

Roping in ‘czars’ to boost employment

Strong leadership is central to managing sectors that have the highest potential to meet our employment objectives



VIKRAM KIRLOS KAR

While the Indian economy is on a stable economic footing and is expected to build on its growth momentum, concerns around providing adequate employment opportunities remain, and job creation continues to be the foremost priority for Indian policymakers. With the Union Budget to be presented tomorrow, significant initiatives to push employment generation are expected to be high on the government’s agenda.

Creating gainful and quality employment is essential for India’s development trajectory. This is even more critical giv-

ing in the rapid advent of technology which necessitates the need for an innovative growth strategy, with a specific focus on the employment intensive sectors such as agriculture and food processing, textiles and garments, tourism, retail and automobiles, among others.

In this context, the CII has recommended the appointment of ‘czars’ to catalyse progress of these sectors. The model of czars is based on the way that Aadhaar was conceptualised and rolled out with Nandan Nilekani as the lead agent. A czar, or empowered mission director, would assume the responsibility of ensuring the growth of the identified sector.

Envisaged as a leading expert or a top industry person with wide knowledge about the sector, the czar would be entrusted with addressing the pain points along the entire value chain, while coordinating with ministries, state governments and industry as well as other stakeholders. This would provide a strategic boost to employment generation for each of these sectors.

Some of the areas to be addressed by such a mission director would include

ease of doing business, availability of finance, and strategic logistics and infrastructure development. A major aspiration would be to strengthen skill development, in line with the requirements of the sector and including aspects such as upskilling and reskilling for technology changes.

Building competitiveness of the sector to expand exports would also be a key target. The czar would further work on enhancing product development and design and promoting R&D and technology adaptation, especially for smaller enterprises.

A total value chain approach can be taken where employment targets would be monitored at regular intervals by the respective czar appointed for the sector. This approach will address roadblocks to investments and employment in the sector, identify solutions, help draft and introduce policies and implement them from all players. With such a targeted and intensive mission mode, the identified sectors would be expected to expand rapidly.

We believe that the strategy of a czar should be deployed for optimal results

In the age of flying food

The potential benefits of using drones in everyday tasks are many, but the regulators are still to lay the groundwork for the sector’s growth

NEHA ALAWADHI

Over the past two weeks, two companies have made what appear to be significant advances in making drones a part of our everyday life. Food-tech startup Zomato announced it was working on creating a fleet of drones to deliver food and drinks at our doorsteps. Another startup, Bengaluru-based Skylark Drones, unveiled its plans to deploy drones for aerial survey at an iron ore mine in Jharkhand.

The prospect of drones delivering goodies is indeed exciting.

But these remotely-controlled flying devices are not just about novelty or quick service. They are capable of doing a lot more. They can collect data in different forms such as video, audio, location, temperature (through sensors) and the like. One of the earliest deployment of drones, not surprisingly then, has been by the army — for surveillance, intelligence gathering, and even as a weapon carrying device in enemy territory.

In recent years, though, they have become more ubiquitous. The technology behind drones has evolved from simple radio communication to remote control through smartphones and more sophisticated digital systems making their

deployment in everyday tasks easier.

The potential benefits are manifest: from photography and camera work in films, Instagram pictures and videos, movie and wedding shoots to more serious use cases in the logistics industry where drones have the capability to bring in efficiency and save time and money. Work is under way to explore their utility in agriculture, insurance, energy, infrastructure, mining, and media and entertainment.

They can also come in handy for a quick inspection over large tracts of land or high buildings. In 2016, it was reported that the Gurugram administration was using drones to map the city, to update the lay of the land that dated back to 1957.

There are plenty of other ways drones are being used elsewhere in the country.

Recently, Hyderabad-based start-up Terra Drone India got on board to help with multi-censor scanning of the city’s most famous historical monument, the Charminar, after a big chunk of plaster fell from one of its minarets. Similarly, power companies, in a bid to reduce cost and improve efficiency, have been working on a project to use drones for monitoring project development in critical areas since 2016.

Drones also have utility in jobs that are fraught with stigma and danger.

Young entrepreneurs are mulling plans to use drones for applications like sewer inspections, a mass use case that can help eradicate the practice of manual scavenging altogether.

