



Death of an activist

Gauri Lankesh's killers must be found; or it'll embolden those who stifle dissent

The murder of journalist-activist Gauri Lankesh in Bengaluru has set off a wave of protests across the country; the chill that has set in is difficult to miss. It is a fool's game right now to hazard guesses about the identity of the killers, but the manner in which she was brutally murdered raises extremely worrying questions. Her killers caught her outside her home, alone and with her guard down as she got out of her car – they fired at point-blank range, hitting her on the chest and the temple. They appear to have fled without even once getting off their motorbike, leaving no finger or shoe prints, as 'clean' a murder as can be. This has the hallmark of a professional hit-job, a pre-meditated assassination. It is the police's remit to identify and nab the killers, but Lankesh's killing cannot but draw attention to the various constituencies that she kept on notice. Lankesh, the publisher and editor of the Kannada weekly *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*, wore her activism on her sleeve. She came up against the establishment in multiple ways, as she sought to bring naxalites to the mainstream, take up the cause of Dalits and farmers, raise consciousness on the creeping influence of Hindutva groups, give moral support to progressive campaigns, and basically bear scrutiny on those in power.

Journalism, especially that of Kannada's uniquely tabloid-driven activism, has suffered a loss, and her death must be intensely mourned. But as in the cases of Safdar Hashmi decades ago and rationalists M.M. Kalburgi, Govind Pansare and Narendra Dabholkar in recent years, the high-profile death of an activist is a notice to society in ways that transcend the individual's specific life story. It is a confirmation of how formidable are the forces, however invisible they may be to the arm of the law, that individual activism is up against. These brutal attacks have the power to potentially scare off others – activists, journalists, complainants – from sniffing around too much. Just last month, the eventual conviction of Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh on the charge of rape was a reminder of the high cost that defenceless individuals pay to bring the powerful to book – in this case, the murder of Sira-based journalist Ram Chandra Chhatrapati, in 2002 for first publishing news of the crime. This is why Lankesh's murderers must be expeditiously traced and punished – another unsolved crime will only embolden those who believe that dissent and opposition must be met with violence. Her murder has taken place in a year that India dropped three places in the World Press Freedom Index compiled by Reporters Without Borders, from an already bleak 133 to 136. It demands words and also acts of reassurance from the Karnataka and Central governments.

Mountains of garbage

Waste management rules continue to be ignored even a year after they were notified

The collapse of a great wall of garbage in east Delhi's Ghazipur area, sweeping people and vehicles into a nearby canal, is a stark reminder that India's neglected waste management crisis can have deadly consequences. More than a year after the notification of the much-delayed Solid Waste Management Rules, cities and towns are in no position to comply with its stipulations, beginning with the segregation of different kinds of waste at source and their scientific processing. Neither are urban local governments treating the 62 million tonnes of waste generated annually in the country as a potential resource. They have left the task of value extraction mostly to the informal system of garbage collectors and recyclers. Improving on the national record of collecting only 80% of waste generated and being able to process just 28% of that quantum, requires behaviour modification among citizens and institutions. But what is more important is that the municipal bodies put in place an integrated system to transport and process what has been segregated at source. The Swachh Bharat programme of the Centre has focussed too narrowly on individual action to keep streets clean, without concurrent pressure on State and municipal authorities to move closer to scientific management by the deadline of April 2018 set for most places, and arrest the spread of pollution from trash.

In the absence of stakeholders at the local body level, recoverable resources embedded in discarded materials are lost due to dumping. Organic refuse, which forms about 50% of all garbage, readily lends itself to the generation of compost or production of methane for household use or power generation. But it is a major opportunity lost. Organic waste that could help green cities and feed small and affordable household biogas plants is simply being thrown away. It is also ironic that while some countries such as Rwanda and Kenya have introduced stiff penalties for the use of flimsy plastic bags, India is doing little to prevent them from drifting into suburban garbage mountains, rivers, lakes and the sea, and being ingested by cattle feeding on dumped refuse. A new paradigm is needed, in which bulk waste generators take the lead and city managers show demonstrable change in the way it is processed. There has to be a shift away from large budgets for collection and transport by private contractors, to the processing of segregated garbage. As the nodal body for the implementation of the new rules, the Central Pollution Control Board should put out periodic assessments of the preparedness of urban local bodies in the run-up to the deadline. Without a rigorous approach, the national problem of merely shifting city trash to the suburbs, out of sight of those who generate it, will fester and choke the landscape. Considering that waste volumes are officially estimated to grow to 165 million tonnes a year by 2030, many more suburbs are bound to be threatened by collapsing or burning trash mountains.

