

## Indian newspapers

# Let 1,000 titles bloom

DELHI

## Which will be the first to wither?

ALMOST every day Raju Narisetti, managing editor of Mint, a business newspaper launched in Mumbai and Delhi this month, gets an e-mail from a Western journalist looking for a job in India. The interest is unsurprising: newspapers are struggling in Europe and America, but in India, as in China, they are booming. Mint is one of several newcomers. Delhi's first tabloid, Metro Now, was launched on February 5th. A second, owned by India Today, a weekly news magazine, is due to appear later this year.

India has some 300 big newspapers, with a combined circulation of 157m last year—a rise of 12.9% on 2005. Only a few dozen of these rags, with a circulation of 35m, are in English, but they get about half of the advertising cash. The economy has grown by 8% a year over the past four years and growth has been particularly strong among traditional advertisers, such as car-makers, property developers and airlines.

The future looks bright. At best, a mere 300m of the country's billion-odd people are middle-class; only 60% are literate. As the untutored crowds learn to read, they are likely to reach for a newspaper. Internet access, although spreading, is enjoyed by only 1.2% of Indians over the age of 12. According to MJ. Akbar, editor-in-chief of the Asian Age, "The language of aspiration is English and the medium of aspiration is the newspaper, so an English newspaper is almost a ladder on which this class seeks to rise."

This year, for the first time in a decade, newspapers and magazines increased their share of advertising revenues, to 47%, despite the continuing proliferation of television channels. That success was partly a

# Sozzled salarymen

## The Japanese are trying to combat drunkenness with technology

DRUNKEN salarymen tottering home after a night's karaoke are as much a feature of modern Japan as sushi bars and bullet trains. Alcohol consumption is declining in most of the developed world, but not in Japan, where the number of heavy drinkers has more than doubled in the past 30 years. The most recent survey by the health ministry found that almost 2% of the population were alcoholics.

Japanese have traditionally excused boozey benders as the only opportunity repressed workers have to loosen up and tell the boss what they think. But a horrific incident last year in which a drunk driver killed three young children in Fukuoka, a southern town, has prompted a change of heart. Consumer groups are campaigning against drunk driving, and the police want parliament to raise the maximum prison sentence from three to five years and to double the heaviest fine to ¥im (\$8,200). Japanese firms, for their part, sniff a big new market.

In the vanguard is Toyota, which plans to launch a car in 2009 that will shut down the engine if its driver is drunk, using sensors on the steering wheel to measure the alcohol level in the driver's sweat. If the driver is wearing gloves, a camera on the dashboard will check for dilated pupils and the car's computer will detect erratic steering. Nissan, meanwhile, is testing a

breathalyser-like device into which the driver must blow before starting the car.

Japan's two leading mobile-phone operators, NTT DoCoMo and KDDI, have launched phones with built-in breathalysers, which they are marketing to bus and taxi firms. Blowing into a tube on the phone measures the user's level of intoxication, which is then transmitted to headquarters along with a mugshot of the user and details of the phone's location, determined by satellite. These devices are not cheap, at ¥89,000 per handset and a further ¥58,000 for the software. But KDDI has sold over 400 since last autumn—many of them to operators of corporate fleets, which account for 40m of Japan's 70m cars.

Another growth area is that of "driving agent" services for the sozzled. The *unten daikouyoukai* service will send a team of two to pick up a customer (often at the request of a bar owner), take his keys and drive him home in one car with his own following. Such is the demand that the service employs more than 6,000 agents across Japan. In addition, Fujitaxi, a taxi firm, has patented a device for carrying the bicycles of people afraid to ride after drinking. Such devices were used more than 5,000 times last year, up from 350 times in 2005, says the firm. The salarymen are unlikely to stop drinking, but at least now they are more likely to get home safely.

product of increased competition between the main titles. In recent years, led by the *Times of India*, the biggest English dailies in each region have gone national, breaking a gentleman's agreement to avoid each other's patches. For example, the *Deccan Chronicle*, traditionally of Hy-

derabad, has won a circulation of nearly 200,000 in Chennai, traditional home of the *Hindu*, in just 18 months.

Competition is forcing once-staid publications to spice up their content. Mumbai's *Midday* tabloid has introduced a bikini-clad version of Britain's topless "page-three girls", called the "Midday mate". Most broadsheets offer similar enticements in colourful "entertainment" sections full of Bollywood stars.

But the most common competitive tactic is to offer huge discounts to subscribers. Before its launch Mint had sold 55,000 one-year subscriptions for just 299 rupees (\$6.70) apiece. That works out at less than two cents per issue, although the paper, ink and printing alone cost 115 cents. In response, the *Times of India*, which also owns the *Economic Times*, offered both papers for little more than the price of one-roughly what they would fetch as wrapping-paper. At those prices, a few titles will surely founder, no matter how high the rising tide. •



On the way to a higher class