

India gets renewables policy right

Low solar, wind tariffs to trigger structural changes



VANDANA GOMBAR

at 750 megawatts (Mw), and located in Rewa, Madhya Pradesh. After a marathon bidding round of over 30 hours, three companies bagged the right to build 250 Mw each at a levelised tariff of ₹3.30 per unit: Mahindra Renewables, Acme Group and Solenergi Power. In the case of wind, five companies will build 250 Mw each at a tariff of ₹3.46 per unit: Mytrah Energy, Green Infra Wind, Inox Wind, Ostro Kutch Wind and Adani Green Energy.

The tariffs indicate three main things.

■ Success of policy: The decision to do away with fixed incentive tariffs decided by regulators and to opt for transparent competitive bidding has been a boon for the country. The benefits have been limited to the solar sector so far. The first auction for wind sounds the death knell for feed-in tariffs in this sector too. Some states had a wind feed-in tariff of over ₹5 per unit, and there was a generation-based incentive paid on top of that. That will be difficult to justify in the days ahead.

■ Electricity mix review: There is a case

for reviewing the energy choices India is making, given how competitive solar and wind power has become in 2017. Leaving aside pithead coal plants, these tariffs would likely be lower than those for the many new coal plants under construction. Offshore wind plants are moving towards being competitive without subsidy support in some parts of Europe. A nuclear power-free policy has been adopted by Germany and

Japan. There are some countries aspiring to get 100 per cent of their power from clean sources. There seems to be a case for revisiting the benefits and costs (including pollution costs) of various sources of power.

■ Structural change: The commercial and industrial users of power which subsidised residential users are moving away from grid-supplied power, and will likely trigger a restructuring of the



COMPARING TARIFFS PER UNIT ₹

Solar	3.30
Wind	3.46
Coal	3.00-5.00
Traded power	2.5

*According to the latest Economic Survey, a break-even rate of ₹4 per unit is needed for most plants, and could be as high as ₹8 for some plants. Pithead coal plants deliver power at the lowest cost.

whole market. Delhi Metro, which is the main procurer of power from the 750-Mw Rewa plant, is installing solar on the rooftop of its stations also to save on the power bill. India's airports too are installing solar power plants because it leads to cost savings. Infosys and Tata Motors are among 88 companies that have committed to source 100 per cent of their power from renewables. Faced with significant leakages of revenue, distribution companies are already seeking tariff hikes for the residential user. What is interesting is that the case for a solar panel on the roof of a residential user would be more compelling if the retail tariffs were higher. It looks like the power market is set to usher in some structural changes.

The government has indicated that future auctions will follow the Rewa solar model, with safeguards built in for investors so as to get the most competitive bids. The country aiming to get the world's lowest bids for solar and wind is Saudi Arabia, which is planning its first tender for 700 Mw — 300 Mw solar and 400 Mw wind — later this year.

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CHINESE WHISPERS

On the 'digi' highway

From the looks of it, various government ministries have taken Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call to make India "digital" really seriously. So after Digishala and Digi-dhan, on Tuesday journalists were invited to the "digi-launch" — mind you, not a plain vanilla launch — of a new programme on e-governance. Starting from the emcee of the programme to the minister in-charge everyone could be heard gushing about the "digi-launch" and its potential for change.

We want London



If the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) sweeps the coming municipal elections in Delhi, India might end up with two Londons. During the course of campaign in the run-up to the elections, Delhi Chief Minister and AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal said he will turn Delhi into London in a one-year time frame

if elected to power. His public commitment follows West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's promise to turn Kolkata into London when she was soliciting public votes in an earlier election. So far, Kolkata has got only a model Big Ben. Kejriwal and Banerjee are often viewed as allies in the Indian political landscape.

