



Unclear doctrine

No-first-use is integral to India's nuclear doctrine and leaves no space for ambiguity

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has been somewhat careful in speaking of envisioning a change in India's nuclear deterrence posture. In place for 16 years, since January 4, 2003, when the doctrine was adopted formally, New Delhi has said consistently that India's nuclear weapons were based on staggering and punitive retaliation, in case deterrence failed. The retaliation to a nuclear strike, any nuclear strike, whether by tactical or theatre weapons or something bigger, would be crushing enough to deter the possible use of nuclear weapons by an adversary. So the theory goes. On the first death anniversary of former Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, and in the nuclear proving ground in Pokhran, the Minister said two things: that the no-first-use has served India well so far, and that what happens in future depends on circumstances. There ought to be no scope for confusion here. Security is, after all, a dynamic concept. It was the security environment in the neighbourhood coupled with the pressure brought by the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty that forced India out of the nuclear closet and, at the same time, to adopt the no-first-use posture. The structures associated with the doctrine, the command and control that can survive a nuclear strike, the redundancies that are in-built, the secure communications, have all been developed keeping in view the posture perspective.

But there is a danger that the minister's remark could spark off a nuclear arms race, given the strategic paranoias that have been at work in this part of the world for over half a century. In the elections of 2014, the BJP's manifesto had references to an intention to update and revise the nuclear doctrine, but that went nowhere. It is conceivable that nuclear weapons could fall into the hands of non-state actors in Pakistan, but even in such scenarios that warrant pre-emptive action, a nuclear strike cannot be a viable option. It would have been much better if Mr. Singh had elaborated on his thoughts so that a debate could have taken place, and not kept his remarks enigmatic. In a nuclear circumstance it is much better to convey the overwhelming nature of the deterrence than to keep the potential adversary guessing. In this respect it is a good idea for the government to make public any periodic review in its strategic posture. The no-first-use policy comes with being a confident nuclear power. For him to state the future is open is to say nothing and at once imply everything. In matters of nuclear doctrine, it is important to be clear above all else. Nothing must be left to interpretation.

Taking on TB

Keeping the prices of the new drug low is essential for increased treatment uptake

The anti-tuberculosis drug pretomanid recently approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration will be a game changer for treating people with extensively drug-resistant TB (XDR-TB) and those who do not tolerate or respond to now available multi-drug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) drugs. That pretomanid is only the third drug in the last 40 years to get FDA approval highlights the scarcity of new drugs to treat TB bacteria that are rapidly developing resistance against most available drugs. The all-oral, three-drug regimen of bedaquiline, pretomanid, and linezolid (BPaL) had a 90% cure rate in a phase III trial in South Africa involving 109 participants. In contrast, the current treatment success rate for XDR-TB and MDR-TB is about 34% and 55%, respectively. Importantly, the regimen was found to be safe and effective in curing TB in people living with HIV. The safety and efficacy were tested in 1,168 patients in 19 clinical trials in 14 countries. Unlike 18-24 months needed to treat highly-resistant TB using nearly 20 drugs, the BPaL regimen took just six months, was better tolerated and more potent in clearing the bacteria. The shorter duration is more likely to increase adherence to therapy and improve treatment outcomes. According to the World Health Organisation, in 2017, there were an estimated 4.5 lakh people across the world with MDR-TB, of which India accounted for 24%, and about 37,500 with XDR-TB. With only a low percentage of MDR-TB cases being treated, the actual number of people who do not tolerate or respond to available MDR-TB drugs and so will be eligible to receive the BPaL regimen is unknown. Though the total number of people who will require the new drug may not be high, these are people who have very little alternative treatment options that are safe and efficacious. Also, the number of those who would need a pretomanid-based regimen is increasing due to rising drug resistance.

While the availability of a potent drug is welcome news, it remains to be seen if it would be made affordable, particularly in the developing countries where the burden of XDR-TB and MDR-TB is the highest. TB Alliance, a New York-based international NGO, which developed and tested the drug, has already signed an exclusive licensing agreement with a generic-drug manufacturer for high-income markets. Unlike in the case of bedaquiline, where its prohibitive cost has severely restricted access especially in the developing countries, pretomanid might become affordable. In line with the TB Alliance's commitment to affordability and sustainable access, the drug will be licensed to multiple manufacturers in about 140 low- and middle-income countries, including India. Making the drug affordable to those with extreme form of drug resistance will be highly commendable and a desperately needed model to be followed. After all, there is a compulsion to keep the prices low and increase treatment uptake to stop the spread of highly drug-resistant TB bacteria. Studies have shown an increase in the number of new patients who are directly infected with drug-resistant bacteria.

