

# **India's Journey: Charting the Path to a Viksit Bharat**

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## **Introduction**

Distinguished guests, esteemed colleagues, and fellow architects of India's future,

It is a profound honour to stand before you today at this pivotal moment in our nation's history. As we gather to reimagine and chart the path to a Viksit Bharat, we must draw inspiration from our remarkable journey—a journey marked by resilience, innovation, and untapped potential.

From the trials of partition to becoming the world's fifth-largest economy, India's story is nothing short of extraordinary. Yet, our greatest chapters remain unwritten.

The reforms and ideas we explore today are not mere policy blueprints; they are the foundation stones for a nation where every citizen's dreams can flourish.

Together, we will shape a legacy that embodies prosperity, equity, and sustainability for future generations.

### **A. Human Capital: Building the Foundations of Transformation**

Developing our human capital is the basis of our capabilities and prosperity. This involves revolutionising three components: healthcare, education, and skills. With the advancement in digital technology we can develop approaches and low cost solutions which we had never thought of earlier.

## 1. Healthcare

- Healthcare is a fundamental pillar of our transformation. The covid pandemic laid bare the vulnerabilities in our healthcare system, but it also demonstrated our capacity for rapid adaptation and innovation. We broke through with vaccines and supplied them at a low cost around the Global South, earning much goodwill.
- Reverting to the issue at hand, the path forward demands more than incremental improvements – it requires a complete system overhaul. In 2024, a survey by the National Health Mission showed that nearly 80% of India's 2 lakh public healthcare facilities failed to meet minimum essential standards for infrastructure, manpower and equipment.
- According to the Indian Public Health Standards, each primary healthcare centre should cater to 20,000 - 30,000 people. Instead, the figure exceeds 36,000 as of 2021.

- Our current healthcare budget at 1.9% of GDP is woefully inadequate for a nation of our size and ambitions. We must commit to increasing this to at least 5% of GDP, with a clear focus on preventive healthcare and primary care infrastructure.
- Investments in preventive healthcare often yield returns that far exceed their costs. Unfortunately, the system's bias towards curative healthcare results in long-term inefficiencies and soaring costs. Preventive healthcare receives only 14% of government funds allocated to healthcare.
- For every rupee invested in preventive care, we save seven in curative care costs. This is a humanitarian imperative. The implementation of a unified health identifier system and electronic health records must be accelerated, but with robust privacy protections in place.
- The shortage of healthcare professionals requires us to think beyond traditional solutions. We need to triple our doctor-to-population ratio, but more importantly, we need to reimagine medical education to create professionals who are equipped to serve in rural and underserved areas. While new medical colleges are being developed all over the country, good faculty is a big problem.

- We should also think of reviving the old Registered Medical Practitioner Scheme aka barefoot doctors who get a diploma after three years of medical education and are able to take care of basic health issues in our rural areas. We also need to pursue the Indian system of medicare namely ayurved and unani systems, rather than depending upon allopathy alone.

## 2. Education

- Our current educational landscape presents a paradox – while we have achieved near-universal primary enrollment, the quality of learning remains our greatest challenge.
- Despite our successes with primary enrolment, recent statistics show an alarming trend in overall student numbers: the number of enrolled students in 2022-23 was 25.17 crore, which dropped to 24.80 crore in 2023-24. The number of girl students dropped by 16 lakh during this period, and the number of boy students fell by 21 lakh.
- Even amongst students who have access to education, data shows that there is a lack of high-quality schooling. 25% of rural students aged between 14-18 years still cannot read a Class II level text in their native language. Only 43% of this age bracket can solve mathematical problems of division correctly.

- The transformation of our education system must begin with a complete reimagining of teacher training and recruitment. I envision a national teaching service that rivals our civil services in compensation, prestige and rigour. This service would not merely train teachers in pedagogical methods but would cultivate educational leaders capable of inspiring the next generation. The same approach should also be taken for medical education.
- The curriculum itself must undergo a fundamental transformation. The age of rote learning must give way to an era of critical thinking and problem-solving. This would revolutionise how we teach.
- Research has shown that when students are engaged in experiential learning, their retention rates increase threefold. We must integrate technology not as a supplement but as a core component of education delivery.
- The digital divide between urban and rural India cannot be bridged with half-measures. It requires a comprehensive digital infrastructure that ensures quality education reaches every child, regardless of their geographical location. The same approach should be taken for skills building with its own dynamics.

### 3. Skills

- Equally vital to our human capital transformation is the focus on skilling and upskilling our workforce. With over 65% of India's population under the age of 35, we stand on the precipice of an unprecedented demographic dividend.
- However, this potential remains untapped without a robust skill development ecosystem. Our approach must integrate vocational training with emerging technologies, fostering industry-ready competencies in sectors like artificial intelligence, renewable energy, and advanced manufacturing. The Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana has laid the foundation, but its reach must expand to rural and underserved areas, ensuring inclusivity.
- Moreover, fostering stronger industry-academia linkages and incentivising apprenticeship programs will equip our youth with the tools they need to thrive in a dynamic global economy. By embracing innovation and adaptability, we can empower every individual to contribute meaningfully to India's growth story.

## **B. Economic Reforms 2.0: Unleashing India's Potential**

- The economic reforms of 1991 unleashed India's potential and transformed our economy. Now, we need Economic Reforms 2.0 – a comprehensive

package that addresses the challenges of the 21st century. This can be achieved by adopting a Competition Policy which will impact every aspect of our economic governance system. When Australia adopted a Competition Policy in 1983, it achieved 5.5% extra growth.

