

EDITORS' PICK

Amazon: Crime And Punishment

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Traders hold placards during a demonstration demanding the closure of online shopping platforms ... [+] AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Curiouser and curiouser: Jeff Bezos goes on a three-day trip to India expecting to be welcomed personally by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. During his trip, Bezos honors the country's traditions and illustrious figures like Gandhi, dons a Nehru vest, flies kites with children... and beyond the symbols, he promises investments worth \$1 billion, to create a million jobs, along with \$10 billion worth of "Made in India" exports, a network of electric delivery rickshaws, an agreement with thousands of small stores for the distribution of parcels... in short, a pile of goodies that no country in its right mind would resist. And what happens? Everything, absolutely everything goes wrong. President Modi refuses to see him, the trade minister tells him that his \$1 billion investment "is not a big favor" and serves him a

lawsuit for anti-competitive practices. Throughout the visit, Bezos was trolled on Twitter and booed wherever he went.

What is it that drives an entire country, from the government down, to reject one of the world's most important business leaders and the richest man in the world who is about to deliver a major investment plan? The reasons for this hostile reception are to do with scrutiny of the e-commerce giant's competitive practices and the prospect that its expansion will threaten the country's all-important small business fabric, along with accusations that the Bezos-owned Washington Post has been critical of the Indian government.

Is Bezos "doing India a favor" with his proposed investments? Obviously, favors of this type are rarely disinterested: India is a huge subcontinent and major market where competition is fierce between local chains and giants like Walmart (which [acquired Flipkart in 2018](#)) or Amazon, and where obtaining a good competitive position is crucial. Bezos is obviously not investing in India out of the goodness of his heart. But it is also clear that Amazon's interests can possibly be aligned to some extent with those of the country, that Amazon's interest can generate major benefits for the Indian economy, that many Indian citizens can find well-paid jobs at the e-commerce giant, and that interesting distribution agreements await local businesses. To receive the richest man in the world in such an unpleasant way when he intends to invest so much money is unusual, could be seen as a mistake from a political and economic point of view... what's more, it's not the first time Bezos has been rebuffed: about a year ago, [New York turned down the chance to host Amazon's second headquarters](#).

The signs are that Amazon will have to get used to being turned down. There are range reasons, from aesthetics to much deeper questions, some of them related to the working conditions of some of its employees, as well as the impact on traditional commerce. The hostility shown toward Amazon may not always be justified, and is possibly sometimes unfair... but is also [easy to anticipate and understand](#). And the company is far from knowing how to manage it. Bezos' India trip must have been a bitter pill to swallow.

Why has Jeff Bezos gone from being seen as a successful entrepreneur, an example who has revolutionized world trade, to being a hate figure attacked on so many fronts? Which are the crimes that deserve such punishment? The technology companies should give the matter some thought. Amid [mounting public hostility and calls for greater regulation of the tech companies](#), with [Larry and Sergey escaping from public scrutiny and focused on other tasks](#), calls for Zuckerberg to be lynched, and now Bezos jeered at, perhaps [there are lessons](#) to be [learned](#) from the

likes of Tim Cook or Satya Nadella, for example. Being a leading light in the technology industry isn't in itself a reason to be universally hated.

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Business leaders who wanted to change the world seem to be going through some tough times and while for some of them their projects have made them rich, they haven't necessarily made them popular, while others manage to run corporations now valued at more than \$1 trillion without attracting such widespread hostility.

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What did Jeff and co. do wrong? What have their peers done differently that has made them more popular, or not so unpopular? It's definitely a question worth considering.

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