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## Matter of mistrust

There's no rule preventing a top banker's or bureaucrat's relative from doing business. But a potential conflict of interest situation arises when that relative's dealings are with someone having significant commercial transactions with the bank or government department concerned. The case of ICICI Bank — involving its managing director and CEO Chanda Kochhar's husband, Deepak, and the Videocon Group's chairman Venugopal Dhoot — is a textbook example of this. As an investigation by The Indian Express has revealed, a Dhoot-owned company, in March 2010, loaned Rs 64 crore to a renewables firm that he and Deepak Kochhar had jointly promoted only in late-2008. Through a series of complex deals thereafter, the company that extended the loan got wholly acquired by a trust controlled by Deepak Kochhar in April 2013. Well before that, Dhoot had also sold his 50 per cent stake in the renewables joint venture for a paltry Rs 2.5 lakh. What's more, even the transfer of shares in the lending company to Deepak Kochhar's trust was made at just Rs 9 lakh.

But the real issue is not about a lender being subsumed by its borrower, on terms seemingly most opaque. More germane is ICICI Bank sanctioning a Rs 3,250-crore loan to the Videocon Group and this taking place in April 2012, a year before the mysterious transaction involving Deepak Kochhar's trust was concluded. While it may not be easy to establish any quid pro quo here, the question to be asked is: Should Deepak Kochhar have been allowed to do business with somebody, to whose group ICICI Bank had lent large monies? The bank's board has claimed no conflict of interest, despite Chanda Kochhar having sat on the credit committee that sanctioned the loan to Videocon. The loan, moreover, was part of a credit facility aggregating around Rs 40,000 crore extended to the group by a consortium of over 20 banks. Chanda Kochhar couldn't apparently have influenced the credit decision, when ICICI Bank was not even the lead bank of this consortium. Yes, the Videocon loan became a non-performing asset (NPA), but that, by itself, cannot have been ascribed to any nepotism or quid pro quo.

The above arguments, however, simply don't wash. Whether or not Deepak Kochhar's business relations with Dhoot helped facilitate ICICI Bank's loan to Videocon only a detailed investigation can establish. What's not in doubt is a clear conflict of interest and the bank's seeming reluctance to get to the bottom of it. A knee-jerk press release in defence of Chanda Kochhar and talking assurances by the bank's board do not make for a credible institutional response. In fact, it only undermines the bank's leadership. ICICI is after all India's third largest bank by assets. At a time when state-owned banks are facing an unprecedented NPA and corporate governance crisis — the PNB-Nirav Modi scam is only a manifestation of that — the country cannot afford any public mistrust in systemically important private sector banks.

## Malala Yousafzai's homecoming

God willing, I will return to Pakistan soon," Malala Yousafzai had said in an interview after becoming the youngest Nobel Prize winner in 2014. Many in her country poured scorn at these sentiments, then. "We hate Malala Yousafzai, a CIA agent," one Facebook page reacted. It's a measure of how much things have changed in Pakistan in four years that social media has gone abuzz welcoming Malala back home. On Thursday, the country's twitterati stayed up well past midnight to "welcome our very own Nobel laureate & the brave and brainy daughter of the soil". "If it were up to me, I would have never left the country," the 20-year-old woman responded.

Perhaps she has yearned for this day more than her people. "When I woke up in hospital in the UK, I looked outside and asked the doctors where are the mountains and the rivers. I miss my friends and family. But I also miss the landscape," she told the Pakistani publication Mangobaa, a week before her visit — when it was still under the wraps. That much of her itinerary is still not public is a testimony to the fact that the authorities who shower accolades on Malala are still edgy about her homecoming. It's a compulsion the young woman seems to understand, even when emotions get the better of her. At public functions to fete her, she often says that she has "seen much". And then, with equal candour, professes that she "rarely cries".

During her short visit, Malala has been moved to tears several times. Her homecoming will not be more than four days. "I want to be able to move freely in the streets and meet and talk to people, peacefully without any fear. And I hope, it will be like my old home," she has said. Let's hope that the welcome accorded to Malala portends her wish coming true.

*Great ambition is the passion of a great character. Those endowed with it may perform very good or very bad acts. All depends on the principles which direct them.*

