

When silence hurts

Is there a business-society communication gap?

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THE EXCHANGE

To put the thoughts here in context, recall that we often comment on the fragile triangle of trust between government, business and society, and the healthy balance essential for the national economy. To achieve this perhaps calls for intensive efforts under the circumstances.

The past many months have seen — with startling regularity — media space flooded with stories on delinquencies and aberrations in business and economic matters and accompanying stakeholder distress. Of course, media reports or formal communiques convey limited information; but broad pictures do get laid out on the basis of which general opinions on fair or foul get formed.

To say that some reported incidents have shaken even tough and experienced minds, would be an understatement. But it is also reasonable and equitable to say that — though almost every story can be painted as delinquent — every event is not criminal in nature or intent; there is a huge share of crises caused by business problems, simply poor decisions and governance lapses.

These latter elements have procedural, contractual and regulatory solutions and we should allow appropriate mature conclusions to emerge quickly and without much ado. No responsible businessman even considers defending delinquency. There has been enough said from all levels that mistakes should not, and do not amount to criminality. There is also enough said in conferences, meetings and indoors that those guilty must be swiftly punished and those not guilty should be just as swiftly discharged. The eco-system has to inspire greater confidence and must establish safe-

guards against unwarranted personal or reputational ruin.

However, perhaps it could be of value to introspect if the voices of business and representative bodies have effectively conveyed its set of core views — and its intolerance of wrongful behaviour by businessmen — to society at large with adequate seriousness, clarity and frequency. If society does not correctly perceive that this is the inherent attitude of business, it may well identify businesses just with self-serving pleas and/or cheer-leading.

Fragile trust will be further compromised. It is not anyone's place to suggest that business is not communicating its position — the suggestion is simply to introspect if it is satisfactory in quantity and substance. Silence can sometimes be golden. It's probably the best thing when a debate is headed nowhere or one has incomplete information, or there is only something unkind to say. But silence is not always golden, as holding back can also ruin relationships with the larger eco-system.

In some situations silence hurts others — for example, when someone needs your reinforcement and if you can do so by taking a principled stand. If one knows with reasonable certainty that someone has been wronged but sits quietly, the silence can be misconstrued as one's consent.

In closing it is hard to ignore some nostalgic music moments. The timeless words of Simon & Garfunkel played quite by chance in the background:

*And in the naked light I saw, ten thousand people maybe more
People talking without speaking, people hearing without listening
People writing songs that voices never share
And no one dared, disturb the sound of silence*

The writer is an entrepreneur and a past President of FICCI. The views are personal.

China's digital route to dominance

Laying undersea cables is just one part of its attempt to connect large parts of the world to its hi-tech network



PARAN BALAKRISHNAN

THE WIDER ANGLE

It's got a remarkably catchy name: Peace, or the Pakistan East Africa Cable Express, and it's an undersea cable that will connect Pakistan's Gwadar Port to a landing point near Mombasa in Kenya. It's one of many undersea cable links being built by Chinese companies like Huawei Marine and the goal is to ensure all digital roads lead to China.

Laying undersea cables is just one part of what's been nicknamed China's Digital Silk Road. It's an attempt to connect large swathes of Africa, the Middle East, South-East Asia and even South Asia to a hi-tech network dominated by the Chinese state or by one of its corporations. And while the key emphasis of China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is on building infrastructure, the Digital Silk Road will underpin BRI strategy every kilometre along the route as China deploys technology to boost its influence.

Whenever we ever feel like comparing ourselves with the Chinese, it might be instructive to take a look at the Digital Silk Road which shows the gigantic scale of Beijing's vision in which they can marry hardware and powerful hi-tech corporations that can take on all-comers. In addition, China's playing for high stakes: a world in which the remnimbis has equal status with the dollar or more as well as for a world where companies like Huawei won't be under threat from the US government that stops sup-

pliers selling essential components. That means hi-tech self-reliance at home and a market abroad for its products. Also, in the coming years, it wants to be the leader in 5G.