So is the drone age upon us then? “Drones are useful for monitoring or inspection of industrial assets, especially at high altitudes, long distances or remote locations. For instance, daily inspection of railway tracks over thousands of kilometres or monitoring of progress in construction of highways by the National Highways Authority of India. Collection of remote sensing data becomes easier with drones since you can control its flight as opposed to relying on satellite imagery,” said Anirudh Rastogi, managing partner at Ikigai Law, a law firm that was actively involved in the regulatory consultations for the drones policy.

India, though not a manufacturer of drones, has an edge in this field because of its capabilities to build software for various applications. Drones imported from China are easily available, and much cheaper.

“The camera or sensors installed in a drone are just one part of it, but building a useful application will require great software that can make sense of the data that a drone collects. That is where real value add will come from India,” added Ratan.

Yet India is nowhere close to unleashing the full potential of the sector. Applications like food and e-commerce delivery through drones are “at

least three years away,” according to Neel Ratan, regional managing partner-north and government leader at PwC.

Elsewhere too the progress is slow because the regulators are still to lay the groundwork for the growth of the sector. The biggest hurdle to mass adoption and use of drones has been the policy uncertainty. In 2014, the civil aviation regulator in India, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), released a public notice prohibiting use of drones for civilian operation because it posed a safety and security threat, and mandated a host of permissions before flying a drone.

In April 2016, a set of draft guidelines was released by the DGCA for comment, but the consultation didn’t move further. In October 2017, the DGCA again released a new set of guidelines for use of drones in civilian airspace.

Finally, in December last year, the DGCA formalised the drone policy, set up an online IT portal called Digital Sky, designed as a one-stop-shop for several clearances, and allowed drones weighing 250 grams or less to fly legally.

Anything above that weight, howev-

er, is weighed down by regulations. It requires separate permission from the DGCA, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade, the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, the Indian Air Force, the Wireless Planning and Coordination Wing (Department of Telecommunications), the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security, the Airports Authority of India and the local police.

“The biggest issue right now is that the Digital Sky platform through which permissions to fly are to be accorded is not fully functional. To operate a drone currently, the user will need to manually approach the regulator and the regulator remains reluctant to grant such permissions until the technology-enabled permission and compliance model envisaged by the current drones policy is live,” said Rastogi.

Once the policy hurdles are figured out, large scale adoption will also require creating a separate air corridor to ensure the skies are not choked by drone traffic and proper training of pilots. According to PwC’s Ratan, there can be an air corridor earmarked for drones in the future.

AGE OF DRONES

- The Indian Unmanned Aerial Vehicle market to grow at 18 per cent during 2017–23 in terms of revenue
- The market for commercial end–use of drones might supersede the military market by 2021, cumulatively hitting about \$900 mn
- Global spending on drones will be around \$100 bn by 2021



Source: BIS Research, Goldman Sachs, Industry

- In 2014, Mumbai’s Francesco’s Pizzeria successfully used a drone to deliver pizza
- Zomato is looking at using drones to deliver food

CHINESE WHISPERS

Race heats up

After Chief Minister Kamal Nath’s recent meeting with Rahul Gandhi, it was expected that the party would soon announce the name of its Madhya Pradesh Pradesh Congress Committee chief. There are many prospective candidates for the post and lobbying is on in right earnest. The names of leaders including Jyotiraditya Scindia, Home Minister Bala Bachchan, Umang Singh and Ajay Singh have been making the rounds for some time now. A host of ministers are openly pushing for Scindia to be their state unit chief. Ministers Govind Singh, Prabhuram Choudhary and Pradyumna Singh Tomar are among them. Sources say the chief minister himself is battling for his Home Minister Bala Bachchan.

Wrong number



Samajwadi Party Rajya Sabha member Ram Gopal Yadav (pictured) on Wednesday said in the House during the Zero Hour that “vulgar” advertisements and “wardrobe malfunctions” of models wearing lingerie on television contributed to crimes against women. Yadav demanded a ban on such advertisements to protect India’s culture from bad influences. He said it had become difficult to watch news shows on television along with the family because of such advertisements shown during breaks. Yadav quoted Arnold J Toynbee’s multi-volume *A Study of History* saying the historian identified nudity and alcoholism as the two major reasons for the disintegration of a civilization. “You (the BJP) promised to abolish (Article) 370 (of the Constitution) but what you did was that you removed (section) 377 (of the Indian Penal Code),” Yadav said. Article 370 grants special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir, and is part of BJP’s core agenda to repeal it.

