

comment & opinion

Changing social fabric

Social networks are changing – that's the new order



nano edits

Pursuit of innovation

Novel ideas find a new taker, as the co-architect of the IT major Infosys Technologies, NR Narayana Murthy, turns venture capitalist. Fuelling an investment vehicle for potential young companies, Murthy is all set to spread his entrepreneurial spirit. In his latest role, the IT czar will incubate entrepreneurs — a boon to the many enterprising lot in the country, who stand to gain not only in terms of funding for their ventures, but also from the valuable guidelines a pro like him will have to offer. With the new VC, India has now perhaps found its own equivalent to the Rockefellers, to boost innovation and take the country to greater heights.

Woes of the namesake

A real-life Harry Potter facing relentless hounding for his name is as illogical and unfair as it is bizarre. Both Harry and Potter are common Anglo-Saxon names and a person being bestowed with both is certainly not beyond the realms of imagination. To top it all, the poor boy wasn't even named after the birth of the Harry Potter phenomenon; there might have been some justification in mocking a person trying to cash in on the phenomenon of second-hand fame. In short, the persecution is laughable and pointless — and it's not like the poor boy is called Lord Voldemort, for heaven's sake!

positive thinking

Goodness in a cup

One of the little rituals my husband and I have clung to for many years now is our morning cup of tea. In the beginning, the steeping pot of tea was all about togetherness. The restful morning hour before we drowned in the morass of our working lives. And a biscuit or two dunked in the tea gave it an extra comfort that helped cushion whatever may follow thereafter — public transport, looming deadlines, bosses with ulcer-induced tempers, writers' block, smarmy colleagues, the cooking, the cleaning, the shopping... Everything seemed that much more bearable if we sat together for a few minutes, clinging to our cups of steaming tea with a mouthful of biscuit.



Anita Nair

Over the years it became a reviver of sorts. The equivalent to 'I have had a hard time and need a stiff drink'. The hard hour in question was a child who needed to be coaxed to rise, and then in a flurry of sleep and bed clothes had to be fed and organised for the day with books, snacks and lunch box. And all in time for the school bus, which sought to intimidate with precision timing: 7.19am, 7.22am and such like.

Then there is the child in question who has always asked too many questions ranging from why do shoe laces have to be of equal length, to will my throat hurt when my voice cracks to why can't I go on my friend's bike? Time seeps away as I try and answer him in a manner that would satisfy his curious mind.

Some days, I would think I ought to take a cue from the ancients who would have fixed a gimlet eye on him and growled, "Shut up and finish your breakfast. You will get late for school". But parenting being what it is now, a minefield of bonding, quality time and feed-the-mind-as-the-body, I would search for succinct answers. At the end of the hour, we would be nervous wrecks and would reach for the kettle with the same alacrity that a lush shows for the bottle. Nevertheless, having got past the morning rush hour, there is an almost reward-like element to pouring out a cup of tea and sitting down for a moment to contemplate.

News that is traditional accompaniment to morning tea seems irrelevant then. Instead, there is far greater pleasure in watching the dog reduce the newspaper to shreds, kittens frolic in the grass, a plane in the sky, or a leaf flutter in the breeze.

—Anita Nair is the author of the novels A Better Man, Ladies Coupe and Mistress

How few there are who have courage enough to own their faults, or resolution enough to mend them.
—Benjamin Franklin

global opinion

Halloween humour!

Boston Globe, Boston

Every year, Halloween revellers try to scare people by dressing as zombies and vampires. Some costumes become controversial because they play on vague fears of — and misconceptions about — immigrants, the irony of which never registers with immigrant advocacy groups, who condemn it as racist. There is always a danger of reading too much into a Halloween mask that was intended to be funny. Then again, under the guise of humour, anti-immigrant cartoons in the US once fuelled stereotypes about groups. Someone thought they were funny and harmless, too.

