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**Regulation needed**

I have returned to Islamabad after a successful visit to the Bhong Sharif area of Rahim Yar Khan where I was invited as a special guest to attend a ceremony for the restoration of the Ganesh Temple. Traditionally, the diverse society of Bhong Sharif has been seen as a practical example of religious harmony and tolerance.

Regarding the unfortunate incident that happened last week in which a violent mob attacked the Ganesh Temple, what I have found is that social media has played a major role in creating panic. A large number of hateful posts have appeared on various social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter and Whatsapp groups. Unfortunately, there was literally no check on hate material on digital spaces.

That is why, during my address at the restoration ceremony, I emphasized on the responsible use of social media. No doubt, social media is the most powerful instrument in societal change but its usage must be for bringing people closer for the betterment of society.

When I was coming back from Bhong Sharif, Federal Minister for Information & Broadcasting Fawad Hussain Chaudhry and National Security Adviser Moeed Yusuf held a press conference, during which they disclosed that many foreign elements are very active on social media with a focus on Pakistani current affairs..

According to Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry, government teams had analysed Twitter trends from June 2019 to August 2021 and "it transpired that India led the top trends against Pakistan” in order to defame Pakistan in the eyes of the international community.

The said press conference reminded me of my article, 'Regulating social media' (June 2, 2017). I had mentioned that the situation in our beloved county is quite sensitive where numerous anonymous websites and fake social media accounts are involved in spreading propaganda and conspiracy theories. Still, I am of the view that fake Twitter accounts are being used to make trending topics more popular than they actually are.

Seven years ago, during my hearings in the Supreme Court for the protection of minorities' rights in Pakistan, I had informed then-CJ Tassaduq Hussain Jillani that there is an immediate need to delete all hate material throughout the country. To implement the National Action Plan in letter and spirit, the government must take solid measures against abuse of internet and social media promoting hatred, extremism, sectarianism and intolerance.

However, the dilemma is whenever there is some serious effort to ensure positive usage of social media, a lot of hue and cry has been raised under the guise of press freedom.

A nationwide awareness campaign on a massive scale is also needed to highlight the importance of social media for good. An internet user must understand that s/he is accountable to God for all deeds while using the internet and further sharing of fake information is in fact an act of sin, whether people like to admit that or not.

I would like to suggest to the information ministry, under the visionary leadership of Fawad Chaudhry, to call a digital media summit in which representatives of leading news portals, bloggers and youtubers could be invited for sharing ideas and fighting against propaganda.

The internet regulation strategies of different countries could also be analysed on the occasion. Strengthening the role of the digital editor for news websites is also in the best interest of news portals for winning trust of their audience by providing authentic news content.

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