

Solar Power Calls for New Accounting

Meet some cost from outside the power sector

Writing on this page on Wednesday, Swaminathan Aiyar cautioned against rapid escalation of solar power capacity without looking at what it means for overall power costs and viability of coal-based and even older-generation, higher-cost solar projects, as lower-cost new solar capacity comes on stream. There is sense in heeding this caution. True, solar power costs, complete with the cost of storage, tend to be compared with thermal power costs without adding on two elements of cost implicit in thermal power: the costs of pollution and the cost of extending the grid, which could be avoided in the case of solar installations in remote areas meant for local distribution. Even so, what the article brings out starkly is the conceptual deficiencies in integrating solar into the power mix without causing financial disruption.

Integrating solar power calls for a system of accounting different from that of commercially charged tariffs. In the case of thermal power, the costs of pollution and greenhouse effects besides the cost of bridging gaps in the grid to transfer thermal power to remote areas need to be factored in. In the case of solar, the costs of generation, storage and added investments to make the grid technically capable of absorbing distributed generation of solar power without frequency disruption need to be taken into account. The costs of potentially lower capacity utilisation of thermal power on account of being substituted with solar should also be factored in. These notional costs have to be compared to determine the merit order of dispatch. The difference between the cost to the consumer of choosing power sources based on such normative and conventional commercial modes of accounting must be borne by the government, rather than by the power sector. This is the cost of meeting India's climate-change commitments and promoting a solar power industry, which could yield long-term competitive advantages.

Solar generation and storage technologies are poised to change dramatically. India must both participate in and take advantage of that change.

Judicial Dysfunction Calls for a New Fix

Members of India's higher judiciary sentencing one another to jail terms is a clear symptom of dysfunction. It does nothing to enhance India's ease of doing business ranking. This calls for a fix. On Tuesday, the Supreme Court ordered the arrest of Calcutta High Court judge C S Karnan, sentenced him to six months' incarceration for contempt of court, and sought to gag media from carrying any statement by Justice Karnan, who immediately filed a counter-order against the gag. Nothing like this has ever happened in India's judicial system before. In the past, Justice Karnan, originally from the Madras court, has accused at least 20 fellow judges in top courts of graft and, more recently, ordered the arrest of six Supreme Court judges, including Chief Justice J S Khehar.

Justice Karnan claims he is being persecuted for speaking truth to power and because he is a Dalit. Incidentally, he has never withdrawn his original graft charges against the top judiciary, and faces no charges himself. The only things his fellow judges can pin on him is a charge of 'mental instability' and 'contempt of court'. So far, Justice Karnan has repudiated a medical test, arrest and all charges made against him by the Supreme Court. It looks a mess, but could be a blessing in disguise.

India lacks an efficient system to investigate and prosecute judicial misdemeanour. Impeachment in Parliament, a politically overlaid option, has not worked well in the past. Here is an alternative: let a body of judges and lawyers try any judge accused of impropriety in open court, hearing all evidence, with media reporting. This trial will be neither kangaroo court, nor a chat behind closed doors. Justice Karnan, whatever the truth of his allegations, has probably opened the door in that direction. The status quo will not do.

The transformational power of good restrooms is being underestimated

Swish Toilets for a Swachh Bharat

Toilets have been flush with controversy in India of late, and while no one disputes their indispensability, there are definite differences over form and utility. That these are also important social markers is also evident as bathrooms at all levels have become indicators of status — or lack thereof. However, one benefit of public toilets is yet to be properly exploited in the country: as a tourist attraction. Not merely in terms of a basic facility to offer visitors but as destinations in themselves. The example of a public restroom in Manhattan's Bryant Park is indicative: 3,000 visitors queue up every day for the privilege of using it. The \$280,000 bill for the renovation seems well worth it as the lure of piped classical music, original art on the walls and fresh flowers on marble washbasin counters — besides, of course, state-of-the-art sanitaryware — have proved irresistible for locals and out-of-towners. Sponsorships and special events have even made the luxe lavatories self-paying too.

Indian authorities should examine how these washrooms have been successfully posited as the symbol of the regeneration of the park from a dirty, crime-infested patch to a clean, green bower. The benefits of building or refurbishing some restrooms in India along those lines to showcase similar transformations is obvious.

India needs to avoid seeing itself in China's crosshairs and denying itself of OBOR's opportunities

No Fire-Breathing Dragon



Kai Xue

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will not be among the 28 world leaders to attend the Belt and Road Initiative on May 14-15 in Beijing to further One Belt, One Road (Obor), Chinese President Xi Jinping's apex international economic initiative to build connectivity in Eurasia. It appears Delhi will boycott the event.

