

conspiracy

The Story Behind The Story

BY SRIVIDYA MENON

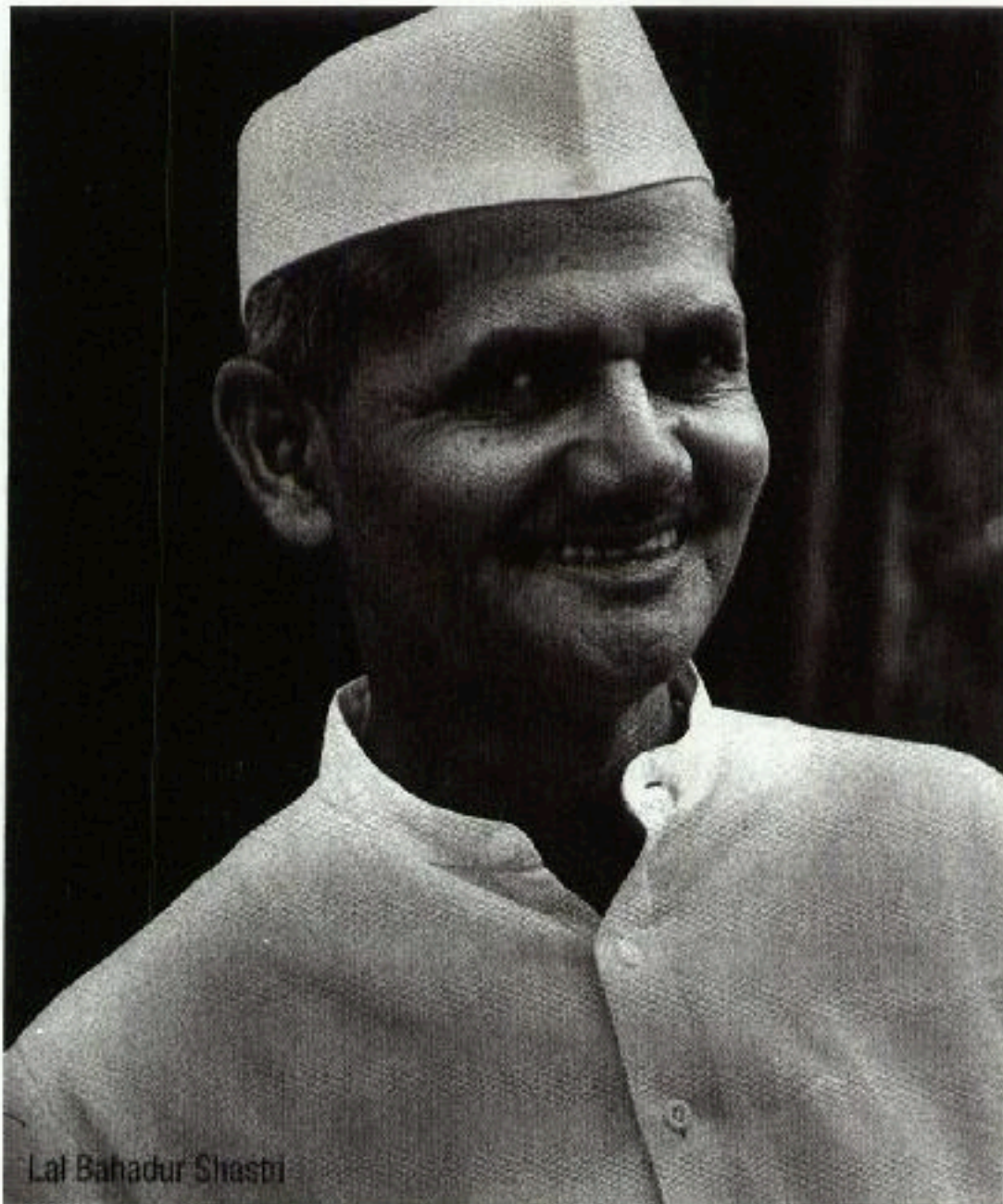
They say that a story isn't over until the fat lady sings. In some cases, the story isn't over even after. Because, brewing behind the scenes is a searing conspiracy theory that, thanks to its very nature, refuses to cool down. As recommended, we serve it to you hot

An author calls it the delectable area between the truth and imagination, a writer cringes at the mention of it while a 'serious' journalist doesn't want to be a part of anything to do with it. The mention of conspiracy theories has responses ranging from curiosity to utter disgust. That explains its popularity. The phenomenon however isn't that easy to define.

