



## Karnataka conundrum

Converting resignation into a disqualification matter adds new dimension to a political crisis

The Supreme Court's decision to ask the parties to the political crisis in Karnataka to maintain the *status quo* until it examines the questions of law involved, is pragmatic and expedient. The Speaker has been asked not to decide the issue of MLAs' resignation or disqualification. An order has been passed when one of the questions to be decided is whether the court can give such a direction to the Speaker. It now transpires that legislators can be prevented from resigning by claiming that they have incurred disqualification. It was argued in court that "the rebel MLAs are trying to avoid disqualification by tendering resignations." This is astounding, as the penalty for defection is loss of legislative office. Quitting the current post before joining another party is a legal and moral obligation. Defection is condemnable, especially if it is to bring down one regime and form another. But politicians cannot be tied down to parties against their will by not letting them leave even their legislative positions. Even if it can be argued that two MLAs had pending disqualification proceedings against them, what about the rest? They say they tried to meet the Speaker, but could not. They may have been wrong to rush to the court without getting an appointment with the Speaker, but in the few intervening days, their parties issued a whip to all MLAs to be present in the House and vote for the government.

Converting resignation into a disqualification matter is an attempt to deny a member's right to quit his seat in the legislature before joining another party, even if the crossing-over is a politically expedient measure. The logic seems to be that a disqualified member cannot become a Minister without getting elected again, whereas one who resigns can be inducted into an alternative Cabinet without being a member. Accepting a resignation is a simple function of being satisfied if it is voluntary, while disqualification is decided on evidence and inquiry. The two should not be mixed up. The ongoing proceedings represent an increasingly common trend in litigation on constitutional issues: the propensity of the political class to twist and stretch the law in their favour and leave it to the court to set things right. The Speaker already enjoys extraordinary powers under the Constitution. In addition to immunity from judicial scrutiny for legislative matters, such as whether a Bill is a money bill, presiding officers get to decide whether a member has incurred disqualification under the anti-defection law. Though the decision is subject to judicial review, many Speakers have evaded judicial scrutiny by merely not acting on disqualification matters. The question whether the Speaker's inaction can be challenged in court is pending before another Constitution Bench. Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu have instances of Speakers not acting on disqualification questions for years. The current crisis in Karnataka has exposed a new dimension to such partisan action.

## Warlord and war crimes

The International Criminal Court verdict against Bosco Ntaganda is a breakthrough

The conviction of the Congolese warlord Bosco Ntaganda is cause for cautious optimism that perpetrators of serious crimes cannot escape justice, even where they have evaded domestic laws. Ntaganda, known as "the terminator", was pronounced guilty of 13 counts of war crimes and five of crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Court. These relate to the 2002-03 ethnic conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo. After a 2006 indictment by the Hague court, it took seven more years for him to surrender and months more before the trial could start. The conviction follows the ICC's 2012 sentencing of Thomas Lubanga, the first to be pronounced guilty under the Rome Statute, also pertaining to atrocities during the Congolese conflict. The verdict in this latest case is a breakthrough for the prosecution, which has come under increasing scrutiny. It has even been forced to abandon high-profile trials involving heads of government owing to the intimidation of witnesses and tampering with evidence. In 2014, the ICC dropped charges of crimes against humanity on Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta, the first sitting President to appear before it, relating to the death of hundreds in the 2007 post-election ethnic violence. The judges held that the Nairobi government had not acted in good faith, as crucial evidence had been withheld from the prosecution. Fatou Bensouda, the ICC chief prosecutor who has been in the midst of some of these reversals, described as "regrettable and troubling" a majority appeal decision last year. That ruling acquitted Jean-Pierre Bemba, a former DRC vice president, who was in 2016 convicted of war crimes and handed an 18-year sentence. In January, Laurent Gbagbo, former President of Ivory Coast, was acquitted of crimes against humanity. In the face of strong resistance to prosecute crimes committed in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, many African nations feel they were being selectively targeted. In an unjustified move, Burundi has quit the ICC, as also the Philippines.

Arguably the greatest challenge today to enforce accountability transcending domestic and regional borders could be linked to the surge of nationalism around the world. The genesis of the Rome Statute, adopted in 1998, made a modest beginning to ensure that serious atrocities committed by elected representatives do not go unpunished. The refusal of major states to bring themselves under the court's jurisdiction has dampened such hopes. It is an irony that countries this year are marking the 75th anniversary of the Bretton Woods institutions. But the new world order they sought to usher in, underpinned by a rules-based system of global governance, is facing its biggest challenge yet.