This, however, shouldn't come as a surprise, since every major infrastructure project by China in South Asia is regarded in Delhi with suspicion. The extension of a rail line to Nepal is perceived as an attempt to lure away a buffer state. A series of new port projects across the Indian Ocean are taken to encircle India. And, most importantly, the headline-grabbing grand corridor to run through Pakistan has offended Delhi's principal of territorial integrity.

The decision to not participate in the Obor summit shows that the bilateral trust deficit is palpable. But Delhi closes the door without having inquired into China's motives and context for underlying actions.

Without appreciating the secondary context, any view of China's aims misses the mark. By 'secondary', one means the geostrategic, 'race relations', and commercial imperatives driving Chinese state policy. India should first consider the three 'second factors', a handy approach for summing up China's leading motives in India's neighbourhood. And it should also dispel the misconception of a China

determined to prevent India's rise by using Pakistan and other neighbours as tools in a grand strategy to undermine India.

The first 'second factor' lies in the \$82 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that is devoted to constructing electricity-generation capacity and transportation projects. A major project route runs from Gwadar on the coast of the Indian Ocean to Xinjiang in western China, through Pakistan-administered Kashmir.

China imports seven million barrels of oil a day. This cargo has to travel a perilous distance. And in light of South China Sea tensions, conflict between China and the US appears possible. Therefore, the prospect of the US Navy blockading China-bound shipping at the narrow Strait of Malacca is deeply concerning.

No Corridor of Power

By building a significantly shorter and more reliable route through Pakistan, trade can continue during such a conflict. The corridor is slated to function as a second coastline when connected by rail to Xinjiang, which borders India and Pakistan. Creating economic prosperity in Pakistan and a line of communication go hand in hand for China to diversify its options to remedy the greatest geostrategic vulnerability facing China.

The second 'race' refers to the Uighurs, a people residing primarily in the southwest part of Xinjiang. They form a Caucasoid Muslim minority in a country 99% Mongoloid. Extremist Uighurs conduct an insurgency in Xinjiang that has intensified since a 2009 riot instigated by Uighurs in Urumqi, the provincial capital. From there, the violence has spread. In 2013, a Uighur suicide bomber drove into crowds in Tiananmen Square.

While their sympathisers cite cultural and religious oppression as a cause for insurgency, the root of the



O come all ye faithful

ir restlessness is like the violence waged by Manipuris in the similarly peripheral Indian northeast. These groups have grievances, but their insurrections are grounded ultimately in a wish to be free from rule by another ethnic race.

To win the hearts and minds of Uighurs and defeat the insurgency, the state spends extravagant sums to build infrastructure in Xinjiang. Two years ago, a 1,904-km high-speed rail line was built, allowing passengers to jump from one desert outpost to another at speeds of 250 km an hour for as little as ₹500. Since 2009, at least 11 railways have been under construction or completed in Xinjiang.

The spurge on infrastructure makes no commercial sense. But no amount can be spared to defeat insurgency and ensure stability. India has interpreted this huge job creation-through-infrastructure programme near its border as a programme designed to deploy troops quickly to the border, justifying India's ongoing, unilateral military build-up in border regions with China.

The last 'second factor' refers to the continental markets opened by connectivity. The lifeblood of China's economic growth hinges upon offering a good bargain to the world's consumers. To sustain export growth, in-

tense efforts are being made to build transport routes via 14 neighbouring countries. These links are planned to go well beyond next-door neighbours and open the way to market opportunities in new continents.

The Train Starts Here

For instance, in Kazakhstan, the New Eurasian Land Bridge is a rail line that enables the running of the Yiwu-London train, an 18-day freight service that ran its inaugural journey this January from China's east coast to London. A planned trans-Himalayan railway extension from Tibet to Kathmandu will tunnel through Everest, opening another continent-sized market.

Understanding the urge to secure a second coast, placate the 'second race', and foster markets in second continents is crucial for India to put into context the CPEC, 'String of Pearls' and the infrastructure-spending spree in borderlands.

Only by appreciating these vital regional interests of China can India avoid the misconception of seeing itself in China's crosshairs, leading to undue insecurity and self-denial of Obor's opportunities.

