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FOUNDED BY

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BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Anatomy of an attack

ISIS claiming responsibility for terror in Sri Lanka points to the danger of its expansion in the Subcontinent



SYED ATA HASNAIN

GOD HAS OFTEN been unkind kind to the island nation of 21 million people. Such a beautiful land and such good people but Sri Lanka seems doomed to its unfortunate fate of violence of different forms. The latest carnage involving bombings by as many as seven suspected suicide bombers, leading to over 250 fatalities at eight locations, is apparently a manifestation of some large-scale clandestine external support to a set of proxies. Since investigation is underway, there is as yet informed conjecture about the (NTJ), an Islamic entity. It is suspected to be a radical Islamist group, which came into the spotlight only in 2017 after the Buddhist radical group Bodu Bala Sena reportedly undertook a campaign against the Muslim minority in Sri Lanka. At this stage, it is sufficient to believe that religious and ethnic differences are behind the carnage. The Islamic State (IS) has lately taken responsibility. Yet, the international connection is a matter of piecing the complex jigsaw of international terror, Islamist networks, the situation post the 2009 war with LTTE and other events. How this deadly cocktail comes together to smother a quiet island nation perhaps needs deeper investigation. At this moment we can, at best, theorise.

Informed theorising can help put together motives, assess potential and piece ideas together to create a narrative. It commences with the immense potential for sectarian violence in Sri Lanka. There is the defeated LTTE, which would desire to rise again since the Tamil population remains as un-integrated and, perhaps as subjugated as it was during the 30 years of the civil war. The government has done little to prevent its resurgence and diaspora networks remain fully alive. The LTTE is expected to return one day with vengeance, but not yet. Besides, the LTTE is hardly likely to target Christians and their places of worship because many are Christians themselves. For them to act as subsidiary of another international group is least likely. International intelligence agencies including those from India had warned Sri Lanka on April 11 about the possibility of NTJ undertaking some form of terrorist action around Easter.

Sri Lanka has a 7.4 per cent Muslim mi-

nority; an undetermined number are from the Wahabi sect and others are Sufis. However, in that country's majority and hard-boiled nationalism, everyone other than Sinhala Buddhists are suspected of being anti-national. A severe trust deficit exists based upon years of internal civil war and internecine violence between various faiths and groups. As an island nation under the larger shadow of India, where 190 million Muslims reside, its sectarian tend to be ignored. It is just the kind of situation tailor made for two things; first, a demonstration of international radical extremist capability; second to send home a message that these terror networks exist across the world and mother organisations still control them. That is why the finger of suspicion points to confirmation of the IS, which has staked claim for the carnage.

After its defeat in the Middle East, the IS has made efforts towards sustaining itself in third countries or locations. Efforts are on in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In Southeast Asia it was the Philippines where it attempted to ride on a surrogate group such as Abu Sayyaf. In the competitive world of international terror, the IS perceives a need to continue retaining its current primacy; any leeway given to other major groups such as al Qaeda will see many years of effort in the Middle East wasted. With an intelligence appreciation, placing oneself in the shoes of IS leadership, it is not difficult to determine that with the loss at Marawi in the Philippines, little progress in Af-Pak and the recent losses at Idlib in Syria, the IS was desperate to show case itself. Targeting the Sinhala majority would be counterproductive as the retaliation from radical Sinhala groups such as Bodu Bala Sena would be intense. Targeting the Tamil community would similarly be counterproductive since the LTTE's networks may eventually be needed. The Christian community is 9.7 per cent of the population and historically no Christian-Muslim feud exists in the island. That is all the more reason that the chances of retaliation against Muslims would be low.

A second chain of events involving bombings remains alive as per the US intelligence

agencies. The IS, with its caliphate-like aspirations, would have viewed the killings at Christchurch, New Zealand as just the event to avenge with an act against Christians anywhere on the globe. Easter was the most appropriate time as was the selection of churches and five-star hotels where western tourists (again largely Christian) would be present in large numbers. The questionable part of this rationale is the short interval since the Christchurch killings — March 15 to April 22. The type of suicide bombings witnessed in Sri Lanka would have called for resource collection, planning, motivation of seven suicide bombers and very careful coordination without even an iota of a leak. Five weeks to plan is far too little time. Christchurch probably only became a justification. The IS's organisational skills are well known. It could be deduced that the operation was in the planning stages already and given greater justification by Christchurch. It is reported that just a year ago, a cache of explosives and ammunition linked to NTJ was found just north of Colombo.