Ashwin Sanghi, a conspiracy fiction writer, first laughs at being called a conspiracy theorist. He then attempts to define it. "A conspiracy theory is born in a situation with a lack of evidence. The genesis of a conspiracy theory is a blend of factual inspiration with dollops of fiction in them. Take the car crash of Late Princess Diana that has umpteen alternative theories. We will not know the truth and so the theories become delicious," he says.

Other hypotheses meanwhile have been delicious enough to be feasted upon for years. The US' moon landing in the early '70s has believers who propagate that the whole event was an expert manipulation and tampering of the 'evidence' of the landings. And, 9/11 meanwhile was supposedly the handiwork of the CIA and Mossad and was orchestrated to invade Afghanistan and Iraq. Search Youtube for 'Mysterious Deaths of 9/11 witnesses' or go to 911truth.org and the plot only thickens. Elvis Presley apparently did not die of a heart attack. He did not die at all, if Elvis-is-alive.com is to be believed. Apparently, he staged his own death and was indoctrinated into the witness protection programme for his work as an FBI agent. Singer Gloria Estefan even reported getting a phone call from someone identifying himself as Elvis when she was recovering from a bus accident. While on the

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Lal Bahadur Shastri



Ashwin Sanghi

topic of the living dead, it is believed that Adolf Hitler didn't really kill himself during the war. The book, *Grey Wolf: The Escape of Adolf Hitler*, says that he did not die in the bunker but rather escaped to Argentina where he lived comfortably until 1962 and fathered two daughters.

Ashwin loves that there is a scope for controversy theories. The author of *Krishna Key* (which said Krishna's DNA is still present and hidden), *Chanakya's Chant* (where an ancient mantra was the source of Chanakya's power) and *Rozabal Line* (which alleged that Jesus Christ was not crucified but eventually died in India) is expectedly biased toward conspiracy theories. What was not expected was the admission that there are "lots of conspiracy theories in India."

The most popular one has got to be ex-Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri's death. Officially known to have died due to a cardiac arrest in Tashkent, his wife later alleged that his body was blue when it was transported back to India,

Recently, the unrest in Balochistan against its ruling Pakistani government has been credited to the Indians to help the separatists there.

hinting that the former leader was poisoned. Veteran journalist Kuldeep Nayar's book, *India, The Critical Years*, rules out any foul play, mentioning that the blue tint was a result of embalming the dead body. Theories abound (on the internet) that say the USSR influenced Jawaharlal Nehru but couldn't do the same with Shastri. So, they invited Pakistan's premier Ayub Khan and Shastri to resolve the 1965 Indo-Pak war. The day after the talks, Shastri was found dead in his room. The butler was investigated and acquitted, while 11 years later, Shastri's accompanying doctor, Dr RN Chugh, was murdered along with his wife and son in what was made to look like a road accident. The result of Shastri's death was the eventual initiation of Jawaharlal's daughter, Indira Gandhi, to power. These theories aside, the government is yet to declassify the document pertaining to Shastri's death and when journalist Anuj Dhar filed an RTI investigation, the PMO refused, citing that the publication could 'harm foreign relations, cause disruption in the country and cause breach of Parliamentary privileges.' These were the reasons to classify the documents of his death as caused by natural causes. Wonder why!