----Napoleon Bonaparte

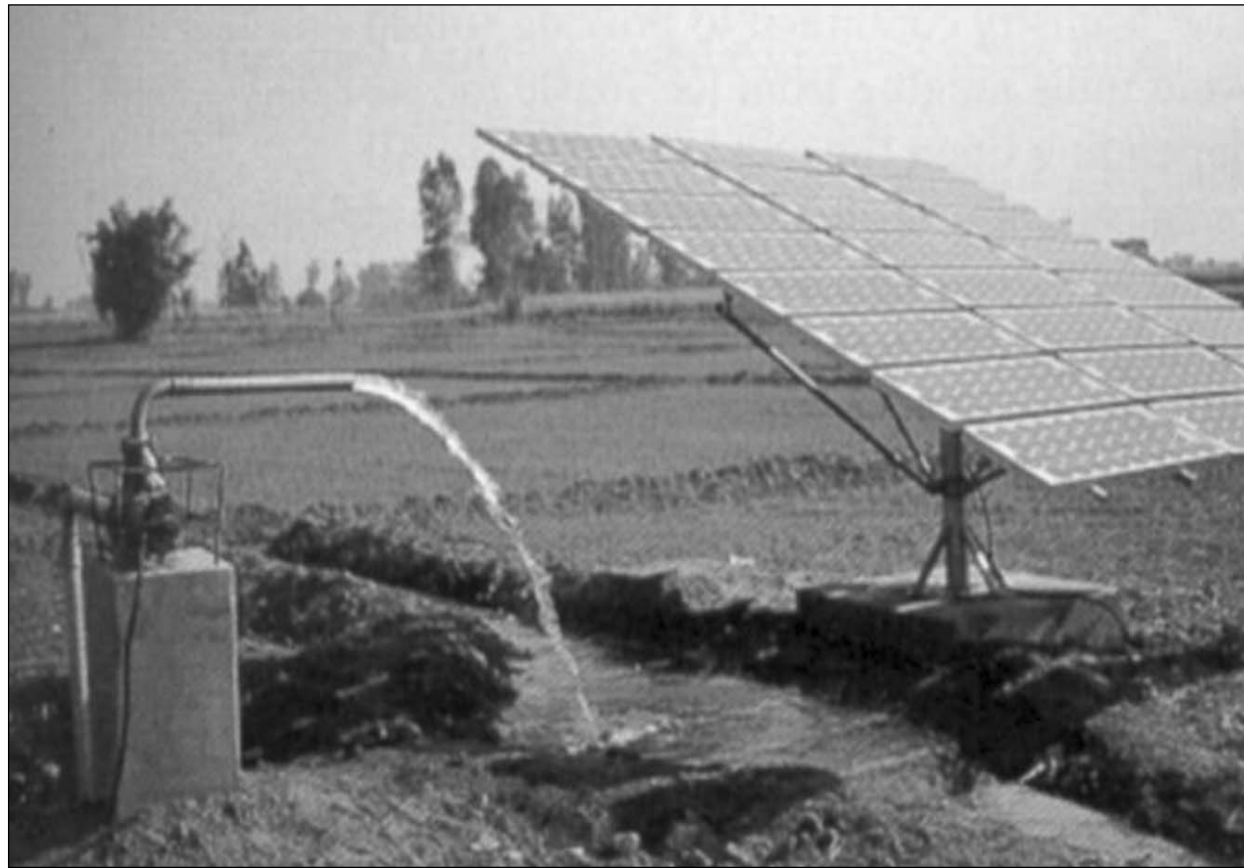
By Saptak Ghosh

The World Economic Forum annual meeting last month revealed some startling facts about India and the world's economy. The Oxfam survey highlighted that the richest one per cent in India accounted for 73 per cent of the wealth generated in the country, showcasing the worrying trend of income inequality. Recommendations to alleviate this included promotion of labour-intensive sectors and investment in agriculture.

On the other hand, India is aggressively pushing for solar power with a 100 GW target for 2021-22. The installed capacity crossed 20 GW in 2017, with 18.4 GW in the form of ground-mounted projects and 1.6 GW on rooftops. This provides us with the opportunity to innovate in terms of systems design and link solar power to India's labour-intensive agriculture sector.

The trend in India is the promotion of large solar parks with capacities more than 250 MW, at each location, in bigger states. The official solar park target has been increased to 40 GW. Recent tenders for these parks have driven the tariff down to less than Rs 2.50/umit, making solar cheaper than coal. However, rooftop photovoltaic (RTPV) systems, which are expected to contribute 40 GW as well, have still not taken off in India and need a boost.

Ground-mounted PV solar projects require



only receive a marginal increment in their revenue. Is there a way then, farmers. Innovative irrigation methods, such as drip or mist, have house, which contributes to making the internal conditions favourable technically feasible to install PV panels on polyhouses, it will obstruct light from entering the structure and negatively impact plant growth. However, initial analyses show that artificial lighting inside the polyhouse can compensate for the loss of natural lighting because of the PV panels.

around four-five acres of land per MW, and 120,000 to 200,000 acres of land are required to meet the 40 GW solar park target. Most of the proposed solar parks have faced issues when it comes to identification and acquisition of land. The common practice today is to identify land with low agricultural yields and then lease them out from farmers for 25-30 years at an annual rate of Rs 20,000-Rs 30,000/acre.

The problem here is that 40 GW of solar parks will result in 160,000 to 200,000 acres of land lying unutilised below the PV panels. Moreover, farmers will

to optimise the usage of land, whilst increasing the farmers' revenues significantly?

