



## Green ambitions

Policy tweaks and incentives are needed to meet the renewable energy targets

In a surprising statement this month, Union Power Minister R.K. Singh said India would overshoot its target of installing 175 gigawatts of capacity from renewable energy sources by 2022. India was on track, he said, to hit 225 GW of renewable capacity by then. This is a tall claim, considering India has missed several interim milestones since it announced its 175 GW target in 2015. The misses happened despite renewable capacity being augmented at a blistering pace, highlighting how ambitious the initial target was. Technological and financial challenges remain: both wind and solar generation could be erratic, and India's creaky electricity grid must be modernised to distribute such power efficiently. Meanwhile, wind and solar tariffs have hit such low levels that suppliers are working with wafer-thin margins. This means small shocks can knock these sectors off their growth trajectories. The obstacles have capped capacity addition to 69 GW till date, with India missing its 2016 and 2017 milestones. To hit its 2022 target of 175 GW, 106 GW will have to be added in four years, more than twice the capacity added in the last four.

In the solar sector alone, which the government is prioritising, policy uncertainties loom large. Manufacturers of photovoltaic (PV) cells have demanded a 70% safeguard duty on Chinese PV imports, and the Directorate General of Trade Remedies will soon take a call on this. But any such duty will deal a body blow to solar-power suppliers, who rely heavily on Chinese hardware, threatening the growth of the sector. There is also the problem of the rooftop-solar segment. Of the current goal of 100 GW from solar energy by 2022, 40 GW is to come from rooftop installations, and 60 GW from large solar parks. Despite being the fastest-growing renewable-energy segment so far – rooftop solar clocked a compound annual growth rate of 117% between 2013 and 2017 – India only hit 3% of its goal by the end of 2017, according to a Bloomberg New Energy Finance report. The reason? Homeowners aren't warming up to the idea of installing photovoltaic panels on their terraces because the economics does not work out for them. Compared to industries and commercial establishments, a home typically needs less power and will not use everything it generates. So, homeowners need to be able to sell electricity back to the grid, which in turn needs a nationwide "net-metering" policy. As of today, only a few States have such policies, discouraging users elsewhere. Such challenges can be overcome with the right incentives, but they will take time to kick in. The good news is that even if India hits the 175 GW target, it stands to meet its greenhouse-gas emission goal under the Paris climate agreement. This in itself will be a worthy achievement. Overshooting this target will be a plus, but until the government tackles the policy challenges, it must hold off on implausible claims.

## Golden feet

The top teams appear to be peaking perfectly in time for the World Cup

The 2018 FIFA World Cup begins in Russia in a flurry of excitement. That there is no single, overwhelming favourite to win the trophy has only added to the appeal of what is cracked up as the world's biggest sporting event. Brazil, the most successful World Cup team of all time, appears revived after a humiliating semifinal loss on home soil four years ago. Tite, the manager, has made the world fall in love with the Selecao again, shunning the dull style of his predecessor Dunga and helping produce some captivating football. Germany, the reigning champion and the side that inflicted a 7-1 defeat on Brazil in Belo Horizonte, has looked far from its best in its last few friendly matches. But this is a world-class side with gifted, young players and is supremely organised. Spain, revitalised after two poor tournaments, sacked its manager Julen Lopetegui for signing on as manager of club powerhouse Real Madrid. With a squad featuring several Madrid and Barcelona players, the decision was made to retain team cohesion, which helped it sail through the qualifiers. France comes with a roster full of frightening, jaw-dropping talent, but that alone – as the Euro 2016 final demonstrated – is never enough. Then there are Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo, widely regarded as the greatest players of the modern era, who could well be appearing in a World Cup for the last time.

Messi has recently endured much heartbreak on national duty, Argentina finishing runner-up at the 2014 World Cup and the 2015 and 2016 editions of the Copa America. In the last of those finals, Messi missed a penalty in the shootout, after which he announced his retirement. But the little magician from Rosario was persuaded to return. It is flawed to contend that Messi needs a World Cup win to be considered among the best of all time. Football, after all, is not an individual sport; but there is no denying that such a triumph will immortalise him in the hearts of Argentine fans. Ronaldo, fresh off Champions League glory with Real Madrid, continues to spearhead Portugal's challenge, displaying a phenomenal level of fitness and skill even at 33. For host Russia, the tournament is an opportunity to showcase itself to the world at a time when its relations with the West are severely strained. Its sporting reputation needs repairing too after a massive doping scandal. The decision to award the 2018 FIFA World Cup to Russia eight years ago was by no means a popular one. There were allegations of corruption, even if a report by FIFA's Ethics Committee cleared the Russian bid team of wrongdoing. But all that could well be forgotten if the country delivers a successful World Cup. With the award of the 2022 edition to Qatar also under sustained spotlight, much is at stake for FIFA too.