Testing times in the Korean peninsula

Old objectives of denuclearisation and reunification have to be set aside, at least for now



RAKESH SOOD

The sixth nuclear test by North Korea on Sunday has provoked a predictable chorus of condemnation and hand wringing in capitals around the world. The test was anticipated, given the shrill rhetoric accompanying North Korea's missile tests. Yet there is little to indicate if the key countries (the U.S., China, South and North Korea and Japan) are ready to acknowledge that old policies no longer work and a new approach is needed to de-escalate tensions.

Measuring 6.3 on the Richter scale, this test indicates an explosive yield of approximately 120 kilotons, six times bigger than the Hiroshima bomb. The North Koreans described it as a successful hydrogen bomb test and also released a photograph of 'Supreme Leader' Kim Jong-un posing with a hydrogen bomb. In August, reports had appeared in the U.S. based on intelligence estimates that North Korea had succeeded in producing a miniature warhead that could be mated with its missiles.

While experts continue to debate whether North Korea has mastered the technology behind a fusion device or whether the posed picture was of a mock-up, the fact is that under Mr. Kim, the nuclear and missile programmes have accelerated. Four of the six nuclear tests have been conducted after he took over in 2011; the earlier two were conducted in 2006 and 2009. Missile development began earlier but while Kim Jong-il conducted 16 missile tests during his rule from 1994 to 2011, his son and successor Kim Jong-un has undertaken more than 80 missile tests. Longer range and solid fuel missiles have been tested and North Korea's fissile material stockpile is enough for 25 devices.

On July 4, North Korea tested Hwasong-14, described as an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) capable of reaching the U.S. mainland. Tested in a lofted trajectory, it



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reached a height of 2,800 km and travelled a distance of 933 km, implying a range of 6,500 km in a normal trajectory, bringing mainland America within range. It was described as a 'game changer', something that U.S. President Donald Trump had vowed he would prevent by doing 'whatever was necessary'.

Trump's ballistic stand

The U.S. policy under Mr. Trump has been 'maximum pressure on North Korea' and 'engagement with China'. Since July, Mr. Trump's tweets indicate a growing impatience with China's inability to restrain North Korea. He has blamed China for increasing its trade with North Korea despite sanctions and conveyed 'disappointment' that "they do nothing for us with North Korea, just talk".

In August, he tweeted that North Korean threats will be met with "fire and fury like the world has never seen". North Korea countered with a threat to launch four missiles around Guam "enveloping it in fire", adding that "sound dialogue is not possible with such a guy bereft of reason". Meanwhile, the U.N. Security Council has met regularly to condemn North Korean missile tests and tighten sanctions.

While Mr. Trump has indicated that "military solutions are now fully in place, locked and loaded, should North Korea act unwisely", his Secretary of State Rex Tillerson adopted a measured tone when he

said, "We do not seek a regime change, we do not seek a collapse of the regime, we do not seek an accelerated reunification of the peninsula, we do not seek an excuse to send our military north of the 38th Parallel."

China and Russia have been critical of North Korea's missile and nuclear tests, proposing that if the U.S. and South Korea were to suspend their joint military exercises, North Korea could agree to suspending its tests, opening the way to a dialogue. This was rejected and the joint exercises took place in end-August, as scheduled. Meanwhile, live firing drills have been taking place in the region raising the risks of a crisis erupting through miscalculation or miscommunication as North Korea prepares to celebrate its Foundation Day this week with military parades.

Nuclear crises in the past

Since 1991, this is the third nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula. Post-Cold War, there was a thaw when the U.S. (and then the U.S.S.R.) withdrew naval and tactical nuclear weapons globally, including the ones in South Korea. A Joint Declaration on the Denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula between the two Koreas followed, even though the two countries do not recognise each other. With resumption of U.S.-South Korea military exercises and new U.S. sanctions on North Korea, positions hardened leading to the first crisis

in 1993 with North Korea threatening to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). In Pyongyang, there was a leadership change with Kim Jong-il taking over after his father's death. The crisis was averted by direct talks with the U.S. leading to an Agreed Framework in 1994 under which North Korea suspended its decision to withdraw from the NPT, agreed to freeze its nuclear activities and in return, the U.S. pledged to build two light water nuclear power reactors.

The Clinton administration also provided more than \$800 million of food aid and humanitarian assistance. The fact that the NPT was to be extended in 1995 was undoubtedly a factor in ensuring that North Korea's withdrawal be blocked.

