

The problem with voice assistants

Users need to find a balance in the trade off between convenience and loss of privacy



TECH-ENABLED

DEVANGSHU DATTA

A recent incident in Belgium highlighted the increasing privacy concerns with voice-activated robotic assistants. A contractor sent audio recordings of over 1,000 Google Assistant conversations to the public broadcaster, VRT. These contained medical information as well as personal data that allowed identification of the user. What’s more, 153 of these recordings should have never been made as the “Ok Google” command wasn’t clearly given.

Google has responded with defensive PR on its official blog saying these recordings are anonymised and transcribed for experts to analyse and help make the virtual assistant smarter. This problem won’t go away. Google Assistant, Apple’s Siri and Amazon’s Alexa are used by well over a billion people. They make life easier in many ways. Their very existence is a triumph for machine learning. But they need to be “trained” by using tonnes of data. Hence, conversations are recorded. In order to improve functionality, conversations are listened to by human teams, to sharpen the assistants’ understanding of natural speech with its pauses and ungrammatical constructions. Although these conversations are supposedly anonymised, this is, in itself, intrusive. As this breach indicated, the conversations themselves may contain sensitive personal data that identifies users along with locations. Also, it confirmed assistants can switch on and record in error. This also happens with Alexa. Users

can playback transcripts of Alexa conversations and this recording error happens with some frequency. This glitch happens when the “wake up” word process goes wrong. Sometimes this can be triggered by random conversation, or some background noise, that the machine “hears” as a wake up word. In effect, a digital assistant includes a microphone that is always on and listening. The programme is supposed to start recording only when the wake up is used. But the mike itself is always on. Even if devices offer a push switch to activate, users tend to keep the mike on by default because that is inherent to functionality. That programme can thus, be started by accident and it isn’t under the user’s control. Those recordings are sent back to the mother servers for analysis, including human analysis. This helps to improve functionality and it is critical to developing the technology that makes assistants useful. But this process is insecure. Contractors hired to transcribe and analyse such recordings may choose to break

confidentiality. For that matter, a server hack could put such data into the wrong hands. Anonymising can also lead to poorer functionality. One reason why some users claim Siri lags Google Assistant and Alexa in the things it can do, could be related to anonymising. Siri anonymises to greater extent. Users can’t playback and human analysis is only done with a random tag attached to identify specific conversations. But this also means that Siri doesn’t learn the individual quirks and tastes of specific users. Amazon and Google monetise their assistants’ interactions in ways, which makes them reluctant to anonymise. They do big data analysis and meta-data analysis to discover patterns of searches, online purchases, entertainment choices, appointments, medical conditions, phone calls and text messages etc. It is even possible for assistants to accurately gauge the user’s mood and mental health from tonality. This analysis builds more complete profiles that can be used for targeted marketing and personalised advertising

Celebrating 50 yrs of bank nationalisation

The nationalised banks do a good job of what their majority owner mandates them to, but most are failed business enterprises



BANKER’S TRUST

TAMAL BANDYOPADHYAY

This Friday marks the 50th anniversary of bank nationalisation. Fourteen banks with deposits of at least ₹50 crore each were nationalised in the midnight of July 19, 1969 hours after Prime Minister Indira Gandhi addressed the nation on this. The Ordinance that paved the path for nationalisation was challenged, an interim stay was granted on a few issues but a 34-day trial before a 11-judge bench in Supreme Court later, all roadblocks were cleared. This set of banks, along with State Bank of India (SBI) and its associate banks, had 85 per cent share in the deposits of the industry then. A second round of nationalisation of six more commercial banks — with deposits of more than ₹200 crore each — followed in 1980. At that time, the government-owned banks’ share in the industry was 91 per cent. SBI, the nation’s largest lender, is majority government-owned but is not covered by the Act that nationalised 20 private banks for expanding the credit market.

Not too many bankers are in a mood for celebrations. Many analysts are questioning the results that nationalisation has yielded even as a few are advocating privatisation despite what a couple of large private banks had been through in recent times. Before we walk down the intensive care unit where some of the public sector banks (PSBs) are resting these days, let’s take a look at the banking scenario in 1969. Then, there were 73 commercial banks (excluding regional rural banks); now the figure is 91. The number of bank branches have grown phenomenally — from 8,262 to 1,41,756. What is particularly important is the share of rural branches, which was just about 22 per cent in 1969 and has gone up to more than 35 per cent now — from 1,832 to 50,081. The share of semi-urban branches dropped from 40 per cent to 27.5 per cent (3,223 to 9,063) while there has not been any significant change in the share of urban (1,447 to 25,498) and metropolitan branches (1,661 to 27,114). The size of the banking industry has grown many times in the past five decades. Aggregate deposits have risen from a meagre ₹4,646 crore to close to ₹125 trillion and bank credit, from ₹3,599 crore to ₹96.5 trillion. For the record, till the 1990s, the PSBs’ assets grew at a pace of around 4 per cent in sync with the average growth rate of the Indian economy. That got changed dramatically in the first decade of this century (the credit growth was three times or more the growth of India’s GDP between 2006 and 2008) but the pace slowed considerably and many of them actually have been shrinking their balance sheets since 2015



after being forced to expose their weak underbelly — a pile of bad assets. Just a week before the promulgation of the Ordinance to nationalise the banks, Gandhi, in her address at the Bangalore session of Indian National Congress on July 12, 1969, forcefully pitched for it. Apart from Gandhi, only three people were involved in the exercise — P N Haksar, principal secretary of prime minister; A Bakshi, a deputy governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI); and a junior bureaucrat, D N Ghosh. The RBI governor was not kept in the loop. Indeed, there was politics behind bank nationalisation. But, there were other reasons too. Many banks collapsed post World War II as they were financing speculative activities and the RBI, a relatively young banking regulator then, was finding it hard to supervise some 300 banks, most of which were into trade finance and reluctant to support industry and agriculture. In 1960, when Palai Central Bank and Lakshmi Commercial Bank collapsed,

pushed by finance minister Morarji Desai, the RBI brought down the number of banks from 328 in 1960 to 94 by 1965 through closures and mergers. Post nationalisation, the government forced a merger only once — that of New Bank of India with Punjab National Bank in 1993. Now, the consolidation drive has been in full force. After ensuring merger of SBI’s associates with the parent, the government has merged two relatively small banks with Bank of Baroda and more such mergers could be on the cards. Is consolidation the answer? Will it ensure efficiency? There are challenges in terms of duplication of branches, different technology platforms and, of course, issues related to HR. Even if the industry successfully overcomes these hurdles, consolidation will not pare the share of the government-owned banks in the overall banking industry which is a little less than 70 per cent now — much higher than most markets. Who is to be blamed for the state of affairs in PSBs? The banks themselves and their majority owner — the government. After the first set of new private banks came into being in 1990s, for the first time, the government owned banks faced competition. By allowing them to raise money from the public, the government tried to make them competitive and technology-savvy as they were answerable to their new owners. That was a good move but two critical issues maimed them. First, the project finance institutions were wound up and the PSBs, which did not know much beyond giving working capital loans, had no choice but to extend long-term

initiatives. It can seem like magic when Amazon offers you a choice of TV shows, music and books that you really like, or Google throws up ads about destinations you’re interested in visiting. This is actually enabled by this sort of analysis of your online usage patterns and your interactions with assistants. That convenience comes with a cost. Users need to find a balance in the trade off between loss of privacy and convenience. This would mean a far greater degree of transparency, and user control over the data being harvested. Unfortunately, most jurisdictions don’t have legislation that enables this. The European Union’s general data protection regulation (GDPR) is pioneering legislation in this area but most nations don’t have privacy legislation of this strength. That in effect means that the corporate service provider decides how much privacy it will allow. There have been thought experiments and speculation about what the service provider should do, if an assistant picks up a conversation about criminal or terrorist activity, or hears an incident of domestic violence. That’s a grey area but it’s likely this has happened. The vast majority of recordings would be about the mundane but they would also provide lots of private information. In this version of dystopia, it isn’t only Big Brother that’s watching.

CHINESE WHISPERS

A breath of cool air



Hitachi Alphonso Smoothie? So, is the air-conditioner manufacturer getting into branded beverages or farming probably? Not really. In an interesting branding move this scorching summer, the Indian arm of the Japanese conglomerate has tied up with coffee maker Barista in the NCR to help promote the latter’s new range of cold beverages. So you will find co-branded table standees when you walk into a Barista outlet, with the Hitachi brand name prominently displayed. In a quid pro quo, the AC brand has fitted these stores with its cooling equipment.

Disciplining MLAs

Missing Assembly sessions will no longer be easy for MLAs in Madhya Pradesh. Assembly Speaker N P Prajapati has ordered if a member is absent citing illness, a medical certificate signed by a "medical board" has to be submitted. Not only that, if a member wants leave to attend a wedding or any other social gathering, the invitation card for this must be produced. With the new rules coming into force, a member rued, "We are representatives of the people, so why treat us as government servants?"

Renovation versus care



A storm is brewing in Madhya Pradesh over renovating ministers’ bungalows when the state’s anganwadi centres require funds urgently.

These centres, mandated to take care of children and support them, are on the verge of closing down because the state government is yet to release ₹40 crore for them. On the other hand, it has reportedly spent close to ₹4 crore on repairing official bungalows of ministers in Bhopal, Public Works Department Minister Sajjan Singh Verma said in response to a question in the Assembly last week. The Opposition grabbed the opportunity. While the government says the previous regime left the treasury empty, it spent crores on sprucing up ministers’ bungalows, said former minister and senior BJP legislator Narottam Mishra.

INSIGHT

Export focus in the govt’s growth agenda

From a competitiveness perspective the RBI may choose not to let the currency gain too much



B PRASANNA

In a positive surprise, Union Budget FY2020 committed on its path of fiscal prudence, lowering its budgeted fiscal deficit to 3.3 per cent versus 3.4 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) budgeted in the interim Budget. The markets were expecting a breach to the tune of approximately 3.6 per cent given the headwinds from both domestic and global growth on the one hand, and expectations of a counter cyclical fiscal policy to stimulate growth, on the other. However, the Budget showcased the underlying ideology of sticking to the path of fiscal prudence to avoid crowding out private investment, reflected in the unchanged expenditure targets. A shortfall in receipts is budgeted to be made up from higher customs and excise duty revenues, higher non-tax revenue including higher RBI dividend payouts, and higher disinvestment receipts. Apart from the headline numbers, which at the moment look feasible, the introduction of foreign currency sovereign issuances would also reduce domestic borrowing demand and is a big positive for the bond markets. Moreover, sticking to the fiscal glide path also provides monetary policy more bandwidth to continue on its path of monetary policy accommodation.

