

Cockroach Janta Party: When satire becomes a threat

IT began as a joke but got taken seriously—so seriously that the government acted against it. That is the story of the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), which is merely a week old. On May 16, an activist, who reportedly was earlier associated with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), Abhijeet Dipke, launched CJP, a satirical take on Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant's comment on the unemployable youth with fake degrees who eventually become "parasites" and "cockroaches," attacking the system. The CJI's remarks were not very elegant; these were especially hurtful as the young have been the victims rather than tormentors of the system. Among other things, they suffer because of a dearth of quality jobs and

a conducive environment in which they can become wealth creators. And now, they are also hit by the incompetence and corruption in the bodies that carry out exams for coveted seats in higher education and jobs. The remarks were deeply resented by not just youth but also others. This was the reason that the CJI later issued a clarification, stating he was misquoted and his remarks were directed specifically at individuals entering the legal profession through "fake and bogus degrees." This, however, didn't stop the usage of the term 'cockroaches' online and the party espousing their cause; in fact, the party received wide support from various politicians, activists, artists, and millions of other users across

social media platforms. It is said that the CJP was able to get more followers than the ruling BJP and Congress, though the figures have not been verified. The government overreacted by reportedly directing X to withhold the account following inputs from the Intelligence Bureau (IB), which flagged "national security concerns." Apparently, the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY) invoked Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000, to demand action against the CJP account. Senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor pointed out that the episode "confirms to us the extent to which there is frustration and dissatisfaction that the public can express through being able to tap into

an initiative like this." In the meanwhile, Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra accused the government of stifling dissent. The government should have avoided action against the CJP, because it was quite clearly a joke. Which serious political party would claim to be the "voice of the lazy"? Or claim that the "eligibility criteria" to join the CJP was to be "unemployed, lazy, and chronically online" with the "ability to rant professionally"? More than anyone else, the government took the joke seriously. By moving to block the account, the government ended up validating the very criticism the satire sought to make. A parody page that may otherwise have remained a passing internet joke suddenly acquired

political significance because of official intervention. In trying to suppress ridicule, the authorities amplified it. The episode also raises troubling questions about the increasing tendency to invoke sweeping powers such as Section 69A against online expression that is inconvenient or embarrassing rather than genuinely dangerous. Democracies are expected to tolerate mockery, even harsh mockery, because satire is often a barometer of public sentiment. What makes the CJP episode particularly revealing is that the government appeared more offended by the language of protest than by the underlying anger that produced it. A confident government would have laughed away the joke.

LETTERS

Promote alternative career paths
This refers to "NEET aftermath: Parents and teachers must anchor our students," (THI, May 22). The paper leak has rightly angered people, but anger alone will not protect the next batch of students. What is more worrisome is the singular importance we have attached to just one examination. Families invest everything — emotionally and financially — into a single outcome, leaving young people with no psychological fallback. Schools and parents must actively normalise alternative career paths, not as consolation but as genuine choices. Counselling should be embedded in the academic calendar, not offered after a crisis strikes. Systemic reforms matter, but the cultural shift around success and failure is equally urgent.

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Students must focus on GCC space

With reference to the article "Bright story of growth in GCC space awaits us beyond layoffs" (THI May 22), the increasing wave of layoffs in global technology companies has become a major concern for employees, students and parents across the country. In recent months, leading multinational firms have laid off thousands of workers worldwide. However, the changing situation should not alarm our IT professionals given that India is the preferred destination for GCCs because of its skilled workforce and growing digital ecosystem. More global firms are setting up technology centres in the country, which is expected to open fresh employment opportunities. Employees must adapt themselves to this transformation. Those who fail to keep pace with emerging technologies may find it difficult to survive in the changing market. Workers should also branch out into communication skills, teamwork and problem-solving abilities. Educational institutions should step in and update their syllabus according to industry requirements. Youngsters must understand that the IT industry now opens opportunities not only in coding but also in analytics, robotics, AI systems and digital transformation. Companies should invest in reskilling and upskilling programmes rather than simply laying off workers. Internal training sessions and mentorship initiatives can help employees move into new domains. Governments and industry bodies can bolster employees through skill development schemes. Skilled professionals who adapt themselves to the changing demands are likely to secure rewarding careers in the future. India's GCC ecosystem is expected to create large-scale employment opportunities in the long run. Employees, students and educational institutions must work together to prepare for the changing technological landscape instead of getting discouraged by temporary setbacks.