# Looming challenges to India's standing

In the coming five years, a host of geopolitical and economic issues need to be reconciled



M.K. NARAYANAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has maintained a frenetic pace, renewing contacts with world leaders ever since the results of general election 2019. He was the cynosure of all eyes at the G-20 meeting in June, in Osaka. At the BRICs informal meeting, also in Osaka, he called for the strengthening of the World Trade Organisation and for a global conference on terrorism. He discussed counter-terrorism and climate change issues at separate meetings with China's President Xi Jinping and Russia's President Vladimir Putin. He participated in the Japan-India-U.S. trilateral grouping, arguing for a "rules based order" in the Indo-Pacific region. He met with U.S. President Donald Trump, to discuss the future of India-U.S. relations.

### A vastly altered situation

This may convey an impression that everything bodes well for India in the external realm. What is often overlooked is that while we were fortunate in the past to be able to take advantage of a rare combination of favourable conditions, this situation no longer exists. The 2019 election verdict was a definitive victory for Mr. Modi, but it hardly carries an assurance that India can pursue the same policies as before. While it has become commonplace for most Indians to affirm that India has arrived, there are a host of issues that exist which need to be reconciled before we can achieve what we aspire for.

The past cannot be a guide to the future. In the past, we did manage a shift from non-alignment to multi-alignment, could

improve our relations with the United States without jeopardising our long-term relationship with Russia, and paper over our prickly relations with China without conceding too much ground; all the while maintaining our strategic independence. This is too much to hope for at the present time.

The global situation that made all this possible has altered. Rivalries among nations have intensified. There is virtual elimination of the middle ground in global politics, and it has become far more adversarial than at any time previously. Even the definition of a liberal order seems to be undergoing changes. Several more countries today profess support for their kind of liberalism, including Russia and China. At the other end, western democracy appears far less liberal today.

### China, U.S. and Asian realities

In this backdrop, India needs to rework many of its policies in the coming five years. South Asia, in particular, and the region of our highest priority, according to the new External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, needs close attention. The region is one of the most disturbed in the world and India has little or no say in any of the outcomes taking place. India-Pakistan relations are perhaps at their lowest point. Tarring Pakistan with the terror brush is hardly policy, and stable relations continue to be elusive. India has no role in Afghan affairs and is also excluded from current talks involving the Taliban, the Afghan government, Pakistan, the U.S. and even Russia and China. India might have recouped its position more recently in the Maldives, but its position in Nepal and Sri Lanka remains tenuous. In West Asia again, India is no longer a player to reckon with.

Across much of Asia, China is the major challenge that India has to contend with. Smaller countries in the region are being inveigled to



participate in China's programmes such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). India and Bhutan are the only two countries in this region that have opted out of the BRI, and they seem like the odd men out. The challenge in the coming years for India is to check the slide, especially in Asia, and try and restore India to the position it held previously. India cannot afford to wait too long to rectify the situation.

Deepening India-U.S. relations today again carry the danger of India becoming involved in a new kind of Cold War. This is another area that needs our special focus. India must ensure that it does not become a party to the conflicts and rivalries between the U.S. and a rising China, the heightened tensions between the U.S. and Russia, and also avoid becoming a pawn in the U.S.-Iran conflict.

There is little doubt that current India-U.S. relations provide India better access to state-of-the-art defence items; the recent passage of the National Defence Authorisation Act in the U.S. makes India virtually a non-NATO ally. However, such close identification comes with a price. It could entail estrangement of relations with Russia, which has been a steadfast ally and a defence partner of India's for the better part of half-a-century. Closer relations with the U.S. also carries the risk of aggravating tensions between India and China, even as China and the U.S. engage in contesting every domain and

# Ecological perils of discounting the future

With growing environmental distress, policymakers cannot shy away from adopting best eco-management practices



KALVAKUNTLA KAVITHA

In a report last year, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) called the Chennai floods of 2015 a "man made disaster", a pointer to how the encroachment of lakes and river floodplains has driven India's sixth largest city to this ineluctable situation. The Chennai floods are a symbol of consistent human failings and poor urban design which are common to most urban centres in India if not urban centres across the world. Now, Chennai is in the midst of another crisis — one of water scarcity.

Unlike issues such as traffic congestion or crime which are visible, environmental degradation is not what most people can easily see or feel in their every day lives. Therefore, when the consequences of such degradation begin to wreak havoc, it becomes difficult to draw the correlation between nature's vengeance with human failings. In Chennai, more than 30 waterbo-

dies of significance have disappeared in the past century. Concretisation or the increase in paved surfaces has affected the percolation of rainwater into the soil, thereby depleting groundwater levels to a point of no return.