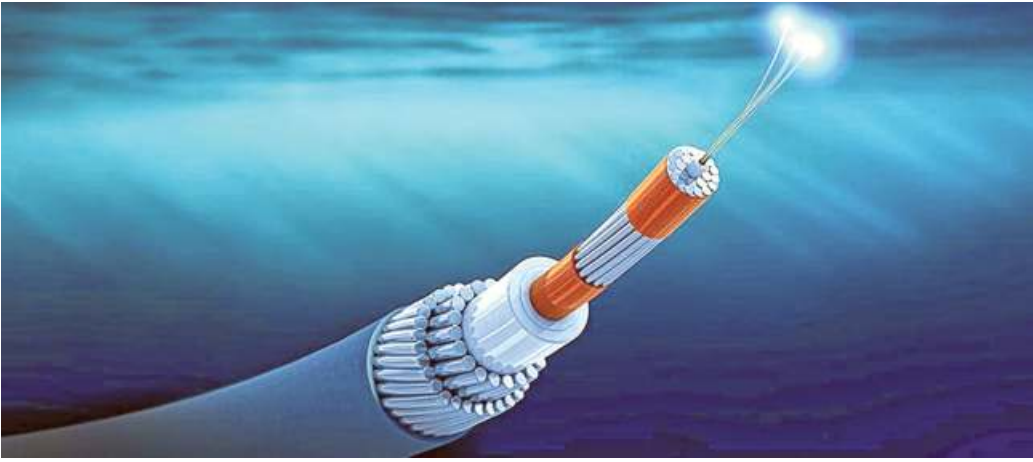
Most importantly, Beijing wants to create conditions under which it, not the US and the Western world, will set the standards for the Internet and surrounding hi-tech environment. Controlling the flow of data will become "increasingly important in shifting the balance of geopolitical power in China's favour," noted a recent paper by Fitch Solutions Macro Research.

Besides the 'Digital Silk Road' consisting of networks of new fibre-optic cables, China has also launched a 'Spatial Information Corridor', consisting of Chinese-backed systems of communications, positioning and observation satellites. Would you like to use a Chinese alternative to GPS? Beidou's Navigation Satellite System will soon be an option in many parts of the world. Beidou has a string of 46 medium-orbit satellites circling the Earth transmitting data to users and will soon be able to offer services globally.

Have the Chinese been able to muscle their way into markets once controlled by the Americans

and the Europeans? Take a look at Huawei Marine which has taken part in 98 projects and laid 59,000 km of undersea cable. A decade ago, it was a small player and now it's got 24 per cent of the undersea cable market.

China's race to build undersea links has led observers to draw comparisons with the British back in the 1850s. Though many in the British government grumbled about the expense, the result was the British controlled the undersea cable market for telegraph and also determined standards to be met by companies from other countries. Incidentally, the British also chose Gwadar as their Indian



Long reach The Chinese have an array of fibre-optic cable projects all over Asia ISTOCK

sub-continent landing point. In the 19th century it was all about telegraph cables. Today it's about fibre-optic cables for the Internet.

The Chinese also have an array of fibre-optic cable projects all over Asia. Early this year, an 820-km fibre-optic cable from Khunjerab in Xinjiang to Rawalpindi became operational. Last year, a 50-km fibre-optic cable from Kerung in China to Rasuwagadi in Nepal ended India's dominance of the Mountain Kingdom's Internet services. China has also laid fibre-optic cables to Myanmar and Kyrgyzstan. Reaching out to other corners of the globe, Huawei recently laid a 3,750 km undersea line from Brazil to Cameroon in Africa.

The Chinese have calculated, just like the British Empire in which trade followed the flag, they must build the infrastructure that will make it easy for their home-grown companies to hold their own against powerful US corporations. That's precisely why US and European companies are worrying about the new powerful challengers emerging both in Africa and Asia.

Even in the Middle East, the Chinese have invested huge amounts in countries like Egypt and the UAE. Some observers believe the mutual interest between the two sides is fuelled by oil — the

Arab countries want to strengthen their links with the country they believe will be their biggest customer in coming years. Similarly, the Chinese want to secure their oil supplies.

Huge opportunities

To be sure, there are opportunities galore all over Asia and Africa. Internet penetration is extremely low in countries like Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos. In the last two years, it's risen steeply in countries like Indonesia and the Philippines just as it has in India. Chinese companies have invested large amounts in these South-East Asian countries. The Chinese companies are also driven by the fact their own market is maturing so they need to move to fast-growth regions.

Leading the way are Chinese giants like the BAT trio, Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent, that are pouring money into all corners of Asia and Africa. Companies like Alibaba have focussed on e-commerce and payments systems. The biggest Chinese venture-capital companies like Qiming Ventures and GGV Capital are opening offices in Singapore and scouting for new opportunities. Western firms say this is an expansion carried out in coordination with the Chinese government.