For us in India, it's a narrow escape. It could well have happened in southern India but the Indian intelligence system is a reasonable dampener for the IS. Little do we realise the worth of our intelligence agencies, which have kept India safe ever since 26/11 with no major targeting outside J&K (excluding Pathankot which too is a military station). If the narrative built above is true, then the IS has obviously sneaked in through surrogate returnees who fought its cause in the Middle East. Maldives nearby too has many, Sri Lanka some. India has over a hundred, mostly logistic support personnel — many could be motivated as potential suicide bombers. With the same threat developing in J&K, these are dangerous portents. India and Sri Lanka need intense intelligence cooperation and even more an understanding of social dynamics which contribute to the hard ideologies behind such acts.

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GENDER BENDERS

Induction of women as jawans is a small, big step towards full parity between men and women in the Indian Army

THE INDIAN ARMY has taken a small — and long overdue — step on the road to gender equity by deciding to induct women soldiers in the military police. Till now, women had been allowed in select corps of the army such as medical, legal and engineering as officers. The military police are tasked with maintaining order in army establishments and cantonments, handling prisoners of war, among other duties. With 1,700 women inducted in the corps, the tiny proportion of women in the army — less than four per cent — might not get a substantial boost. But in a country where the number of women in the workforce has plunged alarmingly in recent years, this is at least one door of opportunity yanked open.

That's still short, however, of what a progressive armed force in 2019 should aim for — full parity between men and women, including in combat roles. Armies of Israel, America, Australia, Denmark, among others, are already there, having pitched women soldiers into the frontline and found them as capable as men. In India, the debate over the role of women has often tripped on cultural vetoes, which are often nothing but patriarchal squeamishness in disguise. There is the argument made that the rank and file of Indian men, often drawn from conservative social pools, will refuse to fight side by side with women. That is simply imagining an element of wilfulness in Indian soldiers that does no credit to a disciplined force like the army. Quibbles about biology or the imagined impediment of parenthood are too antiquarian to be admitted in 2019. Societies and their inherent structures do shape institutions; but the converse is equally true. Hard, progressive decisions also have the power to bend institutions towards equity. The Indian Army, with its rich, varied history and diverse composition, is up to such challenges. The logic of this decision, therefore, must be followed through — and not get tangled in the usual tokenism. A roadmap to induct women across the board, across roles and ranks in the Indian army, must be drawn up — with definite deadlines.

Valour, heroism and honour are aspirations that have driven human imagination through the ages. But the thrill and pride of war has been exclusively a man's domain — though enough women warriors have turned up in history to contest that logic. The young Indian woman, vested with the uniform, too, is ready to claim that full range of human potential, whether it is the responsibility of violence or the code of the soldier's life. True, the internal structures of the Army might rumble and resist the change. But that's a battle well worth fighting.

BATTLING MALARIA

New vaccine against the disease offers limited protection. Work on improved version requires urgency

IN 1987, THE pharma giant GlaxoSmithKline began testing a vaccine to target the malaria parasite. The initiative received support from the WHO, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the international NGO PATH. The collaboration bore fruit on April 23, when health workers in Malawi rolled out the first vaccine against the viral disease. Ghana and Kenya are expected to join the inoculation drive in the next few weeks and the effort could vaccinate more than a million children against the disease which kills more than a 1,000 people a day worldwide, a majority of them in Africa. The vaccine is also a significant intervention given that the WHO estimates that climate change will exacerbate the mortality caused by the disease.

In its most virulent form, malaria is a difficult disease to deal with. *Plasmodium falciparum*, the most dangerous of the virus, replicates very fast in the human body. This means if a person infected with the virus does not get diagnosed urgently, the infection assumes fatal or near fatal proportions rapidly. That is why prevention has always been the primary strategy against the disease. However, insecticides that are used against the mosquitoes have a life of less than 20 years — the parasite is adaptable and has survived for millennia. The virus has proved an equally formidable adversary: Many strains of *P. falciparum* have become resistant to chloroquine, once the first-line malaria drug. That is why triggering the immune system to defend against the first stage of malaria, when the virus enters the blood stream, has been thought to be a more effective strategy. But the scientists had their work cut out because, unlike bacteria, parasites evolve complex ways to evade the immune system. The malaria parasite passes through multiple life stages, each of which presents a unique challenge to vaccine developers. Moreover, inside the human body the virus changes shape making it very difficult for the proteins produced by a vaccine to target the pathogen.

There is a limitation to the new intervention, though. In clinical trials, the new vaccine reduced malaria cases by less than 40 per cent — the measles vaccine, by comparison, is 97 per cent effective and the chickenpox vaccine prevents almost 100 per cent of severe cases of the disease. Another issue with the vaccine is that children need four doses. Critics of the vaccine argue that four trips to a clinic could be tough for families in rural Africa. Work has begun to improve on the vaccine. However, this time the research community cannot afford to spend more than 30 years to develop the vaccine.