Enter, the polyhouse. A polyhouse is an enclosed space where a variety of plants can be grown perennially by controlling the ambient temperature, humidity, air flow and lighting conditions. Polyhouses are a proven concept in India; enterprising farmers have reported five-fold increases in agricultural yield and resultant revenue per acre of land. Central and state governments also encourage polyhouses by providing 40-60 per cent capital subsidies on polyhouse investments made by

reduced the water requirement in polyhouses by more than 60 per cent per acre for typical crops. One acre of polyhouse also creates 10-12 jobs. Is it then possible to change solar parks to solar polyhouse parks where farmers adopt modern farming techniques, while PV panels adorn the roofs of the polyhouse structures?

Polyhouses with RTPV have been successfully implemented in developed countries with colder climates; PV panels are seamlessly integrated into the roof structure. This design allows heat to get trapped inside the poly-

house, which contributes to making the internal conditions favourable

However, in tropical parts of India, the typical design of polyhouses is such that the roof is designed as a broken dome structure, which allows better air circulation and ventilation, and hence control over the ambient temperature. RTPV systems will have to be placed over the roof structure of these polyhouses with an external integration design. This means that the supporting structure of the polyhouses will need to be made stronger to accommodate the extra weight of the panels and their mounts. Agricultural experts claim that while it is

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technically feasible to install PV panels on polyhouses, it will obstruct light from entering the structure and negatively impact plant growth. However, initial analyses show that artificial lighting inside the polyhouse can compensate for the loss of natural lighting because of the PV panels.

Polyhouses with 1 MW RTPV capacity will need around seven acres of land and the auxiliary electricity consumption will be around 12 per cent. Although the land required per MW increases and electricity exported per MW to the grid decreases, the resultant co-benefits, in terms of revenue and yield, increase for the farmers. PV system developers fear that costs will go up if RTPV designs are put on the table. However, with accurate structural engineering, the costs might actually come down by reducing the size of the mounting structures. This proposed innovation of polyhouses with RTPV has the potential to pave the way for inclusive growth in India by linking solar to agriculture. Structural and lighting engineers, along with polyhouse design specialists, need to work together to develop working designs for various parts of the country. This could even culminate into a specific policy being announced to promote this concept. It is a win-win situation for farmers, who had all but given up on their lands, as well as the government when it comes to choosing land for large solar projects. (Courtesy : IANS)

## Why is Lobsang Sangay calling for Dalai Lama to return to Tibet?

by Jyoti Malhotra

Tibet's prime minister-in-exile Lobsang Sangay calling for His Holiness the Dalai Lama to return to the Potala palace in Lhasa is both surprising and odd. Surprising, because it indicates an ongoing conversation between the Chinese government and the Tibetan government-in-exile in Dharamshala that has been in the realm of rumour for several months.

Odd, not only because this is the first time in several decades that something like has been publicly said, but because it also adds grist to speculation that the distance between the government in New Delhi and the Dalai Lama's people is growing.

Remember the letter written by Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale to the Cabinet Secretary, as first reported by the 'Indian Express,' saying that all functions in Delhi commemorating the Dalai Lama's arrival in Delhi won't be allowed because this is a "sensitive time"?

But at the function today in McLeodganj, the home of the Dalai Lama in Dharamshala, where the "thank you India" function was held, senior BJP leaders like party general secretary Ram Madhav, culture minister Mahesh

Sharma and former Himachal chief minister Shanta Kumar sat next



to the Tibetan leader. Satyabrata Chaturvedi from the Congress party added a dimension of political consensus.

Let us be clear that none of this could have happened without the sanction of the government in Delhi. No senior BJP leader, especially Ram Madhav who is also an RSS leader, would have dared visit McLeodganj

if the ministry of external affairs had not said it was okay to do so.

Interestingly, Shanta Kumar, who in the past has demanded a Bharat Ratna for the Dalai Lama, today described as a "tragedy" the fact that the Dalai Lama had to leave home in 1959 and escape to India. China should pave the way for his return, he added.

So what is going on? As India goes about "resetting" its relation-

ship with China — meaning, that it is cutting back on all criticism in

bloodshed. And soon after, during the invasion of Tibet and the

the face of China's rising strength — do Shanta Kumar's words — and Lobsang Sangay's reply — indicate that something is happening behind the scenes? Take a look at what Lobsang Sangay really said during his speech: On the eve of his escape to India in 1959, His Holiness the Dalai Lama had three dreams. The first one was of

he met soon after, were wearing white khadi.

The Dalai Lama's third dream, Lobsang Sangay said, was of him returning to the Potala palace filled with light and "reunited with Tibetan people." "This third dream will also come true by karmic design. We must all make efforts for His Holiness' dream to return to the Potala palace come true," Sangay added. (Courtesy : IE)