Change of place



The seating arrangement in the Rajya Sabha is set to change in the coming days. With Arun Jaitley having retired from active politics temporarily, Amit Shah and Ravi Shankar Prasad elected to the Lok Sabha and four Telugu Desam Party members joining the Bharatiya Janata Party, including its leader Y S Chowdary, some of the front row seats in the treasury benches have fallen vacant. Sources said the new seating arrangement would mean Union ministers Piyush Goyal and Nirmala Sitharaman (pictured) could now get front row seats. It is possible that Lok Janshakti Party Chief Ram Vilas Paswan, who is now in the Rajya Sabha, could also get a front row seat.

INSIGHT

The right price of water



DHIRAJ NAYYAR

It is just as well that water is going to be a key priority for Prime Minister Modi in his second term. The new Jal Shakti ministry, an amalgamation of the Ministry of Water Resources and the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation was the first indicator of a new focus. That Modi’s first Mann ki Baat in his second term was dominated by the theme of water conservation has only reinforced the seriousness of the issue. Of course, clean drinking water — its absence actually — has been a well identified priority for long. What is new is the prospect of a complete dwindling of overall water supply even in major metros like Chennai.

Is India short of water? No, but there may be regional variations. Does India manage its water resources well? Emphatically no. One way to better manage water resources is through conservation methods like water harvesting. Modi wants this to become a mass movement. One can only hope it does. But there is another way to ensure efficient water management. It’s also the elephant in the room. Market pricing for water.

Unlike air, water is not quite a public good. Economists require a good to be non-rival and non-excludable in consumption for it to be a public good but water is rival (because consumption by one individual reduces its availability for others) and it is excludable (because

supply can be cut off if you don’t pay). The only way water will be used efficiently by consumers is if they have to pay an appropriate price for it, just like they do for any other (private) good they consume.

The consequences of not charging the right price for water are serious. There is no reason that the rainfall-deficit (and water deficit) regions of Maharashtra should produce sugarcane which uses around 2,500 litres of water for every kilogram of output. But since farmers are not charged market prices for water, they indulge in farming inappropriate crops. Similarly, in the states of Punjab and Haryana where farmers get highly subsidised or free water, highly water-intensive rice cultivation has led to desertification. Crops like sugarcane and rice should only be grown in water surplus regions but populist “free water” policies have achieved the opposite.

Apart from farmers even industry and individual consumers need to be charged an appropriate price to ensure best use. In industry, incentives/penalties can be given for water recycling/reuse. The simple point is that consumers are more likely to respond to price signals/incentives/disincentives than appeals for voluntary conservation.

The obvious objection to market pricing of water is that it will hurt the poor. The reality is that the poor are disproportionately hurt by water shortages. In urban areas, the middle class and rich are able to organise alternative supplies of water by paying a premium, usually to tanker mafias. These mafias are a creation of an inability to price water appropriately — remarkably most claim to be supplying water from the reservoirs of the local Jal Board. Essentially, a parallel economy which prices water at a premium is running to the detriment of the poor. Instead,

the government should allow market prices for water and give upfront subsidies to poor consumers through direct benefit transfer.

Admittedly, there is a real challenge in implementing water pricing in the absence of robust institutional structures. For a start, water is a state subject so the Union government is not in a position to impose pricing across the board. Within states, there is a need for water regulators — a proposal which has been around for a number of years but which has not been implemented barring a couple of states because of a reluctance to move to a market-based pricing regime for water. Since the supply of water (particularly in cities) is often done by a single supplier (most often state owned but could potentially be private), there is a need for a regulatory authority to ensure that there is no monopolistic pricing. Also, if the regulatory authority is independent and operates at an arms-length from the government, presumably it can resist political pressures while determining/upholding the right price for water.

Unfortunately, the experience from electricity regulators in states is not encouraging. The reason for the miserable state of discoms is at least partly attributable to electricity regulators not stamping their authority. However, that is not an argument to do away with regulators. They must be given teeth.

Obviously, elected governments would be tempted to supply water (and indeed electricity) at subsidised rates to various constituents. It is a government’s right to subsidise, but it must not do so by distorting the market, but through direct benefit transfers to a targeted set. The alternative is a highly water scarce (and indeed energy scarce) economy.