'The Idea of India' is failing

The middle class that led India's nation-building project has now embraced a nationalism that has no place for diversity



C. RAMMANOHAR REDDY

The "Idea of India" has always been grander in promise than in fulfilment. At Independence, the dream was that the people of a country of so much diversity – in language, religion, and tradition – would enjoy constitutionally guaranteed rights and through democratic means, build a just society. A cornerstone of this dream was respect for diversity that was written into the Constitution. It has been a mixed record, with as many failures as achievements. The events of the past two weeks, however, signal to us that the "Idea of India" is in danger of collapsing. We may soon have to accept the "New India" which places no value on pluralism, fraternity and autonomy.

Everything about why and how the constitutional arrangements of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) have been so radically changed violates the "Idea of India".

A worrisome move

The processes used to modify the "Holy Book" that is the Constitution are as important as the content of the amendments. Yet, as many lawyers and constitutional experts have already pointed out, the manner in which the Narendra Modi government has withdrawn the rights J&K enjoyed under Article 370 can only be described as abusing the spirit of the Constitution. Now that the Government has tasted success, it should be fastidious about using the same kind of skulduggery to aggressive-

ly alter the Constitution to further its agenda. Only the courts stand in the way and there the Government of India must be feeling that its own actions will pass muster.

We also have the disappearance of J&K as a State. It is hard to think of anything more insulting to a people than to inform them one morning that their State has been turned into two Union Territories, effectively ruled from New Delhi. This is real "tukde tukde" work.

Since the early 1950s, States have been periodically divided and new ones created. Consultation of some form or the other has always been an integral part of the process. Nothing like the sudden disappearance of the State of J&K has happened before. In a supposedly federal system, the Centre has been able to ram through the necessary legislative changes while keeping 8 million people cut off from the rest of the world and without allowing them to express their views. In the past five years, we have undoubtedly had the most centralised government since the time of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Should we or shouldn't we be worried about what more is in store for us? Was it short-sightedness or fear that made all the regional parties – the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam being the only major exception – endorse the break up of J&K into two Union Territories?

Spirit behind special rights

There are legitimate reasons why in our diverse society, the Constitution has ordained special rights, for instance, for Dalits and Adivasis; for Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim (under Article 371); and so too for J&K until now under Article 370. A uniformity of rights across the nation and all classes does not necessarily make



NISSAR AHMAD

for a cohesive society. In fact, the opposite is the case in a country of vast diversity. Special rights for specific communities and regions enable them to feel a "oneness" in a large country that has so many kinds of differences. Here, the guarantees promised to J&K were especially important because of the circumstances surrounding the State's accession to India.

The autonomy offered by Article 370 has been contentious for two reasons. One, it was enjoyed by a State that remained divided between India and Pakistan. Two, the constitutional provision applied to India's only Muslim majority State. These two features should have made it all the more important to preserve the guarantees contained in Article 370. However, for the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Jan Sangh/Bharatiya Janata Party, for whom uniformity has always come first, abolition of Article 370 has been a core demand.

Contentious Article 370 always was, but it was never adhered to in any measure. In this, there have been no saints in either New Delhi or Srinagar. If one systematically emptied the promise of autonomy right from the 1950s onwards with a series of presidential notifica-

An intervention that leads to more questions

Revoking NFU does not necessarily mean giving up restraint, but it leaves India's nuclear doctrine more ambiguous



PRIYANJALI MALIK

Policymaking by tweet may have arrived in India, for the Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh, appears to have altered a key pillar of India's nuclear doctrine when he tweeted that India's 'future' commitment to a posture of No First Use of nuclear weapons 'depends on the circumstances'. Using the commemoration of the first death anniversary of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee as the setting for this declaration, Mr. Singh's announcement marks a significant revision of India's nuclear stance, seemingly without any prior structured deliberation or consultation. Of course nuclear doctrine, like any directive guiding national security, needs to be a dynamic concept that responds to changing circumstances. However, this raises the question of what has changed in India's strategic outlook that requires a revision of one of the two foundational pillars of its nuclear doctrine.

