

Written Representation 99

Name: Sabaratnam Ratnakumar
Retiree

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Dear Deputy Speaker Charles Chong

Thank you for extending the deadline. I should be much obliged if you could consider my submission.

Fake news encompass untruths, malicious lies and half-truths. They are cornerstones of harmful mass movement.

Arguably, the existence of flawed ideologies and fault-lines present in the communities and the exponential advancements in digital technologies have become an environment most conducive – i.e. efficient, effective, and profitable means – for spreading fake news.

I vividly remember the fake news in 1995 – statues of Lord Ganesha were said to drink milk offerings – that created a mass hysteria across the world (Singapore was not spared). The panic lasted for about 10 days, until science revealed the truth. The sales of Ganesha's statues and milk shot up during that period. My father-in-law was one the many victims of that hoax.

The recent WhatsApp version of the commotion during this year's Thai Poosam - involving the angry HEB volunteer, law enforcement officer, and the angry leader of the group that supported a devotee carrying kavadi – that emotionally hyped up the Tamil-Hindu community (once again) to demand the Government to make Thai Poosam a public holiday is still fresh in my mind.

Facts about fake news come to light only after the fake news have done the damage. A search in the BBC's website reveals that there are profit motivated fake news factories dedicated to manufacturing hoaxes, propaganda, and disinformation.

Commonsense tells that those of us who are in the grips of organized fake news networks are, often unknowingly, become the secondary source of fake news. It is highly likely that – under such state of mindset - we could abandon reason and stand by our captors.

Fake news, without doubt, erode the root of democracy and, hence, the root of freedom of expression.

I believe democracy is the means for the improvements in people's wellbeing - i.e. improvements in health care, education, housing, employment, equal rights, freedom of conscience, human rights, and so on.

Critical mind is necessary - to safeguard ourselves from falling victims to online fake news - but not sufficient.

There must be a law to ensure that online social networks would strictly adhere to good governance – i.e. transparency, accountability, truthfulness, and a quality feedback system.

For, law and order are the instrumentalities through which democracy attempts to thrive.

Kind Regards
S. Ratnakumar