The author is chief economist, Vedanta Ltd

LETTERS

Improving bond yields

This refers to “Signs of maturing bond market” (July 3). India’s economy is slowing, inflation is breathing hard and the central bank is cutting interest rates. But the cost of long-term money is refusing to budge. What could be troubling the market is the unknown quantum of public spending via borrowings, which are but sovereign liabilities, beyond the ₹7 trillion fiscal gap. This highlights the need for deepening of Indian corporate bonds to meet the funding requirement of the infrastructure sector, particularly by insurance companies and pension funds.

Despite interest-rate cuts, the 10-year Indian government bond yield was at 7.4 per cent till recently, only to slip to sub-7 per cent now. Banking sector and bond markets reforms were soft-pedalled when the global economy was in a better shape. But the Trump-disruption era, of uncertain duration, is upon us and the finance ministry needs to be pro-active.

R Narayanan Navi Mumbai

More powers to RBI



This refers to “RBI may get regulatory powers over HFCs” (July 3). At a time when the financial intermediaries, particularly the non-banking financial companies (NBFCs), have defaulted in honouring its financial commitments, the move to bestow more regulatory powers to the RBI to regulate housing finance companies is welcome. The audited financial statements and the ratings assigned by the rating agencies proved untrustworthy. Investors lost a lot due to the beaten down values of

the shares of many NBFCs. Lending to NBFCs by banks, especially by the state-owned ones are more likely to slip into non-performing assets (NPA).

The NBFCs must make arrangements to improve the liquidity position to prevent further defaults. It is essential to make them financially strong to continue lending. It is therefore imperative on the part of the banking regulator to open ways to enable NBFCs to have access to the banking regulator. The oversight of banks and NBFCs must be made more effective to ensure that the lending by these drivers of growth do not defeat the economic goals of the government.

Despite some improvement in the NPA level, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code cases waiting for resolution are still huge in number and as such, it is paramount to ensure the quality of the lending of all the financing institutions. The RBI must get more powers to control all financiers including state-owned banks and for that, the government should not hesitate to amend the relevant acts.

VSK Pillai Kottayam

Together we can

This refers to “Rural job scheme to pump ₹15,000 crore into Jal Shakti” (July 3). It is heartening to see MGNREGs workers being part of the flagship development scheme. It would be ideal if all the workers come together through the efforts of NGOs and CSR sponsored corporates, and are made aware about the save water mission.



It is also vital to distribute messages on their mobiles or hand over pictorial books to familiarise them with the resurrection of water bodies of their regions. We are all aware of the water crisis; once these workers are shown the ways to harvest water and the tricks of desalination, not only will MGNREGs workers get specialisation in water saving techniques but they will be absorbed on contract in nearby fields, farms and agriculture belts. We need to make videos of successful MGNREG projects and circulate on their mobiles praising their contributions.

When the humble milk producers of Anand, Gujarat, could revolutionise milk production in India, there is no reason why these warriors can’t change the water scarcity scenario in India.

N K Bakshi Vadodara

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



© Graphic Syndication, England

A new urgency

New Delhi must move forward on FTA with EU

The conventional wisdom that globalisation has gone into reverse and that the world is turning against trade agreements and openness was delivered a major shock last week. The world's largest trading entity, the European Union, came to an agreement with four of South America's biggest economies — Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Argentina — the four surviving full members of the trading bloc Mercosur, which was till recently the world's fourth-largest of such blocs. (Venezuela, which was also a member, has been suspended for over two years.) Once free trade begins between these two blocs, they will form by far the largest free-trade area in the world. It took the EU and Mercosur 20 years to strike this agreement; and both sides have had to make compromises. Brazil's combative right-wing president has had to temper his plans to ignore past climate change agreements in order to keep the Europeans on-side; and the powerful European farm lobby, in turn, had to make a few sacrifices. These represent, in a way, the importance that political and bureaucratic leaders on both sides attached to this trade agreement.