Reaching out

Lately, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has revitalised its outreach to journalists. The Indraprastha Vishwa Samavid Kendra, an RSS affiliate, has recently seen a generational change in its leadership. It now has office-bearers in their 30s and 40s. On Tuesday, the centre organised a "Holi Milan" for journalists in New Delhi. The chief guest at the event was J Nand Kumar, RSS's all-India *sah prachar pramukh*, or joint publicity chief. Discussions among RSS office-bearers and journalists focussed around the Uttar Pradesh assembly poll results, and their likely fallout in the eventuality of a Bharatiya Janata Party victory. Given the RSS experience in Gujarat over the last decade, the import of such a development was lost on few among the gathering.

Triggers for digitisation

For easy transition, the government and companies must understand how DeMo and BHIM will change Indian consumer behaviour



M MUNEE

No doubt, India will lead the growth in smartphone market globally. At about 230 million, we are already the second-largest smartphone market in terms of active unique smartphone users. With a low penetration of 20 per cent, India offers a huge potential and already over 150 smartphone brands are competing for a slice of this pie. With the digitisation drive growth will accelerate.

Smartphones have transformed consumer behaviour across the world, and will do in India too. Disruptive innovation changes industries and business models and consumers change their behaviour in tune with such disruptions. The DeMo and BHIM drive, if looked through the disruptive lens, will change Indian consumer behaviour and government and companies must understand this in order to ensure a smooth transition.

Disruption triggers shake-ups on establishment (business or behaviour) and drives massive acceleration of new models or adapters. Smartphones have changed us drastically in the Airbnb and Uber way. Till then, we never trusted strangers but suddenly we happily get a stranger to drive us around, and take a bed in a stranger's house. Going by the success of these two aggregators, and their cut-and-paste Indian avatars Oyo



BIG SCOPE Of the 20 per cent or so Indians who own a smartphone, nearly all use it for internet surfing, chats, social media and for staying connected virtually to the world around them

five broad techno-readiness segments of population. Yet, the pace of technological change can accelerate at unpredictable rates and under such an environment, people will have to take decisions quickly and probably with the emotional sides of their brains when time is constrained. No research will unearth the consumer behaviour at such critical moments of truth when decisions are influenced by the place and situation.

Fundamentally human beings are social animals and we do things, buy things and consume things almost consistently because we copy what we see others do. And Indians are most adept in this as evidenced by our movies, TV series, business models, products and services, and even wardrobes. The smartphone has accelerated this "seeing" and "copying" behaviour with Twitterati, Amazon recommendations and Instagram just as movies shaped many behavioural changes in the past. We copy, we "like" and we "follow", and others follow us. Technology and products may be new but the copying is old.

Bureaucrats and economists talk of Big Data to predict the behaviours, but it is not reliable to find the emotional "whys". The decisions of people are personal, and will be influenced by how they "feel" about an issue or service. No feel, no buy. The analysis of framing, copying and feeling will derive insights to make the right decisions with the digitisation drive. What comes next and how quickly it changes us to copy and act, and the insights of what motivates those behaviours will come from techniques that will remain the same just as what makes people buy the smartphone being the same.

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Internet access now bank online. They also use e-payments such as Apple Pay and PayPal for everyday purchases. And they are using the phones for all the other everyday use: Groceries, restaurants, table booking, ticket booking of all types, and even looking for new homes to buy at online listing services.

It may sound counterintuitive but with smartphones teenagers are moving away from TV viewing to phones and social media. This has become a nightmare for media planners and they are all talking of programmatic media buying these days. Many people will say Instagram has low penetration worldwide with just over 300 million users and 70 million or so photos and videos shared daily, but it is indeed changing the way

consumers are documenting their lives. The proliferation of connected devices such as the Gear, iWatch, Fitbit and other wearable fitness trackers, Wi-Fi-enabled thermostats and smoke detectors, and GPS-enabled pet trackers may be debatable, but these devices will indeed change the "how" and "what" questions of consumer behaviour. If we understand the "whys", we will find better use of the Internet of Things and artificial intelligence for faster penetration.

Perhaps not everything will change, as we believe. The things that influence the consumers' decision-making will probably remain unchanged. These influences include environmental, social and personal factors and they fundamentally do not change as we have seen with the

BUSINESS LIFE

How crazy is SpaceX's moon mission?