India is one of two countries – China being the other – that adheres to a doctrine of No First Use (NFU). Our knowledge of India's nuclear doctrine is based largely on a statement circulated on January 4, 2003 by the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), which said that it had 'reviewed progress in operationalising India's nuclear

doctrine', and was making public the relevant details as appropriate (summarised in seven points). The first said that India would maintain 'a credible minimum deterrent' and the second point avowed '[a] posture of "No First Use": nuclear weapons will only be used in retaliation...'. The remaining five points flow mainly from these two points mentioned. India has maintained that it will not strike first with nuclear weapons but reserves the right to retaliate to any nuclear first strike against it (or any 'major' use of weapons of mass destruction against Indian forces anywhere) with a nuclear strike 'that will be massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage'. This is not a statement by the faint-hearted – with two nuclear neighbours, the NFU simply raises the nuclear threshold in order to bring stability into a volatile environment.

A rewind

It is almost exactly 20 years to the day since since any of this was first mentioned officially. On August 17, 1999, the then caretaker Bharatiya Janata Party government released a draft Nuclear Doctrine in order to generate discussion and debate on India's nuclear posture. There was much discussion and criticism of the doctrine, as indeed of the timing of the release of the draft, coming as it did just weeks before a national election. It was known that the first National Security Advisory Board, a group of 27 individuals convened by K. Subrahmanyam, and comprising strategic analysts, academics, and retired



GETTY IMAGES/STOCKPHOTO

military and civil servants, had completed their draft some months earlier; however, their report was only released a couple of weeks before polling began on September 5, 1999.

It has ever been thus. Following criticism of the draft doctrine, the government appeared to move away from it. It was never discussed in Parliament and its status remained unclear for three and a half years until it was abruptly adopted by the CCS with minor modifications in 2003. The draft's emphasis on NFU, however, remained unchanged. The adoption of the nuclear doctrine came soon after Operation Parakram (2001-02), when the threat of a nuclear exchange on the subcontinent had figured prominently in international capitals, if not in New Delhi and Islamabad. The public adoption of the doctrine was in part an attempt by New Delhi to restate its commitment to restraint and to being a responsible nuclear power.

Restraint as a pivotal point

Restraint has served India well. India used the strategic space offered by its repeated proclamations of restraint to repulse the

intruders in Kargil 20 years ago and regain occupied land despite the nuclear shadow created by India and Pakistan's nuclear tests of 1998. Raising the nuclear threshold gave India the space for conventional operations and gained it sympathy in foreign capitals despite the fears of nuclear miscalculation that were widespread from Washington DC to London to Tokyo. India's self-proclaimed restraint has formed the basis for its claims to belong to the nuclear mainstream – from the initial application for the waiver in 2008 from the Nuclear Suppliers Group in order to carry out nuclear commerce with the grouping, to its membership of the Missile Technology Control Regime, the Wassenaar Arrangement and the Australia Group and its ongoing attempts to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

While revoking the commitment to NFU does not necessarily equate with abandoning restraint, it does leave India's doctrine more ambiguous. Ambiguity, in turn, can lead to miscalculations, as India found out with Kargil (1999), where it would appear that Rawalpindi misread India's resolve to carve out space for conventional military operations despite the new nuclear overhang. Neither does adhering to the NFU symbolise weakness, for India is committed to a devastating response to nuclear first use – a stance which underscores India's understanding of nuclear weapons as meant primarily to deter.

Of course, NFU has had its critics among those who advocate a

more muscular nuclear policy for India. Indeed, Bharat Karnad, a member of the first National Security Advisory Board that drafted the basis of this current nuclear doctrine, made it known at the time that he considered NFU 'a fraud' which would be 'the first casualty' if war were to break out. However, consensus among the remaining members of the board clearly coalesced around an understanding of nuclear weapons not as war-fighting armaments but as weapons of last resort, meant to deter the threat and use of nuclear weapons. It was this understanding that was then used to bring India into the nuclear mainstream. It is also this understanding that has formed the basis of India's nuclear posture, from force structure to numbers to its overall nuclear diplomacy.

