

# DRIVING AGRO-ECONOMY TOWARDS GREATER GLORY

Nirendra Dev

India is now eyeing second Green Revolution in eastern India. The need for enhanced investment in agriculture with twin focus on higher quality productivity and welfare of farmers is rightly emphasized from time to time by the Prime Minister. In the entire scenario, the government has laid emphasis on the awareness campaign and enhanced agri-knowledge for the farming community.

In India successful management of economy and political life is seen as a true test case of nation's success as a democracy and its march towards a greater glory. But given the vastness of the country, immense geographical differences and sharp rise in population graph, there are certain grey areas vis-a-vis developmental works and infrastructures. However, the present government at the Centre is certainly looking into these challenges.

For a start, a number of schemes have already been envisaged with adequate fund allocation and tasks ear-marked even at micro-level. The plans actually relating to basic rural infrastructures with focus on agro-development are sought to be addressed in a rather cohesive and more direct manner than before. Steps have been accordingly taken and schemes tailored to ensure creation of gainful employment in villages and small towns through help to generate a resource base at the household level, improve agriculture and allied sectors and, ultimately, usher in rural happiness and prosperity. It goes without saying that the uplift of rural infrastructure is one of the most important factors for the overall growth of the Indian economy.

It is also true that India is primarily an agriculture-based

country wherein farm activities ultimately contributes nearly one-fifth of the gross domestic product.

Thus, it is imperative to understand that in order to enhance the growth of the country and in order to achieve inclusive growth plans as envisaged in Prime Minister much talked about slogan 'Sabka Saath-Sabka Vikas (With all-Development for all)', rural infrastructures in agriculture and allied sectors would be very important.

The rural development in India has witnessed several changes over the years in its emphasis, approaches, strategies and programmes. However, despite a well spread out and adequately staffed rural development machinery, it has been experienced that the results of certain integrated rural development schemes remained unsatisfactory – often due to implementation lapses and leakages.



Thus, we have the experiences of rural areas often with high concentration of poverty given the background of disguised unemployment in agriculture.

The incumbent government headed by the Prime Minister has hence, taken some basic corrective steps. It has tried to focus on basic infrastructure necessities like effective irrigation mechanism and also launched the ambitious Soil Health Card strategy. Emphasis is also on proper execution as we know the effective implementation is the touchstone of any result-oriented planning, ensured people's participation in rural areas is the centre-piece in the development of agro-economy.

Prime Minister himself has number of times emphasized in unambiguous terms that people's participation is the foremost pre-requisites of development process chiefly from philosophical perspectives.

To cite a few illustrations of government initiatives, in September 2015, the Union Cabinet approved **Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Rurban Mission** (SPMRM) and earmarked over Rs 5,000 crore to develop at least 300 clusters over next three years across the country.

Importantly, seeking to achieve catalyzing overall regional growth, the programme aims to strengthen rural areas in basic infrastructures like roads and electrification with adequate jobs and "de-burdening" the urban areas. Thus it seeks for balanced regional development particularly in rural pockets.

Among other features, the programme also envisaged agriculture processing, agriculture market, go-downs and warehouses. It is certainly appreciated that these actually linked to gainful employment – a vital feature to keep rural India attractive especially for the younger generation.

In the Union Budget for 2016-17, the Central Government drew out mechanisms also to develop governance capabilities of Panchayati Raj Institutions on the Sustainable Development Goals. In this connection, the Finance Minister announced a new scheme namely '**Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan**', for which Rs. 655 crore were set apart.



It is important here to reflect upon what's at hand for the Government of India or the Union Rural Development ministry or the Agriculture ministry – catering to rural infrastructures - with regard to ensuring food security in India. In the words of Prof M S Swaminathan, former chairman of National Farmers Commission, the foremost priority should be the well-being of Indian farmers simply because agriculture is the mainstay of the people. "First it is imperative to protect the interests of the farmers. Most problems with regard to the farming community like reasonable prices for their products, doing away with middlemen are manmade. In India, we cherish democracy. Democracy is all about majority, and that way we stand as a country of farmers as for majority of the population in the country, agriculture is the mainstay," Prof Swaminathan had told this writer not long back.

To catch up with the pressing needs, therefore, there is talk about larger investments from both public and private to the Agriculture sector and rural upliftment. Sometime back, the private sector investment in agriculture had actually risen from about 8 per cent to anything between 9.9 to 10 per cent or little more. The Central Government has from time to time only underlined that larger investments in agriculture could only help sustained growth in other sectors like industries.

According to Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, India's robust growth rate when compared to other countries has also rendered in attractive destination for foreign investment. "Public investment in India



in the last few years has significantly picked up. In this regard we have been helped by the global economic situation where oil and commodity prices being moderate have helped us in accumulating a lot of savings."

In fact, the first half of this financial year 2016-16, has witnessed an improvement in private sector's willingness to invest in infrastructures. According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), as against 2015-16, there has been about 43 per cent increase in the value of new project announcements.