Unlike during the Cold War, the competition now is between start-up firms

ADAM MINTER

If all goes as planned, two tourists will crawl into a space capsule at the end of next year and blast off for a weeklong trip to the moon and back. It's the ultimate couple's vacation, offered exclusively by Elon Musk's SpaceX, which announced the venture last week. It may also serve as the starting gun for a new and very different space race.

Unlike during the Cold War, the competition this time around isn't between countries. Instead, it's between start-up companies like SpaceX, on the one hand, and government space agencies and traditional contractors on the other. The immediate prize is the moon. But longer-term victory will go to whoever speeds up the pace of exploration while driving down the costs. In that race, the private sector will always have an advantage — and the sooner the US government accepts that, the better.

Since Americans last visited the moon in 1972, NASA's human exploration programme has been hindered by poor planning and shifting priorities. In 2005, President George W Bush announced an ambitious plan for new lunar missions that would (over time, in theory) reduce the cost of exploration. Five years later, Barack Obama's administration cancelled that plan in favour of a poorly defined "Journey to Mars".

The key hardware for that venture includes a space capsule named Orion and a massive rocket called the Space Launch System (SLS). They are costing over \$3 billion a year to develop. Yet, the Orion capsule has flown exactly once, in 2014, and the SLS hasn't flown at all. The first manned Orion mission isn't expected until 2021 at the earliest. Any future missions would theoretically happen about once a year, but no one



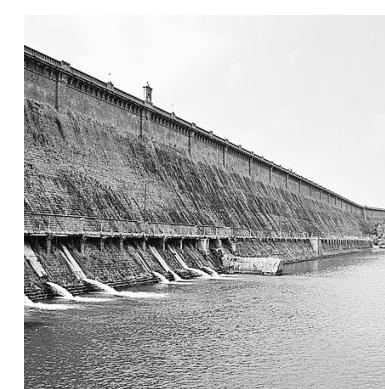
A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket is readied for launch in Florida last month. Development of the Falcon 9 cost just \$390 million, compared to the \$1.7 billion to \$4 billion that NASA would've spent on the same project

LETTERS

Neglect of dams

With reference to "Dams in troubled waters" (March 7), it has been rightly pointed out that a majority of the dams in India has now become obsolete in terms of construction and technology. In India dams have always been shrouded with some controversy or the other, mostly related to their construction and the displacement caused to the neighbouring habitats. What had been termed as "temples of the modern India" by former PM Jawaharlal Nehru have transformed into "ancient" temples with the passage of time. Primarily, two attempts have already been made by the government of India to come up with a Dam Safety Bill, once under the United Progressive Alliance in 2010 and the other under the ruling National Democratic Alliance regime in 2014. However, the two efforts have not fructified till date. Once passed, this Bill would fix accountability in case any disaster strikes. Moreover, it will help create a mechanism for surveillance, inspection and operation of all dams to ensure their safe functioning.

In addition to getting a law on safety of dams, India has been implementing a Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project, a World Bank-assisted programme started in 2011 and implemented in Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Tamil Nadu. This project involves rehabilitation work of 223 dams, of which 68 cases have already been cleared for rehabilitation. The present situation should be taken serious note of as the aftermath of dam failure is already known to Indian citizens. For instance, Bhakra dam, which is located in Himachal Pradesh and is one of the biggest in India and the third largest reservoir, is more than half a century old. This region lies in the seismic zone 4, which is a highly earthquake prone. Thus, in case of any natural calamity the dam has the potential to practically wash out the cities of Chandigarh and Ludhiana and parts of Haryana and Delhi. Thus, the situation



warrants serious government attention.