RETURN TO A DYSTOPIA

A sequel to 'A Clockwork Orange' discovered when the future the writer imagined is upon us

THE DISCOVERY OF an unfinished manuscript, *The Clockwork Condition*, written in 1972-73 by English writer Anthony Burgess as a sequel to his *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), the story of a teenager and his cohorts who revel in untempered violence in a futuristic, totalitarian state — is set to lend the dystopian masterpiece a larger philosophical and moral context.

A writer of mostly comic work, Burgess's relationship with his breakaway novel was complicated. He kept revisiting and revising it, before going on to publish a short, illustrated autobiographical novel, *The Clockwork Testament* (1974). The abandoned non-fiction sequel, which runs to 200 pages and was discovered from his archive at the Burgess Foundation in Manchester by director Andrew Biswell during cataloguing, sees Burgess return to ideas of crime, punishment, the intersection of technology and society and both the aggression and passivity that come from a repressive state culture. It also addresses the outrage that ensued after the release of Stanley Kubrick's 1971 cult screen adaptation that was accused of inflaming copycat crimes. It had led the director to withdraw the film from public circulation.

"The important thing is moral choice. Evil has to exist along with good, in order that moral choice may operate. Life is sustained by the grinding opposition of moral entities," Burgess had written in an introduction to the original novel. It's that very idea he returns to in this sequel. In many ways, the future that Burgess had imagined is upon us. Caught in the quagmire of an unrelenting visual culture and states that want more and more control over its citizens, the sobering question that faces humanity is what Burgess tried to answer through his many explorations: What are the boundaries of free will and can it square up to the relentless challenges that come its way?



KHALED AHMED

WHEN YOU WANT to put a lock on the collective mind, you embrace "ideology". This is a recipe for creating a uniform mind but you have to add a bit of punishment to make it hold. Religion comes in handy because it allows you to punish deviation. In case the state pretends to be democratic, there will always be the "condemned" fringe opinion that the brainwashed nation takes pleasure in abominating. Such a situation now obtains in both India and Pakistan. In Pakistan the "marginalised" wisdom of the "rejected" is contained in a new book, *Rethinking Pakistan: A 21st Century Perspective*, put together by Bilal Zahoor and Raza Rumi. Some extracts will arouse interest and rage in equal measure.

Tariq Rahman is a linguist and Distinguished National Professor and dean, social sciences at Beaconhouse National University, Lahore. He writes: "In India, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (b. 1925), who was then the President of the Islamic Centre in New Delhi, took the lead in refuting radical Islam. Khan expressed his ideas about jihad in many of his publications — *The True Jihad, Din aur Shariat*, and accessible pamphlets. In his brief monograph, *The True Jihad*, written in English to disseminate his ideas outside South Asia, he sums up all he has written at various places in Urdu earlier. Beginning with the ideological assumption that all Islam's wars were defensive, he chooses the most appropriate hermeneuti-

WISDOM FROM THE FRINGE

In era of ideology and nationalism, reflections on what ails Pakistan

cal devices to interpret the canonical texts." (When Khan visited Pakistan he was booed for having rejected jihad.)

Zohra Yusuf, who served as Chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) from 2011-2017 says under the rubric, 'The Slow Erasure of Ahmadi': "Through a constitutional amendment in 1974, Ahmadi were declared non-Muslim in Pakistan. Through amendments later brought in by the military government of General Zia ul Haq, they were also barred from identifying themselves as Muslims, reciting or printing the kalma or calling their places of worship 'masjid'. Since then, Ahmadi have become the most highly-persecuted religious group in Pakistan. From targeting of their congregations to attacks on their graveyards, the Ahmadi have seen the worst of intolerance in Pakistan. The most serious attack took place in May 2010 when Ahmadi mosques in Garhi Shahu and Model Town Lahore were targeted, killing 86 people and injuring over 120."

Afiya S Zia, a feminist researcher with a doctoral degree in Women and Gender Studies from the University of Toronto, delivers this remarkable gem: "Just like secular resistance exists in different political forms across the country and challenges the majoritarian Islamic hegemony, so too women's sexualities and associated freedoms are a direct threat to the Islamic gendered order and its patriarchal base. However, these practices and their associated ideals are considered anath-

ema or snubbed due to religious and/or male anxiety. When women's sexual expression and secular resistance combine, they become potent weapons of non-conformity."