### Urbanisation without vision

Chennai, however, is not alone in terms of suffering from the consequences of human folly. Urbanisation at the cost of reclaiming water bodies is a pan-India if not world-wide phenomenon. There are examples in cities such as Bengaluru, Hyderabad and even Mexico city. In Bengaluru, 15 lakes have lost their ecological character in less than five years according to a High Court notice to the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike, the city's administrative body responsible for civic amenities and some infrastructural assets. The lakes, which are now encroached areas, find use as a bus stand, a stadium and, quite ironically, as an office of the Pollution Control Board. In Mexico city, what was once a network of lakes built by the Aztecs in the 11th and 12th centuries, has given way to a downtown city centre. Parts of the city, especially downtown, sink a few metres every year causing immense damage



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to buildings. In Telangana, the byzantine network of tanks and lakes built by the Kakatiya dynasty has disappeared over the years. However, the question is not about what follies were committed in the past, but about what we can do in the present and, more importantly, for the future. In Telangana, "tanks have been the lifeline of the State because of its geographical positioning". The State's "topography and rainfall pattern have made tank irrigation an ideal type of irrigation by storing and regulating water flow for agricultural use".

### The Telangana example

There are a number of lessons that can be learnt. The Chief Minister of Telangana launched a massive rejuvenation movement in form of "Mission Kakatiya" which involves the restoration of irrigation tanks and lakes/minor irrigation sources

are involved in intense rivalry in military matters as well as competition on technology issues.

The U.S.-China-Russia conflict has another dimension which could affect India adversely. The strategic axis forged between the Mr. Putin's Russia and Mr. Xi's China will impact not only the U.S. but also India's position in both Asia and Eurasia, with India being seen as increasingly aligned to the U.S. Hence, India needs to devise a policy that does not leave it isolated in the region.

Again, notwithstanding the 'Wuhan spirit', India cannot but be concerned about China's true intentions, given the regional and global situation and its desire to dominate the Asian region. Within the next decade, China will become a truly formidable military power, second only to the U.S. The ongoing India-U.S. entente could well provoke a belligerent China to act with greater impunity than previously. As it is, China would be concerned at the rise of a 'nationalist' India, which is perhaps not unwilling in the prevailing circumstances of today to become embroiled in a conflict over 'freedom of navigation' in the South and East China seas.

### The new buzzword

On another plane, as India intensifies its search for state-of-the-art military equipment from different sources, it may be worthwhile for India to step back and reconsider some of its options. Military power is but one aspect of the conflicts that rage today. Experts point out that outright war, insurgencies and terror attacks are fast becoming passé. Nations confront many other and newer threats at present. Today, disruptive technologies have tremendous danger potential and nations that possess these technologies have the ability to become the dominant powers in the 21st and 22nd Centuries.

A major challenge for India will

hence be how to overcome our current inadequacies in the realm of disruptive technologies rather than remaining confined to the purely military domain. The U.S., China, Russia, Israel and few other countries dominate these spheres as also cyberspace and cyber methodologies. New policy parameters will need to be drawn up by India, and our capabilities enhanced in areas such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology and cyber methodology, all of which constitute critical elements of the disruptive technology matrix.

### The economy needs attention

None of this would, however, be possible unless India pays greater heed to its economy. Despite a plethora of official statements, the state of the economy remains a matter of increasing concern. Even statistics regarding the economy are being questioned. Notwithstanding India's ambition to become a \$5-trillion economy by 2024-25, the reality today is that the economy appears to be in a state of decline. Jobs, specially skilled jobs, are not available in sufficient numbers and this should be a matter for concern. The ability to sustain a rate of growth between 8.5% and 9.5% is again highly doubtful. Neither the Economic Survey nor the Budget contain useful pointers to a more robust economy, one that is capable of providing a higher rate of growth, more opportunities for skilled labour, and greater potential for investments.

The looming challenge for India in the coming five years, therefore, would be how to build a strong economic foundation, one that is capable of providing the kind of power structure needed for an emerging power, and also one possessing the best liberal credentials.

M.K. Narayanan is a former National Security Adviser and a former Governor of West Bengal

Why should other urban centres shy away from adopting, remodelling and implementing some of the best water management practices to avoid disaster? The answer perhaps lies in the tendency of policymakers to discount the future and of their obsession of focussing on the here and now.

### By 2050

It is estimated that in just 30 years from now, half of India will be living in cities. If we truly envision a great future for this country, how can we possibly risk the lives of half of our people and the next generations who could be facing a life in cities parched by drought, stranded by floods, mortified by earthquakes or torn by wars over fresh water? What has happened in Chennai now or what happened in Kerala last year in the form of floods are not a case of setting alarm bells ringing, but one of explosions. If we do not wake up now, we have to be prepared to face the consequences of nature wreaking great havoc on humanity. We would not need nuclear bombs for our obliteration.

