

Nurturing Excellence of our Yuva Shakti

Bharat Lal

‘अपि यथा युवानो मत्सथा नो विश्वे जगदभित्पित्वे मनीषा’

This Rig Vedic phrase reminds us that it is the youth who pave the way for a better world. With India's median age today being 29 years, we are witnessing a youth bulge. It is no surprise that India's youth are leading towards the change, as they traverse multiple paths to carry forward the legacy of India and build the future. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision for India @2047, empowerment of youth is seen as an essential step to create an empowered future.

The Government of India has undertaken a number of steps to improve the quality of lives and enhance ease of living, such as ensuring housing to all; clean drinking water; rural electrification; cooking gas; internet and communication facilities; health insurance; road connectivity; quality education; and vocational training for all citizens so that they are able to concentrate on their future and realise their full potential.

Today, India's demographic dividend constituting of working age population between 15-64 years stands at 80 crore (67%) of the total population. Years 2020–2050 dubbed as the ‘golden period’ of Indian economy constitutes youth as a key demographic, and with the right policy measures they have the potential to usher in positive change to transform India into an economy with diversified and sustainable high economic growth. The country is getting its foothold in the global market and is not only fiercely competing with many developed economies, on sheer force of innovation, incubation and youthfulness, but is also being recognised for its remarkable contributions across major economies by our vibrant diaspora.

Era of the ‘Techade’

With an annual 1.2 crore new entries to the workforce, the Government's role has become more crucial in not only creating opportunities for everyone but also in building a strong ecosystem of education; skills; entrepreneurship; improving public services; infrastructure; integrating digital tech; labour protection; and most importantly, creating a sustainable market system which is aligned

with economic growth and stability of the country.

India is the 3rd largest startup ecosystem with one in every 10 global unicorns claimed by India. This is an exceptionally upward trend cloaked with Startup India scheme and efforts to pursue ‘ease of doing business’. From a country having just 4 unicorns in 2014 to more than 100 unicorns in 2022, the growth has been meteoric. From almost 4,000 globally filed patents by India in 2014 to more than 15,000 in 2022, India has maxed out the innovation charts with scale and speed. India's rapidly advancing stand on ‘Global Innovation Index’ is a witness to this transformation from 81st spot in 2015 to 40th spot in 2022.

There are over 77,000 government recognised startups spread across 656 districts of India with diversity in 56 industrial sectors like IT services, healthcare, life



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science, education, professional service, agriculture, food & beverage, etc. These policies and successes are based on India's rise to the competitive global standards and creating an 'enabling environment' locally for the youth of the country. For example, the access to market, a huge barrier for startups, has been easily addressed by the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) platform. The GeM portal has become an operator-friendly interface that assures quality standards, superior products, warehousing networks and logistical support.

Another such significant factor for developing sustainable startup ecosystem is availability of data, services, marketing streams, outreach and reduced burden of excessive cost of doing business and compliances. Digital India is a mission to connect India to its most remote location by not limiting the potential to partake and contribute in the market by way of physical distance. The IoT revolution combined with IT and computer science-based professionals in India has favoured a smooth transition of Indian markets into modern, vibrant and cutting-edge at global level and has significantly reduced the risk factors for new startups.

Job Creators

India's multi-dimensional growth is mirrored in its becoming the 5th largest economy, from 2 trillion-dollar economy in 2014 to 3 trillion-dollar economy in 2019; and with the goal to become the 3rd largest economy of the world by 2030/2031. This ambitious expansion and growth of the India's economy is reliant on youth

demographic and their contributions multiplying with skill development, widening job market and easing global market access for them.

To prioritise skill development and employability of youth, the Government has launched various schemes such as Skill India Mission, MUDRA scheme, Digital India, and PM Kaushal Vikas Yojana to lay a strong foundation of knowledge, proficiency and market-centric skills for upcoming workforce. Furthermore, the raw talent of Indian youth is being shaped by world class academic organisations like National Skill Training Institutes, Indian Institute of Skills, multiple IITs, IIMs and ITIs being developed across the country.

The longstanding concern of any developing nation is maintaining a balance between job creators and job seekers, especially in a culturally and linguistically diverse country like India with over 90 per cent people working in the unorganised sector. To map the actual growth on both accounts besides the GDP and per capita income, there is Employee Provident Fund Organisation data which shows new subscription of over 3 crore formal jobs since 2017. One clear intention behind the codification of labour laws was to extend safety, unemployment and pension benefits to unorganised sector. It has also integrated quantifiable parameters to map job growth in informal sector more accurately.

The second largest employable sector of manufacturing industries, both at large and medium scales, are benefitting largely from cyclical benefits of Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme; starting with a high potential for generating employment, broadening manufacturing base, increased dependency of Indian market at global level leading to more demand and therefore more opportunities and employment. During 2021-22, the government allocated Rs 1.97 lakh crore to PLI scheme in order to pull Indian economy out of COVID-19 led deflation and to provide stability by creating more sustainable and reliable supply chain models.

Improvement in the quality of life and enhancing ease of living—twin goals of the Government have an implicit effect on the lives and potential for youth of India. Infrastructure development has

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accelerated its pace manifold thanks to proactive Government interventions that leverage technology paired with employment growth. With a boost to metro, railways and road connectivity, livelihood opportunities have been generated across the board under various employment schemes.

