



Vibrant India
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Realisation of the New India Dream

In his Independence Day address to the nation this year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi called for the shaping up of a “New India” that would be free from and united against the evils of casteism, communalism, terrorism and corruption. Days earlier, speaking at the special session of Parliament convened to mark the 75th anniversary of the Quit India movement, the Prime Minister had made a similar appeal, saying that he hoped to see a New India emerge by 2022 (when the nation marks 75 years of its freedom). “Karenge our karke rahenge” (We will do and will surely do), he exhorted, juxtaposing it with the 1942 rallying cry of “Karenge ya marenge” (We will do — gain freedom — or die).

The New India slogan is unlike the others the Modi Government has given in the little over three years that it has been in office — it’s not sector-specific but an attempt to infuse the conscience of every Indian with a zeal to deliver real and tangible changes across the national canvas. The earlier ones were programme-oriented: Swachh Bharat Abhiyan targeted cleanliness and hygiene (the construction of toilets in public places, in villages, in schools etc., among other things); Skill India zeroed in on imparting skills to the youth to empower them (both in terms of jobs and self-employment); Make in India called upon foreign manufacturing firms to set up base in India either on their own or in collaboration with Indian partners to generate employment; Startup India sought to create an eco-friendly environment for budding entrepreneurs; and the Pradhan Mantri Mudra (Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency) Yojana extended easy loans to micro, small and medium enterprises — the MSMEs.



Because of its generalised meaning, the New India construct could be, wrongly, interpreted as an empty slogan that has neither direction nor purpose. In fact, there is nothing vague about it. Rather, the terminology seeks to subsume every single aspiration that the Government led by Prime Minister has been articulating for and on behalf of the millions of the country's people. Importantly, the call goes beyond policies and programmes — because the New India that PM Modi has in mind is also a nation where there is zero tolerance to corruption not just in governance but also in society; zero tolerance to terrorism that is perpetrated by militants from within the country and by those across the borders, and sought to be justified by contorted logic by so-called liberals; and zero tolerance to the menace of communalism and casteism. The Prime Minister and his party have to a large extent, at least electorally, succeeded in breaking caste barriers, as results to recent Assembly elections have demonstrated. And because of its determined outreach and commitment to equality without appeasement, the Bharatiya Janata Party and its leaders have also managed to, even if indirectly, raise the levels of consciousness among the country's principal minority community that its members cannot be taken for granted by our so-called secular parties, and that they are not anybody's vote-banks. Not anymore.

Regardless of the criticism from opponents that the New India slogan is yet another 'jumla' (rhetoric) from the Prime Minister, the ground reality is that various sections of both Government and society, including advocacy groups, have begun to work to realise this aspirational goal in ways that have to do with their areas of expertise. Because it can be argued with some merit that many problems have their roots in the lack of financial empowerment, the creation of an eco-system which allows for such empowerment to the masses, is a credible solution. At the macro level, this translates into Governments, both at the Centre and in the States, striving to create conditions that make ease of doing business better and enhance transparency in policy and rules' implementation. Besides, these efforts have to be oriented not so much towards meeting the ends of select lobbies but to the ordinary stakeholder, whether it is a direct beneficiary from the business community or a job-aspirant or those others who would be assisted through indirect ways.



One such initiative was recently taken by the New Delhi branch of the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry. It organised a Chief Secretaries' Conclave on September 16, and the subject was, 'Making New India by 2022 — Role of States. The event saw the participation of senior bureaucrats from different States, including the Chief Secretaries of Uttar Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh. Attended by industry leaders and representatives who interacted with the bureaucrats in a series of special sessions, the conclave was addressed by Union Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office, Jitendra Singh, and Niti Aayog Chief Executive Officer Amitabh Kant. Jitendra Singh offered the blunt message that governance, which included Ministers and bureaucrats, had to change and meet the people's aspirations. He added that a Government which failed or refused to herald such changes should prepare to make way for others. An effective redressal of genuine public grievances, he said, was an intrinsic part of a New India. Taking pot-shots at critics who point out that the number of grievances pouring into Government offices had risen since the Modi regime took charge, he pointed out that people direct their grievances only when they are assured of a positive response; they trust this Government enough to complain even more vehemently. His message, crisply put, was, "Shape out or ship out'.

It was encouraging that every single speaker and participant in the conclave concurred with the growing view that Governments and societies across the country have to work towards the realisation of the Prime Minister's dream of New India, and that the way ahead was through greater participation of the States — via both 'cooperative and competitive' federalism. An interesting feature of the discussion was the emphasis that emerged on the development of the North-East. Both Arunachal Pradesh Chief Secretary Shakuntala Gamlin and a senior bureaucrat from Assam who handled the commerce and industry department, pointed out that the northeastern States were the gateway to ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) which, taken together, formed an imposing market that was waiting to be tapped through greater India-ASEAN trade.



True to his reputation of being a no-nonsense and straight-talking bureaucrat, Amitabh Kant called a spade a spade and hinted that non-performance was no longer an option. Add to that, the heartening endorsements from the PHD Chamber's top brass — including President Gopal Jiwarajka, Secretary-General Saurabh Sanyal, Vice President Rajiv Talwar and others — on the creation of the Prime Minister's New India, and it becomes obvious that the PHD Chamber, like many others, is fully tuned in to the idea and is proceeding towards its fruition. A booklet produced for the occasion by the leading research agency, KPMG, highlighted the work being done to make possible the arrival of New India by 2022. It dealt with a variety of subject ranging from the ease of doing business, industrial development, education and skill development, job-creation and accelerating the pace of the Smart Cities project. The report enumerates the work being done and also the challenges ahead.

Yet, despite all the good intentions and declared commitment, the task is not going to be easy. Age-old mindsets are not readily amenable to changes. New India will happen when new thinking strikes roots and produces branches in all directions — social, economic, cultural, political. Five years may appear too short a time to bring about comprehensive changes, but tangible gains in at least some segments can certainly be attainable/visible. We must remember that the option to New India is not even worth contemplating.

(The writer is a senior political commentator and public affairs analyst)



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