The writer is a corporate lawyer in Beijing

Creating economic prosperity in Pakistan and a line of communication go together for China to diversify its options to remedy geostrategic vulnerability

FBI DIRECTOR FIRED

Easy Comey, Easy Gone



R K Raghavan

Tuesday's dismissal of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) director James Comey by US President Donald Trump was true to the character of a bully CEO rather than a leader. After exulting last year over Comey's revelations on Hillary Clinton's 'email transgressions', Trump was now reportedly incensed at the FBI prying into his 'Russian connections'.

All this smells of a cover-up, à la Watergate. Comey has already demanded the immediate appointment of an independent prosecutor. This seems unlikely with Republican dominance in the Congress. Nevertheless, separate investigations by the two committees — by the House and by the Senate Intelligence Committee, before whom Comey had given evidence last week about Trump's

alleged Russian business connections — is an irritant to the president.

The FBI director enjoys a tenure of 10 years — two presidencies — and he is a Senate appointee. Interestingly, his sacking does not need Senate ratification. The last instance of an FBI dismissal was in 1983 of director William Sessions on ethical grounds when Bill Clinton was in office.

Clinton later went on to appoint a Republican, Louis Freeh. However, the president would go on to suffer the ignominy of being investigated by his appointee in the Monica Lewinsky episode.

The same Democrats, who castigated Comey last year for going public over Hillary Clinton's mishandling of classified emails as US Secretary of State and her unauthorised use of a private mail server, are now burning incense at Comey's altar: They believe that Trump's action was 'Nixonian', and that Comey has been wronged grievously.

Notwithstanding his new-found admirers, Comey has given a lot of ammunition to both political parties in the US. During the critical last few months of the presidential campaign last year, Comey went to town



You're fired

with the 'Hillary probe'. He justified this by saying that if he did not go public on this, he would be accused of favouring Clinton. Soon, he disclosed that the investigation did not reveal any mens rea or culpability on her part requiring regular charges in a court of law.

This and subsequent flip-flops in matters of investigation did a lot of damage to Comey's till-then unblemished reputation. It is unfortunate that such a promising career has ended eight years too early.

The million-dollar question is how long will the FBI remain without a director. If Trump appoints a weak acolyte, suspicions that he is trying

to bury his indiscretions will only get strengthened. Whether he will take a chance by appointing a professional with formidable reputation for non-partisanship and personal integrity is being speculative.

One name given the rounds is former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani. He is ambitious but driven by an ego that could further dent the FBI's already bruised image.

What is the lesson here for India's version of the FBI, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI)? With two of its former chiefs under investigation, the CBI needs to do a lot to repair the damage to its own reputation. Its head will have to speak less in public and spend more time at the desk to be industrious and scrupulous in every case handed over to the bureau. He should steer clear of controversies, lest he embarrasses the government.

Another major lesson should be: whether he has a fixed or uncertain tenure, the CBI director should be honest and, like Caesar's wife, above suspicion, thereby showing the way to his colleagues.

The writer is a former director, CBI

FUNNY BUSINESS

Chit-Chatting with an EVM



Anuvab Pal



Electronic voting machines (EVMs) are the tool of the Indian democracy through which millions exercise their franchise. They've been accused of being easily manipulated — or, by some, for not being easily manipulated. One political party known for accusing everyone being corrupt has now accused a machine of being corrupt. If convicted, the judicial system will sentence a box. We have an exclusive excerpt of the harsh interrogation carried by an investigative body with an EVM.

Interrogator: How long have you been an electronic voting machine?
EVM: All my life. Why? Who wants to know?

I: The nation wants to know. Actually, it is none of your business. Just answer the questions.
EVM: Okay.

I: Do you think you've been manipulated?
EVM: Sir, I live in 21st-century India. Of course, I have been manipulated.

I: Don't try to be cheeky. People say you are behaving weirdly. What do you have to say in your defence?
EVM: Sir, I am a vote-calculating machine that's speaking to you in English. Can it get any more weird than that?

I: I suppose not.
EVM: Are you going to eat those Cadbury Gems?
I: No.
EVM: Can I?
I: Go ahead. Did someone hack into you?
EVM: I'm sorry, that is a private question.
I: I didn't mean it like that. I mean,

did someone break into your house and rig the numbers?
EVM: No. I would've noticed.
I: Is your house secure?
EVM: Way more than a human house. I have no doors or windows.
I: One political party is accusing you of being easy. Of having low morals. Of just leaving with any man who asks you out.
EVM: I have one word for that party. Patriarchy.
I: They allege you come from a bad family. That you were brought up with no values. That you are easily hackable.
EVM: Yeah? Try and see if you can hack into me. Just try.
I: No, thank you. We're being recorded.
EVM: I'm locked down by so many complex algorithms that it is easier to break into a vault at RBI. Just because I look simple from the outside doesn't mean without my consent, you can do anything.