Later, in 1990, The Mandal Committee suggestions and the protests that followed were apparently fuelled by political interests wanting to throw out the VP Singh government. He was eventually ousted for reasons more than the protests. Talking about attempts to change the ruling government, the Purulia Arms

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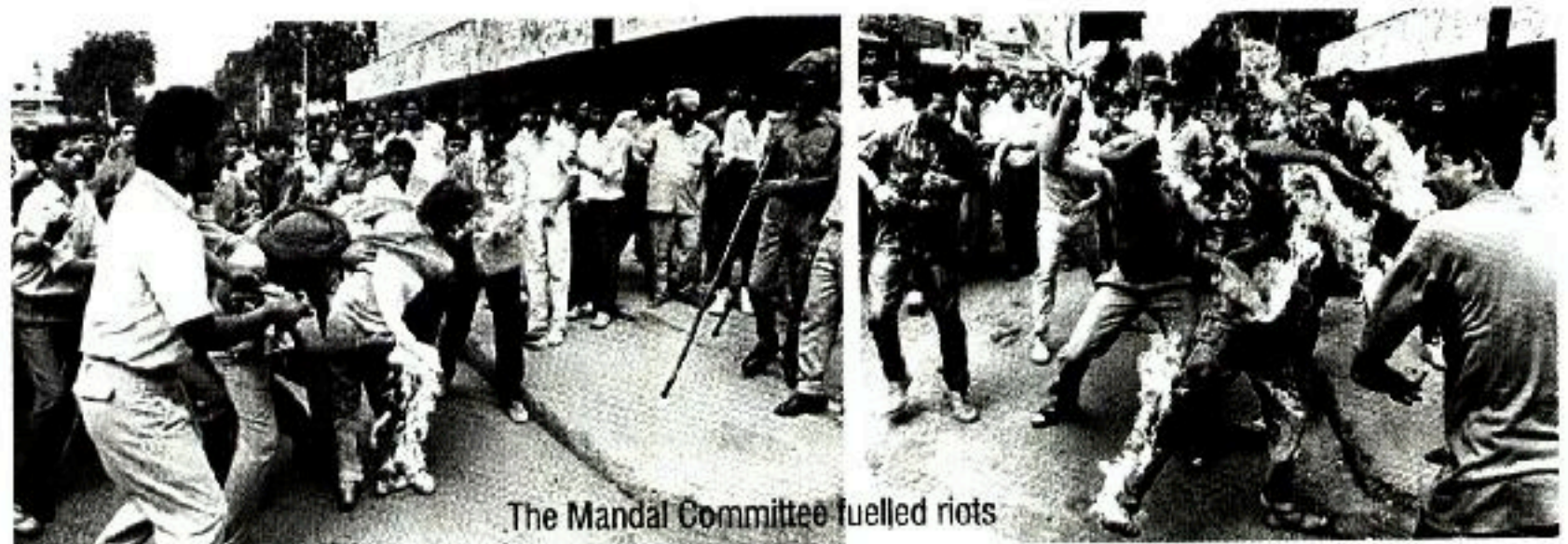
Lady Diana

Drops Case comes to mind. Ashwin puts up a disclaimer before discussing, "It was probably an arms delivery gone wrong but the alternative theory is more interesting." On December 17, 1995, a heavy delivery of arms took place at Purulia, West Bengal, by an Antonov An-26 aircraft which was wasn't intercepted by the Indian intelligence and security agencies. It flew in from Pakistan and allegedly dropped the ammunition for a spiritual organisation, Ananda Marga, and eventually landed in Pattaya, Thailand. The IB dispatched information was only received by the local police long after the aircraft left the Indian airspace. It returned to Chennai to refuel while on its way back to the UK and the inhabitants of the aircraft taken into custody and questioned. The British citizen in the plane, Peter Bleach, alleged that the MI5 and RAW were very well aware of the operation and it was a delivery conducted after notifying the authorities. While India is currently battling an extradition of the mastermind—Kim Davy from Denmark—Bleach has been shouting from the rooftop that India has always known about Davy's whereabouts but has been delaying the process because of their vested interests. The