All of these points are up for revision with the announcement at Pokhran, which is where the BJP chose to remember Atal Behari Vajpayee on his first death anniversary. At a time when there are multiple queries regarding the state of India's economy, the road map to normalcy in Jammu and Kashmir, the strength of India's federalism, to name a few, we can now add questions about what has changed in India's security environment to warrant a review of its nuclear doctrine. India's neighbours will be as interested in the answers as this country's citizens.

There have been three days in the Republic's history on which "The Idea of India" has been shaken to its roots. The first was June 25, 1975 when an Emergency was declared and many of our Fundamental Rights were suspended. The people's vote rescued India at the time. The next was December 6, 1992 when the Babri Masjid was destroyed. We managed to limp away, though with neither atonement nor punishment. Now we have August 5, 2019, when the Constitution was subverted in spirit if not in letter, when federalism was shoved aside and the rights of the people of a member of the Union were stamped on.

It is difficult to see "The Idea of India" recovering from this latest body blow.

C. Rammanohar Reddy is Editor of 'The India Forum'

Priyanjali Malik is an independent researcher and the author of 'India's Nuclear Debate: Exceptionalism and the Bomb'

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Kashmir's special status

The Honourable Vice President of India begins his article (Editorial page, "A considered step that opens up new vistas", August 17) with the words, "The general perception is that a vast majority of people in the country feel that the abrogation is a welcome step" and sums it with the line, "In conclusion, it should be noted that the abrogation of Article 370 is a national issue involving our country's safety, security, unity and equitable prosperity. It is a step in the right direction that the Indian Parliament has taken with an overwhelming majority." Nowhere in the article have I come across a single line

about the wishes, the ascertainment of those wishes, or even the need for considering the wishes of the people directly and most affected by the action – I mean the people of the Kashmir Valley. Am I missing something?

SUSHIL PRASAD,
Hyderabad

■ The Constitution that India adopted in 1950 was a statement on how we will do things in the future. It is, above all, an ethical document that defines our values and guiding principles. We adopted democracy, a system where everyone's voice is heard and decisions are made by consensus. But the recent chain of events in Jammu and Kashmir have gone

against this basic principle. Democracy has been redefined as the rule of the majority, where even direct stakeholders have been sidelined. The principle that ends justify means can be found in many philosophical writings but it finds no place in the Constitution or Constitutional values. Any community is bound to be hurt by such humiliation and forced suppression. It seems the recent decisions have the potential to stoke the flames of instability in Jammu and Kashmir.

PRAKASH MATTHEW,
Thiruvananthapuram

■ The Vice President is right in pointing out that Article 370 was only a temporary, transitional arrangement. In the same vein, the provision

of reservations for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was also meant to be a temporary measure. But even after more than 70 years of Independence, reservations continue with evidence of misuse. Will the Vice President use his good offices and see that the government addresses this issue also?

R. JAGADEESWARA RAO,
Visakhapatnam

A note on CSR

In mandating a corporate social responsibility spend under the Companies Act, we in India have followed a widely accepted global trend. But a prescriptive approach does not gel with a progressive nation. By its very concept, the CSR stands placed above mundane

finance; treating it as a tax is to degrade it. The annual CSR awards for companies should promote inclination and incentive to improving the social milieu. Instead of pedantic clauses, riders and ham-handed penalties, the government ought to facilitate and mould the groundswell. Contributions to the Prime Minister's relief fund are the most unimaginative route to CSR. Originality counts most as CSR is but a part of the tapestry of social empowerment

R. NARAYANAN,
Navi Mumbai

Special bond

Two reports from Kerala, "Pet dogs save goat herd amid Kerala floods" (August 18) and "Lone sentinel of

Kavalappara rescued" (August 17), once again prove that among the kinds of friendships in this world, some of the best happen to be those between people and animals. We are all creatures of this world and in heart-wrenching moments, animals end up showing us that love – especially unconditional love – really knows no bounds. Sometimes we even find more comfort in animals than we do with fellow humans because animals never seem to disappoint. This has been proven in various stories one reads about all creatures great and small.