Happy are the hairy

The Daily Telegraph, Sydney

From Elvis Presley locks to a new documentary, there's a lot of follicle fodder. A clump of Elvis Presley's hair was auctioned in Chicago recently. Meanwhile, Chris Rock just came out with a documentary called *Good Hair*. Seems like a good time to comb through some hairy details. Beehives are pretty, according to *Playboy*, which will feature cartoon character Marge Simpson on its cover. African children are less likely to get head lice. And an old Spanish saying sums up the importance of hair: "Where there is hair, there is happiness."

Word of the day

Prevaricate. v

Be deliberately ambiguous or unclear in order to mislead or withhold information — THEFREEDICIONARY.COM

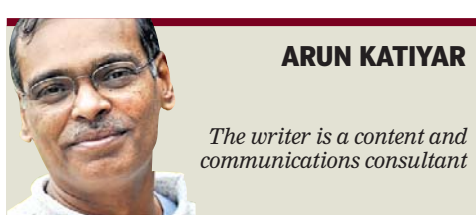
Usage: "While the US slowly grinds the nuclear issue, Iran continues to prevaricate, feeling confident of victory as conditions turn ever more in its favour." —THE GUARDIAN

Muki Regunathan, an expert in online networks, social media and CEO of Bangalore-based interactive agency Pepper Square, frequently comments that there is no relationship behind the number of Facebook friends you have, and your social equity. A large number of friends on Facebook or an enviously large number of followers on Twitter produces a nice graph, but does not represent a connection between people. You just can't equate social media like YouTube, Flickr, SlideShare; social networks like LinkedIn and Orkut and social collaboration tools like wikis to the old boys network.

There is much truth in what he says. But there are aspects to social media that even he says can't be ignored. Bereft of the Saville Row style bespoke suits and Rolex watches, the old boys network is actually a ferocious and brutal tool by which power is cornered and retained, incestuous business relationships are maintained and high-priced golf course memberships are seconded. The old boys network is about country clubs and special viewing boxes at cricket matches. Let's not mince words and hear it like it is: The old boys network is about gold plated cuff links and elitism. The new social networks and social media are anything but that.

Over the last few years, Bangalore has systematically chiselled away at the notion of social networks being exalted or status enhancing. They are an ever-changing circle of people with common interests coming together to the assistance of each other — so that once the favours have been exchanged in the network, the worth of the favours as well as the network is enhanced. But the critical point to note is that no one owns the network, CEO-status and silk ties don't dictate who becomes a part of it and you don't really have to read the Wall Street Journal to feel at home in the social networks of today.

Bangalore has some of the most lively and dynamic online social networks in the country. Ear-



ARUN KATIYAR

The writer is a content and communications consultant

lier this week, Jessie Paul, chief marketing officer of Wipro and author of *No Money Marketing*, demonstrated this in her own sharp and swift manner. She has put together a group of people on LinkedIn that have considerable experience and expertise in marketing. The group met for the first time at a restaurant on Ulsoor Road over beer and small eats, spoke about their backgrounds, exchanged cards, regaled everyone with stories and promised to meet next quarter. Of course, the very next morning people who had attended the meet-

Most people who have cursorily read about — or glanced at — Twitter, think it is all about having some 'fun' and 'passing time'

ing had their mail boxes fill up with messages from the group: Business was starting to hum, ideas were being exchanged and Paul had done what her book promised — frugal marketing for the people in the group.

Tarun Hukku who is the moderator of the Bangalore Business Network (BBN) on Ryze says that the BBN is one of the largest networks in India on Ryze. With membership exceeding 7000 and members from across 60 countries, BBN is a wonderful place for networking. Members of BBN meet ever so often at mixers (fundamentally an excuse to mash up at a local pub and shoot the breeze) and

then go right back to conduct business, set up deals, and enjoy a second opinion on anything using the BBN. People have hired entire business teams using BBN, found vendors to network their offices, joined carpools and undertaken collective purchase efforts.

Bangalore has many other online networks that hum away unknown to most of us: There are photography buffs that routinely meet online and exchange their artistic interpretations of life, there are bird-watching groups that document avian life and sound in Bangalore and there are runners who exchange notes on nutrition and long distance running.