Reema Omer, who has an LL.M focusing on human rights law at the University of Cambridge, talks of the "disappeared persons" who get thrashed by an unnamed authority and then decide to keep quiet: "Enforced disappearances are reported to the police as 'missing persons' cases or as those of abduction, kidnapping or wrongful confinement. A recent report by the International Commission of Jurists says these offences are inadequate classifications... They do not recognise the gravity of the crime, do not provide for commensurate penalties and do not address the need to remedy the harm to families of those disappeared who are not legally considered victims."

Rafiqullah Kakar, a political analyst, focuses on majoritarianism: "With Punjab accounting for 56 per cent of the country's total population, the centralisation of power only resulted in the 'Punjabisation' of Pakistan... The upper house, where all provinces had equal representation, had the potential to balance out Punjab's majoritarian influence, but this was prevented by the fact that the upper house Senate had lesser powers as compared to the lower house National Assembly."

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APRIL 27, 1979, FORTY YEARS AGO

BHAVE BREAKS FAST
ACHARYA VINOBA BHAVE broke his five-day fast at 3.50 pm. This after he was informed by the Janata Party President, Chandra Shekhar, that Prime Minister Morarji Desai had announced in the Lok Sabha the government's decision to amend the Constitution to bring cow protection in the concurrent list. Chandra Shekhar met the fasting leader this morning where Acharya told him that any proposal approved by the Sarvodaya leaders, Dada Dharmadhikari and Radhakrishna Bajaj, would be acceptable to him. Chandra Shekhar also said this move did not amount to any imposition on Bengal and Kerala — that the two states would realise the difficul-

ties inherent in a situation created by the fast.
TAX THE RICH
THE MINISTER OF state for finance, Satish Agarwal, today gave notice that the current year's heavy taxation budget would be the first of a series of such budgets. Towards the end of his reply to the debate on the finance bill, Agarwal said he accepted that difficulties had been caused by the tax proposals. However, he warned, "There will have to be many more such budgets before the goal of poverty elimination is achieved and this would require a continuing transfer of resources from the better-off sections of society, for investment". Agarwal also said that

the primary objective of development was the elimination of poverty and "This objective requires a big shift of resources from those who have, to those below the poverty line," he said.

INDIRA CHARGES
THE JANATA PARTY general secretary, Nanaji Deshmukh, today described as "baseless" the Congress (I) chief, Indira Gandhi's reported allegation that the former US Ambassador, Daniel Moynihan, was the president of the Din Dayal Upadhyaya Institute in America. Deshmukh said that it seemed Indira Gandhi was making "baseless charges" to establish that she did not receive money from the US.

13 THE IDEAS PAGE

Ethics in the time of technology

Google employees' personal politics helped dissolve their own ethics committee. Can India expect a similar scenario?