SARADA NAIR,
Kochi

MORE LETTERS ONLINE:
www.hindu.com/opinion/letters/

A lose-lose scenario

The Centre's actions and plans for Jammu and Kashmir suffer from inherent infirmities



V. SUDARSHAN

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar tweeted on August 2 that he had conveyed "in clear terms" to U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo that "any discussion on Kashmir, if at all warranted, will only be with Pakistan and only bilaterally." Kashmir has been bilaterally enshrined as a legitimate topic of discussion between India and Pakistan and to that extent it is certainly warranted. There is nothing iffy about it. Pakistan has worked in many ways to obtain a better grip on Kashmir, including by getting nuclear bombs. Now that India has given Pakistan a fait accompli, will Pakistan roll over and play dead? And how does New Delhi hope to pull it off?

The road ahead

There is a haphazard shape to the beast, sensing its hour coming around, that slouches its way towards Kashmir to be born. The rough contours: The government will later rather than sooner have to pull additional troops out to give the situation in Jammu and Kashmir a gloss of normalcy. There is no saying how many troops are out there in Jammu and Kashmir. It could be surmised that there are about 80,000 deployed in the northern part of Kashmir, along the Line of Control. This is not counting those in counter-insurgency operations in the southern parts of the erstwhile State. This is not counting local police, the BSF and the CRPF. Obviously the additional troops numbering some 40,000 have been brought in to manage the new situation. There could be more.

The trick is how, with little or no bloodshed, this massive deployment, unparalleled in any democracy, will squelch what waits to emerge out of the Pandora's Box without a lose-lose scenario dominating the national consciousness. It is a tough call.

Moves are afoot to hold an election, probably in March or April. The new political leadership, carefully nurtured, will no doubt be from



"The trick is how, with little or no bloodshed, this massive deployment of troops will squelch what waits to emerge out of the Pandora's Box without a lose-lose scenario dominating the national consciousness." Security personnel stand guard at a check point in Srinagar on August 18. ■PTI

among the throw-ups in the panchayat elections. It is a good time to wager if former Chief Ministers Omar Abdullah, Farooq Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti can ever contest another election. It is a foregone conclusion that these leaders of regional mainstream political parties, which the government says is a discredited lot, will have to be suitably disincentivised from contesting the polls, and this means having them under some form of detention for the foreseeable future. From the new perspective, they have identified themselves too much with separatist impulses. Certainly, third-rung or fourth-rung leaders from these parties may already have been identified and may be being primed to give solidity to the new deal that awaits the Kashmiris. Together they are the new quislings of Kashmir's perennial uprising.

In order to present that green shoots of industry and economy are going to grow out of Kashmir's hitherto separatist soil, the CII has already planned a summit in October, and big money is being readied to throw at the region, as has been done before. Chairman and Managing Director of Reliance, Mukesh Ambani, who has signed on to the government's vision, soon promises to unveil plans for Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. The government may

not risk a repeat of bringing heavy industries to Kashmir now but it will certainly press ahead with the smaller initiatives pertaining to local handicrafts and the like. It will try to set an example by proving that removal of Article 35A, which has prevented people from the rest of the country from buying property in Jammu and Kashmir, will have a real impact. Just like the elections, this will be a managed outcome. It is a challenge: Even though people from Jammu could always have bought land in Kashmir, they never dared. In May 2008, land was allocated to the Amarnath shrine to set up temporary shelters for the pilgrims leading to sustained and massive protests and a reversal of the government stance months later.

Yet this could be an extremely optimistic picture. Having removed the separatists of various hues from the equation on the ground and supplanted them with Delhi-controlled ventriloquism, the Centre cannot hold. It will be laying itself directly open to blame on a variety of counts. With the police, paramilitary and administrative machinery totally under New Delhi's control, the Centre cannot possibly have either the same level of engagement or the same level of deniability of the mess that mis-handling of the situation could create, not least the human rights

abuses accusations that are bound to pile up once the troops cede the ground to grimmer realities that have lurked for seven decades. At the end of it, diplomat Paul Bremer, whom the Americans sent to Baghdad to clean up after Saddam Hussein, could begin to look like Florence Nightingale.