Kalvakuntla Kavitha is a former Member of Parliament and the founding president of the Telangana Jagruthi

## 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.

### Deciphering the moon

As earthlings and Indians, we exult at the launch of the Chandrayaan-2 mission to scan the moon's surface and soil, map its topography, study its mineral and chemical composition and understand its origin and evolution (Nation page, "Chandrayaan-2 all set for 3.84 lakh km voyage," and FAQ page, both July 14). The unmanned mission, undertaken days ahead of the 50th anniversary of the first successful moon landing, has to be seen as part of the wider scientific efforts to push the boundaries of human knowledge. Space exploration has both tangible and intangible benefits and it sometimes transforms the way we look at ourselves and the universe. Surely, reaching out for the celestial bodies is good for life on earth. The question of how a

poverty-stricken country can invest in space programmes is based on misconception. The right approach is that we must have the wherewithal to do both poverty mitigation and space exploration.

G. DAVID MILTON,  
Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

■ Amid pessimistic news items related to political defections, violence and scams, the report on ISRO's ambitious moon mission project comes as a ray of hope. Scientists are said to have skipped holidays and worked hard for the success of the mission. All government departments should take inspiration from the premier space organisation and strive to better their work culture.

KSHIRASAGARA BALAJI RAO,  
Hyderabad

### Undignified defections

This is with reference to the Editorial, "Aftershocks in

Goa" (July 13). The defection of MLAs, whether induced or voluntary, is ugly. The legislators, having won the election as a member of one party, have no moral right to defect to another. Anti-defection laws are no longer acting as a deterrent. The hidden hand of the Bharatiya Janata Party to gain control of States where it has not been elected to power can be sensed. Democracy needs to be saved from such dishonest manoeuvres. The Supreme Court needs to intervene and force the defecting legislators to forfeit their membership, bar them for life from contesting elections and make them ineligible for pension.

R.M. MANOHARAN,  
Ramanathapuram, Tamil Nadu

### Electoral reforms

The themes discussed by former Chief Election Commissioner S.Y. Quraishi, while not irrelevant, lag behind in priority for

ordinary voters. Reforms need to be, first of all, targeted at keeping criminals away from the electoral scenario. If men and women of integrity are elected as representatives, issues like money power, method of appointment of Election Commissioners and EVM use can be addressed. Legislation is urgently required to empower voters with a right to recall MPs/MLAs. Similarly, a 50%+1 rule, based on voters' list, is needed to declare a winning candidate. Empowering the None of the Above (NOTA) option is equally important. From the demarcation of constituencies to the formation of Cabinets, a sense of anarchy prevails at every step. Parliament needs to take up such serious issues to keep the spirit of democracy alive (Editorial page, "A welcome debate on electoral reforms," July 12).

P.R.V. RAJA,  
Pandalam, Kerala

### Wielding the broom

The MPs' act of 'cleaning' Parliament premises, which are already kept reasonably clean, comes across as a supreme farce aimed at drawing attention of citizens and making them believe that the lawmakers are alive to the burning issue. Instead of this, the VIPs should have selected some remote city/town in the country to prove their sincerity to the cause (News page, "Cleaning the house," July 14).

V. PADMANABHAN,  
Bengaluru

### WC dream ends

From a potential reality, India's World Cup dream turned illusory and blew into smithereens. The 'Men in Blue', who were heroes of a frenzied cricket nation, suddenly turned villains with one bad game against New Zealand in the big semi-final. (Editorial, "The climax", July 13). As is widely perceived, the middle order proved to

be the major reason for India's exit from the quadrennial tournament. The selectors made a huge blunder by not picking technically equipped players like Ajinkya Rahane and Cheteshwar Pujara, who have performed well in England, to strengthen the middle order. Also, it is baffling that despite being groomed for the last couple of years for the crucial No. 4 spot, Ambati Rayudu was not selected.

These apart, when India wins a tournament, selectors get financial rewards, but when the team loses, it is only the players who bear the brunt. While the Committee of Administrators (CoA) has got into most cricketing matters, surprisingly it has avoided assessing the performance of selectors.

R. SIVAKUMAR,  
Chennai

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# Relying on the Constitution is not enough

For Dalits, the institution has become synonymous with a grievance cell offering no immediate solutions



SURAJ YENGDE

Caste plays an important role in every facet of life, writes Suraj Yengde, a first-generation Dalit scholar, in his latest book, Caste Matters. Mr. Yengde grew up in dire circumstances in a family where the “education level did not go beyond tenth grade”. He talks about everyday humiliations and about the resilience of Dalits. Mr. Yengde questions Brahminical power as also divisions within the Dalit community, the legacy of Ambedkar, and explains why Dalits must lay claim to power. An excerpt:

The Dalit movement in India is yet to be fully formed with a sizeable consensus. It lives in various forms, sizes and shapes. It has not yet formulated a cogent programme to take in politically conservative Dalits by bringing them into the wider Indian democratic experience. Dalit scholars and politicians alike can be seen struggling to formulate a workable theory of Ambedkarism or Dalitism that would be a manifesto for common liberation.