Raju Kolluru, Kakinada

Engineers should eye GCC positions.

THIS refers to "Bright story of growth in GCC Space awaits us beyond layoffs". Rather than worry over layoffs, professionals must take comfort from the fact India's growing GCC ecosystem offers real hope. Many mid-level professionals are still anxious about job security and the rapid shift towards AI-driven roles. Rather than relying solely on market forces, we need practical steps: targeted government-industry partnerships for short-term AI and data science certification programmes, easier credit for tech startups, and clearer pathways for experienced engineers to move into GCC positions. Companies too must invest more in internal reskilling instead of sudden headcount cuts.

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Reskilling is the need of the hour

As beyond layoffs," (THI, May 22). The anxiety around layoffs is understandable, but the bigger concern is whether India's IT workforce is preparing itself for what comes next. GCCs are expanding, and that is genuinely good news. But expansion does not automatically translate into opportunity if skills remain static. Many mid-level professionals are still anchored to roles that AI is steadily absorbing. Reskilling cannot remain a talking point in corporate presentations. Universities, employers, and industry bodies must together create credible, accessible pathways for professionals to transition into AI-adjacent roles. India has the scale and the talent base to lead this shift. The question is whether we move with enough urgency before the window narrows.

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BENGALURU ONLINE

Flight services from Bengaluru to Bidar and Kalaburagi to resume: MB Patil

BENGALURU: Infrastructure Development Minister M B Patil on Friday announced that flight services from Bengaluru to Bidar and Kalaburagi, the district headquarters of the Kalyana Karnataka region, will resume from June 1 and June 10 respectively.

Speaking on the occasion, he said that Star Air (Ghodawat Enterprises Limited) will operate flights on the Bengaluru-Bidar-Bengaluru and Bengaluru-Kalaburagi-Bengaluru sectors. The Government is extending viability gap funding of ₹28.47 crore to support the operations. Advance booking for flights on both routes has already commenced, he added.

Patil said the flight service to Kalaburagi had earlier been suspended due to financial losses. In the case of Bidar, services were being operated with special support from the Kalyana Karnataka Regional Development Board. Taking into account the growth of industries, education, tourism, agriculture and commercial activities in the Kalyana Karnataka region, the Government has decided to revive the services under the regional air connectivity initiative, he said.

The Minister said the Government is committed to enhancing air connectivity to Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities across the State. Such initiatives will not only accelerate regional economic growth but also contribute to infrastructure development, he noted.

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Hashtags, hate and half-truths: The dark side of India's digital politics



When outrage becomes currency and truth becomes irrelevant, democracy pays the price

THE rise of social media in India was once hailed as a democratic revolution. It promised to dismantle the monopoly of traditional media, amplify unheard voices, deepen citizen participation, and establish a direct connection between political leaders and the public. In many ways, it succeeded. Political communication became immediate, interactive, and accessible on an unprecedented scale.

But now the same platforms have steadily polluted the country's political ecosystem. What began as an instrument of participation has, in many instances, degenerated into an unregulated arena of misinformation, abuse, manufactured outrage, and character assassination. The consequences extend far beyond politics; they strike at the very culture of democracy.

Indian politics has always been intensely competitive and emotionally charged. But social media transformed both the speed and scale of political confrontation. Earlier, allegations against political rivals passed through editorial scrutiny, legal checks, and institutional filters before reaching the public domain. Newspapers and television channels, despite their flaws and biases, still functioned within identifiable structures of accountability. Social media erased those barriers overnight.

Today, anonymous handles with no credibility or accountability can circulate fabricated claims, morphed videos, edited speeches, fake documents, and defamatory accusations to millions within minutes. Once amplified through coordinated digital networks, repetition itself

creates the illusion of truth. The political ecosystem has consequently shifted from ideological contestation to perpetual digital warfare. Truth is no longer merely the first casualty of political conflict; it is increasingly treated as irrelevant.