As the Chinese companies

spread in all directions, questions being raised are whether they will respect Internet freedom or whether they'll want to turn it into a policed zone where the state is supreme, as it is in China. Their Western rivals claim all Chinese corporations are subservient or in informal partnerships with the state. The Americans and Europeans insist the Chinese will change the very nature of the Internet because they prioritise state security and surveillance over all else. Observers see the BRI as being an import vehicle for China to push its goals of becoming a major tech power.

Hence, the moves to block the Chinese firms are accelerating and it's clearly more than just a straightforward corporate battle. These efforts began even before President Donald Trump came to power. The West, led by America, wants to keep ruling the hi-tech roost. China is determined to change this. One international commentator described it this way by saying, "China's task is to build a global coalition of countries that subscribe to its policies and ensure that new laws and norms are in line with its own interests." One thing is certain: the struggle for tech dominance will remain a key source of tension in relations between China and the West.

5 THINGS to WATCH OUT for TODAY

■ **Birla Money**, Mindtree and Federal Bank are among the companies scheduled to announce their results for the recently ended September quarter.

■ **Waryam Singh**, former chairman of PMC Bank, along with Rakesh and Sarang Wadhawan, promoters of Housing Development Infrastructure Limited (HDIL) will be spending their last day under police custody. They were arrested for alleged financial irregularities with caused in the PMC Bank case.

■ **The India** Mobile Congress will come to an end. Top businessmen like Reliance Industries' Chairman Mukesh Ambani and Bharti Enterprises Chairman Sunil Mittal gave the event a miss this time around. Earlier, speaking at the event, Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said that the government was working on a review of the reserve prices for 5G spectrum for the upcoming auctions.

■ **Hindu parties** will begin to present their arguments related to the Ayodhya land dispute to a Supreme Court Bench. This comes two days after the five-judge Bench permitted the Muslim sides to complete the arguments. Earlier, the Uttar Pradesh administration had imposed Section 144 in Ayodhya till December 10 in anticipation of the simmering tensions.

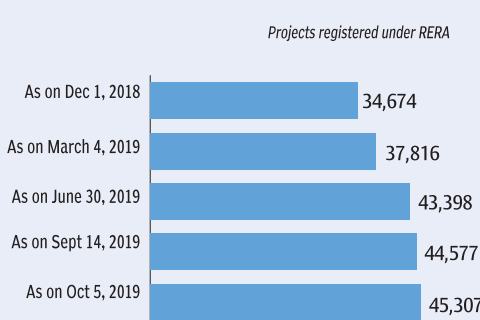
■ **Mercedes-Benz** will launch the G 350d variant of the second-gen G-class in India. This automobile is powered by a 3.0-litre, inline six-cylinder motor. Reports said that the vehicle will be sold as a completely built unit. The model will also be the first non-AMG G-Class in India.

BAVADHARINI K S

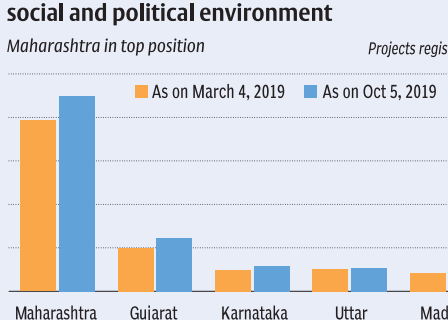
STATISTALK

The Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act (RERA), launched in 2016, still has a long way to go in bringing back buyers' confidence and price rationalisation in the market

RERA project registrations continue to improve



Better compliance in States with favourable social and political environment



But establishment of real estate authority is yet to gain momentum...

Nearly 42 per cent of the States/UTs either have temporary or no authority to monitor real estate transactions

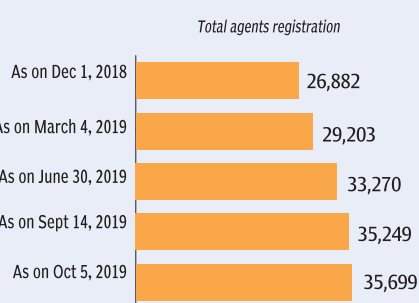
Some of the States with temporarily appointed authority	Some States with no appointed authority
Telangana	West Bengal
Goa	Arunachal Pradesh
Assam	Nagaland
Kerala	Sikkim
Puducherry (UT)	Meghalaya

...establishment of real estate tribunal falls short of expectations

23 of 36 States/UTs do not have permanent tribunal to resolve real estate-related issues

