

India has one of the oldest civilizations known to mankind and currently is the world's largest democracy. Hence our contribution to history and our subsequent achievements are well-known and documented. We need to realize and rightfully take our place in the comity of nations and it is all the more important that we contemplate the path ahead for our country to emerge as a strong player, in the international arena.

However, as we step into the future, we foresee issues that we need to address and overcome. By the year 2040, we are destined to be an economic power in the same league as China and the USA. Having said that, the vast majority of our population is dismayed by what is going on in the country today. We have the largest number of malnourished children in the world. There are conflicts being fought over water resources as a result of acute water scarcity and our power systems are limping and crippled. These are problems that present a major obstacle or roadblock in India achieving all-round progress and development.

At the same time, there are forces that are shaping India's future, and one of these happens to be demographics. India has a huge population and, within it, a swelling number of young people. A young population presents an opportunity like no other particularly for a developing country like ours. Over the next twenty years, it is predicted that India will have many more working age persons than any other country in the world. The youth of our country are raring to achieve their potential and make themselves heard on the world stage. They want to increasingly get their share of the global pie by forming networks and alliances in the international domain. Hence, the youth are leading the resurgence of a new India.

India's workforce is around 400 million, but over 90% percent of them hold informal jobs. Job creation has always been an issue as also the availability of skilled labour. This does not augur well for a rapidly industrializing and urbanizing economy. There is a silver lining however. In recent years, there have been many instances of youth taking the uncharted route as it were, in opting for entrepreneurship as a preferred career option. Although the numbers don't suggest a paradigm shift, nevertheless in the past decade there has been a tendency amongst youth to set up their own businesses thereby promoting entrepreneurship as a successful means of establishing a career. In the process of doing so, the youth are fighting to ward off the social stigma attached to being an entrepreneur given that the Indian society is still averse to taking risks. We are thus slowly witnessing a change in the overall mindset of the people and this augurs well for our country heading into the future.

There is another important aspect needing introspection and that has got to do with democracy and governance, and the way it is perceived in our country. The lack of transparency and accountability has led to massive corruption and given rise to scams and scandals that has dented the image of India in global circles. The nation's all-pervasive corruption is a huge tax burden that weighs heavily on the poor and this has led to growing discontent among the masses and even fuelled rebellion in some cases. While democracy as an institution is entrenched in India and coalition governments have become the order of the day, people's expectations are turning high and they are increasingly demanding accountability rather than learning to live with the status quo. The results of the recent elections in the last 5 years where voters ousted more than 40% of public representatives at various levels is an indication that, while democracy is entrenched in India, people's expectations are high and they are demanding accountability.

The need of the hour invariably is for a new model of pragmatic, practical and effective governance that would pave the way for India becoming a developed nation in the time to come. Responsible and collaborative political dialogue must become the norm if the people are to get the government they deserve. It is important to realize that good institutions are critical for our future.

Reforms in India have always been a moot question, but they are the way forward if we need to achieve our full potential in the years ahead. The simplest of reforms could be using technology to benefit the people at large. And we should also focus on major big-ticket reforms such as driving privatization, shaping India's health ecosystem, overhauling the energy sector, and also modernizing and revolutionizing the agricultural landscape of the country; agriculture being the crucial mainstay of our economy comprising 60% of the labour population, but contribution to the GDP is 20% which is both unfortunate and undesirable.

The Government of India has been pushing this hard in the last ten years, but many more such steps are required. For example, India needs to overhaul its energy sector and ensure it meets its target of achieving 20% of energy supply from renewable sources by 2020; 400 million Indians are without access to the energy grid. It is a collective failure on the part of all of us that we have a country that's at the cusp of being a superpower but 60% of people do not have access to financial services.

We also need to look at inclusiveness, or inclusive and balanced growth. Faster growth provides India with the means to expand development into its poorest and least developed areas. It has no option but to do so; if India fails to make sure that investment and opportunities flow to its poorest regions, more and more rural Indians will pour into the nation's crowded cities, sink into despair, or turn to radicalism in a desperate effort to achieve what economic growth has not – social equity. India therefore cannot focus on growth alone, but must move quickly to make its economy and the benefits of growth, inclusive. In China, every 1% growth in GDP has reduced poverty by 0.8% whereas in India, 1% growth has reduced poverty only by 0.3% because India's growth has been driven by services so far.

India is already working on a US\$ 20 billion, seven-year urban renewal plan, but much more will need to be done. With nearly 70% of all jobs being created in cities, the proportion of Indians living in cities is projected to rise from three in 10 today to two in five by 2030. That will leave 68 cities with more than a million residents, an expansion that will require what some estimate as at least 90 million new dwellings and US\$ 190 billion in additional infrastructure. A World Bank report notes that more people live on less than US\$ 2 per day in India than in Sub Saharan Africa, with a large proportion of the population excluded from education and skills development.

And what is all of the above without education? Needless to say, there is a growing need to impart and invest in education which would help the country reap rich dividends. However, a depressing statistic here is that of the 22 million children who attend school, only 12.4% go on to pursue further education. The immediate priority or goal should be to raise this number to 20% by 2020. And the lack of adequate teaching staff is even more appalling; a recent study indicates that there is a deficit of one million teachers which explains the standard of education in our country; primary or otherwise. Also, there are roughly 450 million people in India that make up our workforce. Of these, 90% haven't completed school education. This is another serious anomaly that needs to be rectified and this can be done only through a sustained awareness campaign stressing the importance of education.

To cap it all, India's soft power presents a huge opportunity that needs to be capitalized and effectively leveraged upon to showcase our strength and capability to the outside world. The youth brigade of India have arrived. The youth of our country have arrived and are making waves thus turning into a force to reckon with. They have become the backbone of our economy and society and their voices are becoming more louder and potent than ever. Without doubt, they are affecting change in India and impacting the mood of the nation as it were, be it in politics, business, sports or culture.

And there have been similar success stories in the business and corporate world as well. Young people take over the mantle of running large corporate houses and this is the case with more young entrepreneurs starting their own businesses to make it big. The recent list of the most recognized brands in India have been either launched by young people or has a large team of youth playing a vital role. In the process, these young turks have become risk-takers and are showing the way forward in not only creating jobs and contributing to the economy, but also in changing the mindset of the traditional Indian psyche.

The world of sports stands a testimony to the role of youth and the recent Olympics and the success in the under 19 cricket world cup show signs of the dominance of youth in these spheres as well. It's a "ditto" in the NGO space, in the media and film industry and in the services sector. Well, if "All is well", we could have achieved much more than what we stand at now – there is something else that needs to happen to better utilize the energy of youth in making their efforts yield better results for the country.

64 years hence independence, the young Indians of today have put their aspirations to count, to stand up for what is right and fight for what is not. As the country goes through turbulence with issues confronting it within, the time has certainly come for standing up and "taking charge" by making the voice heard within the parameters of democracy, ethics of morality and justice of truth and ensuring that a new direction is set for the country to reach its potential. The Young Indians have to stand in the front and lead the way and one can see this happening around your city as we read this.

With this background, Young Indians, currently in its 10th year of engaging youth in nation building activities is organizing the 9th Yi National Summit on "Youth Leading India into the Future" on 22-23 February 2013, at New Delhi. The theme calls for the young people of India to take charge, challenge the status quo and lead India into the future, by engaging with all the stakeholders in the country and around the world to see India truly shine from all quarters. It calls for them to work towards a society that is equal, stable and sustainable.