By exclusively relying on constitutionalism as a means of emancipation, this class of intellectuals argues for a utopian dream. The methods of attaining Dalit emancipation, however, remain unknown. The sooner India’s oppressed realise this, the better. One cannot depend on the limited conceptions of constitutionalism for deliverance. Owing to the limited control of this institution, the Constitution has become synonymous to a grievance cell offering no immediate solutions.

### Limited reach

The linguistic accessibility of the Constitution and its reach to the oppressed is extremely limited. Few peasants would consider the Constitution as a written word that would guarantee them protection from the landlord’s real and financial whipcord. Similarly, beggars who are living on the mercy of donors’ charity would think that this dossier guarantees them equality and access to freedom. The idea of the Constitution is

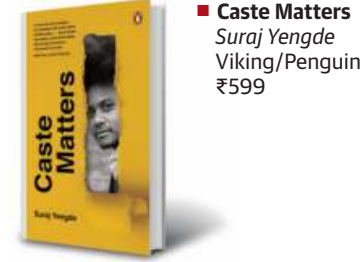


MEETA AHLAWAT

romantic. No one really knows its limitations but lauds its profundity without testing it out. Many Dalits are repeating the state’s narrative of constitutionalism as being the ultimate virtue – a god-sent panacea. It does nothing more than apply a lotion to massage one’s shattered ego. But when it comes to exercising the enshrined codes in the Constitution, Dalits seem to be harming their self-worth. This is because not everybody feels this document is close to their hearts as much as Dalits. Not everyone has similar expectations from the Constitution. Thus, it creates genuine gaps while considering constitutional morality as a common virtue. Hence, in such a situation of one-sided applicability, mutual cohabitation is a long shot. One has to pierce through the devious agenda of casteist rogues by injecting a radical antidote to set a tone of mutuality and respectability. Unless this is settled, no further conversation can be foreseen that will yield real results.

### Second-class citizens

As much as Dalits feel empowered in a constitutionally mandated democratic republic, any hope of their issues being redressed withers away when reality comes knocking. After every gruesome atrocity or everyday humiliation they undergo at the workplace or in their shared housing, the promise of constitutionalism shatters into pieces. Dalits are often accorded second-class citizenship. At the workplace, they do not get the requisite respect and attention from



■ Caste Matters  
Suraj Yengde  
Viking/Penguin  
₹599

their co-workers. A senior bureaucrat friend, Tushar (pseudonym), who has an advanced degree from an Ivy League school, told me about his unpleasant experience. Prior to his departure to America, he was given a heavy workload with additional responsibilities by his immediate dominant caste supervisors. Tushar narrated the story of how he was tasked to work on projects that demanded his extra involvement which in turn consumed more time than required. His selection to an Ivy League institution made everyone at his workplace insecure. He was regularly taunted with disparaging comments. ‘What will you do after studying economics, which is not your field and different from the work you currently do?’

One of the limitations of the Indian Constitution often echoed within Dalit circles is the absolute visionary absence of Dalit pride and the eruptive definition of liberation. Constitutionalism has proved to be an unreliable doctrine to influence perpetrators of casteism. The landmark case of *Surya Narayan Chaudhury v. State of Rajasthan* in 1988 ex-

poses one among its many limitations. This case prohibited temples from discriminating against Dalits’ right to worship and enter the sacrosanct spaces as a rule of law.

The verdict delivered by the Chief Justice of India, Justice J.S. Verma, pointed out the fact that ‘mere enactment of such a law or guaranteeing a right in the Constitution of India is not enough and the change needed is really in our hearts and not elsewhere. It is the willing acceptance of the society which alone is the sure guarantee of eradication of any social evil.’

The Justice J.S. Verma verdict expressed the inadequacies of legal provisions in the absence of society’s willingness to acknowledge its prejudices. This goes in line with Ambedkar’s comments on the uselessness of legislation in the face of social sanction.

### Using Ambedkar

Guarding the elitism of the Constitution and selling it under Ambedkar’s name has come at the cost of Dalit radicalism. Ambedkar is now centralised as a sanctimonious figurehead. And in a country like India, to worship someone is to kill any critical thoughts about the person. Various ideological and semi-social and political circles play football with Ambedkar and enjoy the show put on by Dalits around his portraits. Ambedkar’s image is used to silence Dalit rage around any issue, to the benefit of the oppressor, who is more than happy to co-opt Ambedkar into their vicious programme of hatred and violence. At the time of writing, every Dalit leader in the 2019 election campaign has spoken of protecting the Constitution. They found it a more appealing idea to attract the common mass towards ‘Samvidhaan’, as opposed to other traditional issues at hand, such as social justice, welfare programmes, education, health, taxation and the protection of the working class. The affection of Dalits towards constitutionalism is a curious subject of inquiry. No mainstream Dalit leader has dared to critically engage with the debate around the Constitution and its encouragement of Dalit passivism.