With the government focused on reducing the cost of capital, and the current monetary policy committee (MPC) oriented to align itself to that goal (especially under the scenario of negative output gap and benign inflation trajectory), we expect two more rate cuts in this cycle, with the next one in August. The equity markets were disappointed with the Budget. The expectation that populist doles would immediately kick-start consumption growth were missing. On the contrary, imposition of higher customs and excise duties on gold and petrol/diesel could further dent both urban and rural demand. The increase in shareholder limit from 25 per cent to 35 per cent and higher surcharge on FPIs, have had negative ramifications for stock market sentiment. Policies of bringing in more FDI flows through easing of FDI norms in certain sectors, bringing down public holding to below 51 per cent for PSUs and allocation towards recapitalisation of bonds, while all aimed at reducing cost of capital, have at the moment been largely ignored. Over the medium term, the increase in the available float may lead to some favourable rebalancing on MSCI equity indices which would attract flows in the long term. Other foreign investment related liberalisation steps such as increasing the statutory limit for FPI holding in a company in line with sectoral FPI limits, allowing FPIs to invest in debt securities issued by real estate investment trusts (REITs) and infrastructure investment trusts (InvTIs) could help infrastructure investment in the long term. The watershed event that has happened in this Budget is the announcement of the government’s intent to diversify its borrowings towards foreign currency issuances. India’s external debt to GDP ratio is one of the lowest among emerging market peers with



its sovereign external debt to GDP ratio at under 4 per cent. Most emerging markets have issued foreign currency denominated bonds or have conducted local currency issuances offshore. It seems to be an opportune time for India to explore the same as well. This will have multiple benefits. On an unhedged basis, the government’s borrowing costs should come down significantly as the likely spread of the Indian sovereign over London interbank offered rate (Libor) should be at approximately 100 basis point. This will also help to reduce the crowding out faced by the private sector borrowers on account of large public domestic borrowing. However, on the flip side if a significantly large issuance is done, then there could be some adverse impact on spreads of the investment grade corporates who borrow offshore. Apart from this, as far as the domestic IGBs are concerned, at current Mumbai interbank forward offer rate (MIFOR) levels, FPIs may choose to divert some of their holdings towards the FC issuance especially those who

are hedged. For the unhedged entities there could be a case for investing in the FC bond and use the non-deliverable forward (NDF) market to exploit any onshore-offshore arbitrage. Also, any sharp currency depreciation could lead to government’s fx loss. However, it is still a very significant move and there would be significant effective arbitrage opportunities for India dollar bond at the levels of USD-IRS and MIFOR levels prevailing now. Given that it is India’s maiden issuance, the spread over US Treasury should also be fairly attractive. From a market perspective, we expect bonds to trade in a range of around 6.40-6.70 per cent in the near term, buoyed by the fiscal prudence, prospects of sovereign issuance, monetary policy outlook and globally favourable environment. However, given the rather weak outlook for domestic economic growth, we may witness stress in the fiscal scenario later on in the fiscal and the government could once again have to resort to expenditure shifting or saving methods. We expect the rupee to benefit from a favourable external sector outlook with expectations of a balance of payments surplus worth of \$20 billion, with upside risks dependant on the quantum of offshore bond issuances by the government. The prospects of the Federal Reserve easing policy is also a positive for EMs in general as the dollar index is expected to weaken on the margin. Hence, we expect a broad trading range of 68-70 for the rupee. However, from a competitiveness perspective the RBI may choose not to let the currency gain too much as there is also a strong exports focus in the government’s growth agenda.

The author is group head, global markets, sales, trading and research, ICICI Bank

LETTERS

Unusual times indeed

Apropos your excellent editorial “Pricing impasse” (July 12), I do hope the Digital Communications Commission (DCC) listens to your sane advice and has a serious relook at the totally impractical reserve price for the 5G spectrum auction. In fact, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) has taken a conservative position by suggesting a price of ₹492 crore per MHz; if it were to consider the ground reality in the sector, it would actually recommended an even lower figure. Telecom Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad’s admission — stress in the industry — was a pragmatic statement and it would be fair for the DCC to accept the Trai suggestion. The possibility of mopping up ₹5.53 trillion should help the government arrive at a practical decision. By insisting on the higher reserve price, DCC may well be killing the proverbial golden goose. The DCC should realise these are indeed unusual times. The debt burden of ₹4.3 trillion on the telecom industry is close to breaking its back. Players need all possible assistance at this time to ensure they do not buckle under pressure. Bharti’s decision to not participate in the 5G auction and Vodafone’s suggestion for delaying the same have both been made under duress. Clearly they don’t want to miss the 5G bus but are helpless at this point.

Krishan Kalra Gurugram

Educate the consumer

This refers to “HSBC, Stanchart, Citi top the charts in customer experience:

Kantar report” (July 12). The growing dissatisfaction and increasing customer complaints regarding banking services are apparent in the data thrown in the RBI Annual Report of Banking Ombudsman, Kantar Report and the BCBSI report on customer satisfaction. It is also a manifestation of more people coming into the banking system, low levels of financial literacy, growing awareness of complaint redress forums and the complexity of newer banking products. It must be understood that many of the new entrants into the banking system have leapfrogged from cash-based payments to electronic banking modes. They are not used to safely operating internet banking, debit and credit cards, ending up compromising their card credentials, disclosing passwords or operating at dodgy or unsafe websites or tampered ATMs. Hence, growing frauds and unauthorised transactions show up as complaints. The lack of transparency about the products, suitability of products, pressure on bank staff to sell and achieve sales targets and upfront commissions are some of causes for the misleading. There is a growing need for banks to create continuous awareness among customers about their products and about the ways to use them safely and responsibly.

Arun Pasricha New Delhi

Letters can be mailed, faxed or e-mailed to: The Editor, Business Standard, Nehru House, 4 Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi 110 002. Fax: (011) 23720201 • E-mail: letters@bsmail.in. All letters must have a postal address and telephone number

HAMBONE



ILLUSTRATION: AJAY MOHANTY



The poverty challenge

High, sustainable, and inclusive growth is the only answer

The release of the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP's) annual report on multi-dimensional poverty is an appropriate point to evaluate India's progress on poverty reduction. As the report underlines, it is an impressive achievement. The UNDP had previously found that India had lifted 271 million people out of poverty between 2005-06 and 2015-16. The latest, the 2019 report, further fleshed out how this was achieved. Multi-dimensional indicators recognise that poverty is about more than just access to income: It is also about access to resources and capabilities to improve individual prospects. Thus, 10 indicators go into constructing the multi-dimensional poverty index, including nutrition; schooling; access to fuel, power, and drinking water; sanitation; electricity; housing; and child mortality. What is impressive about India's performance in the decade to 2015-16 is not just the scale of the achievement but also how all-encompassing it was. For one, India was one of the few countries to show a significant decrease on all the 10 indicators. In addition, the report says that "poverty reduction in rural areas outpaced that in urban areas — demonstrating pro-poor development". It added that "India demonstrates the clearest pro-poor pattern at the sub national level: the poorest regions reduced multidimensional poverty the fastest". India also saw that the poorest 40 per cent of the population had the greatest relative improvement in their multi-dimensional capabilities — measured both in terms of size, intensity and inclusiveness, India's poverty reduction effort stands out in global terms.

It is worth noting, however, how much more remains to be done — both in terms of number and inclusiveness, and specific capabilities. There are still more multi-dimensionally poor people in India than anywhere else. The report also points out some problems that are particularly intense in South Asia — for example, child malnutrition. Over 40 per cent of South Asian children aged less than five are stunted or underweight. Worse, it appears that there are disparities within households — almost a quarter of South Asian children live in houses where at least one child is malnourished and one is not. The report is silent as to the gender composition of this problem, but other work has drawn attention to the issue of boys being better fed than girls in India. Last year's report had also highlighted that poverty is very unevenly spread across identities; Muslims and Scheduled Tribes are the poorest groups, with about half of the former stuck in multi-dimensional poverty. Social as well as economic inclusiveness in poverty reduction must clearly continue to be priority.

The specifics of India's progress on capabilities can also guide policy. In the 10 years after 2005-06 — eight years of the UPA, and two years of the NDA — progress was most visible on gaining access to productive assets, housing, cooking fuel, and sanitation. Progress on drinking water existed, but was insufficient — and there was barely any improvement in child mortality. Health and water access are the next frontier for poverty reduction.

Finally, it should be noted that poverty reduction is fastest when growth is high and sustainable. The aim of high, sustainable, and inclusive growth should always be kept in mind.

Policy uncertainty

Businesses avoid environment of policy instability

Macroeconomic stability and policy certainty are important determinants of investment as businesses are not inclined to invest in an environment of economic and policy instability. Over the last few years, India has done well to reduce uncertainty, but some decisions, particularly in the latest Budget, can undermine the benefit.

At the macro level, for instance, the adoption of the flexible inflation-targeting framework has helped anchor inflationary expectations. This is important because it will not only help strengthen macroeconomic stability but also enable businesses to make better longer-term forecasts. Price stability, among other things, can be expected to bring down the cost of capital over time. Similarly, the goods and services tax has significantly reduced complexity in the indirect tax structure, though some of the implementation issues are still being addressed. Further, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code is helping resolve stressed assets and will improve credit culture in the Indian economy. Although some of these reforms implemented in recent years are still a work in progress, at the net level, they represent a significant forward movement and will improve the business environment.

Unfortunately, some of the other decisions of the government have only helped in increasing uncertainty. The Budget is a case in point. What is surprising is that the Economic Survey, presented a day before the Budget, underscored the importance of maintaining policy certainty and noted: "...a poorly drafted law that is riddled with ambiguities, amendments, clarifications and exemptions... such uncertainty can spook investors and spoil the investment climate in the economy."

But the Budget ended up increasing complexity and uncertainty at multiple levels. For instance, investors require stability and predictability in tax rates. But by suddenly raising the income tax surcharge for super-rich individuals, the Budget not only increased complexity in the tax structure but also affected foreign portfolio investors (FPIs), investing as non-corporate entities. That's not all. It was first reported that the government will issue a clarification on the subject, but it later decided that it was not necessary. As investors look at post-tax returns, some of the FPIs might consider moving out of India. Among other stakeholders, with an ambitious disinvestment target, this will also affect the government.

Further, the government again decided to increase import duty on a number of items with a view to protecting domestic industry. Aside from affecting consumers, it will hurt India's chances of getting into the global value chain, which is extremely important if India intends to increase exports. Multinational companies would be reluctant to work with Indian firms or invest in India if tariffs are regularly revised. Another example is the policy push towards electric vehicles. The Budget, for example, gave tax benefits to individuals buying electric vehicles. Containing air pollution is a worthy goal, but the government should not pick winners, as it puts the rest of the ecosystem in the sector at risk and increases uncertainty. After laying the ground rules, the government should allow the market to decide.

There are other areas too. The government has been claiming from day one that its priority is to improve ease of doing business. But the Budget proposal authorising customs officers to detain a person for verification in the interests of revenue or for preventing smuggling has serious scope for misuse. Such measures would only increase uncertainty. The government should consider long-term implications of its decisions, taken to meet short-term objectives such as revenue targets.