There are major lessons for other players in this development — not least for New Delhi. The biggest losers are perhaps in London and in Washington, DC. The United Kingdom is, of course, supposed to break with Brussels on the assumption that it will be able to negotiate such deals for itself in the future. The complexity of the EU-Mercosur deal reveals this as hubris. The United States, under Donald Trump, meanwhile, has been markedly sceptical of the possibility of gains from freer trade — but the EU and Mercosur, both large trading partners of the US, have demonstrated through this deal that they do not intend to follow where the US leads.

But among the countries that should take note is India, which also has been noticeably unenthusiastic about concluding new trade agreements. Meanwhile, many of its trading partners are finding new ways to integrate their markets — while other preferential trading norms are increasingly closed to Indian exporters. Indian textile exporters, for example, were already at a disadvantage in Europe compared to those with tariff-free access from countries such as Bangladesh. Now there is additional competition from Mercosur to consider. The United States just ended the tariff exemption for several Indian imports under the Generalised System of Preferences scheme; that too will mean that Indian exporters are disadvantaged as compared to those from, say, Mexico. It is time for India to revive, in particular, its stalled negotiations with the European Union on a free-trade agreement.

The EU has shown a willingness to compromise on agricultural issues, and India should take advantage of that — even if it means that powerful interest groups such as dairy, automobile manufacturers, and pharmaceutical companies are not happy. The cost of not moving forward with the EU trade deal — and, for that matter, of allowing the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership to move forward without India — will be an ever-increasing isolation for India on the world trading stage. Labour-intensive sectors, crucial for employment generation, such as leather and textiles, will suffer the most. India cannot afford such isolation at this stage of its development.

Hard-hitting crisis

Assaults on public servants are becoming mainstream

It is a potent sign of the rapidly deteriorating standards of public behaviour when the prime minister has to take time out of his party's first parliamentary meet to condemn an assault with a cricket bat by a Bharatiya Janata Party MLA on a municipal official earlier this week. Caught on camera, the MLA, who is also the son of a senior party functionary, was arrested but remained arrogantly unrepentant. Worse, he was welcomed with sweets and garlands at the local party office after being released on bail. Stung by the popular outrage, Mr Modi said such behaviour would not be tolerated, irrespective of the person's status. The prime minister's admonition is welcome but such violent displays of power against public officials is a party-agnostic trend.

In another recent incident, a woman forest officer and her colleagues were beaten with sticks by a group of men led by the brother of a Telangana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) MLA. Last year, two Aam Aadmi Party MLAs assaulted the Delhi chief secretary in the presence of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. And then, of course, was the infamous case of the Shiva Sena MP who beat an Air India staffer with his shoe, which caused the domestic airline industry to introduce the concept of a no-fly list.

Incidents such as these highlight the wilful institutional weakening of the country's law and order apparatus by the political class. It is worth noting that the police hesitated to act in several of these incidents, principally because the political connections of the perpetrators of violence raise the possibility of punishment for the law enforcers. The law did take its course in some of the incidents listed above because they were circulated on social media and attracted a public outcry. But there is no guarantee that politicians will side with the law. Mr Modi and the head of the TRS Working Committee publicly condemned the assaults by their party workers, who were duly booked. But others did not think it necessary to apologise for their associates' behaviour.

Equally, few saffron politicians have condemned unequivocally the cases of communal and casteist lynching that have occurred with distressing frequency over the past few years. This variable response, dictated most often by the exigencies of electoral politics, is not an overnight trend, either. It represents a steady erosion of societal values, has created a vicious circle of lawlessness, and contributed to the rise of the strongman (or woman) culture. Over the years, so many police personnel have been physically threatened and transferred to the boondocks, or have seen their career progression blocked for enforcing the law of the land. Their successors mostly opt to follow the line of least resistance to the powerful and well-connected.

The upshot of this has been a steady diminution of the authority of the state's law enforcement machinery, which enables those with clout to exploit the system by garnering followers based on protection rackets. Mr Modi's very public admonition may have a salutary effect of reining in his party members, but whether India's power elite chooses to exercise such restraint is extremely doubtful.

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



Fix problems before complete failure

We need some real solutions on the ground

There is much talk about improving the big picture in India. What we really need, though, is some successes on the ground — some actual resolution of problems as building blocks for further success. Two instances are discussed below.

The first is a puzzling business failure: Jet Airways running aground in slow motion. It is already bankrupt, but unravelling the sequence could make such financial predicaments, of which there are many, more tractable. India's once dominant airline slipped up and, inexplicably, was allowed to collapse. Over 16,000 employees are affected, and India's airline services are in turmoil. One estimate of liabilities was ₹26,000 crore.