Ankita Kalia Chandigarh

Pass draft Bill

With reference to "Dams in troubled waters" (March 7), in 2010, the then Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Water Resources, Pawan Bansal, had introduced the Dam Safety Bill that sought to provide for surveillance, inspection and operation of all dams of certain parameters to ensure their safe functioning. A National Committee on Dam Safety was envisaged whose functions included (a) monitoring the functioning of state or non-state dam safety organisations (b) evaluating dam safety procedures in various states and suggesting ways to improve safety consistent with international practices and

Indian conditions (c) evolving a comprehensive dam safety management approach, and (d) advising on specific matters of dam safety to the Centre or state governments. Further, every state government and owner of specified dams was required to compile all technical documentation concerning hydrology, dam foundation, structural engineering, and watershed upstream of dam. Unfortunately, the Bill lapsed amidst the parliamentary pandemonium and the new legislation never saw the light of day.

The third National Dam Safety Conference, organised by the Central Water Commission recently, recognised the challenges encountered in the ongoing Dam Safety Rehabilitation and Improvement Project's implementation. While the discussion of strategies for effectively managing the uncertainties associated with dam construction, operation and maintenance are welcome, the same need statutory backing for their effective implementation. It is time the government negotiated the floor of the House with the stakeholders concerned and engaged in a meaningful discussion on its draft Bill on dam safety. The country can ill-afford devastation due to dam-related mishaps.

Shreyans Jain New Delhi

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A legitimate deal

There is need for a fresh look at the Tata–DoCoMo agreement

In an application to the Delhi High Court last week, Tata Sons said it had no objection to the enforcement of a \$1.18-billion international arbitral award favouring its telecom joint venture partner NTT DoCoMo. Tata Sons has already deposited the cash with the Delhi High Court and if the court sanctions the application, the money will move to DoCoMo's account, which will allow the Japanese telecom giant to transfer its 26.5 per cent stake in Tata Teleservices to Tata Sons or any of its investment companies. DoCoMo, in turn, has said that "full satisfaction" of the award through the court's judgment will enable it to consider reinvestment of a part of the amount in India under a new "cooperative relationship" with Tata Sons. The settlement between the two groups was preceded by DoCoMo initiating legal proceedings against Tata Sons in the London Court of International Arbitration on the ground that the Tatas had failed to abide by a 2009 agreement. It won the matter in June 2016. Subsequently, the Japanese firm moved the London Commercial Court, the Southern District Court in New York and the Delhi High Court to enforce the arbitral award. The issue also became the subject matter of a high-voltage spat between the former chairman of Tata Sons, Cyrus Mistry, and Ratan Tata and culminated in the ouster of Mr Mistry.

While the court is slated to hear the matter on Wednesday and the exact contours of the deal are still awaited, there is a case for approving the new settlement formula, as the argument that it is in contravention of existing policy does not hold water. Here's why. In 2009, the Japanese telecom giant invested roughly \$2.6 billion in order to buy its stake in Tata Teleservices at a time when there was no clear law against options embedded in such an investment. When the investment was made, the agreement had a "put option", which meant that when DoCoMo wanted to sell its stake, it had the right to sell it at either "fair value" or half the "acquisition price" if certain targets such as the number of subscribers and towers and financial milestones like EBITDA and profits were not met in five years. By 2014, five years after it made the investment, DoCoMo wanted to exit, thus exercising its put option.

The problem arose as by that time the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had come out with a clear set of rules that banned any exit by a foreign equity investor at an assured price. But the central bank itself wanted to allow the payment, because it was a question of an Indian company honouring an agreement, and sought the finance ministry's advice in December 2014. The latter, however, turned down the suggestion on the ground that a policy change could not be made for a single company. The matter came up once again after the arbitration order, and again, permission was denied by RBI.

The fact is that when the Tata–DoCoMo agreement was signed, there were no clear rules that barred pre-set buyback pricing. In that sense what DoCoMo signed was a legitimate business agreement at that point of time and, hence, there is a case for an exception being made. Or, RBI should say that the order is only prospective and does not apply to existing arrangements, which would clarify the principle and not need a one-off exception. This must be done at the earliest as a reassurance to foreign investors that the government believes in transparent and good-faith dispute resolution.