The Bush administration annulled the 1994 Framework Agreement (the two reactors remain unfinished), and in 2002 declared North Korea part of the 'axis of evil'. North Korea reacted by formally quitting the NPT in 2003 provoking the second crisis. China and Russia initiated the Six-Party Talks in 2003 which the U.S. joined under pressure from its regional allies, Japan and South Korea. These took place in a broader context leading to the 2005 Joint Statement which reiterated the commitment to the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula, agreed to negotiate a peace treaty to replace the 1953 armistice, provided for a U.S. security guarantee to North Korea which in turn agreed to rejoin the NPT as soon as possible. However, when the U.S. imposed new sanctions a few months later, North Korea responded with its first nuclear test in 2006 and the Six Party Talks collapsed.

Resolving the issue

Kim Jong-un took over in 2011 and, having seen the outcome of western interventions in Libya and Iraq and Russian intervention in Ukraine, is convinced that he needs a nuclear deterrent for regime survival. In addition, he wants direct talks with the U.S. that will provide him recognition and lessen his dependence on China, and finally, an easing of sanctions. He might agree to a temporary halt in testing as a

means to start a dialogue but will not accept any restriction on capabilities in return for mere verbal assurances. The old carrot and stick policies will not work. Military action may lead to nuclearisation in Japan and South Korea. Sanctions have limited utility because China accounts for 90% of North Korea's foreign trade and for China, a nuclear North Korea is a lesser threat than a regime collapse that could lead to a unified Korea allied to the U.S.

The 1953 Armistice Agreement was signed by North Korea, China and the U.S. (representing the U.N. Command) ending hostilities and was to be followed by a peace treaty which remains pending. South Korea (and the U.S.) and North Korea do not recognise each other; North Korea considers the South under U.S. occupation while South Korea considers the entire peninsula as its territory. Sovereignty issues have been bypassed when politics is favourable as in 1991 when both Koreas were simultaneously admitted to the UN. China, looking for investment and technology, pragmatically recognised South Korea in 1992, much to North Korea's annoyance.

Today, times have changed and there is more mistrust all around. Moreover, Mr. Kim is suspicious of China and the Chinese consider his provocations timed to embarrass President Xi Jinping – with missile tests during the Belt and Road summit and the nuclear test during BRICS, and with the crucial Party Congress due in October.

The old objectives of 'denuclearisation' and 'reunification' have to be set aside. North Korea's nuclear capability will have to be accepted, at least for the foreseeable future. Mutual recognition will have to precede reunification and for this, the two Koreas need to begin a dialogue in due course. Managing this requires closer understanding between the U.S. and South Korea than is currently on display. For Mr. Kim, the stakes are existential and parallel negotiations on political and nuclear tracks are needed if the current crisis is to be averted.

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A case for universal medical care

The opposition to NEET is a smokescreen to hide inequalities and exploitation



GEORGE THOMAS

The purpose of medical education is to train medical personnel to handle the medical care needs of the country. It is obvious that any democratic government will try to elucidate what these needs are and tailor the education system to fulfil what is required. Right from the Bhor Committee (1946) to the Mudaliar Committee (1962) and the Shrivastav Committee (1975) to the Bajaj Committee (1986) and including the High Level Expert Group on Universal Health Coverage (2011), the question of what type of medical personnel the country should train has been examined. All these committees are unanimous in their opinion that the country needs a large number of basic doctors. It is not sufficient to state what type of doctors should be trained. It is ne-

cessary also to define where they will be employed and who will pay the bills. In short, medical education is the beginning of a process to produce a cadre of personnel who need to be deployed rationally to achieve the health goals of the country.

The piecemeal approach to the problem of providing medical care in India, treating medical education as though it can be separated from medical employment, is responsible for the continuing crisis in medical services and admissions to medical colleges. Numerous commentators have remarked upon the skewed distribution of medical personnel with over 75% of doctors in urban areas where only a third of the people live. A large number of post-graduate doctors and super specialists are underemployed. The problem starts right at the stage of medical admission.

Semblance of quality

Every country should seek to train persons with the best aptitude for a particular task. In doctors, intelligence and empathy are highly



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prized. It is difficult to measure empathy and most democratic countries use a test of intelligence as a screen to admit medical students because everywhere there are more candidates than seats available. In India, one can accept that because of centuries of deprivation, certain communities need affirmative action in the form of reservation. However, it is very difficult to accept that expensive private medical education is useful for the country. Permitting private medical education was clearly a concession to powerful pressure groups who sought to circumvent the difficult entry barriers to medical education by buying their way.

These colleges are filled with the children of doctors, bureaucrats, businessmen and others who seek the social recognition that a medical degree bestows. Anybody with money, irrespective of aptitude, gained entry to some of these colleges. Every year the amounts illegally charged rose by leaps and bounds. Governments were complicit. This egregious state of affairs led to several persons approaching courts. Some semblance of quality has been sought to be restored by the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET). Private colleges can no longer admit whoever pays the highest even if the examination marks are very low. The rule of reservation is applied after the test scores are obtained. Therefore, it satisfies the need for affirmative action. Unlike marks in the twelfth standard, which can be only obtained once, NEET offers a candidate the chance of another attempt. What the syllabus should be and who should conduct the test can be negotiated.

