

Atmanirbhar Bharat: India's march to the future

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in May 2020, announced his vision of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' to shape the future of India. This vision aims for "a self-reliant and resilient India, integrated with the global economy" and gives direction to the ongoing reform process in India.

The idea of Atmanirbhar Bharat is founded on India's longstanding commitment to sustainable development for its own people and for the world based on India's guiding principle of 'vasudaiva kutumbakam' or 'world is one family'. India is home to one-sixth of humanity. India's success in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will determine their global outcome. India is well aware of this responsibility and is committed to fully implement the SDGs through various well-designed national programmes.

In recent years, under the Swachh Bharat (Clean India) initiative, India is proud to have achieved full sanitation coverage in 600,000 villages by October 2019, paying tribute to Mahatma Gandhi during his 150th birth anniversary. In five years, India built over 110 million household toilets, which improved the rural sanitation cover from 38 per cent to 100 per cent and overall 88 per cent of India has been verified to be open-defecation free.

The recently announced National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 paves the way for transformational reforms in school and higher education systems in

India. This policy is built on the foundational pillars of Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability and Accountability, and is aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Government of India is focused on ensuring food security and food access. The world's largest food security programme, Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY), covering 800 million Indians launched in March 2020 has now been extended until November 2020. Last week, our Prime Minister launched the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund to the tune of US \$ 14 billion for post-harvest management infrastructure and community farming assets.

India has achieved gender parity in elementary and secondary education through massive awareness generation programmes. Nearly 70 million women in rural India are part of self-help groups under the Livelihood Mission, transforming lives and livelihoods on a large scale. Over a million women have been elected as representatives of local governments, leading the process of participatory development. In the last six years, India also opened 400 million bank accounts for the unbanked, out of which 220 million are owned by women.

India has achieved an annual reduction of 38 million tonnes of carbon emissions by electrification of villages, providing clean cooking fuel to 80 million poor households, and introducing energy efficient measures. India targets to install 450 Gigawatt of renewable energy and restore 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030.

The International Solar Alliance (ISA) initiative is an example of India's commitment to effective climate action. Similarly, the Coalition for Disaster Resilience Infrastructure aims to build resilient societies through a comprehensive approach coordinated between various stake-holders.

As a first responder in the region to earthquakes, cyclones or any other natural or man-made crisis, India has moved with speed and solidarity to help nations in need. In our collective fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, India has extended medical and other assistance to over 150 countries.

In the context of the Government's focus on socio-economic development and providing better governance and greater protection to the vulnerable people of Jammu and Kashmir, the Indian Parliament approved constitutional amendments a year ago. This resulted in the administrative reorganization of the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir into the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir and the Union Territory of Ladakh. The central laws that protect and promote social, economic and political rights of women and children in the rest of the country, for the first time are also benefiting now the people of the Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. Apart from this, 50 new educational institutions have been established offering 25,000 new slots for students. More than 500 infrastructure projects to the tune of US \$ 80 million have been completed. More than 300,000 households have been given access to electricity for the first time in 70 years.

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely tested the resilience of all nations. The Government of India has sought to convert the challenges into opportunities so that as a nation, India emerges more efficient and more adapted to the new normal, in a post COVID-19 world.

The early actions of the Government have given time to boost our health care infrastructure thereby resulting in high recovery rates and controlling the spread of COVID-19 virus. Internationally, the engagements with different countries at the highest levels have helped shape informed and coordinated responses to the pandemic and its socio-economic impact including, through evacuation of stranded nationals from each other's territories; maintenance of critical supplies of life-saving medicines and food; extension and facilitation of visas for each other's nationals; and sharing of best practices with partner countries. The Vande Bharat Mission, the largest peacetime repatriation exercise undertaken by any country, has facilitated the safe return of more than 1 million nationals back to India, and 150,000 foreign nationals back to their home or countries of residence.

The social and economic impact of the pandemic is becoming much more evident. IMF predicts that the world economy would contract by over 3 per cent in 2020. In order to prepare India better for a new global economic order, Prime Minister Narendra Modi identified five key pillars: creating a new economy, state of the art infrastructure, technology based delivery systems, leveraging India's youthful demography and harnessing domestic demand. In this context, government announced an economic stimulus

package of US \$ 270 billion, equivalent to 10 per cent of India's GDP, under the New Deal for Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan.

Our favourable policy regime and robust business environment have ensured that foreign capital keeps flowing into the country. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, India continued to attract Foreign Direct Investment of US \$ 22 billion between April-June 2020, reflecting its strong economic fundamentals.

The Indian diaspora, known for its work ethic, discipline and contribution to the local community, will continue to play an important role in the success of India's future. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the return of a number of Indian workers. The Government has launched the SWADES (Skilled Workers Arrival Database for Employment Support) application to create a structured mapping mechanism for future employment opportunities to all returning Indian workers. It is also focused on securing mobility for migrant workers in the post COVID scenario. The pandemic has highlighted the global shortage of trained personnel in many sectors, including health care and new and emerging technologies, where Indians have an edge.

As we approach the 74th Independence Day of India, countries around the world show a growing interest in India for its potential to become an additional engine of growth; its ability to provide a large pool of human talent; and its model of governance based on democratic traditions and the rule of law. To quote India's External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar,

“The world may be on the threshold of a new decade; but India is poised to enter the next phase of its own evolution.”