Wrong call by the EC

A law against buying votes will be impossible to implement

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Nasim Zaidi has repeated the commission's hope that the government will accord it the power to countermand an entire election if it detects an attempt to "bribe" voters. Mr Zaidi has said that seizures of cash and liquor during the ongoing Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Goa, Uttarakhand and Manipur are three times as much as was seized in the 2012 iterations of the polls. This is a signifier of the magnitude of the problem, even after the demonetisation of 86 per cent of outstanding currency in November 2016 was supposed to have crimped the ability of political parties to curry favour with voters in this manner. Nobody can thus doubt the extent of this behaviour and that it has become unfortunately integral to the process of electoral politics in India. While the CEC's frustration is thus understandable, it is nevertheless the case that his demand for extended powers to check this phenomenon must be denied.

This is not the first time that Mr Zaidi has sought these powers for the Election Commission. Although the CEC has only a few months left to run in his term, he clearly is convinced of the importance of this electoral reform. Last year, too, Mr Zaidi reportedly suggested that Representation of the People Act be amended to specifically grant the EC the power to cancel elections where credible information existed that voters had been "bribed". The government resisted the pressure to introduce such an amendment then, and it should continue to do so. The problem is that "voter bribery" is too slippery a concept to be enshrined in law. What is the difference, in strict ethical terms, between handing out money before or after an election? Between promising direct state transfers targeted at possible voters and paying them out of party coffers? Why is one bribery and the other legitimate policy? In other words, voters can be "bribed" in different ways at different times. Furthermore, is it not disrespect to the wisdom of the electorate to suppose that they are only likely to vote for the person who is "bribing" them? For many poor Indians, their vote is a crucial and large part of their worldly wealth. They treat it with respect and deploy it to their greatest advantage. This has long been understood as a facet of Indian democracy, which took root even in a newly free India that was largely uneducated. To suppose that voters are easily bribed into giving away their only lever of power is essentially disrespectful of Indians' ability to make rational decisions.

In any case, if voters can be "bribed" in different ways at different times, a law against such bribery will become prohibitively difficult to implement. Proof of bribery will be difficult to find; at best, even if such proof is forthcoming, linking it directly to a candidate will require lengthy investigation when set against the compressed time-scale of election campaigns. And surely, elections cannot be countermanded on the basis of mere accusations. Altogether, while Mr Zaidi's concerns are well taken, the solution to the problem of money in politics lies elsewhere, and not through poorly conceived law-making.



Geopolitical impact of Trump presidency

While realigning to changes in the US, India needs to consider whether the Trump administration can actually deliver

It is nearly two months since Donald Trump became the president of the United States. There has been rising anxiety among allies, friends and adversaries, too, about what may be in store over the next several years of this administration, given the uncertainty and unpredictability which has so far marked its early days. The US, even if it is in relative decline, has a very large global footprint, both in economic and military terms. Decisions made in Washington, even if they are driven by domestic factors, have an impact on countries far and near; hence, the need to assess carefully the political drama that is being played out there. This is particularly important for India, not only because of the consequences of specific policies, such as enhanced restrictions on visas for Indian information technology (IT) professionals, but also second-order effects, for example, the recent racist attacks on Indian citizens and Indian-Americans in the general anti-immigration sentiment, sharpened by the both the rhetoric and policies adopted by Mr Trump. On a larger geopolitical canvas, the emerging picture from an Indian perspective is mixed and still somewhat fluid. Nevertheless, it may be useful to mark some of its less ambiguous features.

Mr Trump's world view has three consistent elements.

One relates to China. Each US administration since the end of the Cold War has seen China as an adversary but also a partner in addressing specific regional and global issues. The US' China strategy has

thus been a mix of confrontation and cooperation, but under Mr Trump, the confrontation aspect has gained sharper salience. This is both in the area of trade and investment relations as well as the security equation. While there may be tactical shifts, such as Mr Trump walking back from his questioning the one-China policy, we should expect heightened US-China contention.