Government debt abroad: Why & how

Nurturing a relationship with foreign investors is particularly important when it comes to the long-term objective of borrowing in times of a calamity

There are three reasons in favour of a government borrowing abroad. Such borrowing will sometimes yield lower-cost financing for the

government. It will produce a reference rate that improves the ability of Indian corporations to borrow abroad. Most important, when India is in a crisis, and a large surge in the deficit is required, it will create a way to obtain large quantities of debt at a low price. There are two caveats. Better institutional arrangements are required for debt management. We have to play the long game by nurturing the foreign investor base and winning their trust.

Suppose the Indian government has two channels for borrowing that are fully active and feasible at all times: To borrow in rupees in Bombay and in dollars in London. The prices at both venues fluctuate. Every now and then, the price in London will be more attractive, and such borrowing should then be favoured. By establishing an overseas borrowing programme, we create this optionality and gain from it.

The second benefit lies in a positive externality imposed upon all firms that borrow abroad. A liquid yield curve for dollar-denominated bonds issued by the government and traded in London can potentially arise. If this comes about, then it constitutes a reference rate against which all Indian corporate borrowers will be priced. All Indian firms that may seek to borrow abroad would obtain better terms, as a consequence of the information production for

the sovereign yield curve through active trading.

The third and most important issue lies in difficult times. Healthy public finance involves running a small primary surplus in most years. But once in a while, every country faces a calamity. It is in such times that a big surge in the primary deficit is called for, i.e. a large surge in borrowing. However, when India faces a calamity, it will be hard to raise money domestically. That is the perfect time to use foreign borrowing. Lenders abroad will be generally unaffected by the calamity faced in India, and will be the better source of

lending compared to domestic lenders, who are themselves stressed when India faces a calamity. Establishing the ability to surge borrowing in an occasional calamity adds to the strategic depth of the Indian state.

These benefits come with two caveats. The first problem faced is the institutional arrangements for public debt management. At present, there is no unified view of the government's strategy for borrowing, which is able to see the full picture, and make decisions about the currency composition of borrowing. There is no place in government that is able to understand what constitutes a liquid yield curve in London for Indian government bonds denominated in dollars and undertake the steps to establish this.

What is required is a Public Debt Management



SNAKES & LADDERS

AJAY SHAH

Tradition for water revolution

You know you are old when you realise that today's conversation is a repeat of the past.

That's how I feel when I hear the current chatter about the potential of rainwater harvesting to fix the problem of water scarcity in our cities and villages. For years now, we have known the importance of harvesting rain from rooftops and hill catchments and holding it in underground reservoirs, aquifers, lakes, and ponds. Then why have we not made this technology work? Why have we failed to use this knowledge? This is what we must ask.

Let me tell you how I learnt about rainwater harvesting. It was back in the 1990s when Anil Agarwal, then director of the Centre for Science and Environment, was at the wheels of his new Maruti 800 — red in colour. We were on our way to see grazing land regeneration in Bikaner. Suddenly there was something different on the ground. Anil stopped. He wanted to know what he was seeing.

It was in the shape of a flying saucer or an upside-down cup on a paved ground. We got off the car, walked over to the settlement and asked, "What is this?" As is often the case in India, such stupid questions from city people get very patient replies. "It is our water system, our *kundi*." It made no sense. They explained. "See, we pave the ground with lime and make it drain to the middle. Then when it rains, even a little, all the water is harvested and channelised into the well, which is covered so that there is no contamination." This small explanation changed our world. Changed it literally.



DOWN TO EARTH

SUNITA NARAIN

Anil calculated that the structure had huge potential. One hectare of land with just 100 millimetre (mm) of rain — that's what deserts get on an average — is capable of harvesting one million litres of water. Not small. A family of five would not need more than 10-15 litres a day for drinking and cooking. This means one hectare can harvest enough water to meet the needs of 200-300 families.

Later, a few more experiences shaped my understanding of not just the potential of rainwater harvesting but its connection with all of us. We were in Cherrapunji, the wettest place on Earth or at least that's what I was taught in school. There in a small government guest house I saw a big sign — water is precious, please use it carefully. Amazing. A place with 14,000 mm of rain, enough to fill a high ceiling stadium, faces shortage of water! Anil and I had just returned from Jaisalmer — a city that had built a flourishing civilisation and a stunning fort of yellow sandstone despite receiving only 50-100 mm of rain. The answer we found was in the way the city had planned its rainwater harvesting, from rooftops to tanks — all to build a water-secure future.

Anil was so fascinated by this learning that he spent the next few years of his life teaching Indians the value of the raindrop. We have put this learning together in our 1997 book, *Dying Wisdom: Rise, Fall and Potential of India's Traditional Water Harvesting Systems*, which explains the sheer intricacy, inno-

Agency (PDMA), which would be the investment banker to serve the Ministry of Finance. This would take a unified view of all the borrowing of the government, and come up with optimal pathways.

Many observers have worried that borrowing abroad is a dangerous thing. It all depends on the magnitudes involved. In the present Indian situation, \$25 billion borrowed abroad is about 1 per cent of GDP, and is not a threat but an important learning opportunity. But at the same time, the PDMA is required to keep track of the risks and manage them, particularly when bigger sums of money are taken from abroad.

The key idea required at the PDMA is a philosophy of building a long-term relationship with sceptical investors. We should have no illusions about what we're up against. At present, almost all of the domestic government bonds are sold by force. Banks, insurance companies, the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation, the National Pension Scheme, and now even mutual funds are forced to buy government bonds. The Indian state can make bad data and violate fiscal prudence, and there will be no consequences when faced with these forced lenders. In contrast, foreign investors are immune from coercion and have to be wooed. This requires a wholly different behaviour on the part of the Indian state.

This will require four tasks: Engaging with investors, answering difficult questions, improving the fiscal position, and improving data quality. When we fumble on one or more of these four problems, the cost of borrowing abroad will go up. Once voluntary lenders are in the fray, our self-interest will demand addressing these problems.

Nurturing a relationship with foreign investors is particularly important when it comes to the long-term objective of borrowing in times of a calamity. This requires first establishing the trust of regularly borrowing, and repaying on time. When this is done many times, India will earn the trust and respect of foreign investors. Advanced economies are able to easily borrow vast sums, at very low rates of interest, because they have a very long track record of borrowing and successfully repaying. The last time the UK defaulted on its debt was in 1688.

Building such a track record, well ahead of time, is required in order to obtain trust from bond investors when faced with a calamity. If the PDMA has a superficial engagement with foreign lenders, then they will shy away from lending to the Indian government when India has a calamity. If the PDMA builds a deep engagement with foreign lenders, where the Indian fiscal system elicits trust, then foreign lenders will offer enhanced resourcing to India when India faces a calamity, albeit at a higher interest rate.

To the extent that the Indian government learns how to engage with voluntary lenders overseas, this will be a valuable stepping-stone to changing course in domestic borrowing also, away from conscription of savings towards voluntary lending by private persons. Once again, the key insight is that substantially enhanced borrowing in a calamity can be obtained only from voluntary lenders, it cannot be obtained through conscription.

The writer is a professor at National Institute of Public Finance and Policy, New Delhi

vation and ingenuity of the knowledge. Every region of the country had its own unique method of harvesting rain, storing it and then using it. Every system had been adapted, in fact, evolved, to meet the special ecological needs, yet each system was an engineering marvel, designed to make the best of the region's rain endowment.

Why then did the wisdom die? First, the State took control from the local community or the households as the provider or supplier of water. This meant that harvesting rain was no longer a priority. Second, local groundwater, which was recharged using rainwater, was replaced by surface water, brought often from long distances in canals.

This is why rainwater harvesting has remained an idea whose time has still not come. The State cannot harvest rain; people have to be involved. It has to be done in every house; every colony; every village; and for every catchment. The incentive to do this only comes when we are dependent on groundwater for our needs. If cities and even villages get piped water, from distant sources, who will harvest rain and why?

The other problem is we have not understood the science and art of harvesting rain on land. So, the catchments — land where the rain falls — have been encroached upon or distributed in the name of land-reform. The drains that channelised rain to underground storage have been built upon or destroyed. Then how will we harvest the raindrop?

We can't and we won't. This is why the cycle of drought and flood will continue and get exacerbated. So, let's really learn from the wisdom that we have ignored and allowed to die.

The writer is at the Centre for Science and Environment
sunita@cseindia.org
Twitter: @sunitanar

Silicon Valley's subsidised fortunes



BOOK REVIEW

STEPHEN MIHM

By the early 1970s, Don Hoefler, a writer for *Electronic News*, was spending after-hours at his "field office" — a faux-Western tavern known as Walker's Wagon Wheel, in Mountain View, California. In a town with few nightspots, this was the bar of choice for engineers from the growing number of electronic and semiconductor chip firms clustered nearby.

Hoefler had a knack for slogans, having worked as a corporate publicist. In a piece published in 1971, he christened the region — better known for its prune orchards, bland buildings and cookie-cutter subdivisions — "Silicon Valley." The name stuck, extensive real-estate holdings in the Santa Hoefler became a legend and the region

became a metonym for the entire tech sector. Today its five largest companies have a market valuation greater than the economy of the United Kingdom.

How an otherwise unexceptional swath of suburbia came to rule the world is the central question animating *The Code*, Margaret O'Mara's accessible yet sophisticated chronicle of Silicon Valley. An academic historian blessed with a journalist's prose, Ms O'Mara focuses less on the actual technology than on the people and policies that ensured its success.

She digs deep into the region's past, highlighting the critical role of Stanford University. In the immediate postwar era, Fred Terman, an electrical engineer who became Stanford's provost, remade the school in his own image. He elevated science and engineering disciplines, enabling the university to capture federal defence dollars that helped to fuel the Cold War.

Terman also built one of the first academic research parks, leveraging Stanford's

sueded to move to the area were Hewlett-Packard and a company owned by William Shockley, the co-inventor of the transistor.

Shockley turned out to be a boss from hell, and, in a legendary rupture, a handful of his most talented employees — the "Traitorous Eight" — parted ways from him and founded Fairchild Semiconductor. Fairchild became the Valley's ur-corporation: Its founders subsequently launched many more storied firms, from the chip maker Intel to the venture capital firm Kleiner Perkins.

Ms O'Mara argues persuasively that Fairchild "established a blueprint that thousands followed in the decades to come: Find outside investors willing to put in capital, give employees stock ownership, disrupt existing markets and create new ones." But she makes clear that this formula wasn't just a matter of free markets working their magic; it took a whole lot of Defence Department dollars to transform the region. Conveniently, the Soviets launched Sputnik three days after Fairchild was incorporated, inaugurating a torrent of money into the tech sector that only increased with the

space race.

