

# Govt sees privatisation as answer to flailing discoms

RAJESH KUMAR SINGH  
New Delhi, February 26

THE GOVERNMENT WILL encourage inefficient state power utilities to seek privatisation and other institutional reforms to turn around money-losing operations and ensure reliable supplies to consumers, according to the top bureaucrat in the power ministry.

States with electricity utilities that lose more than 15% of revenue due to archaic networks, power theft and sloppy billing and collections would be pushed to seek private participation in their distribution network as part of the country's planned second wave of power reforms, power secretary Sanjiv Nandan Sahai said in an interview in New Delhi.

India has been increasingly advocating privatisation of ailing distribution companies as the government's efforts since 2015 to revive them failed to turn around the firms, known as discoms. These utilities lose



money by selling power below costs, often delaying payments to generators and depriving customers of reliable and affordable electricity.

The state governments will also need to do their part to ensure the companies can succeed, according to Sahai.

"There is enough private capital ready to invest in distribution, provided the states ensure a risk-free business," he said. "States need to pay subsidies on time, government departments need to

make timely payments of their electricity bills and political interference in operations needs to go."

He said states can draw upon examples of cities of Mumbai, New Delhi and Kolkata, as well as some smaller towns, where private participation has led to reduction in revenue losses and more viable operations. In one of the most recent such moves, Tata Power Co last year acquired one of the distribution utilities in the state of Odisha.

"We expect a substantial reduction in subsidy burden by bringing in private management of discoms," said Bishnupada Sethi, principal secretary for energy Odisha. "The new management is expected to bring down the losses and turn around the discoms. That will improve supplies to people, which is what the government wants."

The next wave of reforms, which are still in the works, will follow an earlier set unveiled in 2015, which sought to bring down revenue losses to an average 15% by March 2019. While they did decline, they were still at 18% at the end of the year through March, with many states showing much bigger deficits. Combined net income losses in that year for the utilities that signed up for the plan surged 85% from a year earlier to 280.4 billion rupees, after declining in the prior two years, according to the power ministry.

—BLOOMBERG

# Prasad: Govt looking at revamping IT Act

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
New Delhi, February 26

THE GOVERNMENT IS looking at revamping the 20-year-old IT Act to keep pace with advancement in the technology ecosystem, and bring in a stronger framework around issues like cybercrime, IT minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said on Wednesday.

"A thinking is going on in the department to revisit the IT Act. It has been 20 years of the IT Act and the IT ecosystem has developed beyond recognition. New technology has become very pronounced, the whole ecosystem of consumers has changed vastly. And so have the challenges," Prasad said, adding that the new Act will also factor in issues like Supreme Court's judgment on privacy and protection.

The minister said a team will be put in place that will take inputs from experts and the industry.

Prasad said the number of people accessing technology has burgeoned over the years, and services and finances are being delivered digitally now.

"The biggest challenge is the number of consumers we



have to handle, the use of technology, tech is at the centre of digital payments, digital delivery of services, GST, UPI. Now this also raises the question of misuse. The vastness of these platforms was not even contemplated when the IT Act came into being," he said.

Prasad said cyber issues have not been adequately responded to in the present IT Act, and he would like to include a complete chapter on cyber issues in the new proposal.

The minister also held a meeting with Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella, who is on a three-day visit to India. "We had a very good meeting, it was a courtesy meeting. I wish to thank his observations for Digital India, in particular digital inclusion... We also discussed whole range of issues around IT."

# Pune data science event looks to woo women

GEETA NAIR  
Pune, February 26

UNDER A STANFORD University initiative, a conference will be conducted in Pune on February 29 to help boost women's interest in data science.

The Women in Data Science (WiDS) community has been expanding in Pune as an increasing number of women are now taking interest in emerging technologies.

Women working as data scientists and entrepreneurs in the industry will be attending the conference. The theme of WiDS Conference 2020 is 'AI for social good'.

Licensed by Stanford University's Institute for Computational and Mathematical Engineering department, WiDS is a not-for-profit initiative with presence in 128 cities worldwide.

Sucheta Dhare, a WiDS ambassador in Pune, says there is a huge demand for skilled resources in the fields of AI-ML (artificial intelligence-machine learning) and data science, but at the same time there is a scarcity of trained resources. "A lot of women working in

technology face the threat of becoming redundant if they do not update their skills," Dhare said. Many have taken career breaks and find it difficult to get back as their skills are not up to date, according to her.

Gautam Gulati, head, India Technology Centre, Schlumberger said women comprise around 25% of the team and the company wants to raise it up to around 30% to 35%. The comparative figure globally, in technology, is 41%.

"Our data science group is split equally between Houston and Pune and around 22% in Pune are women and we want to expand that," Gulati said.

The WiDS conference will have domain experts sharing their knowledge and practical experience in areas such as data security and privacy policy. Women who have re-skilled themselves in data science, too, will share their journey and talk about how to stay relevant in a rapidly changing industry.

Participants will get a glimpse at applications such as conversational AI, cognitive support through language visualisation and robot assistants.

# Petronet plans buying LNG under 10-year pact

NIDHI VERMA & JESSICA JAGANATHAN  
New Delhi/ Singapore, February 26

PETRONET LNG, THE country's largest importer of liquefied natural gas (LNG), is looking to buy the fuel through a long-term contract starting from 2024, according to a document reviewed by Reuters.

It has issued a request for information (RFI) indicating an interest to buy about 1 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) of LNG for 10 years starting from 2024, with the possibility to extend, according to the February 19 document.

A request for information is a common practice to ask for written information about the capabilities of various LNG sellers to help them make more informed buying decisions.

Petronet's director of fi-

nance Vinod Kumar Mishra declined to comment on the RFI.