arms were apparently meant to topple the communist government in Bengal which didn't go as planned. Peter was released due to the British government's intervention but Davy remains at large. He explained in a TV interview, '(It is a) matter of public record that RAW was informed on three defined dates by MI5 about the arms drop, the people on board the plane, the drop zone, everything. (Who) in their right mind would fly a plane from the arch enemy of Pakistan into Indian airspace with a load of clandestine weapons without having it cleared by the Indian authorities?' Arnab Goswami recently conducted his usual debate on the issue on his channel and it remains to be seen whether this allegation turns out to be true or stays back as a riveting conspiracy theory.

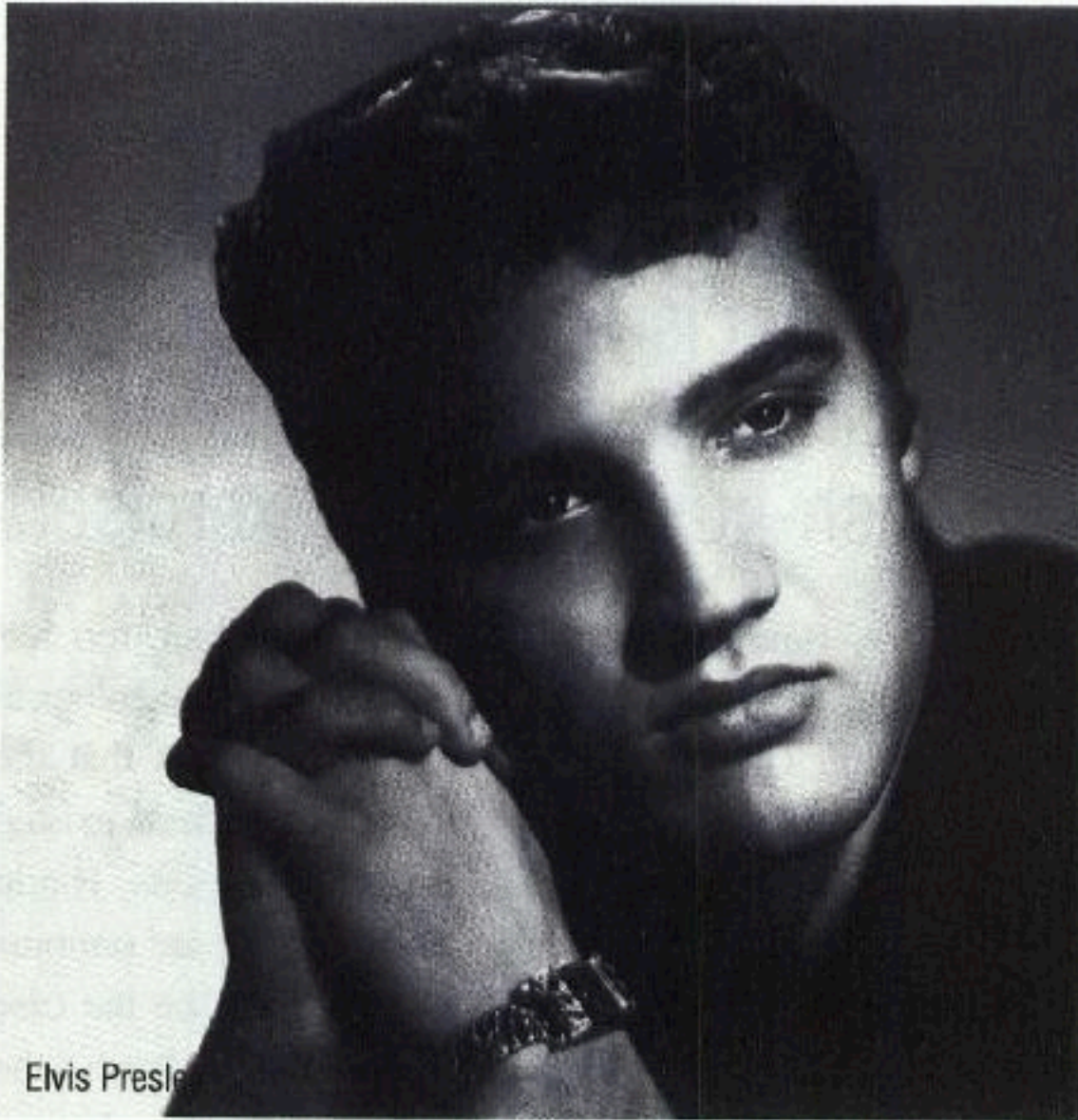
Meanwhile, Pakistan too thinks that India is indulging in covert methods to create unrest in other administrations. Recently, the unrest in Balochistan against its ruling Pakistani government has been credited to the Indians to help the separatists there. Musharraf had pointed a finger at India in 2010 and even claimed that they had solid evidence that India has been financing Baloch nationalist leader Nawab Akbar Bugti's grandson, Bramdagh Bugti, to fuel the unrest. None of that solid evidence yet has been made public and Bugti rubbishes these allegations while an Iranian diplomat on the other hand has blamed the US for the same. As far as India goes, Musharraf's allegations were supported by Pakistan's Interior Minister, Rehman Malik, who by the way, also said that the 28/11 accused, Abu Jundal, is actually an Indian agent who was orchestrating the attacks from Pakistan.