Defence money, Ms O'Mara observes, "remained the big-government engine hidden under the hood of the Valley's shiny new entrepreneurial sports car, flying largely under the radar screen of the saturation media coverage of hackers and capitalists."

But it was how these defence dollars got distributed — via Stanford and a growing number of subcontractors in the region — that mattered as much, if not more. Ms O'Mara argues that the decentralised, privatised system of doling out public contracts fostered entrepreneurship. So, too, did Congress, which passed the Small Business Investment Act in 1958, offering generous tax breaks to the kinds of start-ups proliferating in the shadow of Stanford.

The sources of its success, Ms O'Mara contends, had to do with a host of regulations and legal decisions that governed how firms in the Valley did business. Foremost among these was California's longstanding prohibition on non-compete clauses. This made it easy for employees to job-hop and share news of the latest innovations without fear of reprisal or recrimination. The turnover was staggering at Valley start-ups compared with established corporations such as IBM, on the other side of the country.

But the creativity unleashed in the process left other regions far behind.

No less important was the passage of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, which unexpectedly led to an influx of newcomers, many of them skilled in the technical fields that are Silicon Valley's bread and butter. Between 1995 and 2005, more than half the founders of companies in the Valley were born outside the United States.

But this was a later development. At first, Silicon Valley was the province of white guys in white shirts and crew cuts working for defence contractors and chip makers. They created what O'Mara memorably describes as a "profanity-laced, chain-smoking, hard-drinking hybrid of locker room, Marine barracks and scientific lab." These men happily voted Republican, and had little interest in California's counterculture, much less its increasingly visible feminist movement. As O'Mara notes, Silicon Valley's gender imbalance dates back to a time when "girls and electronics didn't mix."

Ms O'Mara traces how the famously apolitical titans of tech became increasingly savvy to the ways of Sacramento and Washington. In the late 1970s, they secured cuts to the capital gains tax and changes to arcane regulations governing how easily pension funds

could place money with venture capitalists. The result was a flood of new investment that revived Silicon Valley's fortunes.

Can Silicon Valley — a place and state of mind — maintain its supremacy in the coming years? China is pumping staggering amounts of money into its own tech sector, while European regulators are moving aggressively to curb the power of the biggest tech firms. The Department of Justice has signalled that it may initiate antitrust proceedings against them, while Republicans seem determined to restrict immigration to the US, effectively cutting off the lifeblood of talent that has sustained the tech sector in recent years. If Silicon Valley wants to preserve its dominant status, it's time to remember the words of Andy Grove, the iconoclastic CEO of Intel: "Only the paranoid survive."

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THE CODE Silicon Valley and the Remaking of America

Margaret O'Mara
Penguin Press; \$30; 496 pages

Opinion

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Rational Expectations

SUNIL JAIN

 sunil.jain@expressindia.com
 @thesuniljain


Trai has no logic, best to ignore it

Thanks to it, Indian spectrum most expensive in the world; its favourite model is to use the last bid as the new base price

NOT SURPRISINGLY, GIVEN its history of pushing for progressively higher spectrum prices, Trai has reiterated its high reserve price for the 5G spectrum that the government hopes to be able to auction this year. Based on the views of the Digital Communications Commission (DCC), the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) had asked Trai to relook its recommendations, since the government was keen to provide affordable 5G services to everyone and because, since there were just three private telecom players now, the demand was likely to be muted.

Given this is not the first time Trai has refused to budge from its recommendations—indeed, it just did the same in the case of the ₹3,050 crore penalties on Airtel, Vodafone and Idea—the ball is in the DoT/DCC's court, and it is to be hoped that they exercise it quickly. Thanks to Trai's high reserve prices, in 2012, 67% of the spectrum on auction couldn't be sold and this rose to 80% in 2013 and has averaged 38% since 2010. In FY17, while the government budgeted ₹98,995 crore in telecom revenues, including auctions, it got just ₹70,241 crore; it slashed its expectations to ₹44,342 crore in FY18, but got just ₹30,736 crore. It is, though, unfair to blame Trai alone as DoT also played its role and, on several occasions, it didn't release enough spectrum and in some other cases, it said telco licences wouldn't be renewed if they didn't buy spectrum; this forced telcos to bid even more aggressively.

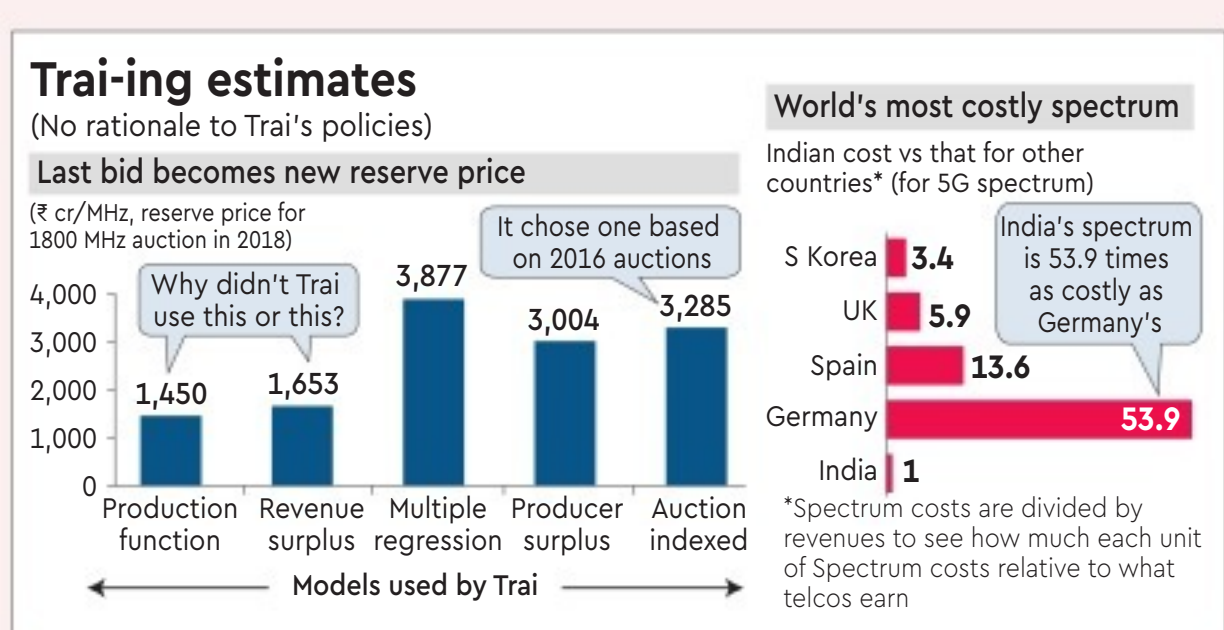
The problem with the Trai recommendations, apart from the fact that they result in India having the world's highest-cost spectrum, is that there is no logic to how the pricing is arrived at; and once whatever methodology is used, it isn't used consistently either.

In 2010, when a limited amount of 3G spectrum (2100MHz) was auctioned, the bid price for Delhi, for instance, was ₹663 crore per MHz as compared to the reserve/base price of ₹64 crore; Mumbai was auctioned at ₹649 crore and had the same reserve price. So, in 2012, when 1800MHz spectrum had to be auctioned, Trai decided to use the 3G auction as the base and set the reserve price at ₹717 crore for Delhi and ₹702 crore for Mumbai. DoT lowered the reserve price but the industry was so cash-strapped, the auction failed; in 2014, Trai slashed its recommendations, to ₹175 crore for Delhi and ₹165 crore for Mumbai; the auction fetched ₹364 crore for Delhi and ₹272 crore for Mumbai. This then became the reserve price that Trai recommended in 2015! In Andhra Pradesh, similarly, the ₹163 crore per MHz auction bid in 2014 for the 1800MHz band got recommended as the reserve price in 2015; when the bid came at an even higher ₹243 crore, this became the reserve price for the 2016 auction.

In 2018, Trai decided to try some new methods to estimate what the reserve price should be. It had a revenue-surplus model, for instance—since this means looking at what telcos will profit from each unit of spectrum, it made sense. In the case of 1800MHz, Trai got a price of ₹3,004 crore per MHz for a pan-India licence using a 'producer surplus' model, ₹1,653 crore using the 'revenue-surplus' model and ₹1,450 crore using the 'production function'. Though the results were so disparate, Trai used an arithmetic mean of various results. And, after all that, it went by what it called the 'achieved price' in October 2016, and 'duly indexed' this using the SBI lending rate. In the case of Delhi, for instance, the revenue-surplus model determined a base price of ₹128 crore per MHz in the 1800MHz band, ₹206 crore in the production-function model and ₹713 crore in the multiple-regression model; surely, as a regulator, Trai should have told us which was better, and why? And even though the arithmetic mean of all models was ₹368 crore, what Trai recommended was the ₹457 crore that was based on the 2016 auction, duly indexed by the SBI lending rate. In which case, why even have a Trai, just apply the index to every auction?

Nor is it that the indexation is done each time; the 2014/2015/2016 examples given earlier didn't do this. In the case of the 5G auctions, though, this was done. The 2016 auction bid for 1800MHz was multiplied by 1.15 and the result was multiplied by 0.3 as the efficiency of the 3300-3600MHz spectrum was considered to be 0.3 times that of the 1800MHz band. Once you divide this by India's population, India's spectrum is perhaps the cheapest in the world. Ideally, however, the cost of spectrum has to be juxtaposed with the revenues earned, since Indian tariffs are also very low. Once you do this, at \$0.0035 per MHz per unit of revenue, India's spectrum costs are amongst the highest in the world; 54 times those of Germany, for instance, and 6 times those of the UK.

The DoT/DCC need to take into account the near-complete absence of logic, indeed arbitrariness, in Trai's pricing and quickly fix an appropriate price. Till DoT/DCC also take a call on, simultaneously, lowering the exceptionally high annual licence fee charges, though, it is not clear that this will be enough to ensure a successful auction. And, for the future, Trai needs to rework its model to ensure both consistency and logic.



Anti-lynching LAW

The UP government must adopt the model anti-lynching law that the state Law Commission has drafted

THE UTTAR PRADESH State Law Commission, taking suo motu cognizance of incidents of mob lynchings in the state, submitted the draft Uttar Pradesh Combating of Lynching Bill, 2019 to state chief minister Yogi Adityanath. The draft Bill recommends that mob lynching be recognised as a separate criminal offence—currently, incidents of mob lynching are treated as cases of assault, grievous assault, or homicide, as the case may be—with strict punishment, ranging from up to seven years' imprisonment and a ₹1 lakh fine for the assailants, including those involved in conspiracy or abetment, if the victim is injured to a maximum of life sentence and a ₹5 lakh in case of assault leading to the victim's death. It also recommends a maximum jail term of three years, along with a ₹5,000 fine for state officials found to be in dereliction of duty. Further, the recommendation defines creation of a hostile environment, including public humiliation, deprivation of basic human rights, forced eviction, etc, as a criminal offence punishable with six months of imprisonment.