Two, counter-terrorism – and in Mr Trump's view, this is Islamic terrorism – will be centre stage in this administration. The persistence with the visa ban on citizens of several Muslim countries, despite legal challenges, is clearly indicative of this. One should expect increased US pressure on countries that are seen as providing havens to terrorist groups or where threats from terrorist groups are endemic. The downside to this may well be an increase in terrorist attacks on the American homeland and this may set into motion a dynamic that confirms sentiments across the Islamic world that the US is against Islam. But for the present, a focus on counter-terrorism may introduce a degree of caution in countries such as Pakistan which have been using cross-border terrorism as an instrument of state policy.

Three, Mr Trump wants to re-set US relations with Russia and this makes sense in terms of the first two objectives. The crystallisation of a China-Russia strategic alignment is not in the interest of the US and the West in general and Russia is not a military threat to them. Russia is also a credible ally in the fight against jihadi terrorism represented by the Islamic State (IS) and Al-



SHYAM SARAN

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These three elements are positive in India's geopolitical perspective even if they prove, for the moment, to be of tactical or less than enduring significance. Any development which constrains Chinese room for manoeuvre should be welcome to India. If the recently announced increase in US military expenditures increases the robustness of US presence in Asia-Pacific, this may slow down the Chinese penetration of the Indian Ocean maritime space. We get a little more breathing space to beef up our own capabilities. The growing Chinese pressure on Japan, South Korea, Southeast Asian countries and Australia may diminish in the short term. However, China's footprint in the Asia-Pacific and beyond will continue to expand, barring an elemental crisis in that country. Thus, India and other countries in the region, who have reason to be concerned about the growth in Chinese power, should actively work together to cope with a world in which US' role on our shared region may diminish over time.

A more focused and energetic US counter-terrorism policy will similarly be of advantage to India but only as long as it does not degenerate into Islamophobia and the targeting of Muslims indiscriminately. In the latter case, a secular country like India, with a large Muslim minority, may find itself in a very uncomfortable and perhaps even an untenable situation. For the present, however, there is more scope for strengthening counter-terrorist cooperation with the US and any pressure on Pakistan on this score is welcome.

On Russia, any improvement of US-Russia relations should be welcome from India's point of view, given our own long-standing partnership with this friendly country. Our growing relations with the US have created some apprehensions in Russia, as its own relations with the US and the West in general, have deteriorated. Its closeness to China has similarly created concerns in India. This could change for the better once US-Russia relations improve. However, this is one element of the Trump strategy which seems to be coming unstuck and we need to take that into account in our calculations. This means that we need to handle our relations with Russia without the collateral benefit of improved US-Russia relations.

While seeking to leverage these elements in Mr Trump's foreign policy, we should be mindful of another likely and negative contingency. Irrespective of what these shifts may imply for India and the larger geopolitical landscape, a great deal will depend upon whether this administration finally clear the decks and settle down to be able to deliver on its agenda. Prolonged domestic political turmoil, the growing polarisation in American society and the inconsistency in policy making may have a bigger impact by making it difficult for the administration to give attention to external issues that require urgent and well-considered attention. An absent US may be more problematic for the world than an inconsistent one.

The writer is a former foreign secretary, and currently senior fellow, CPR

How well does your city fare?

The findings of the fourth Annual Survey of India's City-Systems (2016), conducted by Bengaluru-based Janaagraha, are highly educative, while remaining within the drift of insights available in earlier reports. They help us understand which way our leading cities are headed.

Do leading Indian cities (21 are surveyed and their scores juxtaposed against those of two global leaders, London and New York) have the ability to renew themselves, have plans worth the name to help them get ahead? To the question, "Does your city have a decentralised system of spatial development planning?", the score for 18 out of 21 is poor (3-4 on a scale of 1-10), with London and New York scoring 9.8 each. It is just as well that there is not much of planning because the ability to "implement spatial development plans successfully" is virtually zero, with all cities except one scoring less than one.