Meanwhile, Pakistan is hardly likely to launch a charm offensive. Prime Minister Imran Khan has already predicted the possibility of lone-wolf disruptions of the dreaded Pulwama type. The spiral upward that could follow will end more messily than we have hitherto known. So far, Muslims in the rest of the country have not been drawn into the Kashmir quagmire. There have been some instances but not enough to cause serious alarm. Seeds are perhaps being sown for that to change now. Kashmir's theatre of war is readying to spill outwards. As pressures pile up, communalisation could result. Jammu, after all, is one-third Muslim. Will the presumed positives of abrogation of Article 370 and an old development card that has been repeatedly and tiredly played with less than encouraging results far outweigh the inherent infirmities of the move?

Statecraft then and now

The question finally arises: could statecraft have been handled differently? Painstaking back-channel work had narrowed the outstanding differences between India and Pakistan during the time of Prime Ministers Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh, and the congruence on critical issues had survived changes in Pakistan involving President Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the Mumbai attacks. There had been agreement on, among other things, a freeze on the Line of Control as the border in exchange of end to violence and terrorism, leading to thinning of troops on either side and blossoming of local bilateral trade as critical steps towards normalisation. The presumption was that once the momentum was there the rest would follow. It could have been taken forward. Time alone will tell if that was the less risky, more gentle, more inclusive way forward, or this, which right now appears to be a comedy of terrors.

sudarshan.v@thehindu.co.in

FROM THE READERS' EDITOR

Journalism counters manufactured ignorance

Speaking truth to power is a valuable democratic duty



A.S. PANNEERSELVAN

The disinformation industry is growing at an alarming speed and undermining democracy in an incremental manner. As part of this endeavour, there is a conscious attempt to remove the lustre from some defining terms. For instance, words such as pluralism, inclusiveness, fraternity, equality, and affirmative action are seen as terms defining the politics of a bygone era. The echo chamber of social media further distorts the truth.

Sometimes, readers send me WhatsApp forwards asking why the newspaper did not carry a particular story. They use social media trivia to prove a point that journalism is inherently against the ruling elites. In the present climate where conspiracy theories abound and forced false equivalences reign, readers must know that a news ombudsman has a framework to evaluate complaints and compliments. As the Readers' Editor, I am committed to rectify any journalistic flaws through a process called 'visible mending'. I evaluate news and investigative reports based on facts but rarely entertain complaints based on perceptions.

Commitment to inform

Readers must realise that the cyberspace consists of both knowledge and ignorance. However, today its commitment to inform is nearly outweighed by the voices of the apologists for the regime. Credible and trustworthy journalism is often pitted against blatant propagandist drivel. What is happening now is a clash of ideas between one set of professionals committed to knowledge production for public good and another set of partisan groups involved in ignorance production for political longevity. And this is the difference between sensitive journalism and the puffery of propaganda.

Philosophically, the idea of knowledge production has been explored in a systematic manner and the discipline is called epistemology. It would be helpful for the readers to know about a nascent discipline that is gaining ground among academia. It is called 'agnology', which means the study of ignorance. Two professors of history of science at Stanford University, Robert N. Proctor and Londa Schiebinger, edited an anthology of

essays titled *Agnology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance*, which looked at the theme of what keeps ignorance alive and what allows it to be used as a political instrument. Scholars of the essays explained how ignorance is produced or maintained in diverse settings, through mechanisms such as deliberate or inadvertent neglect; secrecy and suppression; document destruction; unquestioned tradition; and myriad forms of inherent or avoidable cultural-political selectivity. Agnology is "the study of ignorance making, the lost and forgotten".

In his introductory chapter, 'A missing term to describe the cultural production of ignorance and its study', Mr. Proctor argued: "Ignorance has many interesting surrogates and overlaps in myriad ways with — as it is generated by — secrecy, stupidity, apathy, censorship, disinformation, faith, and forgetfulness, all of which are science-twisted. Ignorance hides in the shadows of philosophy and is frowned upon in sociology, but it also pops up in a great deal of popular rhetoric: it's no excuse, it's what can't hurt you, it's bliss." In a forceful manner, he explained how technologies cause the proliferation of ignorance: "The public seems to be awakening to the fact that in the midst of the 'information' explosion, there has been an 'ignorance' explosion as well."

