

Anti-portfolios and portfolios

Old India is not exactly ready to deal with the animal spirits of the young India



VANDANA GOMBAR

When Google's Sergey Brin and Larry Page began working out of a garage 20 years ago, Bessemer Venture Partners had a chance to connect with "two really smart Stanford students writing a search engine." David Cowan, a partner at the company, ducked out of an introduction to the duo. "How can I get out of the house without going anywhere near your garage?," he asked his friend who had rented them the garage.

The venture firm describes that as the most important moment ever for its

"anti-portfolio" — a list of highly successful companies that it missed investing in for multiple reasons. Bessemer's anti-portfolio includes some of the most successful companies: Holiday home rental provider Airbnb, Apple, Ebay, Facebook and Tesla, among others.

As India's startup space bubbles with activity — new, young players are tapping into opportunities opening up — there are local anti-portfolio stories circulating about investors missing opportunities in 'unicorns', or companies that have reached valuation of \$1 billion.

Global mobility disruptors like Bird, Lime, Skip and Spin — providers of shared electric scooters, and more — have their match in India with companies like Bounce and Vogo providing bikes on rent. Both are based in Bengaluru, and both are going electric. The young team at Ather Energy designed two models of electric scooters "from scratch" and is selling them in Bengaluru and Chennai, with plans to expand to other cities. The compa-

ny's backers include Tiger Global, Hero MotoCorp and InnoVen Capital.

There are startups like Magenta Power rolling out charging stations for electric vehicles, and they started even before the government's incentive scheme, or even standards for charging infrastructure, were finalised. Skylark Drones offers services to developers of solar power, right from gathering intelligence on a prospective site for the plant to tracking an under-construction project or mapping panels that are not generating as well as they should.

Blu Smart offers only electric taxis on its app-based ride-hailing service recently launched in Delhi. It is backed by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development. The International Finance Corporation has invested in the Bengaluru-based Lithium Urban Technologies, an electric-mobility service provider to companies like Google in Bengaluru. It has a fleet of over 1,000 electric cars running across eight cities, and plans to expand its service to electric buses and electric trucks. Shuttl is trying to establish an electric bus fleet, and is one of the 50

RECENT GLOBAL VENTURE CAPITAL/PRIVATE EQUITY INVESTMENTS

■ **Sense Photonics:** Flash lidar for autonomous vehicles, drones, robotics & advanced manufacturing

Investor: Samsung Ventures, Shell Ventures, Congruent Ventures, Prelude Ventures

■ **Clir Renewables:** AI based analytics for wind farms

Investor: Active Impact Investments

■ **Evolve Energy:** Software that shifts energy consumption to non-peak hours

Investor: Urban-X

■ **Opus One Solutions:** Grid Software for distributed energy management & trading

Investor: Export Development Canada, Renewal Funds, MKB

■ **eSmart Systems:** Predictive maintenance software

for transmission & distribution utilities

Investor: Energy Impact Partners, Innogy Ventures

■ **Probus Smart Things*:** IoT sensors & software analytics for smart grid

Investor: Seedstars World

*headquartered in India; Note: This list is not exhaustive

Source: BloombergNEF Technology Radar

companies globally that have committed to expand its electric vehicle footprint as part of the EV100 initiative.

Companies like Cleanmax Solar have been turning rooftops into power houses for almost a decade. Again, it is a company headquartered in Bengaluru. The Gurugram-headquartered Yellow Tropic is an engineering firm helping design and install floating solar panels on dams and lakes — a huge new market.

Many believe the best is yet to come.

Old India is, however, not exactly ready to deal with the animal spirits of this young India. Though startups find 17 mentions in the Budget speech (2019) of the finance minister, and have been promised tax exemptions, the reality is that only 2 per cent of the

4,648 applications received from startups for income tax exemption had been approved as of February 2019, according to an answer to a Parliament question.

Globally, startups serving utilities or the intelligent mobility space have been finding favour with investors, according to data tracked by BloombergNEF. For instance, eSmart Systems, a company developing predictive maintenance software for transmission and distribution utilities, secured funds from Innogy Ventures and Energy Impact Partners in June 2019.

The author is the editor – global policy for BloombergNEF. She can be reached at vgombar@bloomberg.net