The Mumbai attack meanwhile has conspiratorial overtones too. The death of ex-cop and the then Anti Terrorism Squad (ATS) Chief, Hemant Karkare, drew more than just shocked gasps. Former Inspector General of Maharashtra, SM Mushrif, published a sensational book, *Who Killed Karkare*, which says that there is a section in the intelligence forces of India who are communal and have for years ignored the Hindu fundamentalists' danger to India. Mushrif, on the basis of his own investigation, believes that Karkare's involvement



The Mandal Committee fuelled riots

conspiracy



Elvis Presley

in the Malegaon blasts case, where he investigated a Hindu fundamentalist group for the attacks, led to his own death. It is believed that the former Maharashtra ATS Chief KP Raghuvanshi, on the day of the Mumbai attacks, gave incorrect directions to the locations of the two terrorists, Mohammed Ajmal Amir Iman Kasab and Abu Ismail, which led to his death. Interestingly, Karkare was wearing a bullet proof jacket, which was apparently substandard and went missing after the incident.

A journalist who doesn't want to be named rubbishes Mushrif's story and doubts any Indian officials' wit to come forth with a plan to annihilate Karkare by taking advantage of the attack. Furthermore, Ajmal Kasab, the terrorist nabbed and hanged on November 21, 2012, apparently died of dengue days before the hanging. That, the conspiracists claimed, was why the government conducted a hush-hush hanging exercise. Newspapers, on the other hand, said that dengue was a ruse to conduct a formal check-up that is mandatory before the convict is hanged.

