



Slanting posts

Social media platforms should have the same standards for the rulers and the Opposition.

Mistake and Bias:

1. Several Twitter handles associated with Congress and its leaders including its former president Rahul Gandhi was blocked by Twitter in the last few days, for violating its user policy and the law of the land.
2. The violation pertains to posts shared by these handles that identified the family of a child who was allegedly raped and murdered in Delhi. The platform has since revealed that the NCPCR brought the violation to its notice.
3. A petition in the Delhi HC seeking legal action against Mr Gandhi has pointed out that his post was in violation of Section 74 of the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 and Section 23(2) of the POSCO Act 2012, both of which mandate that any material that might reveal (directly or indirectly) the identity of a child victim of a crime shall not be published.
4. Additionally, the post also violated Twitter's own rules. Congress has alleged double standards by the platform and questioned its impartiality.
5. It must, without qualifiers, accept that mistake, and commit to better standards in social media campaigns.

Manipulated media

1. Twitter had flagged posts on several handles associated with the BJP in May, which were intended to target the Congress, as 'manipulated media'. The BJP and the Centre took umbrage over the decision, claiming that only a police investigation could establish whether the content was altered.
2. Twitter insisted that it had its own mechanism to check whether files uploaded on the platform were tinkered with. Herein lies the core conflict between the state and private companies over controlling the information flow in a democratic society.
3. Both the state and the companies invoke public order and interest to justify their control over information, but the protocol for exercising that enormous power over lives remains open to question.



4. Additionally, private companies also claim a right to unilaterally decide their user policy. This raises the pertinent question of whether a private company that is providing a service that is essential — connectivity in this instance — can set the terms of usage arbitrarily.
5. The state has often shown itself unable to control speech in a fair and even-handed manner. It does even wilfully misuse such powers, going by experience.

The age of acceleration has thrown up many such complicated moral and governance questions that society needs to resolve. In the meantime, state agencies must exercise control over speech only in the rarest instances, for the briefest periods, and in the most transparent manner. Private companies must be more transparent in enforcing their guidelines and reassure users that their standards for those in power and those in the Opposition are one.

An Indian sail to navigate the maritime environment

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address on August 9 at the UNSC High-Level Open Debate on "Enhancing Maritime Security: A Case For International Cooperation", convened by India, was both timely and apt.
- He described the oceans as a common heritage for humankind and a lifeline for the future of the planet. In urging the global community to develop a common framework to deal with contemporary challenges, including maritime disputes and natural disasters, he outlined a far-sighted vision rooted in India's culture, history and geography.

Maritime principles

1. Mr Modi reiterated the relevance of SAGAR (Security And Growth For All In The Region). He urged the international community to develop a cooperative and inclusive framework for maritime security, so essential for unimpeded trade and commerce.
2. Ninety per cent of global trade is conducted on the high seas, for the simple reason that it continues to be the most cost-effective mode of transport.
3. Freedom of navigation and unimpeded commerce is key to the spread of prosperity. Critical supply chains depend on the concept of mare liberum



(open seas). The neo-colonial concept of mare clausum (closed seas) in the South China Sea is anathema to the future of the global economy.

4. The Prime Minister advocated the peaceful settlement of maritime disputes on the basis of international law. This idea is rooted in India's values of peace and non-violence.
5. India's acceptance of the award by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2014 paved the way for India and Bangladesh to put aside their maritime dispute and forge even closer ties. This should be an example to others in the region. In 2016, China summarily rejected the Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling in favour of the Philippines.
6. Today, natural disasters and maritime threats posed by non-state actors have grown exponentially. Mr Modi called upon the global community to rally together to deal effectively with the ravages of cyclones, tsunami and maritime pollution.

Environmental concerns

1. Mr Modi's remarks underscored the importance of preserving the maritime environment and its resources. The oceans remain our lifeline. Yet, they have been overwhelmed by plastic waste which chokes all forms of marine life. This, in turn, poisons the entire food chain and imperils the lives of millions.
2. Development of connectivity and infrastructure was also outlined as a major priority. There are heightened concerns today over China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
3. India stands for openness and transparency in the execution of projects, based on local priorities, with in-built fiscal viability and environmental sustainability. The U.S., Japan and Australia are also promoting better standards for global infrastructure through the Blue Dot Network.

Primacy of UNCLOS

1. As President of the UN Security Council for the month of August, India's leadership in the debate on maritime security, that too at the level of the Prime Minister, has strengthened its credentials as a key stake-holder in the maritime commons.

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2. The Presidential Statement issued on the occasion highlights the commitment of the UN Security Council to international law. More relevantly, it emphasises the importance of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea as the legal framework governing all maritime activity.

India's natural interests stretch across both the Indian and Pacific Oceans as reflected in its inclusive Indo-Pacific vision. No doubt, India's initiative will further the prospects for a stable and enduring maritime environment.