# An improbable friendship

Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un have stunned the world. They may yet surprise us by pulling off a détente



RAKESH SOOD

"Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because Fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; Truth isn't," wrote Mark Twain. Nothing proves it better than the summit between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un in Singapore on Tuesday. No reality TV show could have scripted an episode with greater suspense and drama than what the two leaders successfully imparted to their meeting.

Mr. Trump, the 72-year-old leader of one of the world's oldest democracies, an \$18 trillion economy with a 1.3 million strong military, of whom 28,500 troops are deployed in South Korea, and Chairman Kim, at 34 the third-generation leader of a totalitarian state with an impoverished economy estimated at less than \$40 billion and a military force of 1.2 million with a newly acquired nuclear capability, make for an unusual couple. And yet, as Mr. Trump said, "From the beginning we got along." Describing Mr. Kim as "very talented", he recalled with a degree of empathy that the North Korean had faced a challenge when he took over his country at just 26 years.

### Art of making friends

Less than a year ago, the heightened rhetoric on both sides had led to growing concerns about the possibility of a nuclear exchange as North Korea ramped up its nuclear and missile testing programmes. In September 2017, it conducted its sixth nuclear test, declaring it a thermonuclear device, a claim that has been disput-

ed. However, with a yield of 100-300 kt (kiloton), it marked a significant improvement from earlier tests. Four of the six tests have been undertaken by Mr. Kim with a view to miniaturising the device to fit a missile warhead.

Simultaneously, he accelerated the missile programme conducting over 80 flight tests during the last seven years, compared to 16 undertaken by his father from 1994 to 2011. At least three new missiles have been successfully tested and inducted. These include the Musudan (around 3,500 km), Hwasong 12 (4,500 km) and Hwasong 14 (around 10,000 km). Last November, Hwasong 15 was tested with a range estimated at 13,000 km, making it clear that North Korea was close to developing the capability to target the U.S. mainland.

Mr. Trump warned North Korea with "fire and fury like the world has never seen". North Korea responded by threatening to hit Guam "enveloping it in fire". Mr. Trump announced that "military solutions are now fully in place, locked and loaded". The UN Security Council met repeatedly, tightening economic sanctions on North Korea. Mr. Trump described Mr. Kim as a "rocket man on a suicide mission for himself and his regime" while North Korea vowed to "tame the mentally deranged U.S. dotard with fire". Russia and China appealed for restraint, proposing a "freeze for freeze", calling on the U.S. to stop military exercises with South Korea in return for North Korea halting its nuclear and missile testing.

### Beginnings of a thaw

The situation began to change with Mr. Kim's New Year's address indicating that North Korea had achieved its nuclear deterrent capability and offering a new opening in relations with South Korea as it prepared to host the Winter Olympics in February. Things moved ra-



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pidly thereafter. The two Korean teams marched together at the opening ceremony and the presence of Mr. Kim's sister, Kim Yo-jong, added a dash of bonhomie to the soft diplomacy.

Two senior South Korean officials visited Pyongyang in early March. Over a long dinner conversation, Mr. Kim indicated continued restraint on testing and willingness to discuss denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula if military threats to North Korea decreased and regime safety was guaranteed. The testing restraint was formally declared on April 21, a week before the summit between the two Korean leaders on April 27 in Panmunjom, which was acclaimed a success.

The U.S. was kept fully briefed by South Korean officials and in early March Mr. Trump indicated readiness to meet Mr. Kim, leading to heightened speculation about mismatched expectations all around. Even after two visits by Mike Pompeo (first as CIA chief and then as Secretary of State) and the release of three Americans sentenced for spying, there were hiccups when National Security Adviser John Bolton held up the "Libyan model" for North Korea's disarmament and the U.S. launched air combat exercises together with South Korea. North Korea responded angrily. The summit was put off, followed by an exchange of conciliatory letters between the two leaders amid

mounting suspense, and on June 1 the summit was reinstated.

There have been previous attempts by the U.S. to address concerns regarding North Korea's nuclear programme. The first was the 1994 Agreed Framework after North Korea threatened to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). This was annulled by the Bush administration in 2002 with the 'axis of evil' speech. Consequently, North Korea withdrew from the NPT. The Six Party talks (second round) were initiated in 2004, resulting in a joint statement the following year reiterating commitment to denuclearisation, with a peace treaty and security guarantees to be concluded. The process collapsed when the U.S. imposed new sanctions, and in 2006 North Korea conducted its first nuclear test.

### Changed situation

Since then, the situation has changed. The old process is dead; North Korean capabilities have grown dramatically, increasing anxiety especially in South Korea and Japan and Chinese worries about U.S. deployment of missile defence in South Korea. There are challenges too. The U.S. would ideally like complete, verifiable and irreversible disarmament as would Japan. North Korea seeks regime legitimacy and regime security together with sanctions relief while reducing its dependency on China. China would like to prolong the process to ensure its centrality. And South Korea would like to lower tensions while retaining the American presence. Reconciling these needs time and sustained dialogue.