In a state that has seen as many as 20 distinct instances of mob lynchings which have claimed 54 victims, leaving 11 dead and 29 with major injuries, in a span of seven-and-a-half years, the draft Bill is much-needed and the state government should lose no time in accepting and implementing these recommendations if it wants to make good on its promise of reducing crime in the state. To be sure, navigating the judicial terrain will still be challenge—affixing blame on a crowd instead of one person dealing the killer blow will have to negotiate many legal hurdles, and injuries not being manifest and death occurring later due to internal injuries may complicate investigations and eventually trials. But, adopting the model law would be a good first step.



THE BLAME GAME

Union defence minister, Rajnath Singh

It is not that the condition of farmers deteriorated in the last one, two or four years. Those who ruled the country for a long time are responsible for their state

GLOBAL LESSONS

INDIA MUST EASE MARKET REGULATION & BORDER PROTECTION AND MAKE COMPENSATORY DIRECT PAYMENTS TO PRODUCERS, LIKE EUROPE DOES

Opportunity knocks for Indian agriculture

KEN ASH & SILVIA SORESCU

Ash is director, trade and agriculture & Sorescu is policy analyst, OECD Views are personal



inputs, such as fertilisers, electricity, and irrigation water. These domestic and trade policies have combined to reduce Indian farm revenue by an estimated 5.7% in the past three years—amounting to an 'implicit taxation' of about ₹1.7 trillion per year—as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER) report in the *Agricultural Policies in India 2018* study and the 2019 *OECD Agricultural Policy Monitoring and Evaluation*.

At the same time, funding for public services—such as physical infrastructure, inspection, research & development, and education and skills—that are essential to enable the long-term productivity and sustainability of the sector has not kept pace.

The government in India has set ambitious objectives for the sector, including to double farmers' incomes by 2022. How can Indian governments—federal and state—strengthen the productivity and sustainability of Indian agriculture, and provide remunerative opportunities for farm households?

Ashok Gulati has recently written about farm policy developments in China, drawing lessons for India. Policy reform experiences in the European Union (EU) might also provide useful insights. Reforms to the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) since the early 1990s have involved a gradual but consistent reduction of market regulation and border protection and the introduc-

tion of compensatory direct payments to producers. These payments were originally based on cultivated area or animal numbers, but became increasingly independent from production. Over the past 15 years, the share of support linked to production declined from 30% to 9% of farm revenue while compensatory payments increased from virtually zero to 8% of farm revenue. Producers acquired more flexibility to make their own production and trade decisions in response to market demand, independent of government intervention. These payments were subsequently adapted to address the specific needs of certain categories of farmers or regions, and conditions for receiving payments were introduced to ensure sustainable resource use.

Input subsidies have been reduced and, where they remain, are subject to environmental constraints on farm practices. In addition, new payments have been granted to farmers for providing valued environmental services, such as preservation of biodiversity. Today, nearly 50% of the support to producers is conditional on mandatory environmental constraints, and an additional 10% of support goes to voluntary agri-environmental schemes with conditions that go beyond the mandatory requirements. Investment support has

also been made available to accompany structural adjustment, improve industry competitiveness, and foster rural development—for example, to facilitate diversification of activities. Importantly, EU investment in agricultural research and innovation has increased dramatically in recent years.

Experience in the EU and elsewhere shows that persistence pays. Meanwhile, as for the EU, the diversity of India's regions and agriculture systems means that no single policy change or technology shift will get the country where it wants to be. But, reforming agri-marketing regulations and implementing direct support payments, where needed, can build on major initiatives already underway.

Domestic and trade policies have combined to reduce Indian farm revenue by an estimated 5.7% in the past three years

These include the electronic national agricultural market (eNAM), the 2017 marketing model act, and the recently implemented direct cash transfers scheme to small-scale farmers.

More can and should be done. Scarce financial resources should be directed towards investing in public services that enable a productive,

sustainable, and resilient food and agriculture sector. Doing so would require strengthening the institutional framework; eliminating duplication and fragmentation is a pre-requisite to ensuring coherent policy packages are developed and consistently implemented.

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and addressing the "triple challenge" will require new policy directions in India, as elsewhere. India has already shown it has the capacity to achieve high levels of growth and poverty reduction; with the right policy incentives, India's food and agriculture system can work better for all.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Changing the financial year

An expert committee, chaired by known economist LK Jha, set up by the Union government to suggest a new financial year, had suggested that the systematic calendar-year of January-December replace the current system of April-March financial year due to multiple advantages, and also to be in tune with most other countries of the world. But, as usual, recommendations of the LK Jha committee, set up at a high cost, were dumped by the then political rulers, without being implemented. It is time that both the financial and working year for the whole country be unified as the systematic calendar year to replace the present financial year of April-March, which is a continuation of our British legacy even seven long decades after the country achieved independence. — Subhash Chandra Agrawal, Delhi

Predictability woes

As loss strikes with vengeance at complacency, it might seem sudden, but is rarely so. Shorter versions of cricket have shaped, out of convenience, a few top batsmen and a clutch of bowlers, with the rest playing as good fielders. The coach, selectors as well as the captain, then, tend to juggle around this limited group. The assortment of lower order players seldom experience crunch situations, and are happy to let the top order ones revel in glory. The eclipse of the team, therefore, becomes instant if the this top order collapses. There is little solace in winning every game in the league format, only to lose in the semi final. The fault lies in not conditioning lower order players in league matches, even if that meant the possible loss of a match or two. We err in counting on predictability of individual performances in a game that is notoriously unpredictable. — R Narayanan, Navi Mumbai

● Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

Is Mumbai the next Istanbul?

For the city to be the next international centre, the trick will be to for India to check populist polarisation and enable a swift economic turnaround

JAMAL MECKLAI

CEO, Mecklai Financial Views are personal



ISTANBUL WAS THE most important city in the world for longer than any other—from approximately 450 AD, when the Byzantine Empire was founded, till the Ottoman Empire fell at the end of the First World War (1918). It's location on the Bosphorus, which was the nexus between the continents of Europe and Asia, made it a key commercial, cultural, and diplomatic centre over the years; Ataturk's subsequent reforms turned Turkey into a modern state.

Today, Istanbul is an amazing place, a wonderful blend of *khandani* and hip, reflected in the extraordinary traditional architecture sitting side by side with very sophisticated contemporary art; in sync, the people live a sensitive balance between conservative and modern Islam—many Turks fast during Ramadan, and also party wildly drinking rake, and dancing and singing. I truly became a Muslim the first time I went to Istanbul, about 12 or 15 years ago, and the joy of it is reconfirmed each time.

We were in Istanbul for a few days last month, and stayed at a small hotel in Ortakoy, just by the bridge; our room had a small balcony with a breathtaking view, right on the Bosphorus. Breakfast lasted forever as the cimit bread and cheese and honey and tomatoes and cucumbers and melon and Turkish coffee kept lazy pace with the boat traffic just below, the idyll occasionally interrupted by ferry horns and the call from the mosque just to the left—*allah-oakbar*.

While we were there, campaigning for the election for mayor of Istanbul was in full swing. Erdogan's party, the AKP, had already lost the election for this post a few months ago, but he pulled all his corrupt institutional control to declare that election invalid—it was too narrow a victory/loss he said (13,000 votes). People were really upset by that, and given that the econ-

omy was also in deep shit, Erdogan's ass was really kicked—the winner, Imamoglu of the opposition CHP, won by over 800,000 votes, with 54% to AKP's 45%!

Significantly, Imamoglu's campaign was celebratory, about bringing people together, in stark contrast to the offensive polarisation that Turkey and much of the world has been suffering from over the past fifteen years or so, as demagogues (like Erdogan, Putin and numerous others) successfully seized upon the failures of previous decades of politics to sell "populism" to people in so many countries.

Democratic capitalism, the previous "ism", became the only game in town in 1981, when the Berlin Wall fell and the world became essentially unipolar. That cycle ended dramatically with the 2008 market collapse, which exposed what unfettered capitalist democracy had really become—an asset grab by a well-positioned minority. The criminal failure to demand accountability after 2008, increasing inequality as the "free" market did its job, and the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, which generated tragic waves of refugees, all fed the growing anti-establishment rhetoric, making it inward-looking, jingoistic and anti-immigrant—the new populism was born.

This new cycle probably began a few years into the terms of Erdogan and Putin, both of whom, interestingly, started out as mayors of major cities—Istanbul and Leningrad, respectively—about 20 years ago. This means the "populism" cycle has already been running for nearly 15 years; it probably peaked when Trump was elected—it is hard to imagine anything that could top that.

The "populism" cycle has already been running for nearly 15 years; it probably peaked when Trump was elected

With technology continuously narrowing all cycles, it would appear that this fake "ism" has, at most, another 5 to 8 years to run.

The tempo at which it will unwind will, of course, be different in different countries, but the turning point will always be economic stagnation, which populism, almost by definition, creates. Turkey is already scraping the bottom; Russia is not far behind.

While the US is currently rocking on—unemployment is near an all-time low—the fact that the yield curve has remained inverted for over a month confirms that a recession is a probably

less than a year away, just in time to spike Trump's chances at re-election. The UK has its October 31 Brexit deadline, after which nobody knows how things will pan out, but it is odds-on that the economy will stagnate at best; a Parliamentary election is certainly on the cards and, with all political parties shamefully discredited, we could see the rise of a large number of independent lawmakers. Europe, which is holding on for dear life economically even as long-term bond yields have been negative for over 3 years, will doubtless suffer some fall-out from Brexit, which will hopefully drive some sense into the electorate.

India, which has also been hugely susceptible to polarising populism, is currently sitting pretty politically, but the government has a big job to rescue the economy. Modi is both remarkably strategically savvy and knows how to get things done—the trick will be to turn off the polarising approach to enable the economy to turn around swiftly. The Budget was an excellent first step.

Who knows, maybe in a few years, we will be able to say, Welcome to Mumbai!



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



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

built by the Kakatiya dynasty. From the perspective of inter-generational justice, this is a move towards giving future generations in the State their rightful share of water and, therefore, a life of dignity. The city of Hyderabad is now moving towards a sustainable hydraulic model with some of the best minds in the country working on it. This model integrates six sources of water in a way that even the most underdeveloped areas of the city can have equitable access to water resources and the groundwater levels restored in order to avoid a calamity of the kind that has gripped Chennai now.

The larger question is: Can we not take inspiration from the following examples? When Mexico city can create a new executive position of a "resilience officer" to save its sinking urban sprawls, Bengaluru can reclaim Kundalahalli lake (once a landfill) through corporate social responsibility funds in a Public Private Partnership model, and Hyderabad and the larger state of Telangana rebuild its resilience through a combination of political will and well-designed policies such as the Kaleshwaram Lift Irrigation Scheme and Mission, what stops us from learning from each other?