In 2015-16, new projects worth Rs. 44,607 crore were announced. The Agriculture Ministry officials say that infrastructure development in rural areas and agrarian fields will also mean impounding of rainwater in ponds and using it for critical irrigation particularly in low rainfall areas. While many states have enacted legislation to ensure water harvesting both in urban and rural areas to supplement irrigation water supplies, in 2014 the Modi government launched the ambitious Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana. In more ways than one, this is being seen as a 'game changer'.

The Union Budget for fiscal 2016-17 also pledged that steps will be taken to reorient its interventions in the farm and non-farm sectors to double the income of the farmers by 2022. Stating that the '**Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana**' has been strengthened and will be implemented in mission mode, 28.5 lakh hectares will be brought under irrigation. The government has also announced creation of a dedicated Long Term Irrigation Fund in the NABARD

bank with an initial corpus of about Rs. 20,000 crore. Simultaneously, a major programme for sustainable management of ground water resources has been prepared with an estimated cost of Rs. 6,000 crore.

The government has meanwhile taken other related steps. It has approved Mega Food Parks in several states including the likes of Jharkhand, Assam, West Bengal, Bihar and Tripura. The Mega Food Parks Scheme (MFPS), a flagship programme of the Food Processing ministry is aimed at ensuring an efficient supply chain.

The cold chain scheme with adequate storage arrangements was approved with an objective to provide integrated and complete cold chain, value addition and preservation infrastructure facilities. The assistance under the scheme includes financial assistance for installing plants and machinery and technical civil works in general areas. Special funding mechanism under this has been drawn for rural areas as also far-flung northeastern states.

The government has been also encouraging use of self propelled combine harvesters. The combine harvester includes a threshing module, a separating module and a cleaning module. Driven by the technology these harvesters are economical in operation and ensures high crop recovery.

The Green Revolution had heralded the first round of changes in Indian rural economy and agri movement. India is the largest producer of pulses and also the consumer. It is second largest producer of wheat, rice, sugar, groundnut as also in production of cash crops like coffee, coconut and tea.

India is now eyeing second Green Revolution in eastern India. The need for enhanced investment in agriculture with twin focus on higher quality productivity and welfare of farmers is rightly emphasized from time to time by the Prime Minister. In the entire scenario, the government has laid emphasis on the awareness campaign and enhanced agri-knowledge for the farming community. But besides the measures to improve minimum support price and assistance like improved irrigation and rural electrification, the mandatory regime has laid emphasis on the Soil Health Card Scheme.

Awareness of soil health position and the role of manures would help in higher production of foodgrains in eastern India too and this would help tackle the decline in production in central and peninsular India.

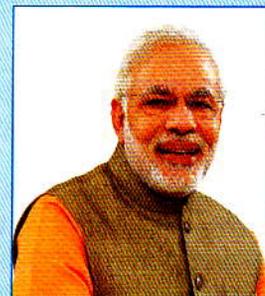
Launched by the Central Government in February 2015, the scheme is tailor-made to issue 'Soil Card' to farmers which will carry crop-wise recommendations of nutrients. This is aimed to help farmers to improve productivity through judicious use of inputs.

This path-breaking initiative would create a golden opportunity for the farmers to improve the productivity of their crops and also go for diversification. A comprehensive growth in agriculture production and also focused approach for uplift of allied sectors like animal husbandry, bee-keeping and fisheries will certainly contribute significantly to ensuring food security of the country.

*(The Author is a New Delhi-based Senior Journalist and a keen observer of Rural Development and Agro-Economy. Email: nirendev1@gmail.com)*

### **Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana (Gramin)**

Prime Minister formally launched "Housing for All" in rural areas under which the Government proposes to provide an environmentally safe and secure pucca house to every rural household by 2022. The scheme is named as Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana (Gramin), at the recently concluded Agra Parivartan Rally in Agra, U.P. The PM saw over 40 of the over 200 building designs and interacted with newly trained Rural Masons and beneficiaries which were showcased to him. The main highlights of the scheme are:



- 'Housing for All' in rural areas under which the Government proposes to provide an environmentally safe and secure pucca house to every rural household by 2022.
- The target of the first phase is to complete one crore houses by March 2019 and minimum support of nearly Rs. 1.5 lakh to Rs. 1.6 lakh to a household is available.
- Provision of bank loan upto Rs. 70,000/-, if the beneficiary so desires.
- A major step forward in bringing together Skill India, Digital India, Make In India, IT/DBT Aadhaar platform and Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY).
- Programme provides for skilling 5 lakh Rural Masons by 2019 and allows over 200 different housing designs across the country based on a detailed study of housing typologies, environmental hazards and the households' requirements
- Large scale use of local materials is envisaged along with a complete home with cooking space, electricity provision, LPG, toilet and bathing area, drinking water etc through convergence.
- All payments are through IT/DBT mode with Aadhaar linked Bank accounts with consent, to ensure complete transparency and accountability.
- A 45 days on site hands-on skill training of Rural Masons to help poor households to better their skills.