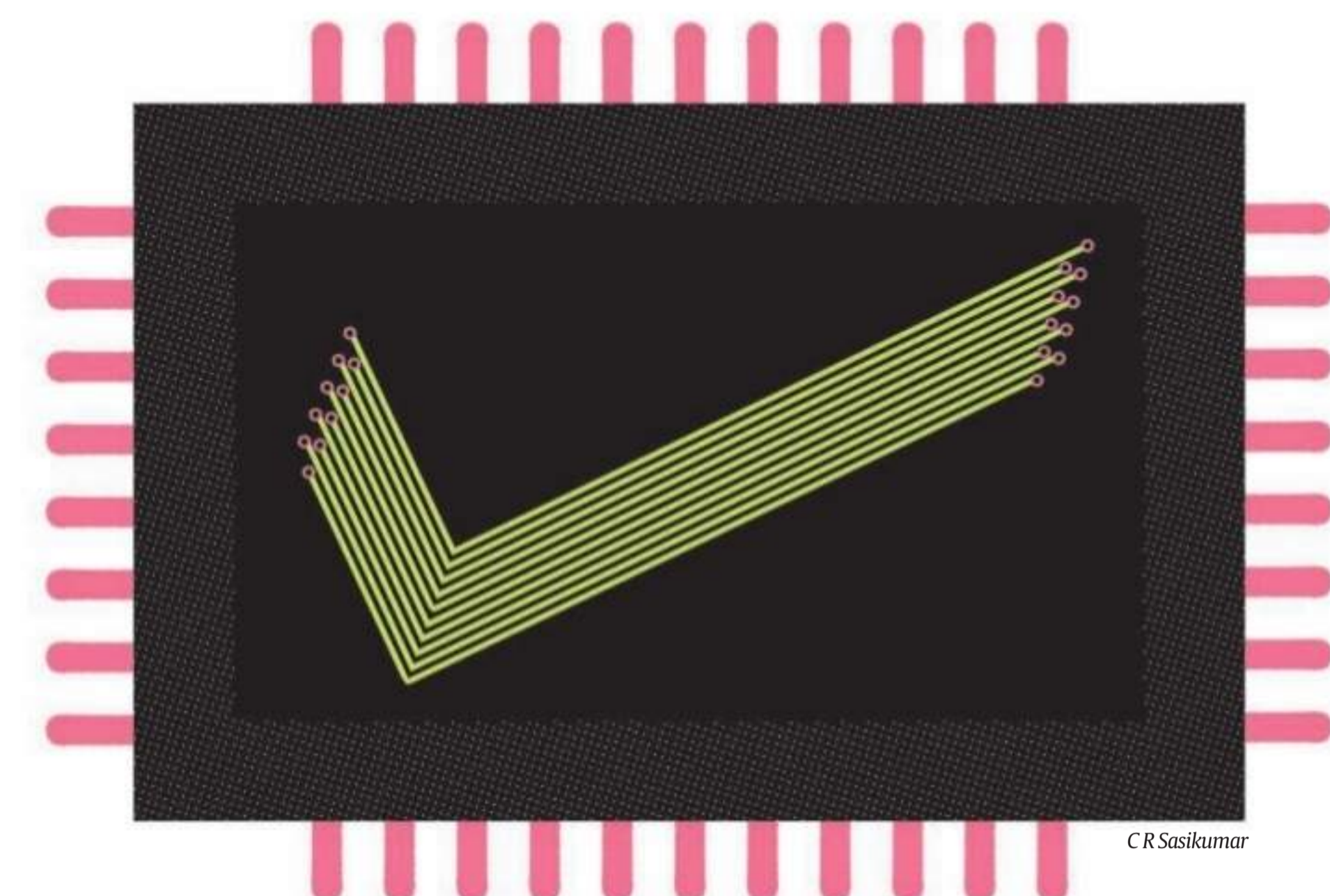


PETER RONALD DESOUZA

CONSIDER THIS: AN external advisory council, the Advanced Technology External Advisory Council (ATEAC) — essentially an ethics council to guide new technologies — set up by Google in the last week of March, being disbanded in the first week of April, within less than a fortnight. However, one wants to play it, this was a major goof up by the company — a failure of conception, planning and execution. Google could have avoided this huge embarrassment if they had only googled to find out what lay ahead. But to do so, one must know what questions to ask. Even they seemed to have asked the wrong questions.

The ATEAC comprised eight members from across disciplines and organisations. It was supposed to discuss issues that Google confronted in the new and fast-growing area of Artificial Intelligence, and related technologies such as facial recognition and fairness in machine learning. ATEAC was to meet four times a year and complement the advice of an internal body to help Google navigate the ethical challenges that were emerging. It was to align the AI work of Google with the seven principles that the CEO, Sundar Pichai, had enunciated in June 2018. These are (i) be socially beneficial, (ii) avoid creating or reinforcing unfair bias, (iii) be built and tested for safety, (iv) be accountable to people, (v) incorporate privacy design principles, (vi) uphold high standards of scientific excellence, (vii) be made available for uses that accord with these principles. A cursory glance at these elegantly set out principles will immediately tell you that words such as "unfair bias", "accountable", "beneficial" and "privacy" are ethically loaded and contested concepts and, therefore, some tough ethical questions lay ahead. Google's initiative was not a moment too late. Those of us who belong to the humanities were delighted. When it was disbanded, we were dismayed. So why did this happen?

The simple explanation is that the composition of the committee was challenged by at least 1,800 Google employees: Not just because the process employed was flawed — no consultation with the staff and no consultation with other members of the committee — but also because of who the members are. Kay Coles James, president of the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank, was strongly opposed because of her anti-environment, anti-LGBTQ and anti-immigrant public views. Dyan Gibbens, CEO of a drone company, Trumbull Unmanned, was challenged because of the debate on the use of AI for military applications. Privacy expert Alessandro Acquisti resigned because he didn't believe this was "the right forum to engage with issues of fairness, rights and inclusion in AI". Further the task of the committee was not clearly set out. Its powers vis-a-vis Google were not properly defined. Could it, for example, veto technologies considered inappropriate? Were four meetings a year adequate? Would its recommendations be secret or made public? No clear answers were given and many suspected that it was a PR exercise, rather than a genuine at-



C R Sasikumar

tempt to begin a conversation on ethics and advanced technology.

But instead of letting the issue go into the pages of history, now that the committee has been disbanded, let me draw four lessons from the episode that are pertinent in the context of an absent Indian debate on tech ethics.

The first is poor planning. The fact that prospective members were not informed about who else would be on the council, or that the political implications of prospective members' public positions would be considered, or that clear terms of reference were not formulated — all this shows how casually the task of setting up the council was taken. Deep thought, which Google excels in, would have shown how fundamentally flawed the building blocks of the council were.