Petronet's request comes amid a trend among LNG buyers to move away from long-term contracts with fixed pricing to shorter contracts with lower volumes and more flexible terms. However, Indian companies have sought longer contracts as they expect domestic gas demand to increase.

Cargoes will be bought on a price formula linked to both Henry Hub natural gas futures in the US and Dutch TTF gas futures and shipped on a delivered ex-ship (DES) basis, the document showed.

Indian companies typically price their LNG contracts on an oil-linked basis while some are tied to the Henry Hub, two sources familiar with LNG imports into India said. Contracts priced on a TTF basis are rare, the sources added.

Petronet is asking for suppliers to provide information related to the delivery and pricing of cargoes as well as the flexibility they can provide, including volumes and destination, the document stated.

According to the document, suppliers must respond by February 26 and Petronet will shortlist the five most competitive suppliers. However, according to a source at one of the companies that has received the bid document, the company has since extended the bid submission date to March 4. Petronet will analyse supply offers as well as potential LNG terminal investments if required by suppliers.

The group is already in talks with

several companies including US-based Tellurian and NextDecade Corp to buy LNG. It currently has long-term contracts with Qatar Petroleum and Exxon Mobil Corp to lift about 10 mtpa of supply.

India wants to raise the share of gas in its energy mix to 15% by 2030 from the current 6.2% to check pollution, including in New Delhi. —REUTERS

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4	Librarian	-	01	01-OPEN

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\*Qualification, Pay Scales and other requirement are as prescribed by the UGC Notification dated 18th July 2018, Government of Maharashtra Resolution No. Misc-2018/C.R.56/18/UNI-1, dated 8th March 2019 and University circular No. TAAS/CT/ICD/2018-19/1241, dated 26th March, 2019 and revised from time to time. The Government Resolution & Circular are available on the website nu.ac.in.

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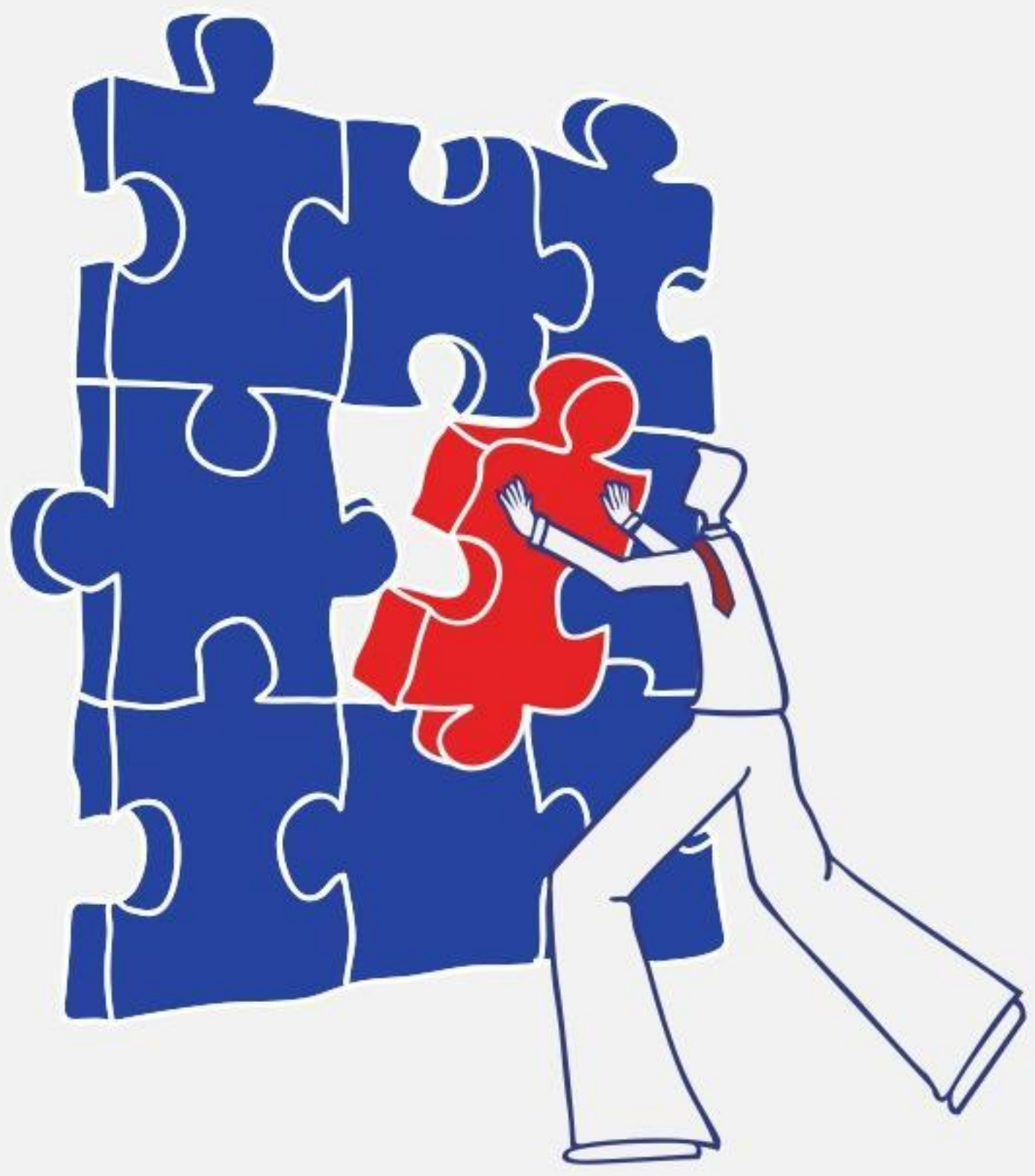
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