much more dangerous given that the sole purpose of this "news" may be intended to sell harmful goods for the enrichment of corporations.

There can be little argument over who claims the crown of emperor of such deceit in modern times: This dubious honour must go to the tobacco industry. We now have reams of evidence testifying to the strenuous efforts this industry took to hide the compelling truth that their product killed its users.

In 1979, a secret memo from the tobacco industry was revealed to the public; in it were contained these chilling words: "Doubt is our product since it is the best means of competing with the 'body of fact' that exists in the mind of the general public." It took decades of advocacy by scientists to finally get the landmark World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control passed in 2005. However, by then, tens of millions of lives had been lost to tobacco, the vast majority of which could have been saved had governments not colluded with the tobacco industry. The tobacco industry's tactics have now been copied to perfection by many other industries. The oil and coal industries actively rubbish the evidence on how its products are fuelling climate change, which in turn is leading to dramatic changes in food and water security and the spread of infectious diseases. The alcohol industry

continues to target young people who are most vulnerable to the addictive and harmful consequences of drinking. The fertiliser industry peddles pesticides so innocuously that one would never guess that they are the leading method of suicide in our country and that their toxic residues taint our eco-system. The food and beverage industry sells products which poison our bodies with salt, sugar and the wrong kinds of fats, directly contributing to epidemics of diabetes and heart disease. John Yudkin, a British professor of nutrition, had sounded the alarm on sugar 40 years ago; yet, his warnings were ignored and his reputation demolished by a cabal of nutritionists and policy makers supported by the food industry.

All these industries have mastered the art on how to deceive, distract and confuse through a combination of lobbyists, support to political parties, trolling of the scientists who produce evidence they don't like, generously funding those who promote their message, surrogate advertising through innocuous products such as clothes and 'lifestyle' goods, and becoming part of a conglomerate of companies which include those which may sell perfectly legitimate goods to mask their lethal products. Some libertarians may argue that it is finally up to the consumer to make independent inquiries about the products he chooses to buy. I think this might be perfectly reasonable in this dystopian free-market world of ours if we were talking about relatively harmless things like a child's rattle or lacy underwear.

But where we must draw the line, without any compromise, is when the products are damaging to the health of communities. To do so, not only should every one of us be vigilant and fearless to call out and shame those industries whose products kill us every day, but demand that the State take appropriate steps to protect us all from these emperors of deceit.

Vikram Patel works with the Harvard Medical School and the Public Health Foundation of India. The views expressed are personal

deepcut



RAJESH MAHAPATRA

## JOBS CRISIS: BEING IN DENIAL DOESN'T HELP

It is difficult to disagree when BJP president Amit Shah says it's impossible to provide jobs to everyone in a country of 1.25 billion people. It is also equally absurd to agree with him that reports of rising unemployment are a media creation. The reports are based on the findings of the government's own surveys and disclosures made by companies, either through earnings reports or official statements, which suggest that the pace of job creation in India slowed over the past decade. And there has been no perceptible change in the trend even after Prime Minister Narendra Modi took charge of the nation in 2014. Shah should know playing down the employment challenge will be repeating the mistake the previous UPA regime made, in ignoring the downside risks to the India growth story of its time.

So, what really is the scale of this challenge?

In a seminal paper titled Employment, Education and the State, economist Sudipto Mundle sums it up well: India's core labour force, estimated at about 430 million, is growing 1.5% annually, which means it will add six to eight million young workers each year over the next decade or so. In addition, there are around 13 million open unemployed, 52 million underemployed and another 52 million, mostly women, who are not in the labour force due to lack of adequate opportunities. In other words, there is a backlog of 117 million people. If this backlog is to be cleared over the next 15 years and the new entrants joining the labour force every year are to find employment, India will need to add 15 million new jobs annually. That is the scale of the employment challenge

## IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT THE MODI GOVERNMENT ACKNOWLEDGES THE CHALLENGE, AND NOT BE DISMISSIVE ABOUT IT. AMBIGUOUS EXPRESSIONS SUCH AS 'PROMOTING SELF-EMPLOYMENT' DO NOT HELP

India faces today. There are no easy answers to this monumental challenge; nor will it be prudent to expect quick results even if the right answers were found.