Perhaps the gravest danger posed by social media is the near-total absence of accountability.

Traditional journalism, at least in principle, carried institutional responsibility. Publications could face defamation suits, public scrutiny, legal consequences, and professional censure for unethical reporting. Editors and publishers were answerable for what they printed. Of course, it is a different matter that these days even journalists seem to be getting increasingly influenced by social media and are vying to belittle the views expressed by fellow journalists acting more like activists.

Political operatives, ideological influencers, troll networks, and anonymous accounts routinely spread allegations without evidence. Many posts are cleverly framed as "questions," "sources suggest," or "reports indicate," enabling users to evade direct liability while successfully planting suspicion in the public mind. The damage, however, is immediate and often irreversible.

A false allegation may trend nationally for a day, dominate television debates, influence public perception, and quietly disappear later without apology, correction, or consequence. By the time fact-checkers intervene, the political narrative has already hardened.

This has created a dangerous incentive structure where outrage is rewarded, restraint ignored, and sensationalism travels faster than truth.

In a healthy democracy, political rivalry should revolve around governance, policy, ide-



The digital public square has become a theatre of political hostility, where anonymous allegations, viral half-truths and manufactured narratives often overpower evidence. This article examines how social media polluted India's political ecosystem and asks whether democratic discourse can still recover civility, accountability and respect for truth

ology, and public performance. Increasingly, however, Indian political discourse online revolves around the destruction of individuals rather than debate over ideas.

Political opponents are routinely portrayed not merely as rivals but as enemies, traitors, criminals, dictators, communal agents, or anti-national conspirators — often without substantiated evidence. Families are dragged into political battles. Private lives are scrutinized. Old videos are selectively edited. Rumours are packaged as "exposés." The objective is not persuasion but delegitimation.

Almost every major political formation now possesses an aggressive digital ecosystem dedicated less to defending its own ideas and more to attacking opponents relentlessly. The tragedy is that civil disagreement — the cornerstone of parliamentary democracy — is steadily disappearing.

Social media algorithms are designed not to promote truth or balance, but engagement.

Anger, outrage, fear, and polarization generate more clicks than reasoned analysis. Consequently, users increasingly inhabit ideological echo chambers where they consume only information that reinforces pre-existing beliefs.

Supporters of one political camp accept every allegation against rivals unquestioningly while dismissing all criticism of their preferred leaders as propaganda. Facts themselves become partisan.

A democracy cannot function effectively when citizens no longer agree even on basic facts. Nuance disappears. Complexity is reduced to hashtags. Serious policy discussions are drowned out by viral abuse and performative outrage.

Another disturbing feature of India's social media is that political messaging today is systematically engineered through coordinated hashtag campaigns, bot amplification, influencer networks, edited clips, selective leaks, meme factories, and targeted disinformation operations. Public percep-

tion itself can now be artificially manufactured. Visibility is mistaken for legitimacy.

The loudest voices online are often not the most credible — merely the most aggressively amplified.

The pollution generated by social media extends beyond political parties and leaders. Institutions themselves have become targets of sustained digital delegitimation.

The judiciary, Election Commission, investigative agencies, armed forces, universities, journalists, economists, and even constitutional authorities are routinely attacked whenever their actions conflict with partisan expectations.

Social media toxicity is not accidental; it is deeply tied to the economics of digital platforms which interests most of those who own these digital channels. These platforms profit from engagement, not civility. Outrage sustains attention. Polarisation increases interaction. Conflict keeps users online longer. As a result, inflammatory political content is often algorithmically rewarded.

Political actors exploit this structure ruthlessly because digital aggression delivers immediate visibility. Falsehood spreads not only because it is politically useful, but because it is commercially incentivised. The ultimate casualty is informed citizenship.

The answer, however, cannot lie in censorship alone. Excessive state control over digital speech carries dangers of its own and can easily become an instrument of political suppression. What India urgently needs is a culture of balanced accountability.