Inequality among qualified doctors is quite high. The economically well-off can aspire to better

jobs, training abroad (still much sought after in spite of all nationalist talk), and generally adopt metropolitan lifestyles. Doctors from poorer backgrounds will need to struggle a lot more. All this can be changed if the government abolishes private practice, institutes universal medical care and becomes the employer of all medical graduates, similar to the National Health Service of the U.K. All medical graduates will be on the same level playing field. Patients will benefit a lot. The deprivation of patients in rural areas will vanish. Unhealthy competition for patients in urban areas will disappear too. No Central or State government has shown any interest in this obvious solution which will benefit the ordinary citizen and the vast majority of doctors from humble backgrounds. The opposition to NEET is a smokescreen to hide the real truth, the abysmal level of medical care services and the continued exploitation of poor patients and the doctors who serve them.

George Thomas is an orthopaedic surgeon at St. Isabel's Hospital, Chennai

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.

Murder most foul

Dislodging dissent by annihilation is undemocratic. A free-thinking society such as ours has still to recover from the shock of the murderous attacks on Narendra Dabholkar, Govind Pansare and M.M. Kalburgi. The cold-blooded murder of Gauri Lankesh is yet another instance of intolerance. It was doubly tragic that it happened on the birth anniversary of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. It may be a fact that Lankesh was harsh in her criticism and at times even made intemperate comments. But such flaws must be met with healthy debate and discussion and not countered with bullets.

K.C. KALKURA,
Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh

It is quite distressing and heartbreaking that one more intellectual has fallen prey to fascist forces in the country. Muting the voices of dissent with violence is a

cowardly act. Lankesh's death seems to be a sequel to the killings of other activists. What is even more distressing is that the perpetrators of such crimes still remain at large, making a mockery of our systems.

ABDULLAH AHAMMED K.P.,
Areekode, Malappuram, Kerala

Lankesh's killing must be strongly condemned. Gunning down a writer, thinker or activist for his or her views is the height of intolerance in a democratic society. Whenever such incidents happen, political parties are quick to blame one another and the issue becomes convoluted. Little do they realise that they are responsible in a big way for stifling dissent in the name of free speech. Our Parliament and legislatures stand testimony to the fact that unruly behaviour rather than healthy debate is the order of the day. Parties with a divisive agenda and those that appease certain sections for votes are bad

examples to society at large. Many of the parties even condone violence for winning elections. What is worse, governments of the day have got used to stifling criticism by hook or by crook. In such a milieu, the hue and cry raised by parties over Lankesh's killing is at variance with their precepts and practice.

V. NAGARAJAN,
Chennai

The bullet that killed the Father of the Nation has once again struck to silence a critic of fanatics. Where is the tolerant India? It is lost perhaps in the fanatical sounds orchestrated by the frenzy of religious chants and murderous shrill voices of those groups who pander to politicians, who use them to polarise and thus ensure their chair remains intact, whatever be the cost to the prestige of the nation and human values enshrined in the Constitution, for which our freedom fighters sacrificed their lives.

Can we learn from these incidents? Maybe never. Because the country is not ruled by rulers who were sensitised by the freedom struggle or who faced the consequences of a civil revolution but by those propped up by funds from corporate houses to ensure the growth of crony capitalists. We can only organise a few candle light protests and share the pain of losing valiant torch bearers of free speech. But when will the real revolution begin to herald the true freedom for which our forefathers fought and died?

VARGHESE GEORGE,
Secunderabad

What struck me when news of the outrageous killing broke was how dissent and strong opposing ideas scare some elements to the extent that they will stoop low to silence the dissenting voice. Are the views and beliefs of these people, the perpetrators of these murders, so frail and

fragile? The moot question here is, do we want the country to imperceptibly and gradually slide into the abyssal pit where Pakistan and Bangladesh find themselves today?

ANILKUMAR KURUP,
Thiruvananthapuram

The nowhere people
As a UNHCR intern in India and having worked on a project with Rohingya refugees, I can vouch for the fact that the stories of what they have undergone are spine-chilling. Many have lost their near and dear ones and continue to live in exile. Many of the children are school dropouts even though they are given opportunities in government schools. India should show some compassion for the

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

The abbreviation, CERT-IN, stands for Computer Emergency Response Team - India, and not Computer Emergency Response System - India, as stated in the front-page story headlined "Top babus given secure mobiles" (Sept. 5, 2017).

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