In 1984, Thomas Pynchon, in his introduction to his collection of novellas *Slow Learner*, wrote: "Ignorance is not just a blank space on a person's mental map. It has contours and coherence, and for all I know, rules of operation as well." We need to know the contours of the ignorance that flows from prime-time noise. The ignorance-generating mechanism has a sense of coherence, creates its own set of tortured data, politically vacuous vocabulary, and eliminates the distinction between justice and revenge. It stands testimony to George Orwell's observation: "The nationalist not only does not disapprove of atrocities committed by his own side, but he has a remarkable capacity for not even hearing about them."

A cursory reading of the responses to critical voices in the comment section of this newspaper proves that there is an explosion of ignorance. In the short-term, journalists who retain their analytical and interrogative spirit may pay a price for speaking truth to power. But they are performing an irreducible and inalienable democratic duty: confronting a system that produces ignorance.

readerseditor@thehindu.co.in

A law for those who testify

The Centre is yet to act on a Supreme Court directive to legislate on witness protection

M.P. NATHANAEL

The recent accident in Rae Bareilly in which a rape survivor's two aunts died, and which left her and her lawyer in a critical condition, has drawn much media attention. The rape accused, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MLA Kuldeep Singh Sengar, was arrested in April last year after the survivor attempted to immolate herself in front of the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister's residence while demanding justice. Consequent to the death of the two individuals, one of whom was also a witness in the case, charges pertaining to attempt to murder were added to those already present against Sengar.

On June 2 this year, Assistant Sub Inspector Suresh Pal, assigned to protect murder witness Rambir, was accidentally killed when the assailants missed their aim while attempting to kill the witness. In 2017, in the Asaram Bapu case concerning the rape of some women devotees, three witnesses were killed and as many as 10 attacked in an attempt to weaken the case. In fact, it was the killing of the three, followed by a Public Interest Litigation, which prompted the apex court to issue directions to the Centre and the States to frame laws for protection of witnesses.



Maharashtra's law

Following this, Maharashtra came out with the Maharashtra Witness and Protection and Security Act 2017, which was notified in January 2018. However, the Centre, and most other States, are yet to act on the directive.

Meanwhile, the apex court gave its assent last year to the Witness Protection Scheme, which was drafted by the Centre in consultation with the Bureau of Police Research and Development and the National Legal Services Authority. The Centre was to implement the scheme after circulating it among all States and Union Territories and obtaining their comments. However, the scheme was meant to be a measure in force only till the government brought out its

own law on the issue. Though the Centre is scheduled to bring an Act on the subject by the end of this year, it has not made much progress.

Lax implementation

As regards the existing measure, though its objective is to ensure the safety of witnesses, so that they are able to give a true account of the crime without any fear of violence or criminal recrimination, its implementation on the ground leaves much to be desired. The Unnao matter would have been hushed up but for the fact that the survivor attempted to immolate herself in front of the Chief Minister's residence.

Further, though the scheme provides for police personnel to be deployed to protect the witness on the basis of threat perception, it is silent on the punishment to be given to those policemen who, while being charged with providing security, themselves threaten the witnesses. Why were the policemen tasked with protecting the Unnao survivor not with her when she travelled to Rae Bareilly? Were they aware that a sinister plan had probably been hatched to eliminate her relatives?

Above all, what emboldens the criminals the most is the support they get from the police. The shadowy politician-police nexus is so strong that no policeman, at the mercy of political leaders for his career progression, dares take any action against his "master". As long as this nexus continues, the delivery of criminal justice in India will remain a casualty.

The Witness Protection Scheme calls for more elaborate and stricter laws to be incorporated so that criminals find no loopholes that can be exploited to their advantage. The sooner the Centre comes up with a legislation codifying the protection to be given to witnesses, the better it is for India's criminal justice system.