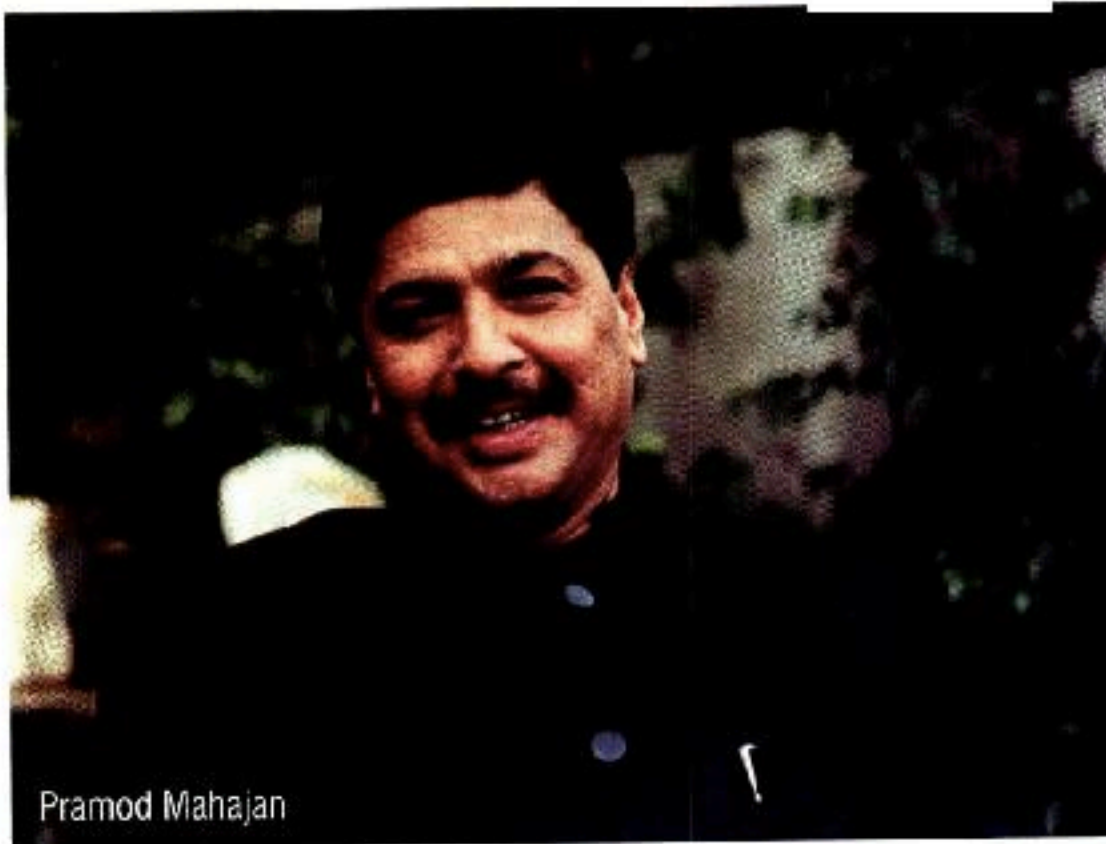
While sadly the mystery does not seem to be coming undone anytime soon, let's go to 2006, when Pravin Mahajan shot dead his elder brother, Pramod Mahajan, in broad daylight. The elder Mahajan was one of the most influential leaders in the country and was being looked upon as a possible opposition leader. Interestingly, 27 days after the murder came the news of Pramod's son Rahul and his PA Bibek Moitra's drug overdose which eventually killed the latter. This set off speculations, especially because Moitra was often

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dubbed as the 'person who knew too much' as a result of his close relationship with Pramod for 15 years. His untimely death sprung up assumptions of poison mixed in the drugs that he must have consumed. Pravin meanwhile maintained that he did not shoot Pramod which was promptly quashed by the judiciary and was presented a life term. Three years later, a furlough was granted on November 27, 2009. Before the leave expired, he complained of headache and blood pressure and was admitted to a local hospital where he later slipped into a coma and eventually breathed his last after 82 days. What's to be noted here is that Pravin left the BJP and joined the Congress a month before he murdered Pramod. The internet is rife with connections linking the three deaths. A blog even cites Subramanian Swamy's article on Sonia Gandhi and his allegation that she is a tough competitor who hates rivals (in and out of Congress). Madhavrao Scindia died in a plane crash, Rajesh Pilot died in a car crash, YS Rajashekhara Reddy in another plane crash and now Pramod Mahajan was killed by his disgruntled brother, a Congressman. Go on, connect the dots.