The second, is the heartening fact that politics is back in certain corporate spaces. Google employees have been at the forefront of raising issues relating to ethics and new technologies. They opposed the work done by the company on drone technologies for the Pentagon. They challenged the inclusion of a member with openly anti-LGBTQ and anti-environment views on the council. They demanded more robust public debate on the ethical issues involved. This is great news. Politics has reemerged to counter the technology-first attitude that appeared to be settling over society and colonising our minds. Ethical issues, so important for the well-being of human societies, it now appears — thanks to Google employees — cannot be ignored by policy makers in organisations, universities or the state. And, what is most uplifting is the political activism that technology workers are prepared to demonstrate. Is this the 1960s generation being re-born? Here is a group of people who are highly paid, materially comfortable and enjoying good social status. Yet, they are willing to challenge their bosses, publicly too, on issues of ethics. Just when political sociologists such as myself were lamenting the subtle co-option strategies of global capitalism of young people, grieving for the apparent death of the protest politics of a Dylan or a Freddie Mercury,

Politics has reemerged to counter the technology-first attitude that appeared to be settling over society and colonising our minds. Ethical issues, so important for the well-being of human societies, it now appears — thanks to Google employees — cannot be ignored by policy makers in organisations, universities or the state. And, what is most uplifting is the political activism that technology workers are prepared to demonstrate.

or a Bob Geldof, along comes this protest from young men and women, thousands of them, from Google, Salut, my friends. But when will our own IT community get publicly involved in ethical issues in India — such as the misuse of Aadhaar by the state, or, of cooperation of IT companies with the government on the National Population Register in Assam?

Which brings me to the third issue. I looked at the ethical manifesto of Indian IT companies such as TCS and Infosys. The former only listed the ethical code of the house of Tatas: Integrity, honesty, accountability, and all that motherhood and apple-pie sort of stuff. No statement on ethics and technology such as Google's seven principles. The same is the case with Infosys. These companies seem to be living in another age where such ethical issues have not yet emerged. Despite huge grants by the Tatas and Infosys to Harvard and Yale, the humanities debates taking place there have not reached the company. Perhaps, some employee activism is now in order.

Finally, the fourth issue. I looked at the teaching curricula of the IITs: No engagement with ethics and technology. We have humanities programmes, but no mainstreaming of ethics with robotics or biotechnology or artificial intelligence. Our IITs produce technologists not humanists with excellent technology capabilities. I was disappointed to find no Indian among the experts interviewed by the MIT Technology review of April 6 on why ATEAC bombed. This despite many Indians leading technology companies in the Silicon valley. Perhaps it has to do with the absence of ethical sensibilities among Indian technologists. Perhaps it has to do with the IIT training they get. Perhaps the humanities scholars in the US are all postmodernists. Perhaps it has to do with our dharmic philosophy. Which one is it, Sundar Pichai?

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WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Sadly, Pakistan's once vibrant, questioning media — albeit not without its faults — is largely in retreat, browbeaten into a supine conformity where self-preservation is predicated on self-censorship." — DAWN

Your lordships must speak

The courts must censure wrongful behaviour of the organs of state for the sake of constitutional democracy



M R SHAMSHAH

THE SUPREME COURT order awarding compensation and rehabilitation to *Bilkis Bano* is certainly a step forward in strengthening the faith of the common citizen in the judicial process while fighting the failure of the state in ensuring protection of their guaranteed rights. If we talk in legal jargon, it has strengthened the concept of the constitutional tort against the state as an entity. The Court has discharged its function of redressing the grievance of a citizen of India. However while passing the order, the Court also made an oral observation to tell the State of Gujarat that it should "feel lucky" as the Court was not observing anything against the government in that order. I feel this observation is not appropriate, given the facts of the case. It is duty of the constitutional courts to make appropriate observations about inappropriate functioning of the state and its administration.

The background of this case was that the concept neutrality of state action and inaction was completely absent and biased action and inaction had reached a level that is unparalleled after India became a constitutional democracy. For successful working of democracy, it is essential that the governments behave on secular principles by treating its citizens equally.

Today we witness a serious distrust of the citizen qua fixing of accountability in functioning of the executives and other organs of state. We have enough laws in place to ensure protection of a citizen from illegal action of state organs, but accountability of the state's inaction has now reached the lowest. For that we need to talk more about accountability of the state's action and inaction. Every citizen, whether aggrieved or not, needs to question this gradually developed culture of non-accountability of the state organs. This will strengthen the functioning of democracy and this questing of citizens cannot be done without the support of the institutions created under the Constitution itself.