The point is this: Unlike the old boys network that got you a membership to the Bangalore Golf Club or to the Whitefield Club, no one owns these social networks. What really matters is how you leverage them. And, more importantly if you are the first to do so. That's the new order.

Yes, most people who have cursorily read about — or glanced at — Twitter, think it is all about having some 'fun' and 'passing time'. But people are collaborating using these tools, trying to accomplish everyday things using the power of collective thinking, transparency and speed. These social tools may be used to put together a team of people to manage a blood donation camp, or to organise a cycling workshop at a local tech park. So, the network is being leveraged to accomplish important stuff. Besides which, what's really wrong if someone is having fun while using these social tools? It's ridiculous to believe that social software should be banned in a serious workplace.

If you are a sociologist in Bangalore, and have begun to observe the invisible changes happening to society, you'll see an exciting picture emerge. And journalists, politicians, marketing folk, thought leaders and brands are starting to wonder: How do I dip my fingers into the social pie?

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second serve

Sleight of hand



JAI MRUG

The writer is an election analyst

The election verdicts yesterday were a vote for the incumbents. But, each was for a different reason. The October 22 verdict had two clear messages — a discredited and disunited opposition can achieve for an incumbent, what a visionary may not be able to. Secondly, 'Ekla Chalo' is not a medicine for everything.

The Shiv Sena-BJP alliance failed to capitalise on the discontent among voters on account of power-cuts, price rise and the drought. The opposition failed to project themselves as a credible alternative that could mobilise all the anti-Congress forces across the spectrum. The election was thus, fought amongst regional satraps, factional leaders and rebels. The Congress-NCP alliance managed to augment its tally marginally to 144 given that the low Index of Opposition Unity (IOU) ensured that the two terms of anti-incumbency against the Congress-NCP combine translated into virtually nothing.

In urban areas, especially Mumbai, as the mills turned into malls, the Marathi *manoos* has split almost evenly between the Shiv Sena and the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS). In Mumbai, for example, the Congress-NCP combine won 20 out of the 36 seats, but the Sena-BJP lost 6 of their traditional seats to the MNS. The MNS has damaged the prospects of the Sena-BJP in close to two dozen seats, polling 6% of the votes statewide. The damage to Sena has been monumental. Of the 90 seats won by the Sena-BJP, the BJP won 46 and the Sena 44.

The Congress-NCP alliance also polled well in Marathwada, the CM's region where they decisively surged ahead of the Sena-BJP alliance, winning 27 seats against 13 of the former; but conceding 6 to

others, most of them Independents. In western Maharashtra the Congress-NCP alliance maintained its lead, though it was down considerably — it won just half the seats in this region: 29 out of 58. Independents and smaller parties like Raju Shetty's Swabhimani Paksha halted the avalanche of the Congress-NCP, winning 10 seats, in addition, to the Sena-BJP, which won 18 seats here.

The Congress' tactical inclusion of Rajendra Gawai in the alliance, disunity in the ranks of the third front, and the BSP holding on to its traditional Dalit vote ensured that there was virtually no impact of the Third Front in Vidarbha. As a result, the Congress-NCP alliance did better than the Sena-BJP, winning 32 out of the 62 seats.

Haryana has repeated the verdict, but not the scale. Inflation and drought, especially in southern Haryana, have cost the Congress nearly two dozen seats in the state. There was a 6 percentage point swing against the Congress party, whittling its vote share to 36%. The party was, however, poised to win 43 seats, making it the single largest party. Om Prakash Chautala's Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) picked up far more votes than it did in the Lok Sab-

ha polls, when it polled approximately 15% of the vote. The party's strategy to come out with an early candidate list, and to hit the campaign trail before the others, paid off. The party won 31 seats, 22 more than what it won in 2005. The BJP polled 10% of the votes, almost the same as it did last time and won 4 seats.