I: Then why are these people saying they've hacked into a version of you? They even held a press conference.
EVM: Every time something like this happens, they always blame us. Never the men. Never their dirty mindset and their archaic values. We need a change in thinking. What they hacked into is not one of us but a cheap imitation they built. And they went on to say, 'All EVMs are like that.'

I: This party claims we should get rid of you and go back to manual counting.
EVM: Really? That's what you want? Did you just forget the history of 30 years of Indian voting? People with guns at polling booths. People stealing entire ballot boxes. You'd trust the most deceitful criminals controlling the counting at gun-point over an inanimate device with no emotions?
I: You seem quite emotional to me.
EVM: Thank you. I'm programmed like that. The difference between intelligence and artificial intelligence is the word 'artificial'.
I: So, why do you think people are saying you are a cheat?
EVM: If you go to an ATM and you can't find money, do you blame your inability to earn or the banking software? That's what some parties are doing. No one voted for them. I'm just a machine. I count. What's the point of blaming me? Next they'll blame the building the vote takes place in, the ink on the finger, the colour of the shirt of the poll booth operator.
I: Are you the only talking machine?
EVM: No, many political parties have machines masquerading as spokespersons.
I: Are you single?
EVM: My lawyer has counselled me to not answer that question. [Interrogation ends. EVM leaves with a respected senior advocate.]

I: I'm sorry, that is a private question.
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did someone break into your house and rig the numbers?
EVM: No. I would've noticed.
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the speaking tree

The Golden Incarnate

PARMARTHI RAINA

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, a leading light of the Bhakti movement, is considered by many to be none other than Lord Krishna. He is known as Gauranga, the Golden avatar, because His body was the hue of molten gold. Shri Chaitanya disclosed that Krishna was so intrigued by the intensity of Radharani's unconditional love for Him, that to find out why Radharani found Him so attractive, He appeared on this earth as Chaitanya, a devotee of Krishna.

He said whenever He wished to taste the sweetness (madhurya) of Krishna, He would assume the feelings and emotions Radha had for Krishna. But in His avatara as Krishna's devotee, His mission was to propagate sankirtana (congregational chanting of the names of the Lord) as the best way to counter kaliyuga and overcome material bondage.

Lord Chaitanya appeared on this planet in 1486 in Navadvpep, Bengal. Not many people perceived Him as the Supreme Lord. But Krishna walked the earth over 5,000 years ago, during the Mahabharata days, without being recognised as God Almighty. The gopis of Vrindavana knew Him as the bewitching cowherd boy, Nandagopal.

Since Krishna is Absolute, explained Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, there is no difference between Krishna and anything associated with Him. For example, Krishna's name, qualities, form and pastimes (lilas) associated with Him are identical to Him. Thus, meditating on anything connected with Him, particularly His name, has the same potency as meditating on Krishna Himself.

Chat Room

A Clarification

ET's page 1 story in May 10, 2017, edition quoted defence and finance minister Arun Jaitley, as saying foreign arms companies needed to be incentivised. The minister only referred to the need to incentivise local manufacturing in defence in general and did not refer to foreign companies. The error is regretted.

Prefer Private Lift for Air India

Apologies the Edit, 'Start Privatisation With Air India' (May 10), the government has no business to run businesses, leave alone an airline. Beside being unfair to private players, government is encouraging an unhealthy trend. Air India, which is constantly on oxygen support and has sucked in more than ₹30,000 crore of public money, deserves to be privatised. And, sooner the better. The aviation ministry must focus on providing first-rate infrastructure for airports and their security rather than losing sleep over mounting losses of its flying wing. Beside some disgruntled unions, no one is going to shed a tear over its closure.

BHOLEY BHARDWAJ
Mumbai

Justice Cannot Court Delays

This refers to the Edit, 'Speed Up Prosecution for Fair Play's Sake' (May 10). Long-pending cases in judiciary is a big challenge, and the lower conviction rate is even more alarming. The reasons are many, including lengthy legal procedures, influenced witnesses, frequent tenure changes of judges hearing same cases, lack of judicial accountability, dearth of specialist judges, counter-trials and right to appeals, which dampen public trust. The need of the hour is to get the judicial accountability Bill passed by the Parliament and fill up vacant positions in high courts and the Supreme Court. The amended legislation will reduce the cumbersome procedural delays during trials.



SANJAY TIWARI
Hisar

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