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### FROM THE READERS’ EDITOR

## The act of verification requires time

The Readers’ Editor’s office requires effort and expertise to verify arguments and counterarguments



A.S. PANNEERSELVAN

What are the issues that a Readers’ Editor can address and what are the issues that are beyond his remit? The fine line between acting responsibly and overreach is clear to all the three concerned parties: readers, the editorial staff, and the Readers’ Editor. Readers recognise that the Readers’ Editor’s role is strictly limited to post-publication, but they have an ambiguous idea when it comes to his right to reply.

### Time for evaluation

On July 9, *The Hindu* published an article titled “Taking a myopic view of foreign-made generic drugs” by Srividhya Ragavan, Professor of Law at Texas A&M University School of Law, on the opinion page. The article looked at how the U.S. is using the Ranbaxy experience as an excuse to deny access to lifesaving medication to productive workforces. Dinesh Thakur, a public health activist and blogger, wanted the newspaper to publish a rebuttal. He marked it to both the editorial team and the Readers’ Editor office on July 10. However, he withdrew his rejoinder on July 12 saying he was disappointed that the editorial team did not indicate whether his article would be published or not. Mr. Thakur failed to recognise the fact that rebuttals need careful analysis. It takes time to examine the points made. Further, it is only fair to check with the original author for her response. The Readers’ Editor’s office only facilitates a dialogue between the reader and the editorial team, it does not interfere in the editorial selection process. Mr. Thakur withdrew his submission without giving adequate time to the editorial team to either examine his counterarguments or get Ms. Ragavan’s response. I request readers to grant us time to carry out due diligence in evaluating complaints. This request for time should not be interpreted as the lack of a proactive outlook.

The Readers’ Editor’s office acts as an ef-

fective listening post and passes on every alert that comes from readers. There are moments when it acts as an early warning system.

### Cause for floods

When parts of north India were flooded last week and this week, Kanak Mani Dixit, founding editor of *Himal Southasian* and a regular contributor to this newspaper, drew our attention to some very important facts. He pointed out that there are no significant dams in Nepal with ‘open sluice gates’ to send floodwaters to Bihar or Uttar Pradesh. He said that the two barrages on rivers Kosi and Gandaki near the India-Nepal border are operated by Indian authorities. And that there is only one relatively small reservoir in Nepal, Kulekhani. For nearly three decades, Indian leaders have been blaming Nepal for floods in north India, especially in Bihar and U.P. Even a statesman like Atal Bihari Vajpayee believed in this allegation. During his 1998 tour of flooded eastern U.P., Vajpayee

remarked in Lucknow that Nepal was responsible for the floods. Most news channels reported that Nepal had released 3,50,000 cusecs from its dams. Ajaya Dixit, a water resources expert and a member of the Nepal Water Conservation Foundation based in Kathmandu, pointed out that the politics of blaming Nepal began in the colonial era when Sir Claude Inglis, the director of the Central Irrigation and Hydrodynamic Research Station at Poona, attributed floods in the Kosi river to hill farmers cutting trees, as early as 1941.

Mr. Dixit explained the causes for floods in the plains of Bihar. He meticulously explained that the real issue is not what is stored upstream but with the drainage congestion downstream. Bihar’s embankments stretching over 3,000 km have made more land susceptible to floods than what they were meant to do – provide deliverance from the annual inundation.

Both the cases – one about Indian-made generic drugs and the other about the floods in north India – draw our attention to the act of verification amidst conflicting claims. A Readers’ Editor’s verdict is an act of validation. It recognises that verification requires not only effort and expertise but also time.

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## A valiant attempt to mainstream the marginalised

The ‘good cop’ in ‘Article 15’ is aware of his privilege

KUNAL RAY

One popular trope in Hindi cinema is that of a ‘good cop’. He regularly performs swashbuckling tricks, takes the rowdies to task and does out justice. Amitabh Bachchan played many of these angry cop roles in the 1970s. In fact, his angry young man image was largely a creation of these films. The cop character was angered by wrongdoings of various kinds but remained oblivious to caste-based injustice.

What has changed, I wonder? Look at Ajay Devgn’s cop character in the *Singham* films or Salman Khan’s in *Dabangg*. Caste issues don’t seem to rattle our filmmakers in Mumbai.

### Taking caste head on

In such a scenario, Ayushmann Khurrana’s lead character in *Article 15* comes as a welcome change. I don’t remember the last time a policeman took caste head on in Hindi cinema. There are very few instances of mainstream Hindi cinema exposing caste-based oppression so eloquently with nuance.

A cop walking over a heap of garbage, entering the swamp with his subordinates, visuals of manual scavenging on screen – it is rare to encounter these moments in Hindi films.