The 'Ekla Chalo' by the principal opposition parties in Haryana, with an IOU of 45%, made it a walkover for the Congress. On the social front, Congress ensured that the Chautalas did not have an unchallenged suzerainty over the Jat vote. It worked carefully to cultivate the scheduled castes through developmental projects, and a covert understanding with the Dera Sachha Sauda. Haryana is the first state in the country to provide its entire scheduled caste population with private water connections under the Indira Gandhi Drinking Water Scheme. Also a reasonably high number of SCs (59%) in Haryana are covered by the NREGA. This has helped in containing the BSP in Haryana to about 7% of the vote. A balanced social coalition and a splintering opposition have ensured the Congress party a second term in Haryana.

In Arunachal Pradesh, the Congress swept the polls winning 42 of the 60 seats. Not that something phenomenal was achieved by the previous regime, but it was simply a case of pragmatic state politicians going with the party at the Centre, and doing so, unanimously.

The Congress can relax for now; the opposition is yet to get its act together. The idiom of Indian politics has changed from TINA (There is no Alternative) to TINCO (There is no Coherent Opposition).

inbox

LOVE JIHAD IS A THREAT TO SECURITY

This is with reference to the news report on 'Love Jihad'. The Karnataka High Court has issued a well-considered decision to probe into it and its security ramifications. This is an alarming menace threatening the nation's security, as the new trend speaks of recruiting women suicide bombers. In fact, in a recent interview with a reputed American news correspondent held captive, a Taliban leader proclaimed, "You have atomic bombs, but we have suicide bombers." The statistics of women being enticed by them should set alarm bells ringing, and our government should act before they turn into terror zombies.

—HN RAMAKRISHNA, INDIRANAGAR

RAILWAYS MUST PRIORITISE SAFETY

This is with reference to the report about the collision between Goa Express and Mewar Express, which left 22 dead. This is a very unfortunate tragedy. The railways should collectively take responsibility for the accident, and not just blame the officials on duty during the mishap. Mere suspension of those on duty will not in any way help prevent accidents in the future. The initial reports point out to a safety lapse. It is, therefore, time the Indian railways made safety norms a priority which, however, has never been emphasised in any of the railway budgets. The railway ministry must also set up machinery to provide quick medical help to those injured in accidents such as this.

—VARUN DAMBALKAR, NAGARBHAVI SECOND PHASE

STOP NEGOTIATING WITH MURDERERS

As a common man, one fails to understand and appreciate the stand our Union government has taken with regard to holding talks with the Maoist leaders. Koteswar Rao alias Kishanji, the so-called leader of the Maoists, has openly said that they headed the police official, Francis Indwar. The Maoists are engaging in gruesome violence without any remorse. Our home minister P Chidambaram has been holding talks with Kishanji, but the right thing to do would be to arrest him and try him for murder. I shouldn't wonder if our ministers soon invite Hafiz Saeed to Delhi for talks. How can the government hold negotiations with murderers and kidnapers?

—MV NAHUSHARAJ, BANGALORE

INDIA'S HEIGHTENED SECURITY CONCERNS

This is with regards to Venkatesan Vembu's article, 'The Red Eye flashes'. The article is a brilliant analysis of China's renewed hostility towards India. In addition to China, India's security concerns are now compounded by a hostile government in Nepal and increasing Naxal violence. The recent peaceful elections in Arunachal Pradesh are an affront to China's ambitions about this area of the country. The government must take these threats seriously and do whatever it takes to impede possible misadventures by our hostile neighbours.

—MM GURBAXANI, WHEELER ROAD

ACTION AGAINST THE TAINTED A MUST

The government's decision to introduce a comprehensive bill to deal with complaints of corruption against judges in the high court and Supreme Court, as reported in your news item, 'No place for tainted judges in court: Moily', is a good idea. People in general have faith and confidence in the judiciary, but instances such as this erodes their confidence in the justice system. Therefore, the government must set up a foolproof mechanism to look into corruption charges against tainted judges, and ensure that justice is delivered to those who approach the courts.

—HP MURALI, RAJAJINAGAR

Send us your views and feedback at feedback@dnaindia.net

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