

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 'agnotology', 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 *Agnotology: 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. Agnotology 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



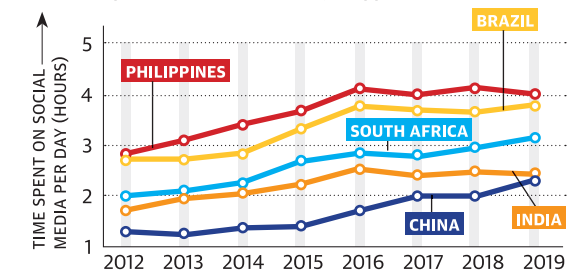
DATA POINT

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

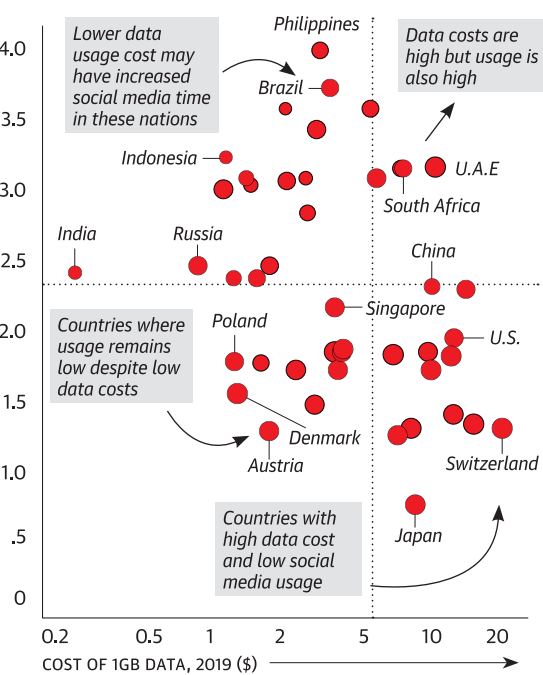
In 2018, 65% of Indian consumers thought that social media kept people informed on current events, while nearly half thought it made people more divided in their political opinions

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.