Conference Report

Transforming PSUs, Transforming India

A day-long India PSU IT Forum organised by Governance Now witnessed the heads of India's top PSUs and industry experts deliberating upon the role of technology to turn around the fortunes of their companies and demonstrated how they used IT to make their working transparent and user-friendly

Laying stress on improving the efficiency of public sector undertakings (PSUs), coal secretary Anil Swarup said that while public sector has an amazing potential, it is the environment in which they work that hampers their functioning. Speaking at Governance Now India PSU IT Forum on May 18, Swarup said, "We have to understand the limitations within which they have to work, perform and compete. Once we understand those limitations and are able to solve those issues, we can achieve anything under the sun."

Talking about the benefits of IT intervention in the coal sector, he said, "We made the whole process of coal block auction transparent. My idea was to make everything transparent with the use of technology. We did commit a lot of mistakes. And technology identified those mistakes then and there."

Swarup was earlier heading Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY), the only paperless health insurance scheme in the world, which benefits the poorest of poor. He said the scheme was recognised across the world by international agencies like the World Bank, International Labour Organisation (ILO) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). After the tremendous success of RSBY, Swarup was asked to move to the cabinet secretariat to head the project monitoring group, which was again turned into file-less entity under his leadership.

"From serving the poorest of the poor, I was asked to serve the richest of the rich. I was fast-tracking projects of over ₹1,000 crore [with the help of technology]," he said.

Elucidating the power of technology, he added, "That was also the time when scams were happening. And in that scenario I was asked to fast-track the project. Nonetheless in that environment, it was difficult to do things. So we created a paperless and file-less office where the industry could go to the portal in case they had any problem. Through this process we were able to clear projects worth ₹6 lakh crore. It happened because no matter how inefficient you are, you would like to appear efficient in the public, once you use technology and expose everyone on the portal. So many people are sitting on files for so many months."

His work philosophy? "I carry my office on my phone. I hate files. Everything has to be digitised." ∎

Top PSU chiefs speak

- MSTC can give freedom from 5 Cs of which PSUs are scared – CAG, CVC, courts, CIC and CBI – by improving transparency.
- To demonstrate the transparent functioning at MSTC, the company web-telecast their e-auctioning process, which was broadcast live all over India.
- MSTC has become an e-commerce service provider for coal block auctions. At any point of time, as many as 107 e-auctions take place on the MSTC portal.
- Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Odisha and others are utilising MSTC portal. Currently, 43 mine blocks are in various stages of auction.
- Future projects include an auto shredder plant, e-bidding for the power sector and e-shopping mall for sale of industrial products.

SK Tripathi, CMD, Metal Scrap Trade Corporation (MSTC)

"IRCTC has come a long way. We sold 29 tickets on the first day in 2002. After introducing e-ticketing in 2003, the number rose to 5.5 lakh tickets per day. We have more than 10 lakh passengers who register themselves through e-ticketing today."

AK Manocha, CMD, IRCTC

"Prospects for online education and admission to grow is huge in the country. It is expected to become a ₹20,000-crore market in the future. But before that, an active policy for education in IT sphere is needed. There are instances where even large companies like Wipro are not providing solutions for the education sector."

Diptiman Das, CMD, EdCIL (I) Ltd

"We practise the best technology in mining. We have the fastest logging system today and this has been possible only because of technology."

Malay Chatterjee, CMD, KIOCL Limited

"NRDC is in talks with the government to develop an online trading platform, on which technology developers can upload their technologies. And entrepreneurs, companies, and PSUs that are interested to modernise their management process can use this innovative platform."

H Purushotham, CMD, National Research Development Corporation (NRDC)

"Today there is no resistance from the PSUs in adopting technology. PSUs are taking the lead in adopting IT. Only affordability matters right now."

S Venkateswar, CMD, Projects and Development India Ltd

"Air India is using technology in a big way – from ticketing to check-in process. However, I believe that it is important to have a proper manual system in place before going for a larger scale computerisation. For Air India to become the best airline in the world, it has to have a strong, thriving human resource."

Ashwani Lohani, CMD, Air India Limited

"We were instrumental in the transformation of AIIMS OPD. With 12,000 patients visiting it every day, one would still find place to sit and have proper dates [for appointments with doctors]. A patient coming from a remote place often has to make several rounds of a hospital as some or the other document is missing. It is in these areas that IT can be helpful. One can sit in California and retrieve all the reports sitting online – these are some of the IT-enabled things."

Gyanesh Pandey, CMD, Hospital Services Consultancy Corporation

"PSUs are mammoth organisations, which need time to turn around their fortunes."