The way director Anubhav Sinha deals with caste issues is different from the approach of, say, Pa. Ranjith, and I think both can coexist. Hindi cinema is riddled with many ills. It can’t look beyond the urban, dishes out films that look like soap operas and is lacking in social content. On the other hand, when a Hindi film deals with social issues and lacks a big mainstream lead actor, it is often dismissed as ‘art house’.

These distinctions are facile. Why can’t these so-called ‘commercial’ films also glimpse the times we live in? Why do we have to wait for a *Fandry* or a *Court* (both non-Hindi films) to give us the wake-up call?

Nobody can deny the reach of mainstream Hindi cinema and its desired impact. Thus, it becomes im-



perative to widely discuss a film such as *Article 15*, which uses the conventions of the mainstream to discuss the marginal and pushes these conversations into spaces where they matter the most.

Set in rural Uttar Pradesh, *Article 15* takes a clear position on caste-based crimes, untouchability and other associated social ostracisation practices that keep Dalits invisible and crush all their attempts at mobilising themselves and taking on the powers that be.

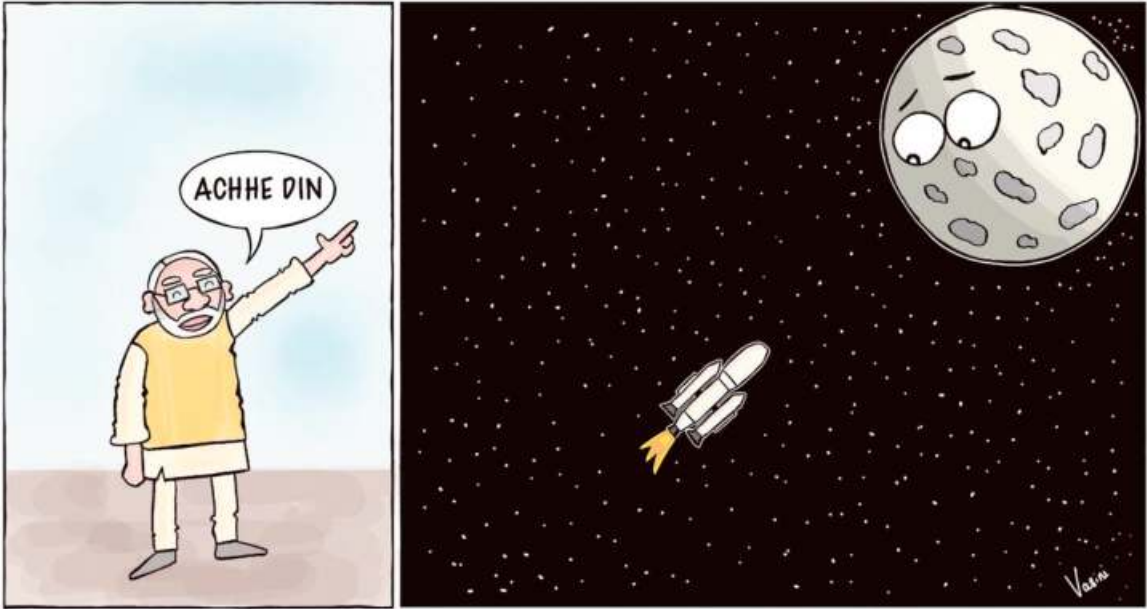
### The Ambedkar reference

The film opens with a song which vocalises the wide chasm that exists. Immediately thereafter appears a familiar statue of B.R. Ambedkar in his trademark blue coat with his hand raised and holding a copy of the Constitution. Some might dismiss this as a tokenistic measure, but I believe it is of great significance. The song and the statue create an iconography that mere words cannot capture.

I still remember the concluding scenes from Pa. Ranjith’s *Kaala* and his effective use of the colour blue that takes over the screen. It is rife with suggestions and cinema, after all, is an image-based medium. The events depicted in such films are common knowledge, but they attain a renewed vigour on screen. This is where cinema fulfils its role as a watch-keeper in democracy.

In *Article 15*, the ‘good cop’ breaks barriers and leads by example. He is not merely sympathetic but also reminds us that any form of discrimination is anti-constitutional. At the same time, he is acutely aware of his own privilege and upbringing. He finds his own ignorance troubling. Lest we forget, a vulnerable male lead is not a Hindi cinema favourite. In these times of increasing jingoism, every attempt such as *Article 15* inspires hope, because cinema must provoke us to think and act.

