

The art of the start-up

Like the start-up guys, Narendra Modi is trying to find smart new solutions to nagging old problems

Every time I think Narendra Modi is about to miss the bus, he surprises me. He surprises me even more because I am not a bhakt, I don't think India is the most tolerant nation in the world, I don't like Mark Zuckerberg who has been trying to sneak in Free Basics under the pretense of free internet for everyone, and no, despite being a vegetarian and an animal lover, I don't believe the State ought to interfere in people's eating habits. Anything forced creates its own rebellion. (Hey, Hegel said it. Not me.)

Modi is like a typical start-up guy. He has some smart ideas which he articulates passionately. But, like many start-up guys, he has not been able to put together the team, which can take those ideas ahead. Instead, he has attracted a strange menagerie that claims allegiance to him and yet goes about systematically ruining his every clever move. He tries to distance himself from them but they keep reappearing in the headlines, trying to sell their own agenda in his name. The fact that this embarrasses Modi does not appear to bother them.

Meanwhile, Modi has realised (very wisely, in my opinion) that campaign promises are just campaign promises. Governing India is an entirely different proposition. It is not possible to do them both without compromising one for the other. So he has made his choice. He has focused on the more important task of governance. As Prime Minister, this is the right decision. He now owes it to us to repair the damage caused by UPA2 and bring about the reforms this country so direly needs. The time for settling old scores is over. And no, we do not need any new anxieties.

His unplanned stopover in Lahore was an amazing, disruptive act. He sidestepped the entire system to try and build a direct one-to-one with the leader of a nation we have always chosen to see as the enemy. He knew there will be many critics (even within his own party) waiting to pounce on him if it failed. And the chances of failure were high. But he took the risk. It's a gesture history will remember. For it was the



Modi's insightful move to limit the government from poking its nose in the start-up business sector, could go on to be a huge gamechanger for us

same Modi who, on his campaign trail, seemed all set to go to war. Today, he has the courage to look at the problem differently, and seek new solutions.

This is Modi's new found strength, his ability to take risks, to revisit old ideas and find new solutions often contrary to what he had himself espoused earlier. Consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds. (Yes, Emerson said that.) And it takes a great deal of courage to contradict oneself. Modi has started doing that. He has realised that there are no enemies in the start-up business, only failed efforts which need to be bravely re-addressed.

What he did last weekend was yet another smart step. Instead of pampering the two traditional constituencies all politicians have appealed to from the time of the Mahatma, the fat cat industrialists on one end and the huge vote bank of the poor on the other, Modi chose Start

Up India to address a new political constituency, the constituency of the future. The benefits he announced for start-ups and his promise to stop the government from poking its nose into what is not its business can make a huge difference. Young people who were going from door to door begging for jobs will now hopefully rediscover their confidence and go out and create new jobs for others. PhDs will not have to apply for peons' jobs in sarkari offices. Talent and skill will, finally, find respect and respectability.

Young people look for jobs because they are scared to start their own ventures. They know how tough it is to cope with the corrupt system. Everyone everywhere is waiting to harass them, extort them if they are successful, and punish them if they fail. No, this is not just true of internet businesses. It's true of all business in India. And everyone knows it.

Yet we are an amazing people. We succeed under the most difficult circumstances. The two businesses I know, media and entertainment, are perfect examples. We have created, against all odds, a fiercely independent media. The Emergency excesses did not set us back. In fact, it enriched us, gave us more strength to fight the failures of our politics. As for entertainment, it's what holds India together. We make more movies than anywhere in the world. We sell the largest number of tickets. We download the largest number of videos. As far as skill and tech go, we are on par with the best in the world. We have created, out of nothing, the world's most exciting entertainment business, and the fastest growing. It began like a cottage industry with no help from any quarters. Yet it provides livelihood to millions of people, many of them unschooled, untutored. It's an amazing global showcase for our soft power.

These are actually the best examples of Make in India and Skill India. It's time we stopped chasing the old, outdated dreams of the Industrial Revolution, putrefied by history, and focused on such businesses. You will then see the real Start-up India. The India that can change the world, not follow in its footsteps.