

Afternoon

DESPATCH & COURIER

Ponder awhile...

"I no longer count as one of my merits that I always tell the truth as much as possible; it has become my metier."

—Sigmund Freud

'Secular' Congress targets 'communal' BJP

THE UPA government will be out of office in the next six months. A few months more, elections to Parliament will be held. It has become clear it has definite poll-oriented targets: It is undertaking new initiatives relating to important, controversial issues. It cannot fool anyone in this regard.

Two bills which the Congress thinks will increase its poll chances will be introduced by the government in the ensuing session of Parliament: the women's reservation bill and the prevention of communal violence bill. The UPA wants to make out it is on the side of the women and hence its decision to pass the women's bill.

And suddenly it has decided to punish all those parties which by word or deed cause communal violence. The UPA wants to make out it is a protector of the minority community – the Muslims – and that the BJP which is not secular is against them. This secular claim of the Congress does not have any basis. By repeatedly claiming that it is secular, the Congress has shown it has a friendly message for the Muslims.

The BJP however is not taken in by these claims. It points out, for instance, that a number of communal clashes have taken place in Congress-ruled Maharashtra. The BJP also asserts it stands by governance and development. It is a fact that the BJP's poll campaign committee chairman Narendra Modi has told huge rallies across the country, the BJP stands for governance and development. The party also has started asserting it is totally secular.

All parties in the country are secular now. The BJP seems to have realised that Hindutva has ceased to work and it would be more pragmatic to put on a secular garb. The communal bill is not likely to be passed when it comes before Parliament later this month. A big question is whether the Centre can pass the bill. The opposition says it is a state subject and the Centre has nothing to do with it.

Fudges, fluffs and flubs: Modi's problem with facts

IN November 1999, George W. Bush, as Republican frontrunner for the 2000 US presidential elections, cut a sorry figure trying to name the leaders of the then global conflict hot-spots of Chechnya, Taiwan, Pakistan and India. W or 43 as he is called to differentiate from his one term President father, gave a shot in the dark "Mr. Lee" as a response for the leader of Taiwan and stopped at "General" while trying to recall Pervez Musharaff's name. Aslan Mashkadov and Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee may have been extremely complex tongue twisters for the soon-to-be President Bush in his response to questions posed by a political reporter for WHDH-TV, an associate of NBC in Boston, Massachusetts.

As political parties gear up for the 2014 General election in India, Narendra Modi, like his conservative counterpart in the US, seems to be facing the heat with constant criticism on his inability to state the facts accurately. The common justification in defense of Modi's transgressions has been that he is running to be a leader of the largest democracy and is not a Mastermind Quiz contestant. While this may be true, a survey conducted by Yudofud among Modi's core constituency of voters shows that these gaffes have affected the perception of Candidate Modi.

Modi's core base values factual correctness

It's a no-brainer that being factually correct is preferred over factual distortions. However, the impact of these factual inconsistencies varies depending on a candidate's core base. It is a lot more damaging to Modi in comparison to President Bush or Rahul Gandhi. President Bush had a solid base of partisan conservatives who did not see it important for their leader to know such facts. In all probability, with primetime American political discussions being a lot more isolated from World events, a sizeable number of Mr. Bush's base may not have been aware of these facts themselves. Similarly, even if Mr. Rahul Gandhi were to be factually inconsistent, it would not work against him as the base that he appeals to is not swayed by such inconsistencies. It's a different matter that the social media would have taken a very strong view against Rahul Gandhi in comparison to the kid gloves treatment being meted out to Modi.

In contrary to Rahul Gandhi, Modi's suc-

cess hinges on his ability to attract the youth, the middle class and the urban voters in his side. This coalition of voters that Modi wishes to maximize his support has always put a premium on learning and knowledge even if it were to be the most inconsequential of trivia. This voting group expects their leader to be smarter and shrewder than them and constant bloopers are bound to puncture the aura that has been built around Modi – the first step in potential supporters becoming disaffected in the long run.