The courts are expected to ensure redress of grievances of citizens against the state and also to see that such violations are minimised in future. How will that happen in the context of Rule of Law? This will happen when the redress of grievance is addressed at least at two levels in the same judgment of the court. One being specific to the grievance of the citizen with consequential action and another by reminding the state about its failure to protect the right of its citizen.

These are few occasions when the Supreme Court has realised that it was necessary to make appropriate observation on the functioning of the government(s). The *Best Bakery* case was one of the cases relating to 2002 Gujarat riots. When that case

reached the Supreme Court in 2004, it said: "The modern-day 'Neros' were looking elsewhere when Best Bakery and innocent children and helpless women were burning, and were probably deliberating how the perpetrators of the crime can be saved or protected. Law and justice become flies in the hands of these 'wanton boys'. When fences start to swallow the crops, no scope will be left for survival of law and order or truth and justice. Public order as well as public interest become martyrs and monuments."

In another case of this series, while convicting the accused, the trial court stated that the incident of riots "was a black chapter in the history of the Indian Constitution".

In 2013, in the cases arising out of communal riots of Muzaffarnagar, at the stage when the riots had happened and the state of UP was working on prosecution, the Supreme Court prima facie held "the State government responsible for being negligent at the initial stage in not anticipating the communal violence and for taking necessary steps for its prevention".

While dealing with the powers of the president of India, Justice K Ramaswamy, in his judgement in *S R Bommai* in 1994 questioned "whether the President of India can keep fiddling like Emperor Nero while Rome was burning or like Hamlet, Prince of Denmark of Shakespeare keep the pendulum oscillating between 'to be or not to be' for the issuance of the proclamation under Article 356 of the Constitution dismissing the state government and dissolving the state legislatures and to bring the administration of the state under his rule".

Today, when it comes to the enforcement of legal rights of the poor, victims of oppression in the hands of the state functionaries, most of the grievances remain without meaningful resolution despite strong constitutional protection. Very few of them reach its logical end. These are occasions when the highest court would remind the functionaries of their role. This will certainly have some deterrent effect in the functioning of the administration in future. Hence, whenever the grievance of a citizen is found justified against the mighty administration, the court must speak on their functioning.

Not speaking on the wrongful behaviour of the organs of State in constitutional democracy has its own consequences. Apart from discontentment amongst the aggrieved citizens in the functioning of the state's organs, the functionaries shall lead towards authoritarianism or dictatorial regime of elected representatives.

In this context B R Ambedkar's warning given to the Constituent Assembly in November, 1949 at the time of adoption of Constitution of India becomes relevant to quote. "There is a danger of democracy giving its place to dictatorship. It is quite possible for this new born democracy to retain its form but give place to dictatorship in fact," he said.

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VINAY SAHASRABUDDHE

Democracy with deliverance

The gap between expectations and realisation could undermine governments

FOR DECADES, ISSUES like deepening democracy dominated the global discourse on democracy. But sadly, the reasons behind the inherent limitations of democracy in the context of its ability to deliver rarely got the attention they merit.

The gap between reasonable popular expectations from democratic governance and the actual performance of elected governments seems to be ever widening. Largely, people get disenchanted with elected politicians as they realise that the capacity of democratic governments to deal with many of the enduring challenges — from overcoming social and economic inequality to controlling pollution — is woefully short. This underscores the fact that all is not well within the old and established democracies. The most worrying consequence of this scenario is the rapid spread of cynicism. The only way to effectively prevent the emergence of such a situation is to ensure demonstrably that democracies also deliver.

After the dawn of this century, countries like Georgia, Brazil, Egypt and Tunisia witnessed some popular uprisings against the established governments. Georgia represents the dilemma that most CIS countries face. Post Communist rule, most people in these countries realised that they had neither truly liberal democracy nor any effective governance. The same was true of Arab Spring countries. The story was not different in Brazil either. From Mikhail Sakashvili to Dilma Rousseff, almost all of them failed to address popular expectations. Some of them attempted reforms

in governance but curtailed liberal democracy. Few others promoted liberalism as if at the cost of quality of governance.

Almost during the same period, i.e. early this decade, India too witnessed a popular movement. This period saw a general policy paralysis, horrific incidents like the December 16 rape and unearthing of several corruption scandals. All this provided a perfect recipe for widespread cynicism, that shadowed the national discourse.

From Georgia or Egypt and also India, events underscored what political scientist and scholar Pippa Norris has theorised, stressing need for the combination of democratic responsiveness and state effectiveness. According to her, in practice, liberal democracies often prove imperfect on the count of accountability and governance-related procedures. Norris has a word of advice for those who cause expectations to rise among ordinary citizens, saying "if these cannot be met by elected officials, due to limited state capacity, this can be a recipe for frustration!" She is acutely conscious that democratically elected leaders may not "necessarily have the capability to implement effective public policies addressing social needs".