The Joint Statement in Singapore is shy on detail but carries political promise. Instead of obsessing on the nuclear issue, it reflects clear recognition that a new beginning in U.S.-North Korea relations is possible only by replacing the 1953 Armistice Agreement

with a permanent peace treaty and that regime security guarantee for North Korea is a prerequisite for denuclearisation. Mr. Trump has accepted that the denuclearisation process will take time, but he wants to take it to a point that makes it irreversible. The affirmation of the Panmunjom Declaration (signed between the two Korean leaders in April) means that bilateral normalisation between the two Koreas will move apace and a meeting involving the U.S. and possibly China to conclude a peace treaty can happen by end-2018.

Mr. Trump's unilateral announcements at the press conference are equally promising. He announced suspension of joint military exercises with South Korea and indicated that North Korea would dismantle a major missile engine testing site. There is no sanctions relief yet but given the changing psychological backdrop, it is likely that there may be a loosening by China and Russia.

Summit diplomacy has a mixed record. In 1972, U.S. President Richard Nixon travelled to China for the first summit with Chairman Mao Zedong leading to a realignment of political forces whose impact is still reverberating. In 1986, U.S. President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev met in Reykjavik, coming close to agreement on abolition of all nuclear weapons till realpolitik eventually prevailed.

With Mr. Trump and Mr. Kim, it is difficult to predict how the process will unfold but it is a new opening. One can almost visualise Mr. Trump and Mr. Kim telling each other as they said their goodbyes in Singapore: "I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship."

Rakesh Sood is a former diplomat and currently Distinguished Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation. E-mail: rakeshsood2001@yahoo.com

# The missing tiers

The disempowerment and depoliticisation of urban local government has happened in multiple ways



MATHEW IDICULLA

Twenty-five years ago, the Constitution underwent what is arguably its most significant transformation with the passage of the 73rd (mandating the creation of panchayats) and the 74th (creation of municipalities) Constitutional Amendments. While the 73rd Amendment came into force on April 24, 1993, the 74th Amendment came into effect on June 1, 1993. As the Central Government's Smart Cities mission completes three years this month, it's the right time to examine India's tryst with municipal governance.

Much has been written about the failure of States to implement the provisions of the 74th Amendment. However, it is important to examine concerns in the underlying constitutional design of urban local governments and the politics impeding this Amendment's operation. The "implementation failure" narrative tends to focus on how local governments are financially constrained and do not have the administrative capacity to carry out its functions. It is also important to explore how urban local governments are actively

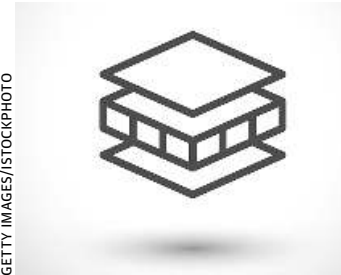
disempowered and depoliticised as an institution.

The disempowerment and depoliticisation has happened in multiple ways. First, elected representatives at the city-level are rendered powerless by making them subservient to the State government. In most municipal corporations, while the mayor is the ceremonial head, the executive powers of the corporation are vested with the State government-appointed commissioner. This disjuncture in municipal governance has been exploited by State governments to ensure that no city-level politician challenges their control over a city.

### An overshadowing

Municipal corporations are further denied their political role by the continued operation of various parastatal agencies created by the State government. These may take the form of urban development authorities (which build infrastructure) and public corporations (which provide services such as water, electricity and transportation). These agencies, which function with a certain autonomy, are accountable only to the State government, not the local government. Even urban planning and land-use regulation (globally a quintessential local government function) is with State government-controlled development authorities.

While parastatal agencies and



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unelected commissioners are pre-74th Amendment legacies that have not been undone, what is also worrying is the further depoliticisation of local government in recent years. Central government programmes such as the Smart Cities Mission seek to ring fence projects from local government. This programme mandates the creation of special purpose vehicles (SPVs) for Smart Cities which will have "operational independence and autonomy in decision making and mission implementation". It further "encourages" a State government to delegate "the decision-making powers available to the ULB (urban local body) under the municipal act/government rules to the Chief Executive Officer of the SPV".

The creation of parallel institutions that disempower the elected local government shows how higher levels of government distrust local politics and craftily retain control of a city's reins. Even for performing functions that are within its purview (such as levying local taxes or undertaking civic

projects above a certain budget) the local government requires State government permissions. Hence, municipalities are not yet autonomous units that can be genuinely called as the "third tier" of government in India's federal system. Even after the 73rd and 74th Amendments, India has effectively only two levels of government – Union and State.