Not all "gaffes" harm Modi

Quite surprisingly not all factual inconsistencies hurt Modi equally. In fact some of these have worked to his advantage as he has been able to draw a sharper contrast with his



« PERSPECTIVE »

Venkat Goli

political opponents. Modi's factual inconsistencies can be classified into three categories – fudges, fluffs and flubs. Modi's fudges include his statements on Nehru and Patel and his statement on Article 370 leading to unequal rights for men and women in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. In both these cases, though Modi may have pushed the envelope with respect to factual correctness they affirm an overwhelming perception in the surveyed people's mind – Sardar Patel as India's first Prime Minister would have left behind a more positive legacy in comparison to Nehru and Article 370 gives the state of Jammu & Kashmir disproportionate powers that are being misused by the state government while legislating. In fact an overwhelming 63 per cent of the 1,600 potential student, youth, middle-class and urban voters surveyed endorsed or saw no issue with Modi's fudges. Of the group, 11 per cent surveyed were extremely critical of Modi while the remaining 26 per cent were

not swayed either way.

The second category, termed fluffs, include statements made by Modi at Ferguson College, Pune about China allocating 20 per cent of its GDP to education and his comparison of the GDP growth under the NDA and UPA governments which drew a sharp rebuttal from the Finance Minister, P. Chidambaram. 44 per cent of the surveyed sample gave Modi the benefit of the doubt while 34 per cent were critical about Modi and a little over 20 per cent were neutral or had no strong opinion either way. The reason for such muted criticism on Modi could be due to the fact that UPA's own growth story has been severely punctured by allegations of crony capitalism and the perception of it not doing enough on long term objectives such as education and employment.

The most damaging of these are the flubs which probably have the least impact if Modi were to govern as Prime Minister but have dented his image most severely. Statements on Alexander fighting at the banks of Ganges near Patna, the mix-up between the Gupta and Maurya dynasty and his mistake of using Mohanlal as Mahatma Gandhi's first seem to have done the most damage. An overwhelming 68 per cent were extremely critical of the flubs while only 19 per cent gave him the benefit of the doubt while another 13 per cent were neutral or had no strong opinion either way. One reason for a large unfavourable view on the flubs could possibly be due to the facts being rebutted by Nitish Kumar, a leader who is viewed as a person with strong leadership credentials among some of Modi's core voter base.

The George W. Bush parallel

Modi's flubs may well be forgotten if he moves towards controlling them without affecting the overall spontaneity of his speeches. With a protracted election campaign that has just warmed up, course correction and more diligent fact-checking may stem the dissipating Modi aura. The Bush parallel then would be employed for Rahul Gandhi to illustrate how a person of privilege belonging to the establishment, no less the son of a Prime Minister of India, was running as a rank outsider just as the son of an American President did in 2000.

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My Baby's Cry...!

I was startled by the wail. It came from just behind me. I looked back and realized between my seat and the wall, a chair had been wedged sideways and on it lay a baby. She was crying. She had obviously been crying awhile, because her little face was dripping with tears. I hadn't heard her because of the noise. We were in a hall for a wedding reception, my wife and I. Even she hadn't heard the baby and women normally hear such sounds better than men but the sound of the music, the loud talk and heavy laughter interspersed with giggles from the ladies must have drowned the sound of the crying.

I looked back. She was wailing even more. Some mother obviously gone to wish

the wedded couple had kept the child behind so she would not have to lug the weight up on stage and maybe she looked better in gorgeous sari with no child hanging

« BOB'S BANTER »

Robert Clements

ing from her shoulder: saris drape well with no weights attached!

The tears were flowing; slowly I put my palm on her forehead. She whimpered, opened her eyes then closed them again. I gently stroked her tiny face. Her tears a million of them wet my hand: It was another

little face I was stroking, many many moons ago; my eldest one, crying as I opened the door and returned home. My wife and her mother trying desperately to calm her down. But the wailing continued. "Colic!" Explained my mother in law to me as I put out my arms, "She won't stop crying!"

"She will!" I said and held my little one against me. One stroke was all she needed. Her crying stopped. She knew my touch.

I stroked the baby behind my seat. Her crying had stopped. I looked up and found a woman standing over me smiling. "You stopped her crying!" she said, "Thank you!"

"Thank you!" I said, "She's coming home next week from New York!"

"Who?" Asked the young mother as she gathered up her little one.

"My daughter!" I whispered and looked at my hand happily, they glistened with tears, some of them mine..!

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