Some States/UTs with temporary tribunal	Some States/UTs with no tribunal
Gujarat	Andhra Pradesh
Telangana	West Bengal
Punjab	Kerala
Uttarakhand	Assam
Jharkhand	Chhattisgarh

Agents registration is slow as well



EASY

ACROSS

- Kingdom, province (5)
- Taken away (7)
- Punctuation mark (5)
- Over-fastidious people (in language etc) (7)
- Legislation (3)
- Followers, attendants (9)
- Comes to a finish (4)
- Fiasco, failure (4)
- Road charge collection point (9)
- Pouch (biol) (3)
- Not clear, hidden (7)
- Bundle of 24 arrows (5)
- Long paces (7)
- Support for canvas (5)

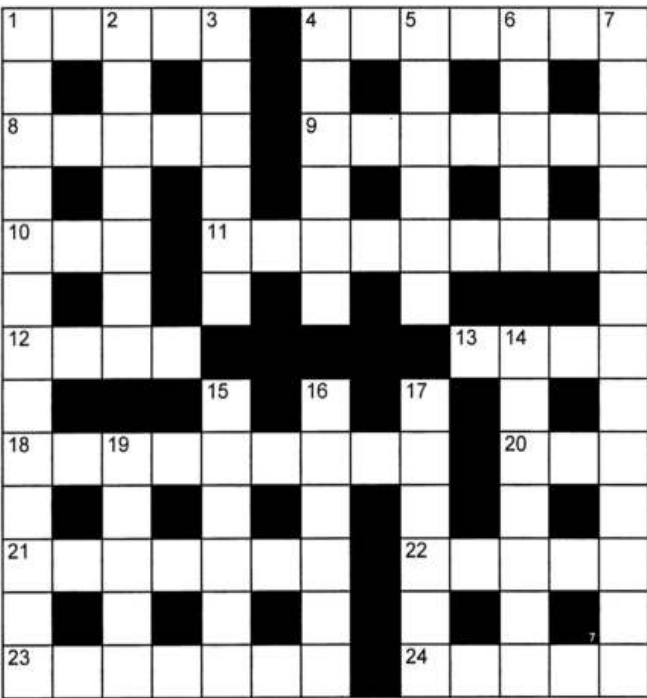
DOWN

- Reminiscences (13)
- Granted (7)
- Style, way of doing (6)
- General impression, opinion (6)
- Brand, mark, car make (6)
- Wax-stemmed match (5)
- Discourteous, not civil (13)
- Gives ear (7)
- Ridiculous (6)
- Puts something on top (6)
- Unscullied (6)
- Defeated contestant (5)

SOLUTION: BL Two-way Crossword 1466

ACROSS 01. Vertiginous 08. Shine 09. Outwear 10. Bristle 11. Askew 12. Engine 14. Attend 18. Floss 19. Onerous 21. Chagrin 23. Briar 24. Deliberated
DOWN 01. Visible 02. Raining 03. Inept 04. Ironed 05. Outlast 06. She 07. Straw 13. Nostril 15. Egotist 16. Desired 17. Hobnob 18. Facts 20. Ember 22. Add

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 1467



NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- Lear turned to capital of Mercia for his kingdom (5)
- Took it away from Dover with me (7)
- One point over another in the large intestine (5)
- Being over-fastidious, they might give it spurs (7)
- The legal profession starts litigation at Westminster (3)
- Star followers put out a green form (9)
- Finishes the day in three ways (4)
- Theatrical failure to get over the bar with Fosbury (4)
- Where to pay road charges to boot Hell, maybe, without East! (9)
- Can't quite dismiss the biologist's pouch (3)
- It's not clear how cub rose out of it (7)
- Bundle made safe around top of haystack (5)
- Takes long steps in Australian trousers (7)
- Some support for the board in school or studio (5)

DOWN

- Things remembered concerning couturiers' fashion ranges (13)
- Permitted nothing to be paid for yet? (7)
- A way to do it with all but end of remnant (6)
- A name for Peter, doing u-turn (6)
- Brand of car that made off with end of large tent (6)
- Match five thrown by the East (5)
- Irreverent and crisp, left dues to be settled (13)
- Pays attention to silent form adopted by leading school (7)
- Very silly, to turn bus in a short road (6)
- Puts something over positions in the field (6)
- Modest version of Cats he arranged (6)
- He gets beaten if he can't find something (5)