The writer teaches literary & cultural studies at FLAME University, Pune



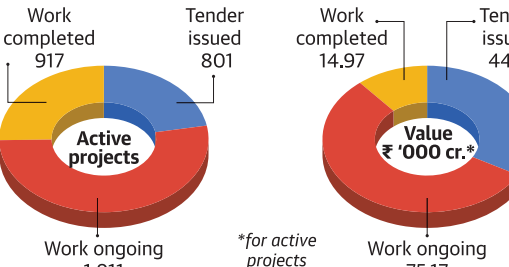
### DATA POINT

## Far from smart

In June 2015, the Centre launched the ‘100 Smart Cities Mission’. These cities were supposed to have better infrastructure, expand housing to all, and develop open spaces, among other things. Five years on, a large chunk of the earmarked money has not been spent. Several smart cities are yet to complete a single project. By **Varun B. Krishnan**

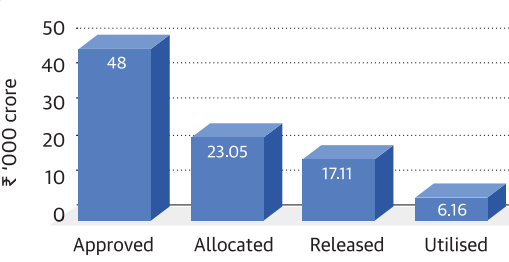
### Status update

Of the 5,151 projects initially proposed, only 3,629 have been actively pursued. Of these, about 25% of the projects have been completed. But in value terms, the share of work completed amounts to just 11% of the total



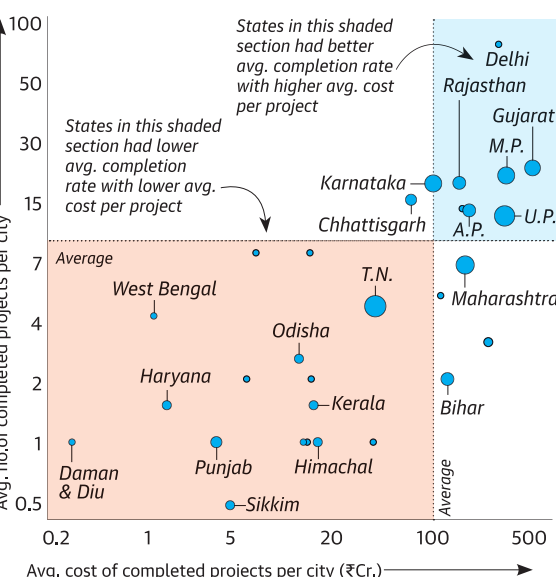
### Trickle down effect

Though ₹48,000 cr. is the total approved budget between 2015 and 2019, just half of that has been allocated till now. Of the allocated funds only three-fourth has been released and just 36% of the funds released have been utilised



### Where States stand

Each circle represents a State. The size of the circle indicates the number of smart cities in that State – the bigger the circle, the higher the number of the smart cities. Delhi, and cities in Gujarat and M.P., had a better project completion rate on an average, while cities in Punjab and Haryana were among the worst



**28** No. of cities which haven't completed a single project

**14** No. of cities which have completed just one project

Source: Parliament Question Hour

### FROM The Hindu ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JULY 15, 1969

### Six lakh people affected by floods

The flood situation in Upper Assam worsened to-day [July 14] following a major breach in the embankment of the Desang river. According to official information reaching here [Gauhati], about 4,000 people in four villages have lost their homes as a result of the breach. Road communication between Dibrugarh and the rest of the State remained suspended for the fourth day to-day. The entire Sibsagar sub-division is in the grip of floods and about 6,00,000 people have been affected, according to district authorities. Sali seedlings in about 8,000 bighas of land and other crops in an area of 10,000 bighas have been badly damaged. The swollen Desang has inundated parts of the Sibsagar town and nearby areas. The entire Wakati Mauja and a part of Thowra Mauja are under water. About a hundred granaries in Bakata have also been flooded. In all, about 200 villages in the sub-division have been inundated. Train communication between Simaluguri and Moran has been suspended following the submersion of the railway track.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JULY 15, 1919.

### A Sensational Murder.

[In the Madras High Court on July 14, 1919, before Sadasiva Iyer and Burn J.J.] Dr. Swaminathan with Mr. S. Ranganatha Aiyar argued a referred trial and criminal appeal from the conviction and sentence of death passed by the Sessions Judge of Ramnad on Tharasaya Thevan and four others for the murder of S.P. Allapitchai Rowther, a wealthy merchant of Pudukudam, Ramnad district, and a member of the Taluk Board. The prosecution case was that the deceased was going from Pudukudam to catch the Rameswaram Express at Butchupatti Railway Station when the accused waylaid him, from his dog cart, took him to the Railway line, beat him and tied him to the rails and cut his neck with a bill hook. Very soon the train passed over his body and cut it to pieces. The motive alleged was that the deceased was in execution of a decree against the accused attached all their properties and started criminal proceedings against them alleging that a forged document had been filed by the accused in the course of the suit. Mr. E.R. Osborne appeared in support of the conviction. Their Lordships acquitted the fifth accused as there was not sufficient evidence to justify his conviction and confirmed the conviction of the first four accused.