### Future pathways

While the 74th Amendment has become a lodestar for civic activism in many cities, it has certain inherent limitations. Many of its key provisions are not mandatory for the State government. The functions listed under the 12th Schedule – which a State government is expected to devolve to the local government – do not include essential civic issues such as urban transportation, housing or urban commons. The 74th Amendment also contains an industrial township exception whereby a municipality need not be constituted in areas which are declared as industrial townships. These provisions have been employed by State governments to keep local governments weak.

Civic activism has often been focussed on the creation of two bodies mandated by the 74th Amendment – ward committees and metropolitan planning committees. However, an over-reliance on such semi-representative bodies does not augur well for creating a

genuinely democratic city government. In fact, civil society's fixation with nominating its members into ward committees can further depoliticise local governments and make them captive to the interests of certain elite resident welfare associations. Instead of distrusting them, we must acknowledge that local governments are inherently political spaces where multiple interests compete.

As cities struggle to meet the basic needs of their inhabitants, we must re-examine the existing modes of organising power in urban India. Unlike the 73rd Amendment which provides for three levels of panchayats (village, taluk, and district levels), power in urban areas is concentrated in a single municipal body (whether it is a municipal corporation, municipal council or town panchayat). However, as Indian cities have grown exponentially over the last 25 years, with some crossing the 10 million population mark, we must rethink the present model of urban governance that vests power in a singular municipality. While urban governance reforms can take multiple shapes, they must be foregrounded in the political empowerment of local government that furthers local democratic accountability.

Mathew Idiculla is a lawyer and researcher on urban issues and works with the Centre for Law and Policy Research, Bengaluru

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

### A new phase

The Donald Trump-Kim Jong-un historic handshake is a classic example of how diplomacy can work wonders in rewriting the destiny of nations ("Trump-Kim meet ends with promise" and Editorial - "Historic handshake", both June 13). One cannot help wishing that the same bonhomie is replicated in the subcontinent with India and Pakistan resolving their differences. It needs concerted efforts and a determined leadership at both ends to grasp the olive branch which could save many an innocent life and usher in prosperity.

ANJALI B.  
Thiruvananthapuram

■ While the full details of the Trump-Kim discussions

behind closed doors are still awaited, their meeting seems to underline two things. It has, to some extent, provided a degree of legitimacy to the North Korean regime. Two, the remarkable rapprochement within a year of threatening each other with mass destruction has served to underline the importance of personalities in international relations. It is to the U.S. President's credit that he has managed to enable an important diplomatic turnaround.

R. SIVAKUMAR,  
Chennai

■ There is no doubt that the summit is historic. One hopes that the resolution on denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula will help bring in much-needed peace

to a strategic part of the globe. Why no other U.S. President met the North Korean leader is a pertinent question. Is it because they did not want to legitimise the existence of North Korea in the diplomatic order without concrete commitments? One is sure that the two leaders will feature in the shortlist for the Nobel Peace Prize.

K.A. SOLAMAN,  
Alappuzha, Kerala

■ Finally, something positive happened after a protracted exchange of threats. The positive body language and the optics showed that some progress was possible. In the end, this remarkable development between the U.S. and North Korea should still be viewed with caution as we never know when one of them may retract the

promises made.  
DIRKSHA PANT,  
Dehradun, Uttarakhand

### Script and speech

One was left baffled after reading the report, "PM will run away like Nirav, Mallya" (June 13). On what basis does the Congress president declare that the Prime Minister will do this? It is crystal clear that Rahul Gandhi has no agenda for his party other than levelling charges – many of them personal – against Mr. Narendra Modi. I am unable to understand how former Congress president Sonia Gandhi and senior leaders in the party are unable to offer him counsel. There needs to be an element of decency and dignity in one's political speeches. Perhaps Mr. Gandhi should refer to and

learn from the elegant speeches and writings of Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi.

BELLUR S. DATTAJI,  
Bengaluru

### Hindi for elephants?

It is amusing that forest officers in north India are planning to teach Hindi commands to elephants "being imported" from Karnataka for patrol duties in north Indian forest reserves (Online edition, "The elephant ambassadors of Karnataka", June 13). While the elephants are sure to have experienced physical

and emotional turmoil after being transferred from one region to another, teaching them new commands in an alien tongue is bound to vex the giants. On the other hand, as one forest officer has said, forest officials can do themselves and the elephants a favour by having their new mahouts learn simple Kannada commands. Else one is bound to come across a confused herd of jumbos in the wildlife reserves of north India.

SAM VIJAY KUMAR J.,  
Puducherry

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### CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

The standalone picture on the front page titled "Fan frenzy" (June 13, 2018) erroneously gave the kick-off date of the FIFA World Cup as Friday. Actually, the month-long event starts on Thursday, June 14, 2018.

The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in