Why didn't lenders and government agencies use a combination of executive action, judicial process and bridge financing to keep the airline afloat? Did legal obstacles genuinely prevent resolution? Or was it irresolute collective action, including lenders being gun-shy because of the Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) and witch-hunts, or manipulation, complicity, or vindictiveness? Answers and corrective action could help fix other high-profile NPAs.

The second is a macro-level example from telecom: The mishandling of BSNL and MTNL. Since the 1990s, successive governments have repeatedly attempted to give a fresh impetus to these hapless telecom entities, while depriving them of what could actually have made them successful, namely, strong, informed leadership, with independence/non-interference. Consequently, BSNL's accumulated losses amount to nearly ₹1 trillion. This is nearly five times Jet Airways', and double Air India's accumulated losses until March 2018, the latter being roughly the size of India's annual health budget.

Sorting out these infrastructure service problems is crucial because of their effect on everything from security, education and healthcare, to work and entertainment. If BSNL and MTNL can change course con-

structively, we may be able to get them off their collapsing trajectory. Resolving this situation would remove severe impediments to our effectiveness and convenience, and an enormous drag on productivity. Connectivity and communications are so critical to social and economic capabilities, and our approach for decades has been so flawed and on a disastrous trajectory, that it is incomprehensible that we should be resolutely following this failing path without changing it. Now, the government is reportedly considering infusing thousands of crores into the same business, together with monetising land and assets.



SHYAM PONAPPA

What is in the public interest?

The first step is setting appropriate objectives for BSNL and MTNL. What public-interest needs do they serve? The communications minister mentioned strategic areas like home and defence, and services for crisis management during times of disaster such as cyclones and floods. Two others that he mentioned appear unjustifiable: That they are national assets, and leading providers of free services. The first is just an assertion, while the second is inappropriate for commercial undertakings. It's time to drop wishful thinking and take honest stock. For instance, after policy statements supporting spectrum sharing, regulations were framed to be so restrictive as to make it not worthwhile. Instead, policy-makers should set objectives that actually serve the public interest.

Thus far, we have had confused and absurdly contradictory objectives in practice: High government collections from auction fees and charges, while expecting ubiquitous, reasonably-priced, good-quality services. It seems self-evident that such contradictory objectives cannot possibly be achieved. The fact that high government charges deprive networks of funds and increase user costs are documented in the following reports:

"A Study of the Financial Health of the Telecom

This deficit too needs to be bridged

Hindustan Unilever Chairman and Managing Director Sanjiv Mehta made a pertinent point at the company's annual general meeting last week. It was important, he said, that the trust deficit that existed with business was removed. While it was incumbent on the part of business to practise the highest standards of ethics and governance, it needed to be recognised that private enterprises were the engines of growth and all impediments to their growth should be removed, he told shareholders.

The head of India's largest consumer company certainly isn't alone in voicing the "trust deficit" between the government and India Inc. Just a few days earlier, Vikram Kirloskar, the new president of the Confederation of Indian Industry, said the trust and respect between the government and industry had hit an all-time low, which caused a lot of over-regulation and perhaps a loss of economic momentum. Others have said that the rule-based approach of the regulators and the government towards India Inc has gone to the extreme, to a level where there is a lack of mutual trust.

India Inc, of course, should share the blame for this. Most old-age companies, which cut their teeth in an exception-based regime in the past, are understandably rattled by a rules-based regime such as the goods and services tax. Also, promoters, who used to think they had a divine right to control their companies, are suddenly finding their companies slipping out of their hands, courtesy the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code. So a growing number of promoters are either diluting their stakes in their companies or are simply cashing out.

But has the government done enough to bridge the trust deficit that India Inc is talking about? The answer to that question should be in the negative. There is considerable merit in the argument that investigative agencies have been given a free rein

without commensurate accountability. Many high-profile cases have vilified the entire business community, though their closure is still pending.

A case in point is the one involving former ICICI Bank MD Chanda Kochhar and her husband. Nothing has been heard after the Central Bureau of Investigation filed a charge sheet against them in January this year. No one is expecting the CBI to give daily media briefings on the case, but five months should be enough for the agency to show some progress. Such questions arise because of the

royal mess that the CBI created on its own by naming several top bankers without any specific charge, prompting then finance minister Arun Jaitley to say whether "a journey to nowhere (or everywhere) was being undertaken".