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

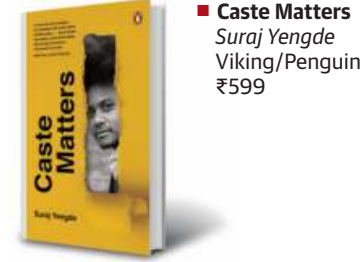


MEETA AHLAWAT

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.

Excerpted with permission from Penguin Random House

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.

readerseditor@thehindu.co.in



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK PHOTO

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.

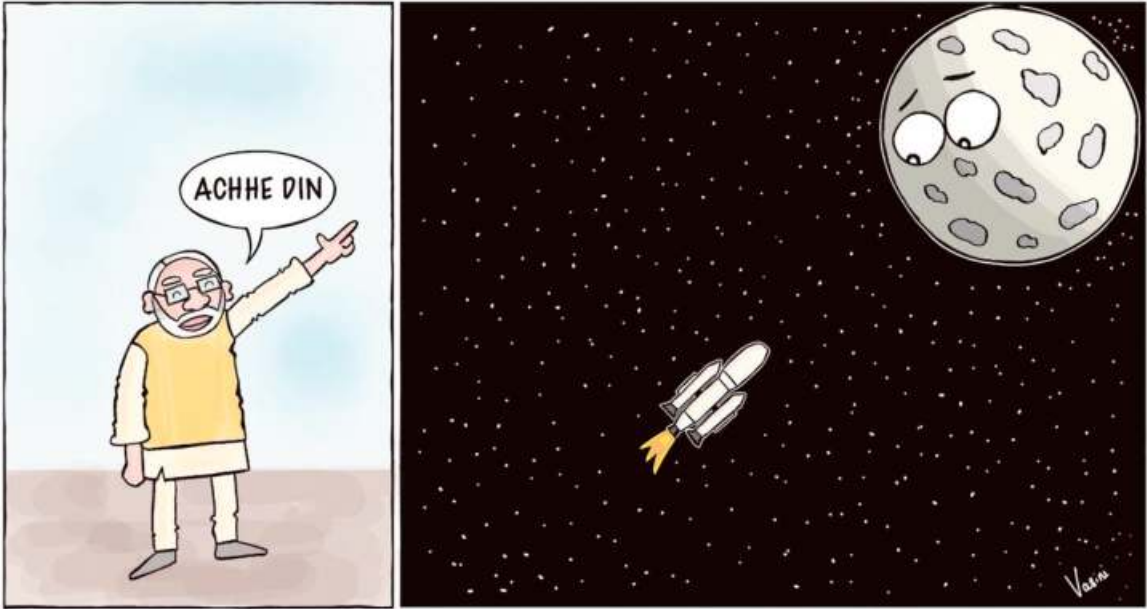
The Ambedkar reference

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



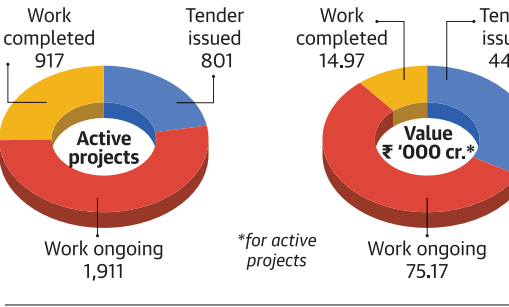
DATA POINT

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**

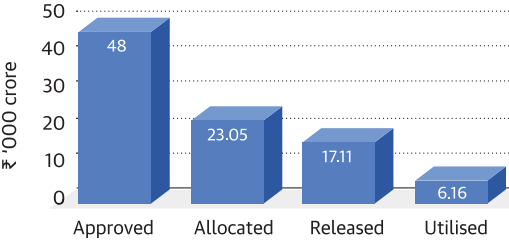
Status update

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



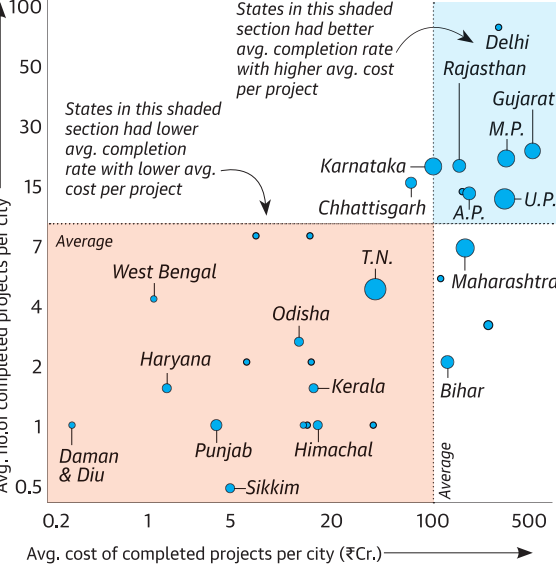
Trickle down effect

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.

बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड

वर्ष 12 अंक 127

नीतिगत अनिश्चितता

वृहद आर्थिक स्थिरता और नीतिगत निश्चितता निवेश के अहम कारक हैं क्योंकि कारोबारी ऐसे माहौल में निवेश नहीं करना चाहते हैं जहां आर्थिक और नीतिगत अस्थिरता हो। बीते कुछ वर्षों के दौरान भारत ने अनिश्चितता कम करने में कामयाबी हासिल की है लेकिन कुछ निर्णय, विशेष तौर पर हालिया बजट के कुछ निर्णय इस लाभ को कम कर सकते हैं।

वृहद स्तर पर देखें तो लचीले मुद्रास्फीति लक्ष्य ढांचे ने मुद्रास्फीति संबंधी अनुमानों के मामले में मदद की है। यह बात महत्वपूर्ण है क्योंकि इससे न केवल वृहद आर्थिक स्थिरता को मजबूत करने में मदद मिलेगी बल्कि कारोबारी जगत को दीर्घावधि के अनुमान लगाने में भी आसानी होगी। अन्य चीजों के अलावा यह आशा की जा सकती है कि मूल्य स्थिरता से

पूंजी की लागत कम होगी। इसी प्रकार वस्तु एवं सेवा कर ने अप्रत्यक्ष कर ढांचे की जटिलता को कम किया है, हालांकि क्रियान्वयन के कुछ मुद्दे अभी भी हल किए जाने हैं। इसके अतिरिक्त ऋणशोधन अक्षमता एवं दिवालिया संहिता भी तनावग्रस्त परिसंपत्तियों के निपटान में मदद कर रही है। इससे देश की अर्थव्यवस्था की ऋण संस्कृति में सुधार होगा। हालांकि इनमें से कुछ सुधार हाल के वर्षों में लागू किए गए हैं और अभी इन पर काम चल रहा है परंतु इनका महत्वपूर्ण ढंग से सकारात्मक प्रभाव हुआ है। आगे चलकर इससे कारोबारी माहौल में और सुधार होगा। खेद की बात है कि सरकार के कुछ अन्य निर्णय अनिश्चितता बढ़ाने वाले साबित हुए। बजट की बात करें तो उससे एक दिन पहले पेश की गई आर्थिक

समीक्षा में नीतिगत निश्चितता की जरूरत को रेखांकित किया गया था। उसमें कहा गया था कि खराब ढंग से तैयार कानून जो अस्पष्टता, संशोधनों, स्पष्टीकरण और रियायतों से भरा हो, उससे उपजी अनिश्चितता निवेशकों को निराश करती है और देश में निवेश का माहौल खराब होता है। परंतु बजट में कई स्तरों पर जटिलता और अनिश्चितता बढ़ाई गई। निवेशकों को कर दर में स्थिरता अनुमन्यता की आवश्यकता होती है लेकिन अत्यधिक अमीर वर्ग के लिए अचानक आयकर अधिभार बढ़ाकर बजट ने न केवल कर ढांचे को जटिल बनाया बल्कि उन विदेशी पोर्टफोलियो निवेशकों को भी प्रभावित किया जो गैर कॉर्पोरेट संस्थानों में निवेश करते हैं। पहले कहा गया कि सरकार इस विषय पर स्पष्टीकरण जारी करेगी लेकिन

बाद में कहा गया कि इसकी जरूरत नहीं। कर पश्चात प्रतिफल पर दृष्टि डालने पर कुछ विदेशी पोर्टफोलियो निवेशक देश से बाहर जाने पर विचार कर सकते हैं। यह बात सरकार को भी प्रभावित कर सकती है जो विनिवेश का बड़ा लक्ष्य लेकर चल रही है। सरकार ने कई वस्तुओं पर आयात शुल्क बढ़ाने का निर्णय लिया है ताकि घरेलू उद्योग को बचाया जा सके। यह उपभोक्ताओं को भी प्रभावित करेगा और वैश्विक मूल्य श्रृंखला का हिस्सा बनने की हमारी कोशिश को भी। इसका असर देश की निर्यात बढ़ाने की संभावनाओं पर पड़ेगा।

अगर दैर बार-बार बदली गई तो बहुराष्ट्रीय कंपनियां भारतीय कंपनियों के साथ काम करने या यहां निवेश की अनिच्छुक हो जाएंगी। इलेक्ट्रिक वाहनों पर जोर इसका एक और

उदाहरण है। बजट में इलेक्ट्रिक वाहन खरीदने वालों को कर राहत दी गई। वायु प्रदूषण चिंताजनक है लेकिन सरकार के ऐसे कदम से वाहन क्षेत्र का शेष हिस्सा अनिश्चितता और जोखिम महसूस करेगा। सरकार को नियम बनाने के बाद शेष काम बाजार पर छोड़ देना चाहिए। कुछ अन्य क्षेत्र भी हैं। सरकार पहले दिन से दावा कर रही है कि कारोबारी सुगमता बढ़ाना उसकी प्राथमिकता है। परंतु बजट प्रस्तावों में सीमा शुल्क अधिकारियों को राजस्व हित में या तस्करी रोकने के लिए किसी व्यक्ति को पकड़ने का अधिकार दिया गया है जिसका दुरुपयोग संभव है। ऐसे उपायों से अनिश्चितता बढ़ेगी। सरकार को राजस्व जैसे अल्पकालिक लक्ष्यों की खातिर लिए गए अपने निर्णयों के दूरगामी असर पर विचार करना चाहिए।



अजय मोहंती

देश की प्रतिरक्षा बतर्ज मेरा जूता है जापानी!