M.P. Nathanael is a retired Inspector General of Police, CRPF



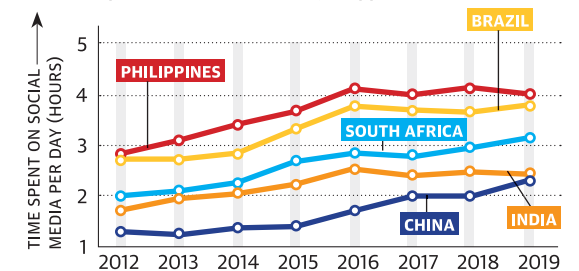
DATA POINT

Socially networked

Globally, digital consumers spent nearly 2.5 hours every day on social networks and messaging in 2019. In India, rising usage can largely be attributed to the falling cost of data usage. About three out of five Indian social media users felt that the usage of social media has made it easier to manipulate people with fake news. By Varun B. Krishnan

High time

The graph looks at how select countries have been spending time on social media. While usage has increased rapidly in the Philippines and Brazil, growth has been relatively sluggish in India and China



Likes and dislikes

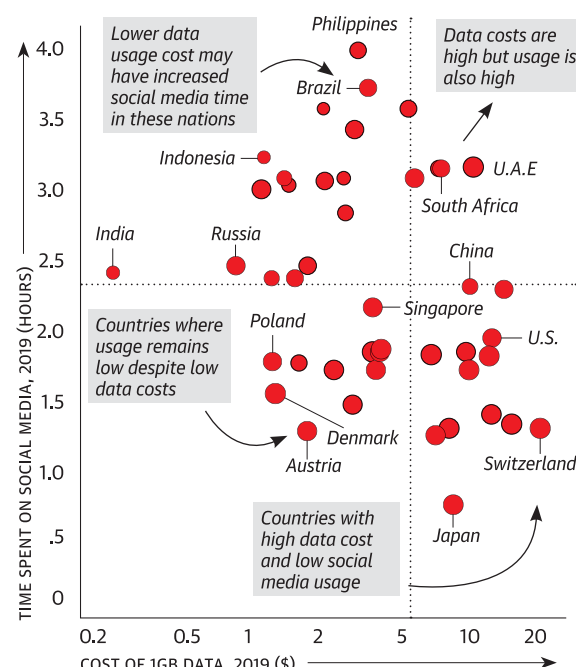
In 2018, 65% of Indian consumers thought that social media kept people informed on current events, while nearly half thought it made people more divided in their political opinions

Access to phones, internet & social media has made people... (answered in 2018)	%
More informed on current events	65
Easier to manipulate with false information & rumours	60
More divided in their political opinions	46
More willing to engage in political debates	46
More accepting of people with different views	38

Source: Global Web Index report (2.78 lakh respondents, 15K from India); Pew Research Centre, Cable.co.uk

Cost vs usage

The graph plots the average time spent on social media per day in 2019 against the average cost of 1 GB data in US\$ across select countries. Size of the dot represents internet penetration



The Hindu

FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO AUGUST 19, 1969

'Congress has split beyond repair'

Mr. S.K. Patil, Member of Parliament and Treasurer of the All India Congress Committee, said in a statement here [Bombay] today [August 18] that whatever might be the result of the Presidential election, there was no denying the fact that the Indian National Congress had split, perhaps "beyond repair." "Nobody likes to say these things, but the logic of events is inexorable," he said and added, "for the last few days, many Congressmen were literally praying that something would happen even on the eve of the election to avert the dreadful consequences of an open split. That did not happen." As regards the demand for a free vote, Mr. Patil said the free vote was nothing but a vote for Mr. Giri who was basically a Communist candidate and perhaps for that reason a favourite candidate of the Prime Minister. "It would be less than honest for the Prime Minister to deny that she had in ever so many ways encouraged the candidature of Mr. Giri. On a closer examination a free vote becomes a ludicrous farce when every other political party had issued a whip for its candidate."

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO AUGUST 19, 1919.

Indian Labour in Ceylon.

(From an Editorial)

The part played by the Government of Madras in the negotiations that took place early last month in respect of the question of Indian labour in Ceylon has not yet transpired despite the public protest made against the secrecy of the transaction. The report of the Committee appointed by the Ceylon Government has now been issued and the text of the draft ordinance which it has recommended should be published elsewhere. We are absolutely in the dark as to the extent to which the local Government have approved of the proposals made in the report and it is very regrettable that, at a time when His Excellency was publicly expressing his desire to establish an agency for interpreting the actions of Government to the people, the details of the important question should have been debated upon, and perhaps decided in secret conclave. The Ceylon Committee have proposed a few remedial measures of first rate importance; but all of them have proceeded from the point of the view of one who is anxious to be no more bothered by the difficulty of labour scarcity which would spell ruin to Ceylon agriculture.