RK Bahuguna, CMD, RailTel Corporation of India Limited

"Infrastructure, application and security are the three pillars of business IT. Currently, the company is engaged in consolidating multiple applications into nine internet gateways to improve manageability and security. By merging servers into nine application centres we have saved a lot of money on licensing Oracle centres."

Rajiv Garg, executive director - IT, BHEL

- IOCL has its own secure data centre.
- The government-sponsored direct LPG subsidy scheme was launched in November last year. Since connectivity at some places was an issue, there was a need for a stable IT system, for efficient data transfer. But real-time data transfer for the LPG scheme was achieved.

Alok Khanna, executive director-IS, IOCL

"Technological innovations and knowledge integration have delivered solutions that have improved efficiency and enhanced the user experience at airports. We have established airport operation control centres at 10 airports and e-office has been implemented. We have integrated cargo management system at 12 airports."

SV Satish, executive director – IT, Airports Authority of India (AAI)

- A web-enabled solution was created to monitor the progress of the project for providing solar power system at Atal Seva Kendras in 9,400 locations. Right from a panchayat head to the prime minister can monitor the project through the portal.
- REIL developed 1 megawatt solar power solution for Katra railway station, inaugurated by the PM. The project was completed in three months.

AK Jain, managing director, Rajasthan Electronics and Instruments Ltd (REIL)

"NHPC's limits begin where a normal person's limit ends. We have our projects in places like Kargil, Leh, and the northeast region, where communication is a big problem. But ICT has helped us tremendously in bridging this gap."

Amod Aggarwal, general manager (IT&C), NHPC

"The core strength of RailTel is its strong VPN network, which is being used by many banks and PSUs. The optical fibre cable networks of RailTel covers a route of 45,000 km and has high bandwidth of 800 G."

Ashok Kumar Sablania, group general manager, data network and marketing, RailTel

"Since IT has been introduced in REC, there has been no instance of operation failure except for one day in September 2009. There has been no major security breach in the ICT set-up. The approach has been focused as per the approved IT plan, prepared in the beginning of the year aligned with business strategy."

Prashant Kumar Mukhopadhyay, GM (IT/ERP), Rural Electrification Corporation Limited (REC)

Deepak Srivastava, CVO, Mahanadi Coalfields Ltd

- Coal India Limited (CIL) is the first PSU where vigilance setup has been utilised for implementing IT interventions.
- Earlier, there was no tab on how much coal was transported, but today real-time data is available. Entire mining area is geo-fenced. And through IT intervention many cost cutting exercises have been done.

Sunil Kumar, GGM-IT, IRCTC

"We had launched our e-wallet service. Due to technical issues we had to withdraw it, but now we have launched it again. Travellers can book tickets from our e-wallet with less transaction charges, that is, Rs 5, in comparison with other wallets and now registration on e-wallet is free, which was chargeable earlier."

Atul Rastogi, deputy general manager (BIS), GAIL

"Even though the company had only 4,300 employees, it carries out its operations easily due to highly automated systems in place. Some of the IT measures adopted by GAIL include decentralised applications and e-mail, centralised SAP ERP and corporate intranet, and a three-way disaster recovery. Our CMD has a vision of transforming GAIL into a smart utility."

Shantanu Das, deputy general manager (IS), IOCL

"Change management is about changing the people. The human interaction is creating problems, not the tool or technology, so change management is very important."

What industry experts said

Nitin Varma, vice president – industrial and ITES vertical, Cisco

"At present we are in the middle of fourth industrial revolution, which is digitisation. Data collection and analytics is the new currency for decision-making which is only possible through digital advancement."

Gaurav Tripathi, head, project sales, Vantage Integrated Security Solutions

"We have deployed IP Video Surveillance solution at RBI, covering its 10 regional offices. A total of 1,250 cameras have been deployed. Until 2015, the RBI had an analog video surveillance system. The company has also bagged Delhi government's contract for deploying 3 lakh cameras in the city."

Rajesh Kumar S, technology lead, Juniper Networks

"Network is everything that puts ICT together as a platform. It is a key enabler that connects the user and the application. It is not just important to focus on building a network but also to sustain it for future betterment."

Pradeep Saluja, India security lead, CA Technologies

"PSUs are not only expanding their physical infrastructure but also their network infrastructure towards public or private cloud. Hence, it is becoming critical for the PSUs and other industry verticals to monitor people having privileged access to the data."

Gautam D Goradia, CEO, COM-SUR India

"While the city authorities are busy deploying more CCTV cameras to enhance security, their efforts would serve no purpose if footage captured in those cameras is not audited. To prevent crime and losses we need to have daily auditing of footage and COM-SUR provides solutions to audit hours of videos in minutes.