पेंशन को अलग कर दिया जाए तो 20 वर्षों में तीन प्रधानमंत्रियों के अधीन देश का रक्षा बजट जीडीपी के 1.5 फीसदी से ऊपर नहीं निकल पाया।

तीन बातों ने इस सप्ताह की विचार प्रक्रिया को प्रभावित किया है:

- सामरिक समुदाय रक्षा बजट में इजाफा न होने के कारण व्यापक तौर पर हताश है।
- द फ्रिंट के सृजन शुक्ल को दिए साक्षात्कार में अमेरिकी सामरिक विद्वान क्रिस्टाइन फेयर ने कहा कि लश्कर-ए-तैयबा केवल एक और आतंकी संगठन नहीं बल्कि पाकिस्तानी सेना का एक कम खर्च वाला दस्ता है। इसका लक्ष्य ऐसी असंगत लड़ाई छेड़ना है जिसका मुकाबला भारत नहीं कर सकता। उन्होंने यह भी कहा कि भारत अल्पकालिक लड़ाई में पाकिस्तान को नहीं हरा सकता।
- वायुसेना के दिवंगत कमांडर जसजीत सिंह ने अपनी किताब में कुछ दिलचस्प बातें लिखी हैं। मसलन कैसे भारतीय वायुसेना ने इजरायली इंजीनियरों को अपने पुराने फ्रांसीसी मिराज विमानों में बदलाव की अनुमति दी ताकि उन्हें रूसी आर-73 हवा से हवा में मार करने वाली मिसाइल ढोने लायक बनाया जा सके। ऐसा इसलिए क्योंकि मिराज की मूल मात्रा 530-डी मिसाइल बेकार हो चुकी थीं।

यह पूरा वाक्या मशहूर गीतकार शैलेंद्र के लिखे उस शानदार गीत की याद दिलाता है जो उन्होंने राजकपूर की फिल्म श्री 420 के लिए लिखा था: मेरा जूता है जापानी / ये पतलून इंगलिस्तानी / सर पे लाल टोपी रूसी / फिर भी दिल है हिंदुस्तानी। ये पंक्तियां सन 1955 में एक नए बने देश के लिए थीं। परंतु 65 वर्ष बाद भी यह देश के सशस्त्र बलों की स्थिति स्पष्ट करने के लिए पर्याप्त है।

सबसे पहले बात करते हैं बजट बनाम जीडीपी के मुद्दे का। इस वर्ष का रक्षा बजट पेंशन समेत 4.31 लाख करोड़ रुपये का है। यह राशि जीडीपी के 2 फीसदी के बराबर है। अगर पेंशन को निकाल दिया जाए तो यह राशि 3.18 लाख करोड़ रुपये यानी जीडीपी के 1.5 फीसदी के बराबर रह जाती है। यहां दो सवाल उत्पन्न होते हैं: क्या भारत

इतनी कम राशि में अपना बचाव कर सकता है ? और क्या भारत इससे अधिक रक्षा बजट का प्रावधान कर सकता है ? तात्कालिक प्रतिक्रिया में पहले सवाल का तात्कालिक जवाब है न, लेकिन दूसरे का जवाब हां है। स्पष्टीकरण: कुछ समय पहले तक शायद मैं भी यही कहता लेकिन मैं गलत था। रणनीतिक क्षेत्र से जुड़ी बहस में जीडीपी और राष्ट्रीय बजट के बीच हमेशा अंतर नहीं किया जाता। बजट सरकार का है, जीडीपी नहीं। रक्षा व्यय पर और करीबी नजर डालने का सही तरीका है राष्ट्रीय बजट का प्रतिशत।

करीब 23 फीसदी की ऋण अदायगी के बाद 15.5 फीसदी के साथ यह बजट का दूसरा सबसे बड़ा हिस्सेदार है। यह कृषि, ग्रामीण विकास, शिक्षा और स्वास्थ्य के समेकित 15.1 फीसदी के आंकड़े से भी ज्यादा है। रणनीतिक क्षेत्र से आधा फीसदी या कुल बजट का 3.5 फीसदी, केंद्रीय अर्धसैनिक बलों पर व्यय किया जाता है। ऐसे में कोई भी वित्त मंत्री रक्षा के लिए अतिरिक्त बजट कहा से लाएगा ?

हमारे डेटा पत्रकार साथी अधिषेक मिश्रा ने सन 1986 से अब तक के रक्षा बजट के आंकड़े जुटाए। इसके मुताबिक जिस समय राजीव गांधी सैन्य विस्तार पर जोर दे रहे थे उस वक्त रक्षा बजट जीडीपी के 4 फीसदी तक पहुंचा था। यही वह दौर था जब मिराज विमानों का देश में आगमन शुरू हुआ। तब से बजट में निरंतर, स्थिर और पारंपरिक तरीके से वृद्धि हुई है और यह औसतन जीडीपी के 2.82 फीसदी के बराबर रहा (विश्व बैंक के आंकड़े)। सन 1991 के सुधार के बाद जीडीपी आंकड़ों में तेजी आनी शुरू हुई।

बीते दो दशक में करगिल की जंग के बाद बजट में औसतन सालाना 8.91 फीसदी की वृद्धि हुई। आप चीख चिल्ला सकते हैं,

शिकायत कर सकते हैं लेकिन अब यह स्पष्ट है कि कोई भी सरकार इतनी गैरजवाबदेह नहीं हो सकती है कि वह रक्षा व्यय में इजाफा करने के लिए नए नोट छापे या गरीबों की सब्सिडी कम करे (यह बजट का 6.6 फीसदी है) या फिर कृषि, स्वास्थ्य, शिक्षा या ग्रामीण विकास के बजट में कटौती करे। यह धारणा गलत और अनुचित थी कि अधिक ताकतवर मोदी सरकार कुछ नाटकीय करेगी। मोदी मूर्ख या लापरवाह सैन्यवादी नहीं हैं। मजबूत रणनीतिक रुख का यह मतलब नहीं कि वह देश को पाकिस्तान की तरह राष्ट्रीय सुरक्षा वाले मुल्क में बदल दें जो अपने खर्च के लिए आईएमएफ का मोहताब है।

देश की रणनीतिक बहस को नई हकीकत के मुताबिक ढालना होगा। हमें देखना होगा कि क्या व्यावहारिक है। अगर 2024 में जीडीपी का आकार 5 लाख करोड़ डॉलर हो जाता है तो रक्षा बजट करीब दो फीसदी रहेगा। ऐसे में बहस इस बात पर होनी चाहिए कि इस राशि से देश की किस हद तक रक्षा-सुरक्षा की जा सकेगी। मौजूदा सैन्य स्तर पर देखा जाए तो लंबी लड़ाई की स्थिति में हमारा देश पाकिस्तान से बहुत बेहतर स्थिति में है लेकिन फिलहाल लड़ाई के हालात नहीं हैं। याद रहे सन 1965 और 1971 की पिछली दो लड़ाइयां भी बमुश्किल 22 और 13 दिन चलीं। परंतु क्रिस्टीन फेयर का यह कहना भी सही है कि आज भारत अल्पकालिक लड़ाई में पाकिस्तान को नहीं हरा सकता। हमें यह सवाल उठाने की आवश्यकता है कि क्या भारत के पास यह क्षमता है कि वह पुलवामा जैसी कुटिल और असमान लड़ाइयों की स्थिति में वह पाकिस्तान को प्रतिरोधात्मक सबक सिखा सके, वह भी बिना भारतीयों की जान जोखिम में डाले। बालाकोट और उसके अगले दिन जो कुछ हुआ वह बताता है कि हमें फिलहाल ऐसी कोई बढ़त हासिल

नहीं है। यह सही है कि लंबी लड़ाई में वायुसेना का कौशल निर्णायक साबित होगा लेकिन हमारे रक्षा बजट के सातवें हिस्से के बराबर रक्षा बजट और हमारे विदेशी मुद्रा भंडार के बमुश्किल 3 फीसदी मुद्रा भंडार वाला देश अपनी मर्जी के चुने समय में हमें शिकस्त क्यों दे ? यहां फिर वही सवाल आता है कि क्या हम अपने रक्षा बजट को सही तरीके से खर्च कर रहे हैं ?

हमारी दो प्राथमिक सामरिक जरूरतें हैं: चीन के खिलाफ मजबूत बचाव जो उसे किसी तरह के भौगोलिक दुस्साहस न करने दे और पाकिस्तान बिना किसी भय की आशंका के बेमेल लड़ाइयां छेड़ने से रोकना। दो मोर्चों पर जंग असंभव तो नहीं लेकिन इसकी संभावना कम है। भारत तीनों परमाणु हथियार संपन्न देशों के बीच अपना बचाव करने सक्षम है। कोई भी देश लंबी लड़ाई में अगर हारता है तो वह दूसरे को भी डुबाएगा। दो मोर्चों पर लड़ाई के सोच से बाहर निकलना होगा। बल्कि हमें स्पष्ट नजर आ रही हकीकत पर ध्यान देना होगा।

फिलहाल हमारी वायु सेना या थल सेना के पास पाकिस्तान के खिलाफ उक्त दंडात्मक प्रतिरोध मौजूद नहीं है। तीन सप्ताह की लड़ाई की बात तो छोड़ दें, नियंत्रण रेखा पर भी पाकिस्तान ने अब तक हमसे बेहतर हथियार, बाँडी आर्म्स, स्नाइपर राइफल और गोला-बारूद तैनात कर रहा है। संप्रग के 10 वर्ष के कार्यकाल में हमने जो लापरवाही बरती और जो असंतुलन आया वह 26-27 फरवरी की उजागर हो गया। केवल हमारी नौसेना को ही आज पाकिस्तान पर निर्णायक बढ़त हासिल है। परंतु सेना का दंडात्मक इस्तेमाल शेष विश्व के लिए जरूरी जलमार्गों को अस्तुलित कर सकता है। 4.31 लाख करोड़ रुपये के रक्षा व्यय में 1.12 लाख करोड़ रुपये पेंशन के मद में जाते हैं। इसके बाद तीनों सेनाओं के वेतन में 1.08 लाख करोड़ रुपये व्यय होते हैं। इसमें डीआरडीओ और नौसेना व्यय शामिल नहीं है। एक लाख करोड़ रुपये की राशि अन्य तेयशुदा खर्च, रखरखाव आदि में लगते हैं। इसके बाद कुछ सौ करोड़ रुपये की राशि बचती है जो वेतन भत्तों की राशि से भी कम है। यही कारण है कि तीनों सेनाओं का आधुनिकीकरण नहीं हो पा रहा है और उन्हें जैसे-तैसे काम चलाना पड़ रहा है। हम सब जानते हैं कि आखिर मायने यही रखता है कि मशीन के पीछे कौन खड़ा है, क्योंकि ...फिर भी दिल है हिंदुस्तानी।

महाशक्ति बनने के आकांक्षी देश को कहीं बेहतर की जरूरत है। अगर हम ज्यादा नहीं खर्च कर सकते तो हमें समझदारीपूर्वक खर्च करना होगा। हम वेतन और पेंशन में कमी नहीं कर सकते, बल्कि हमारे जवानों की और अधिक की आवश्यकता है। परंतु क्या हमें पूर्णकालिक स्तर पर इतने अधिक सैनिक चाहिए ? हमें सेना को छोटा, फुर्तीला और आक्रामक बनाने की जरूरत है। हमें अल्पकालिक सेवा और अमेरिका के स्लाइस अमेरिकन आरओटीसी (रिजर्व ऑफिसर ट्रेनिंग कोर) जैसे नए विचारों पर काम करना होगा। इस दिशा में कुछ पहल भी हो रही है क्योंकि मौजूदा सरकार संप्रग की तरह बदलाव को लेकर शक्ति नहीं है। हमें सैद्धांतिक बदलाव की जरूरत है। रणनीतिकारों को भी अतीत की जंगों को भुला देना चाहिए।