To begin with, it is imperative that the government and the ruling coalition acknowledge the challenge, and not be dismissive about it. Ambiguous expressions such as "promoting self-employment" do not help. If the government and businesses find comfort in pursuing policies that displace labour or have a bias against creating new jobs, it affects prospects of all kinds of employment, including self-employment. That is how it has been, all these years. It is time the government moved to correct the course.

It is also important that we move beyond focusing on headcount growth to the quality of jobs that get created. According to the labour bureau data,

only 15% of India's workforce in 2015-16 had a monthly income of ₹10,000 or more. In other words, 85% workers struggle to survive in a low productivity-low wage trap. Creating opportunities for them to climb up the productivity chain is one challenge and enabling them to cash in on the new opportunities is another.

Prime Minister Modi's Skill India plan seeks to address the latter, by training 400 million workers in the age group of 15-45 years over a seven-year period. The outcome so far has been disappointing, however. Out of 1.8 million people, who received training in the first two years of this programme, only a third could be certified and less than 82,000 were placed in jobs. The reason for this dismal show is not difficult to find. As Mundle, an emeritus professor at the government-administered National Institute of Public Finance and Policy, explains: No amount of skill development can work without a solid foundation in basic education. India's long neglect of the education system is coming back to haunt its economic ambitions.

With a majority of states under its control and the political dominance it commands now, Modi's National Democratic Alliance has a unique opportunity to change the course.

@RajeshMahapatra

## thisweekthatera

### PICTURE OF THE WEEK

MAY 29: Members of Central Sports Club (Meerut) being introduced to Union Defence Minister Swaran Singh during their Salwan memorial cricket match



### NEWS OF THE WEEK

#### INDIA

"JAWAHAR," NEW SEED DEVELOPED  
MAY 28: "Jawahar" an outstanding new variety of maize, was gifted to the nation today (May 27) by the Indian Agricultural Institute to mark the third death anniversary of Jawaharlal Nehru. "Jawahar" is one of the six new composite kinds of maize evolved by the ISTI.

#### WORLD

NIGERIA IS SPLIT INTO 12 STATES  
MAY 29: Nigeria's military Head of State last night decreed an immediate national state of emergency and said he was ordering the federation to be split into 12 States instead of the present four regions.

MAY28-JUNE 13, 1967 >>FROM THE ARCHIVES OF THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

## sundayletters

### THE PROOF OF THE PUDDING IS IN THE EATING

This is with reference to Rajesh Mahapatra's column 'Why Support for Modi floats on Hope' (Deep Cut, May 21). Prime Minister Narendra Modi's three years in office have been a mixed fare but the electorate still thinks that he is the best person to lead the country out of the morass. On the positive side, the NDA government's direct benefit transfer and LPGs for poor women programmes have worked well but the 'Make in India' programme has not. The next two years may see more reforms. As they say, the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

ASHOK GOSWAMI, MUMBAI

### Trump must learn to behave

Karan Thapar's 'A case of two Donalds but one quack!' (Sunday Sentiments, May 21) is spot on. United States president Donald Trump had promised action on many issues before the election and the voters liked his promises and elected him. But now Trump's advisers should ask him to keep his erratic behaviour under control. Bad behaviour only diminishes the value of the office he holds.

SUBHASH VAID, VIA EMAIL

### Boys are also not safe

Lalita Panicker in her column has correctly pointed out that boys and men are also at risk and this needs to be discussed (Boys too are vulnerable to sexual predators, May 21). As with male sexual violence against women, sexual violence against men is motivated by the desire to dominate and use sex as a weapon against the victim.

MANOJ GAMI, NEW DELHI

Write to us at: letters@hindustantimes.com