Political parties must discourage anonymous abuse and misinformation instead of covertly benefiting from it. Social media platforms must evolve

Therefore, any caste enumeration exercise must be conducted with transparency, scientific rigor, and strong legal safeguards. Data protection mechanisms should ensure that information is used exclusively for policy and welfare purposes, not for partisan political gains.

The debate now demands clarity and political maturity from the Union government. Caste enumeration should not be viewed merely through an electoral lens, but as an administrative and constitutional necessity. A credible framework must emerge through consultations with states, sociologists, statisticians, and policy experts. Public expectations today are increasingly shaped by a demand for evidence-based governance rather than broad political assurances.

Dr B R Ambedkar envisioned an India where equality would not remain a constitutional promise alone but become a lived social reality. Achieving that vision requires more than slogans or symbolic commitments. It requires institutions willing to confront uncomfortable truths with honesty and policy courage.

A comprehensive caste census is not merely a bureaucratic exercise. Properly designed and responsibly implemented, it can become a transformative democratic reform, one that strengthens representation, improves welfare delivery, and deepens the Republic's commitment to social justice. For a nation still grappling with entrenched inequalities, understanding the true contours of deprivation may well be the first step toward correcting them.

A historic step towards social justice

AMARAWAJI NAGARAJU

THE national debate on caste enumeration has once again moved to the centre of India's political and social discourse. Recent observations by the Supreme Court emphasizing the importance of caste data in the Census have added renewed urgency to a long-pending issue. For communities that have consistently demanded equitable representation, welfare, and social justice, the development carries both symbolic and policy significance.

Our Constitution guarantees equality to every citizen. Yet, the realities of social and economic inequality continue to shape access to education, employment, political representation, and public resources. Despite decades of affirmative action and welfare policies, the absence of comprehensive and updated caste-based data has remained a major policy gap. Governments continue to frame reservation policies and welfare interventions largely on estimates and outdated assumptions rather than contemporary evidence.

The last comprehensive caste census in India was conducted in 1931. After Independence, official Census exercises have largely restricted caste enumeration to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Consequently, there is no reliable nationwide data on the population, educational status, economic conditions, or



representation of Other Backward Classes and several marginalized communities. These paradoxical policies meant to advance social justice are being implemented without a precise understanding of the social realities they seek to address.

Caste enumeration:

In this context, the Supreme Court's observations assume considerable importance. The underlying principle is simple, yet profound: meaningful equality cannot be achieved without understanding the actual structure of inequality. In a democracy committed to inclusive governance, representation and opportunity must be informed by evidence, not speculation. Policymakers across the world increasingly recognise that data-driven governance is indispensable for effective welfare planning and equitable distribution of resources.

The demand for caste enumera-

tion has been consistently raised by several political and social movements over the years. Their argument is rooted in a fundamental democratic question: who has access to the nation's wealth, institutions, education, and decision-making structures, and in what proportion? Without credible data, these debates remain confined to rhetoric. The Court's intervention has now provided institutional legitimacy to a conversation that many believe was delayed for far too long.

The Telangana caste survey:
Telangana's recent caste survey has emerged as an important example in this regard. Conducted with administrative coordination and public participation, the exercise attempted to systematically gather socio-economic and educational data across communities. While debates on methodology and implementation may continue, the broader sig-

nificance of the initiative lies in its attempt to shift governance toward evidence-based policymaking. In an era where governments worldwide rely on data to frame targeted welfare measures, India too must strengthen its statistical foundations.

Globally, countries routinely collect demographic and social indicators to address disparities in health care, education, employment, and income distribution. In diverse societies, such exercises are not viewed as instruments of division but as tools for inclusion. India, with its layered social realities, arguably has an even greater need for accurate and transparent data systems.

Critics of caste enumeration, however, raise concerns that such exercises could deepen social divisions or intensify caste-based politics. These concerns cannot be dismissed lightly. Yet, acknowledging inequality is not the same as perpetuating it. Democracies cannot correct structural disadvantages without first identifying them. Just as a physician cannot prescribe treatment without diagnosis, governments cannot meaningfully address social inequities without reliable evidence.

Data privacy and public trust:

Another critical dimension is data privacy and public trust. In the digital age, the collection of personal information naturally raises concerns about misuse and surveillance.