Even without much planning, does a city have adequate funds to invest in "public infrastructure and services"? Ahmedabad, Mumbai, Surat, Ranchi and Delhi all score in the four to five range, with Bengaluru, Bhopal, Dehradun, Ludhiana, and Raipur bringing up the rear with scores below two. This overall score is made up of several factors. One is how much of its own resources make up the total expenditure. In this, Hyderabad leads (77), followed by Mumbai (6.6) and Pune (6). Cities which are themselves broke are Patna (1.7), followed by Lucknow (1.8). Interestingly, London scores a poor 4.6 and New York 6.8. So if a city is important, the system will find the necessary resources for it. Per capita spending gives an idea of whether a city spends as much as it should, and on this, the leaders are Mumbai (10) and Thiruvananthapuram (9.4). The middle order consists of Chennai, Pune, Surat and Ahmedabad (in the four to five range).

Aside from how much a city spends, the key issues

are whether it is accountable, efficient and transparent in its spending. Efficiency is partly reflected by the ability to stick to budget timelines. On this, the leaders are



VALUE FOR MONEY

SUBIR ROY

Ahmedabad, Delhi, Mumbai, Pune and Surat – all scoring a full 10. On accountability, absolutely no India city is mandated to have its accounts independently or externally audited. And just three cities put their annual accounts in the public domain – Bhubaneswar, Kanpur and Ranchi.

Human resources are the key enabler in getting the best out of spending. In this, overall, Mumbai leads the pack, followed by Kolkata, Pune and Delhi (in that order). Within this, only three cities have adequate staffing strength. Delhi leads with a perfect score of 10, followed by

Mumbai and then Kolkata. A critical related issue is whether urban local bodies can draw skilled officials from a dedicated cadre whose members specialise in the running of local bodies. As many as 10 cities do – Bengaluru, Bhopal, Bhubaneswar, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai, Patna, Pune and Ranchi. With so many well-regarded cities in this list, a municipal cadre emerges as a key enabler in delivering quality local government.

Despite keeping away from the "smart cities" lingo (the phrase does not appear in the entire report), the study takes a look at cities' ability to make good use of information technology (IT). Pune leads the seven cities (the rest are Bengaluru, Bhopal, Chennai, Delhi, Mumbai and Surat) that overall make some use of IT. The level of use of IT by cities is, however, very patchy. Only one city, Chandigarh, has a digital governance road map, and only Pune puts its schemes and services on its website. Citizens' participation in urban governance through a local body's website is minimal.

A critical element determining the success of urban local bodies is whether they are truly democratic and whether the elected representatives have adequate pow-

ers. All states have state election commissions and elections to urban local bodies have been held every five years in most states, except Bengaluru and Hyderabad. On city governments having clout and legitimacy, key elements are whether the mayor is elected directly and has a term of five years. Altogether 14 cities have mayors with five-year terms. But seven metros and large cities – Bengaluru, Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Chandigarh, Pune and Surat – are missing from the list. Only six of the 21 cities covered have directly elected mayors – Bhopal, Dehradun, Kanpur, Lucknow, Raipur and Ranchi. Note that none of the metros figure in this list. Not a single mayor has the power to appoint the municipal commissioner or the chief executive of the local body.

A yearly study like this offers a useful benchmark to gauge how a city has fared over a period. During the three-year period 2014-16, among the 21 cities covered, the one that has improved its rank the most is Hyderabad (+12), followed by Bhubaneswar (+10), Kanpur (+7), Pune (+6), Mumbai (+5), Chennai (+4), Bengaluru and Ranchi (both +2) and Lucknow (+1). The cities that have lost the most in terms of rank are Surat (-10), Raipur and Jaipur (both -9), Patna (-7), Delhi and Ahmedabad (both -4), Bhopal (-3), and Kolkata and Dehradun (both -2), and Lucknow (-1).

The great success story in urban India for the period is clearly Bhubaneswar. Correspondingly, the city that has remained consistently at the bottom of the league is Chandigarh (21st in all three years). At first blush, this seems counterintuitive. Independent India's foremost planned city, designed by Le Corbusier, which looks so orderly and posh, scores very poorly in "decentralised system of spatial development planning" (never went beyond its first blueprint?). On the other hand, chaotic, messy and congested Kolkata does well on all criteria but particularly so in "empowerment and legitimate political representation". Thiruvananthapuram leading the league table (scores well on all counts), followed by Hyderabad (improved the most) and Chennai (also near the top and improved substantially), will not surprise anybody.