Here comes the factor that distinguishes Prime Minister Narendra Modi from his peers. A commentator wrote about the Modi government: "On the regulatory front, the record has been better. Early in its tenure, the government passed the Arbitration and Conciliation (Amendment) Act that

smoothed out the wrinkles and established a time-bound mechanism for binding arbitration. It followed that up with a Central-level Real Estate (Regulation & Development) Act, or RERA. RERA needs to be notified in each state (since land is a state subject) so this is still a bit of a work in progress. Paving the way for the GST with a constitutional amendment and a complex set of other steps and establishing a new Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) must count as the two biggest legislative accomplishments. Overall, grade A." One may agree with his policies or not, but one will have to admit that Modi has proved to be a leader capable of taking risks and challenging the forces of status-quo that add to the darkness of helplessness, cynicism and frustration.

Clearly, Modi was able to grasp the message of popular uprisings world over, just before he took over as PM. The unambiguous message was: For a democracy to be successful, free and fair elections and other such ingredients of liberal democracy are essential but not enough! PM Modi realised what people wanted to say and tried to make democracy deliver. Arguably, his governance doctrine has at least three important ingredients. First, greater accountability and transparency in all financial dealings; second, emphasis on time-bound and monitored implementation; and third, renewed thrust on partnership between people and government.

Initiatives like the national public procurement portal (GeM), direct transfer of benefits including subsidies, emphasis on cashless

transactions and enhanced level of deterrence through strict implementation of laws curbing corruption and economic offences have strengthened India's transparency-accountability regime. Besides, programmes like PRAGATI, strict monitoring of the integrated development plan for the most neglected aspirational districts, using space technology to monitor road construction and laying of railway tracks and using real-time data through dashboards for day-to-day review of the ground situation were important hallmarks of the Modi brand of governance.

Keen on urging bureaucracy to shed the habit of working in silos, Modi constantly engaged with people in a spirit of partnership in governance, reminding them that development can't be outsourced to any government. His emphasis on every citizen becoming a swachhagrahi for Clean India, appeal to the consumers to give up subsidies of cooking gas cylinders and to railway passengers to give up senior-citizen concessions, monthly engagement with countrymen through Mann ki Baat are some of the noteworthy examples of Modi's engagement with the people.

Liberal democracy is inherent to the idea of India. Neither Mughals nor Britishers and much less the forces that imposed the Emergency, could curb India's indefatigable democratic spirit. But the matching proportion of deliverance was missing and PM Modi has cleared this backlog convincingly.

The writer is national vice president, BJP

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

IGNORE PRAGYA

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The curse on the cops' (IE, April 26). I feel Pragya Thakur's comments are not really representative of society's attitude towards the police and ludicrous as they are, these are not likely to have any rational takers. The writer, a police officer, is very right in pointing out the hazardous nature of duties performed by the police but I am sure nobody can be more aware than him that the police forces, to some extent, do seek domination, control and hegemony. Fortunately, Pragya's audience is limited.

Sangeeta Kampani, New Delhi

BLAME THE LAW

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The Pragya bailout' (IE, April 26). As long as the law which debars only convicted candidates from contesting elections holds good, there is no point segregating the candidates according to the kind of crime they are alleged to have committed. If Rahul Gandhi, who is on bail can contest elections, so can Thakur. The remedy is to change the rule or law on the subject, or depend on the judgment of voters.

Y G Chouksey, Pune

NO TAINT ON NITISH

THIS REFERS TO the report, 'The one note in JDU campaign this election: Nitish Kumar playing second fiddle' (IE, April 26). Modi and Nitish are two of the very few politicians of India with a clean record. Secondly, none of their

LETTER OF THE WEEK

COURT'S HONOUR

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Your Honour' (IE, April 22). The Supreme Court convening an "extraordinary meeting" to defend the sexual allegations made against CJI brings to the fore, two points. First by this impulsive act the apex court has given legitimacy to the media trial which has regrettably become almost common place and takes precedence over the legitimate criminal justice system. Mere publication of allegations in some media outlets does not establish the crime, so the CJ should have exercised restraint. Second this is obstruction of justice to both sides and against the principle of natural justice.

Deepak Singhal, Noida

close relatives are in politics which makes them unique in electoral politics. Although people preferred Modi to Nitish in the 2014 general election, Nitish is still popular with the people of Bihar for his sincerity and hard work. So, whatever be the outcome of the 2019 elections, there is no second opinion on Nitish's image as a good leader.

VEENA SHENOY, Thane