

Ashok Bhatt, Master of the Art of hitting headlines

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The new Gujarat Assembly has Ashok Bhatt as its Speaker. Bhatt has many distinctions to his credit. He is the MLA representing Khadia constituency in Ahmedabad since 1975, longest surviving MLA in the country. The new Gujarat Assembly has Ashok Bhatt as its Speaker. Bhatt has many distinctions to his credit. He is the MLA representing Khadia constituency in Ahmedabad since 1975, longest surviving MLA in the country. During this period he has witnessed turbulent periods of Gujarat as a society and its politics. Today when incumbency is a catch phrase in Indian politics, Bhatt's survival as MLA from Khadia is a classic example of his ability to hit right note with his electorate. His personality has another fascinating aspect. However, media and his contemporaries have not been able to do justice to this aspect of his personality. This is his ability to hit headlines at his will and in his way. It may sound strange when one learns that he is just SSC. He has no qualification in Journalism nor has he undertaken any course in media. He is great in throwing up ideas that catch the attention of the media instantly. PR skills are natural gift to him. He is always willing to help people particularly people from press. But his mastery is much beyond simple PR tricks of exchanging pleasantries and offering help. It is a known fact that Health, Law and Justice are among those departments which are not sought after by politicians. These are not newsy departments. Nor they are considered important. But Ashok Bhatt has shown that even these dull departments can be turned into happening departments from media point of view. Malaria is a common health problem. No one thinks beyond quinine tablets. But our Bhattji had processions of monstrous models of mosquitoes to tell people about the villain that caused malaria! This was a good picture event for media. Then there were all kind of information tableau. Once the issue of problem of malaria in the Banaskantha district was raised in the House. He had a very creative explanation. He said flooding of water from the neighbouring Pakistan was the main cause of Malaria in the border district. No one could miss the story, whatsoever may be the fact of the flooding water. He would have plenty of such occasions. He was probably the first Health Minister who involved UNICEF and had frequent joint media interactions. Promotion of Ayurveda and projects of development of herbal plants brought him fruits in the form of wide media coverage. His tenure as Law and Justice Minister saw news stories of Lok Adalats, evening courts and National Law University in Gujarat! It is a known fact that Chief Minister Narendra Modi's decision to have him as speaker did not bring cheers to him. But he had to accept the job. Once he accepted it, he started showing his best. He visited the vast library of the Assembly. It had no readers. He sent letters to all MLAs asking them to use the Library. It was a good news copy that MLAs did not use the library. All had this news as prominent one. Next day he wrote a letter to former MLAs asking them to keep relations with the Assembly as the creator of present Gujarat. A creative newsworthy idea! Then he arranged a three day workshop for MLAs. Lok Sabha Speaker was among the important speakers. Certainly a national event. Even during the budget session, he showed his creative newsiness. What use speakers make of the CCTV. Hardly any. But Ashok Bhatt started viewing tapes of all cameras after Assembly hours. He found some MLAs sharing chocolate, ministers sending notes to MLAs to ask questions. He used this information in the House to act as a good successful monitor!! At a time, when people curse media for its reporting and charge it with writing all kind of things, here is Ashok Bhatt who sets agenda for media and succeeds in it!!!