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Veerappan: Chasing the legend



BOOK REVIEW

ANAND SANKAR

The legend of Koose Muniswamy Veerappan is such that any story of any aspect of his life is bound to be a gripping read, and it always starts with his simply fabulous moustache on the cover. This is a tale that will be told for many generations. Every narration will add its own bit of intrigue and this one by K Vijay Kumar, the IPS officer who led the Tamil Nadu Police Special Task Force that finally gunned down the forest brigand down on October 18, 2004, is

no different.

You would expect a book by a professionally distinguished officer who had been involved in the hunt for Veerappan for more than a decade to answer a lot of questions and put a lot of conspiracies to rest. Alas, this is an incredibly tame effort, made worse by the fact that the officer could have been more frank since he has now retired from service.

The book begins as a standard autobiography of an IPS officer, from selection to his various postings. The author highlights the facts that he was among the first batch of the central government's Special Protection Group and the Tamil Nadu Police's Close Protection Team, meant to guard VIPs. He gets chosen for these posts, he says, because of his shooting skills and his organisational ability. But it

soon becomes apparent that the author is besotted by the enigma of Veerappan, and his life story is soon entwined with the legend of the brigand.

Where do you begin with Veerappan? It is extremely difficult to pin him down. Elephant poacher, sandalwood smuggler, local mafioso, insurgent leader... The beauty was that he was sometimes one of those at the same time. The author honestly admits that he is at a loss to pin down what actually drove Veerappan to do what he did. What emerges is a very detailed caricature linked inseparably to the man, the moustache and the persona.

Although you only end up with conjecture on what went on in Veerappan's mind, you have to give the author credit for his methodical, factual accounts

of all the various incidents of violence that catapulted Veerappan to page one news from the depths of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve in south India. In a rare feat, the author has gone back to the archives of the Karnataka and Tamil Nadu Police Special Task Force (K- and TN-STF), to dig out after-action reports of famous incidents, such as the killing of IFS officer P Srinivas, IPS officer T Harikrishna and Sub-Inspector Shaheed Ahmed. These incidents brought Veerappan to the notice of the world, and you can read about these encounters in forensic detail.

Reams are also devoted to Veerappan's zenith – the kidnap of Kannada superstar Rajkumar – but there is precious little here that has not been dissected by the new media.

Though not quite as forensic in analysis, the book also presents a good idea of how Veerappan managed to escape the long arm of the law for almost two decades. It is tragic to read of ambushes in the mid-1990s when the

state police forces are found to be woefully unprepared to face a cunning adversary who is intimately familiar with the local lay of the land. It is rather strange that the police forces never sent an SOS to the Indian Army or other central armed paramilitary forces, which had vast experience of fighting counter insurgency battles in Kashmir and the Northeast by then, to share knowledge that could have saved lives. Even the few central forces who were rushed in to combat Veerappan find themselves out of depth. But as time wears on, the efforts of the police forces begin to pay off and the end game nears.

One glaring failure of the book is that it never treads near politically sensitive territory. What kind of political patronage did Veerappan have? For years the author was known to be close to one side of the political divide in Tamil Nadu – the AIADMK, which was then led by J Jayalalithaa. There is barely any mention of attempts made to pin down Veerappan when the other party, the

DMK, led by M Karunanidhi, was in power. This is the party that is accused of being soft on Veerappan. You would assume the author would take this opportunity to give his take on the patronage that the brigand supposedly enjoyed, but he plays it very safe, only going as far as mentioning an influential "Mr X", who was the key apparently to bringing down Veerappan.

The endgame begins with an elaborate intelligence game, almost like catching Osama Bin Laden. It ends with Veerappan being caught in a hail of bullets with