At least five recent decisions show why the government-industry trust deficit is widening. Take the GST Council's decision to go aggressive on anti-profiteering. The two-year extension to the National Anti-Profiteering Authority is a bad idea as it reflects deficient trust in the power of competition in the Indian marketplace and in the ability of the Competition Commission of India to handle any deviant market conduct. Though profiteering has not been clearly defined, stiffer penalties have been proposed for "violations". This is nothing but evidence of a control raj mindset.

Second, the over-aggressive tone taken by the ministry of corporate affairs on the auditing fraternity defies logic. The guilty should be punished after the evidence provided is proved in a court of law, but is it fair to see criminality in every audit lapse or rating error? For example, in its charge sheet, the ministry said the fraud committed by the auditors at IFIN was nothing short of "organised



POWER POINT

SHYAMAL MAJUMDAR

Sector": http://icrier.org/pdf/Working_Paper_380.pdf and "The Impact of High Spectrum Costs on Mobile Network Investment and Consumer Prices": [https://www.nera.com/content/dam/nera/publications/2017/PUB_High_Spectrum_Costs_0517.pdf](https://www nera.com/content/dam/nera/publications/2017/PUB_High_Spectrum_Costs_0517.pdf).

Suggested objectives

A genuine reset could be attempted on the following lines:

■ Connectivity is the most essential objective. The ideal must be balanced with the practical, through trade-offs and phasing. The top cities and clusters have a major share of economic and social activity and are therefore a priority, of which 35-50 may be the fastest growing, with the next 50 requiring attention because of sheer size. For instance, Sweden's phasing for 2025 is for 98 per cent of the population to have a minimum of 1 Gbps at home/work, 1.9 per cent at least 100 Mbps, and 0.1 per cent at 30 Mbps. But to the extent communications are available in our hinterland together with roads, water and sanitation, activity and prosperity will spread, with less pressure to migrate to urban centres. The longer term objective therefore needs to be good connectivity everywhere (within reason).

■ An equally important objective is to safeguard the public interest, while ensuring good, reliable services at reasonable prices. The question is not whether to shut down BSNL and MTNL, but how to provide the right structuring and support including reskilling and continuing education, so that they participate effectively in consortiums and provide safety, security, and oversight in the public interest.

■ A third is to avoid disrupting markets with unsustainable prices, including free services. Governments have done this repeatedly in telecom, airline and electricity services. It needs to stop. People need high-quality infrastructure for productivity, not shoddy services that undermine productivity and waste their time, pre-empting better services because of low pricing.

■ A fourth is to actively ensure adequate capacity and quality in services to not constrain or waste public resources and potential. This is to avoid the shoddy services referred to above, that are bottlenecks that subvert alternatives as low-priced barriers to competition, through constraining revenues while draining public resources.

■ Finally, we must embrace infrastructure- and spectrum-sharing. Sweden provides a model not only for the European Union, but also for India. Singapore had a model public-private partnership until some years ago, when SingTel, a passive anchor partner, took over OpenNet. We need mandatory active network sharing (including spectrum) through consortiums run by the private sector, with BSNL and MTNL as guardian anchor participants. A report by Stokab, the City of Stockholm's IT infrastructure company, provides details of an operator-neutral fibre and mobile infrastructure (March 2017): https://www.stokab.se/Documents/Nyheter%20bilagor/Provins%20rapport%20mars%202017_en.pdf

Resolving connectivity problems that affect many people may be more easily doable than, for example, clearing the NPAs, or reconfiguring agriculture.

shyamponappa@gmail.com

Winning ways



BOOK REVIEW

DHRUV MUNJAL

Those slightly bewildered or exasperated with Carlos Braithwaite's match-ending dismissal against New Zealand earlier in the World Cup — with six required off seven balls, he tried to smash it out of the park when the ideal thing would have been to take a single to get back on strike the next over — Paddy Upton has a much-needed explanation.