All the talk of political games gets Ashwin to talk about the latest event that sparked a train of conspiracy theories in the media. The north India power failure that affected people in and out of India happened as a result of sabotage. The reason could be the ongoing negative publicity that India had been subjected to in the west (Manmohan Singh's *Time* magazine cover with the headline, 'The Underachiever', Rajat Gupta's trial), the attempt to strengthen south India which is becoming an industrial hub, thanks to the western corporate presence in Chennai, Andhra Pradesh and Pune-Mumbai, RAW's falling out with Israel's Mossad because of India's closeness to Iran, a cyber attack, but the least flimsy theory was what Ashwin mentions. He says, "The Anna Hazare movement was on its peak and closing down the energy could have been a desperate move by the government." In fact, Sanjay Singh, a Team Anna member, quoted to the media

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Pramod Mahajan

that, 'The government can cut the grid, cut the light, cut the metro services, bus and auto services but people will come out and join the Anna Hazare movement.'

While on Delhi, *Indian Express* once attempted a courageous 'exposé' in April 2012 on a suspected coup when two army units moved to Delhi without notifying the government. One was a whole mechanised infantry from Hisar, Haryana, while the Agra based 50 Para Brigade moved toward Palam. The movement sparked the government to carry out an alert and made routine checks on vehicles leading to Delhi, thus slowing traffic. Checks were carried out on locations of key formations and their commanders. The Defence Secretary cut short his visit to Malaysia and questioned the Lt Gen, AK Choudhary, of the movements. Routine exercise to check the movement in fog was the answer. However, valid doubts were raised as to why the Ministry of Defence or the higher authorities weren't informed. The *Express* was careful not to use the 'coup' word here, but the readers weren't that kind. The coverage definitely must have sparked some interesting conversations.

"The fundamental element is the entertaining value. There is no issue of gossip happening around the story but when it is presented in a newspaper or a channel as a fact with no research and conjecture is when the problem arises," says Ashwin. A case in point is the argument that Taj Mahal is actually Tejo Mahalaya, a Shiv temple. The idea floated by Professor PN Oak in his book, *Taj Mahal: The True Story*, states that the Taj was taken by Shah Jahan from Jai Singh for Mumtaz's burial. According to the book, the structure existed 300 years before Shah Jahan's rule in India. Oak cites biographies, the cobra motifs on the walls and sealed rooms that remain inaccessible to the public which Oak believes contain the headless statue of Shiva and other objects of worship. Talking

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about Shiva, Hindu religion's other deity, Krishna, too has found himself in the headlines after a series of archaeological discoveries off Gujarat coast has spread the news that the old city and Krishna's capital town, Dwarka, indeed existed and was submerged underwater, which supports Hindu beliefs. However, sceptics classify that the above are rumours spread to propagate Hinduism. Similar seems to be the case of Ram Sethu (the bridge supposedly built by Lord Rama), the submerged bridge off the coast of South India also known as Adam's Bridge. According to Wikipedia, the government of India, in an affidavit to the Supreme Court, denied any historical proof of Rama's involvement while the Madras High Court ruled that the bridge is a man-made structure because of the loose sand layer under the corals in the entire structure. Corals are normally formed over rocks. Maybe, it is divine intervention, or maybe connecting the bridge to mythology is a conspiracy to push Hindu interests. Or, it may just be another product of a busy mind.

A valid point that Ashwin puts forth is that these theories actually encourage a wide discussion of facts and in turn educate readers than spread rumours. There have been cases of such theories turning into facts. The Malegaon bomb blasts and its Hindutva connections were present only in drawing room conversations. But, the investigation leads soon collaborated with the rumours. Ashwin says, "When I studied in Yale, there was a skull and bones society whose members had the notorious likelihood of becoming a judge, senator or the President. They have secret meetings and funny initiation proceedings that others are not party to. I know this exists but as a rationalist, I have to question myself whether I believe it because it makes sense or because it sounds like a good story." Ashwin is not the only one finding himself easily carried away. Conspiracy theories exist in popular media for reasons more than a just a few brains with over active grey cells acting over time. It is for those who aren't satisfied with the rut. They seek a bit of drama, a bit of mystery and a revel in the thrill of asking, 'That's ok, but what if...?' <<