कारोबारी जिंदगी के दो मुकाम: बिड़ला और ऐकोका

कारोबार जगत के दो दिग्गजों का पिछले पखवाड़े एक दिन के अंतराल में ही निधन हो गया। ली ऐकोका का 94 साल की उम्र में 2 जुलाई को निधन हुआ और अगले ही दिन बसंत कुमार बिड़ला 98 साल की उम्र में दिवंगत हो गए। एक मशहूर उद्योगपति परिवार के उत्तराधिकारी बिड़ला जहां भारतीय कारोबारी परंपरा का प्रतिनिधित्व करते थे वहीं ऐकोका अपनी पेशेवर प्रतिभा के बल पर ग्रेट अमेरिकन ड्रीम को साकार करने में जुटे तबके के विलक्षण प्रतिनिधि थे।

बिड़ला विरासत में मिली संपत्ति के दम पर विशाल कारोबारी साम्राज्य खड़ा करने वाले भारतीय उद्यमी के प्रतीक थे। वहीं ऐकोका इसी से आकर अमेरिका में बसे माता-पिता की संतान थे और उनका बचपन काफी मुश्किलों में बीता था। पारिवारिक कारोबार के नाम पर उनके पास हॉट ढांग का एक स्टैंड भर था। फिर भी ऐकोका अमेरिका के सबसे सफल प्रबंधक बनकर उभरे। उन्होंने 'मोटाउन' की तीन अस्तुलित कर सिले हैं। 4.31 लाख करोड़ रुपये के रक्षा व्यय में 1.12 लाख करोड़ रुपये पेंशन के मद में जाते हैं। इसके बाद तीनों सेनाओं के वेतन में 1.08 लाख करोड़ रुपये व्यय होते हैं। इसमें डीआरडीओ और नौसेना व्यय शामिल नहीं है। एक लाख करोड़ रुपये की राशि अन्य तेयशुदा खर्च, रखरखाव आदि में लगते हैं। इसके बाद कुछ सौ करोड़ रुपये की राशि बचती है जो वेतन भत्तों की राशि से भी कम है। यही कारण है कि तीनों सेनाओं का आधुनिकीकरण नहीं हो पा रहा है और उन्हें जैसे-तैसे काम चलाना पड़ रहा है। हम सब जानते हैं कि आखिर मायने यही रखता है कि मशीन के पीछे कौन खड़ा है, क्योंकि ...फिर भी दिल है हिंदुस्तानी।

बिड़ला परंपरागत कारोबार करने वाले परिवार से ताल्लुक रखते थे और उस परिवार का स्वतंत्रता आंदोलन से भी करीबी संबंध रहा था। उसके मशहूर पिता घनश्यामदास बिड़ला उन भारतीय उद्योगपतियों की पहली पीढ़ी का हिस्सा थे जिन्होंने कमोडिटो की तरह-बिज्जी के बजाये कंपनी संचालित कारोबार की तरफ अपने कदम बढ़ाए। उस पीढ़ी के उद्यमियों ने विश्व युद्धों के समय मिले मौके का बखूबी फायदा उठाया और एजेंसी व्यवस्था को संभालने के गुर सीखे थे।

‘बीके’ के रूप में लोकप्रिय बिड़ला का जन्म उद्यमिता एवं धन से भरे-पूरे परिवार में हुआ था और उन्हें कम उम्र से ही कारोबारी गुर सिखाए गए थे। बिज़नेस स्टैंडर्ड में प्रकाशित एक लेख में कुणाल बोस ने कहा है कि बिड़ला को शेयर कारोबार में हाथ आजमाने के लिए 13 साल की उम्र में ही प्रोत्साहित किया गया था और उन्होंने पहले साल में ही 4,000 रुपये का अच्छा मुनाफा भी कमा लिया था। अपने पिता के कारोबार में प्रशिक्षण के तौर पर



जिंदगीनामा

कनिका दत्ता

शामिल होने के लिए उन्होंने इच्छा न होते हुए भी प्रेसिडेंसी कॉलेज छोड़ दिया। आजादी के समय उत्तराधिकार में मिली संपत्ति ने उन्हें अपने दम पर बड़ा साम्राज्य खड़ा करने का आधार दे दिया। उन्हें देश में मिश्रित अर्थव्यवस्था स्थापित करने की नेहरू की पहल से मिले शुरुआती मौकों का भी फायदा उठाया था।

लेकिन अत्यधिक समृद्ध होते हुए भी बिड़ला पर इसका कोई असर नहीं दिखता था। गरिमापूर्ण आचरण एवं नम्र स्वभाव वाले बिड़ला की कार्यशैली कलकत्ता के डलहौजी स्क्वेयर के आसपास से मिले शुरुआती मौकों का भी फायदा उठाया था। उनमें आर्थिक नीति में आसन्न अवसर पहचानने की समझ खूब थी। मसलन, सीमेंट पर नियंत्रण आंशिक रूप से हटाए जाने के बाद उन्होंने सीमेंट कारोबार खड़ा करने का मन बना लिया।

बिड़ला एक उद्यमी के तौर पर बिड़ला सीमेंट, टायर, कपड़ा एवं चाय जैसे कमोडिटी-केंद्रित कारोबार में ही लगे रहे क्योंकि उन दिनों घरेलू बाजार काफी हद तक संरक्षित थे। विदेशों में कुछ कारोबार थे लेकिन उनमें से कोई भी पूंजीवाद के गढ़ अमेरिका और यूरोप के कड़ी प्रतिस्पर्द्धा वाले बाजारों में नहीं था। भारत की अधिकांश बड़ी कंपनियों की तरह बिड़ला भी भारत में ही कारोबार करने में सहज

महसूस करते रहे और उनकी प्रबंधकीय शैली मिलनसार एवं सहृदय होते हुए भी मूलत: केंद्रीकृत एवं विवरणोन्मुख थी। बिड़ला साम्राज्य या परिवारों के स्वामित्व वाले किसी भी भारतीय समूह में ऐकोका जैसे सख्त एवं विलक्षण प्रबंधक के बारे में सोचा भी नहीं जा सकता था। महज मार्केटिंग रणनीति की काबिलियत ने उन्हें फोर्ड कंपनी में लंबे समय तक बचाए रखा। कंपनी के कर्ताधर्ता हेनरी फोर्ड

कानाफूसी

आपका पक्ष

हर किलोमीटर पर हो जल संचयन

आने वाले दशक में विश्व में जलसंकट काफी गहराने की आशंका दिख रही है। विश्व के कई देशों में अभी से ही जल संरक्षण बहुत बड़ी समस्या बनी हुई है। कई देशों में भूजल का स्तर काफी नीचे चला गया है जहां से पानी निकालना संभव नहीं है। दक्षिण भारत में चेन्नई में घोर जलसंकट छा गया है। वहां दूसरे शहरों से ट्रेन से पानी मंगवाया जा रहा है। पिछले दिनों सैटेलाइट से ली गई एक तस्वीर हमसे आई थी जिसमें एक वर्ष में चेन्नई की झील में पानी की कमी के अंतर को दिखाया गया था। इधर, मॉनसून के एक माह बीत जाने के बाद भी राजधानी दिल्ली तथा इससे सटे नोएडा में बारिश नहीं हो रही है। जबकि दिल्ली-नोएडा से सटी अन्य जगहों में जोरदार बारिश हुई है। देश की राजधानी में भी जल संकट छाया हुआ है। कई कॉलोनियों में पानी की आपूर्ति टैंकरों से की जा रही है। दिल्ली



में यमुना नदी तो है लेकिन यह लगभग एक नाले में तब्दील हो चुकी है। यमुना नदी इतनी प्रदूषित हो चुकी है जिसका पानी उपयोग करने लायक नहीं बचा है। दिल्ली में हरियाणा से नहर के जरिये पानी मंगाया जाता है। वह भी दो राज्यों के बीच कई साल पहले हुए करार के तहत हरियाणा निर्धारित पानी ही नहर में छोड़ता है जो दिल्ली

सरकार को बारिश का पानी संचयन करने के लिए ठोस कदम उठाने चाहिए

के लिए अब नाकाफी है। बहरहाल जलसंकट की समस्या को देखते हुए दिल्ली सरकार बारिश का पानी संचयन करने की योजना बनाई है। इसके लिए यमुना नदी के दोनों

पाठक अपनी राय हमें इस पते पर भेज सकते हैं : संपादक, बिजनेस स्टैंडर्ड लिमिटेड, 4, बहादुर शाह जफर मार्ग, नई दिल्ली - 110002. आप हमें ईमेल भी कर सकते हैं : lettershindi@bsmail.in
उस जगह का उल्लेख अवश्य करें, जहां से आप ईमेल कर रहे हैं।

सोशल मीडिया पर निगरानी

इस समाचार पत्र में 12 जुलाई के अंक में प्रकाशित लेख ‘सोशल मीडिया पर निगरानी’ पढ़ा। लेख के अनुसार मानव संसाधन मंत्रालय का यह प्रयास है कि करीब 900 उच्च शिक्षण संस्थान सकारात्मक

सोशल मीडिया प्रोफाइल तैयार करें। इसके तहत उच्च शिक्षा प्राप्त कर रहे करीब तीन करोड़ छात्रों से यह कहा जाएगा कि वे अपने सोशल मीडिया प्रोफाइल संस्थान के प्रोफाइल से जोड़ें। इससे छात्र के प्रोफाइल के शिकार हो सकते हैं जिससे उनकी निजता भंग होने की आशंका रहेगी। बहरहाल आम जनजीवन में देखें तो सोशल मीडिया पर लगातार निगरानी हो रही होती है। किसी संस्थान में पढ़ने वाला छात्र अगर संस्थान की खामियां उजागर करता है तो उसे संस्थान की ओर से लताड़ लगाई जाती है। वहीं निजी क्षेत्र की कंपनियों की बात करें तो मानव संसाधन विभाग अपने कर्मियों के प्रोफाइल पर पूरी नजर रखता है। अगर कोई कर्मि कंपनी की बुराई करता है तो उसे बाहर का रास्ता दिखा दिया जाता है। सोशल मीडिया आधुनिक युग का एक हथियार है जिसे काफी सोच समझ कर इस्तेमाल करना चाहिए। इसके उचित इस्तेमाल के लिए कार्यशाला आयोजित की जानी चाहिए।

अजय कुमार, गुड़गांव

