



NARENDRA MODI: The Gujarat strongman is by far the eye magnet on the Net and anything written on him, good, bad and ugly is bound to get you attention.

HEADLINE INSPIRED: "Modi claims every Gujarati now living beyond 100"
(source: Faking News)



RAHUL GANDHI: Congress' young vice-president is a popular subject for satire due to his choreographed outings.

HEADLINE INSPIRED: "Who brought dengue first to India? Congress! Exclaims Rahul Gandhi, as reports of Kasab's illness spread."
(source: The Unrealtimes)

DR MANMOHAN SINGH: The good doctor is always game for a laugh whether it is for the things he says, or doesn't.

HEADLINE INSPIRED: "All problems disappear on Rajinikanth's birthday; Indians celebrate, PM found awake"
(source: News That Matters Not)



SUSHIL KUMAR SHINDE: India's home minister has been grabbing headlines everywhere, satire and all.

HEADLINE INSPIRED: "Boy called Sushil Kumar Shinde copies in exam, fails, blames faulty chits"
(source: Faking News)



M KARUNANIDHI: The DMK patriarch is a surprise popular choice, although followed closely by AICC general secretary Digvijay Singh and former BJP president Nitin Gadkari.

HEADLINE INSPIRED: "Sonia Gandhi wins Karunanidhi heart by correctly pronouncing Kanimozhi. Cements Cong-DMK ties"
(source: The Unrealtimes)

Modern Day Aesops

India's politicians, film stars and cricketers are sitting ducks for satire, and a rash of young writers is using the internet to parody them

:: Nistula Hebbar

Former finance minister Yashwant Sinha seems an unlikely cause for the maelstrom of political satire flooding Indian cyberspace but according to CS Krishna, 34, and Karthik Laxman, 30, founder members of the immensely popular The Unrealtimes.com website, that is exactly where the credit lies.

Unrealtimes.com was launched on April 14, 2011. The trigger was the Union Budget of India 2011. "We had done a lot of work to prepare the 'alternative Union Budget of India' in 2011. Unfortunately, that work was never presented in the public domain but it was quite mentally draining. So to take a break from the work, we wrote a satire

piece on how dropping money bags from the sky is the best way to implement a direct cash transfer programme for poverty alleviation," says Krishna. That piece got many hits, and egged the IIM (Ahmedabad) graduates on. They had switched to the development sector from the corporate and realised that there was a market and a readership on the Net for satire, and political satire at that.

It helps matters that the two, now working with a member of Parliament in the field of constituency development, are in the thick of grassroots political action as well. The absurdities of political discourse are laid bare.

Finding that Funny Bone

India, a gerontocracy when it comes to politics, is not known to poke fun at its rulers. The relationship with politicians ranges from reverence to revulsion, with the light touch of satire often missing from the engagement. When it does happen, results can be unpleasant, like section 66A of the Information Technology Act (which penalises sending false and offensive messages via communication services) and the crackdown on websites on account of government censoring.

Even so, compared to television and print, the Net has provided a safe haven for satire and parody. "Cyberspace is a fluid,

virtual almost anonymous space," says renowned cartoonist Sudhir Tailang. "It provides a shield to act with freedom, since in other avenues this freedom is curtailed either by the state in collusion with the political class or the market," he adds.

The satire sites (many have been around for the past couple of years or so) have found a surprisingly large audience in cyberspace. According to Rahul Roushan, 33, founder of Faking News, a popular satire website and Twitter handle, the vernacular medium has had a tradition of satire or vyang. "Satire is not alien to India. We had excellent satire authors: Harishankar Parsai, Srilal Shukla for example in Hindi, and I'm