Access to Holistic Education

India has been a global centre of knowledge from ancient times, and there is an implicit understanding in the society that an effective education system is essential to fulfil the aspirations of youth. Every Indian mother aspires to get quality education for her children. To achieve this aspiration, the Government ushered in the modern era of education reforms that aim to transform the education sector. The most significant among them was the introduction of the new National Education Policy (NEP) that is changing India's education system. It focuses on new age skills and provides room for students to learn at their own pace.

The policy's implementation seeks to make India's youth solution-oriented, agile and mentally equipped to handle real-life situations, and operate in challenging environments. The new policy has prioritised efforts to boost literacy and numeracy achievements in primary schools while lowering dropout rates in middle and secondary schools. The adoption of a multi-disciplinary approach, academic bank of credits, and multiple entry-exit options make higher education more responsive and flexible. Additionally, the policy focuses on early childhood care, education in one's mother tongue,

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assessment and exam reform, teacher training, and broad-based evaluation.

The ground focus of reforms is visible to all. Another example of this is the medical education system. In 2014, there were 387 medical colleges in the country. This number has increased to more than 600 medical colleges in 2022, showing a rise of over 50 per cent. The Government has also tripled the number of operational or established All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS). Also, the National Medical Commission Act

took effect on 8 August 2019, bringing in a new National Medical Commission (NMC) aimed at serving as the country's top medical education regulator. NMC has also brought transparency and accountability in medical education.

The footprint of education has been expanded to ensure that 'no one is left behind'. Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) have been set up in tribal areas for talented Scheduled Tribe children to have high quality education. Between 2004 and 2014, about 90 EMRSs were sanctioned. Since 2014, more than 686 EMRSs have been sanctioned, which is 5-times more than the decade before it. Almost one IIT and IIM have been added every year and the total number of universities has risen from 723 to 1,043 as of October 2022 and we see a wide net being cast for the betterment of the future of India's youth. Similarly, number of Navodaya Vidyalaya have also increased. A concerted effort is being made to ensure that quality education is within the reach of every child.

Access to such premier institutions often faces the barrier of finances. Cheaper education loans and expansion of the scholarship programmes, particularly for the SC and ST students at school level, have also made access to education easy. This ensures that the meritorious students have a genuine shot, and do not have to worry about the implications on their families.

Ease of Living – A New Reality

Modern infrastructure and seamless services have a positive impact on enhancing quality of life. It has boosted academical, vocational and entrepreneurial integration of new generations even in the remotest parts of India. The Government has taken visible and tangible actions on ground, positively impacting the lives of crores of the youth by adapting the mantra of 'ease of living' at the core of every developmental programme.

Under Swachh Bharat Mission launched in 2014, more than 11 crore household toilets have been built, while under Ujjwala Yojana, provision of cooking gas



to make the home smoke-free, has been given to over 10 crore families. Deendayal Upadhyay Gram Jyoti Yojana and SAUBHAGYA scheme ensured that over 99 per cent of Indian households today have electricity, bringing huge change in the lives of the youth. Cleanliness is now part of a lifestyle for the youth. After the success of Swachh Bharat Mission 1.0, to make India open-defecation free, more than 1.34 lakh villages have become 'Open Defecation Free (ODF) Plus', which means solid and liquid waste collection, treatment and reuse has started in these villages. It is not only improving the environment in rural India and helping achieve the public health goals, but also bringing dignity to our youth. Additionally, when Jal Jeevan Mission was launched, only 3.23 crore (17%) of the country's rural households had tap water connections. Today, more than 10.75 crore (56%) rural households have assured clean tap water supply. A self-owned house brings assurance and also signals steps towards elimination of poverty. Through PM Awas Yojana, over 3 crore houses have been constructed and these are not only providing shelter but the construction itself has skilled several communities and provided employment to youth. Under Jal Jeevan Mission, concerted efforts have been initiated to skill our youth especially in rural areas so that they can work as mason, plumber, electrician, pump operator, motor mechanic, etc.

Connectivity has been ensured with schemes like UDAN, which has made flying not only accessible and affordable but has also provided much needed exposure and opportunities to youth. This is complimented by the vast expansion of highways, railways and urban public transport networks, bringing the transformational change

in terms of efficiency and enhancing productivity of India's youth.

The Government's emphasis on a healthy lifestyle directly aims to benefit the youth. Fitness and sports after all are a pre-condition to a healthy and prosperous life. The FIT India movement was launched in August 2019 to reinvigorate the mindset of youth to keep themselves fit. Another major boost was with the revival of grassroots sports culture among the youth through Khelo India programme. Through this programme, talented youth are identified at various levels and provided with annual financial assistance of Rs 5 lakh per annum for 8 years.

Way Forward

Swami Vivekananda had aptly said, 'Give me hundred energetic youngsters and I shall transform India'. Today, India's youth are coming up with innovative, cost-effective solutions in areas of waste management, healthcare, communication, renewable energy, food processing, artificial intelligence and what not.

It is the youth of the country who can enable India to realise its full potential and dreams. In 2047, when India will be celebrating 100 years of its independence, contribution of today's youth will be the key factor in making India become not only the 3rd largest economy but truly a developed nation. To achieve this goal, the Government has taken a number of initiatives to not only equip our youth with education, skills, and good health but also impart the right value system i.e., fraternity- well-being of everyone. As India strives to change its destiny, the focus must be continued on furthering ways and means to tap the energy and ambitions of our youth. □

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