The Indian cricket team's former mental conditioning coach, Mr Upton, in his new book, *The Barefoot Coach: Life-Changing Insights from Coaching the World's Best*

Cricketers, says that "playing to strengths delivers excellence; merely fixing weaknesses does not". Mr Braithwaite's strength is hitting the big shots and it was his unreal ball striking that had helped the West Indies get within touching distance of a target that once seemed horribly out of reach. So according to Mr Upton, Mr Braithwaite was justified in taking on Jimmy Neesham because he was backing his strengths, and this was exactly the kind of belligerent, carefree stroke play that had got his team so close to victory in the first place.

Come to think of it, Mr Upton's hypothesis offers a very plausible explanation for the "brainless" approach of many West Indian batsmen. (Think Andre Russell trying to take apart Australia's Mitchell Starc in their game at Trent Bridge earlier in the piece.)

Some of Mr Upton's expositions may seem banal, but they make for compelling reading because they are so essential to

understanding a player's psyche and attitude towards the game. Perhaps more important is deciphering the exact role performed by a coach, an enduring question that Mr Upton tries to answer in one of the earlier chapters of his book.

The coach's responsibility, after all, is a complex one. Any athlete will tell you how different coaches swear by different methodologies. Alex Ferguson, the former Manchester United manager, for instance, made up for tactical deficiencies by being a terrific people person who knew how to get the best out of his players. Jose Mourinho, one of his successors at the club, was the complete antithesis: brilliant in a footballing sense but personally abrasive, a trait that often led to dressing room rifts and triggered a general sense of unhappiness. Mr Upton goes on to list out in immense detail how coaches can adopt a wide range of leadership styles: instruction, advising, mentoring and abdicating, adding that sometimes coaching is a combination of all of them.

Much like the book, Mr Upton's personal story is a fascinating one. He was the fit-

ness trainer for the South African national team — the first full-time physio in international cricket — when Hansie Cronje was skipper, before taking on the role of a mental conditioning coach with the Indian side, where he worked with long-time friend Gary Kirsten and helped India win the 2011 World Cup. Now, of course, he has transitioned into mainstream coaching, most recently with the Rajasthan Royals in the Indian Premier League. In between all this, in the archetypal journey to self-discovery, he travelled the world alone and even got himself an MBA.

The sight of Mahendra Singh Dhoni striking the winning blow against Sri Lanka on that mystical Mumbai evening is one of the great sporting images of our times, but the road to becoming world champions wasn't easy. Mr Upton writes how soon after he and Mr Kirsten took charge, they had to fix the team's depleted morale, a by-product of the scandalous Greg Chappell era that had seen India crash out in the group stages of the 2007 World Cup. After creating a more jovial dressing room, they got around to helping the team prepare better — Mr

Upton notes that with the exception of Sachin Tendulkar and Rahul Dravid, almost all other players prepared poorly — and worked tremendously hard on their fitness. More than anything else, the fitness part of it is perhaps Mr Upton's most significant contribution to Indian cricket — he, in many ways, helped kick-start a culture that is clearly reflected in the current bunch of players' admirably high level of athletic prowess.

This book, however, is more about the mind than the body. In a chapter on "The Myth of Mental Toughness", Mr Upton reckons that the term is "currently the most overused and least understood concept in sports psychology", and there is no such thing as mental toughness. The same segment has an entertainingly revealing passage about Gautam Gambhir, who Mr Upton describes as one of the "weakest and mentally most insecure" he has ever worked with. Some have been suggesting how Mr Gambhir must give Shahid Afridi's autobiography a miss; I would suggest the same with this one as well. (Just to balance things out, though, Mr Upton *does* write

glowingly of Mr Gambhir while talking about the 2011 World Cup final.)

As insightful as Mr Upton's analyses are, the book sometimes veers into management territory. Many pages are splattered with overly detailed diagrams, tables and flow charts, robbing the book of the clarity that would have made it much more appealing to younger sports enthusiasts interested in knowing about the secrets of world-class coaching. Moreover, it is a bit tedious in its length, with several of Mr Upton's thoughts making multiple appearances across chapters. At the same time, it's an engrossing, plain-speaking account of working with elite athletes. In fact, it just might come in handy for the Indian team as it heads into the high-pressure phase of this World Cup.

THE BAREFOOT COACH: Life-Changing Insights From Coaching the World's Best Cricketers

Paddy Upton

Westland Sport, ₹799, 377 pages