- Building Competitiveness is a *sine qua non* for inclusive economic growth. This has to encompass all factors of production: land, capital and labour.
- The labour market requires reforms that go beyond the traditional binary of protection versus flexibility. Reports indicate that simplified labour codes, combined with robust social security systems, could increase formal sector employment by 25% over a decade. This would address unemployment, and ensure high-quality jobs that offer dignity and security to our workforce.
- The financial sector must undergo a transformation that goes beyond traditional banking. The credit gap for MSMEs, currently estimated at ₹20-25 trillion, represents not just an economic challenge but a missed opportunity for growth and innovation. We need specialised financial institutions that understand the unique needs of small businesses, coupled with technology-enabled credit assessment systems that can evaluate potential rather than just collateral. One measure to ensure easy credit to MSMEs is through covering risks by insurance policy.

- Furthermore, reforms must also facilitate private sector participation and foster public-private partnerships in the defence sector, particularly for manufacturing and exporting effective weapons. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has exposed the brittleness of modern defences, underscoring the importance of innovative, agile weapon systems.

### **C. Defence: Prioritising Military Modernisation**

To achieve the vision of a Viksit Bharat (Developed India), the Indian Army plays a pivotal and most important role in multiple dimensions. Without the Indian Army there is no nation, there is no development!

However, to achieve the goal of a developed nation, the Indian Army should:

AI for IA

(Artificial Intelligence for Indian Army)

First, by leveraging advanced technologies for national security, the Army can integrate cutting-edge innovations such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), drones, and cyber defence to enhance its operational readiness and strategic capabilities. With 2025 being recognized as the year of "Defence Reforms" and setting the foundation for military modernisation till 2047, Rajasthan can emerge as a key player in defence manufacturing, strengthening India's self-reliance. We are sitting



in the headquarters of the South Western Command and should strengthen deep tech collaborations here.

Moreover, capacity-building programs for Army personnel in advanced technologies like AI will not only bolster national security but also drive innovation in other sectors.

Second, the Army's emphasis on discipline, leadership, and resilience serves as a blueprint for empowering the nation's youth. By instilling these values, the Army can shape a robust and dynamic workforce that contributes significantly to India's progress.

Finally, strengthening civil-military collaboration is vital. Increased Army involvement in disaster management, infrastructure development, and education in remote regions will uplift marginalised communities and foster holistic national development. Additionally, encouraging military personnel to engage with CSOs and NGOs can enhance discipline, coordination, and efficiency in developmental initiatives.

Together, these among various other efforts will cement the Army's integral role in transforming India into a Viksit Bharat.

#### **D. Green Growth: Prioritizing Environmental Sustainability**

- Environmental sustainability cannot be an afterthought in our development journey. Climate change presents an existential threat that requires us to fundamentally rethink our relationship with natural resources. In 2024, India faced extreme weather events that affected 3.2 million hectares of crops, destroyed more than 2 lakh houses and buildings, and killed 9,457 livestock across the country. January 2024 was India's ninth driest since 1901. India also had record-high minimum temperatures in July, August and September.
- Reports on India's energy consumption per capita has indicated improved access to electricity over the past decade, as well as a notable shift from non-renewable to renewable sources of energy. The share of renewable energy in total energy supply was 3.81% in 2021-22, a substantial increase from previous years. Despite this positive trend, the non-renewables sector continues to dominate.
- The transition to renewable energy must be accelerated with ambitious targets. This transition presents economic opportunities. A well-designed circular economy approach could reduce waste while creating millions of green jobs.
- The implementation of carbon pricing mechanisms must be done with both environmental effectiveness and social equity in mind. We must ensure that the costs of transition do not fall disproportionately on the Global South or

the vulnerable sections of our society. This requires careful policy design and robust support mechanisms for affected communities.

- Competitiveness, fiscal sustainability, and green growth must go hand in hand, ensuring strategic and economic security. Domestically, we must monitor supply chains for rare earth minerals critical to green technologies. Strategically, projects like China's hydropower initiatives on the Brahmaputra River highlight the need for vigilance, balancing environmental goals with regional stability and security.

## **E. Governance Reforms: The Backbone of Change**

- Governance reforms must serve as the thread that binds all other transformations together. The complexity of 21st-century challenges requires governance systems that are agile, responsive, and technologically enabled. The relationship between the Centre and States must evolve from mere coordination to genuine collaboration.
- The civil services must transform from generalist administrators to domain specialists with deep expertise in their areas of operation. This requires procedural changes in recruitment accompanied by a fundamental shift in how we think about public service.

- Employing AI and blockchain technologies will enhance transparency and efficiency in service delivery, creating a responsive and agile governance system. Technology should also drive evidence-based decision-making, streamlining processes, and reducing discretion in government operations where it is most needed.

## **F. Social Infrastructure: Inclusive Urban and Rural Development**

- Planned urbanisation and rural empowerment are pivotal to holistic growth. Urban innovation, with a focus on affordable housing and sustainable transport, will significantly enhance quality of life and link planned urbanisation to GDP growth.
- Simultaneously, rural areas need closer attention by non-farm economic activities so that migration to cities is limited. Already, the rural road network has been done very well. Now, piped water and electricity are being provided to every village.
- Thus, rural development efforts must prioritise non-farm economic activities balanced with infrastructural development. This balanced approach will limit migration to urban areas and foster inclusive development.

## **G. Implementation Strategy: A Phased Approach**

- The implementation of these reforms requires a carefully phased approach. The first phase must focus on building the foundational systems and infrastructure. The second phase should accelerate the pace of transformation, particularly in economic and environmental reforms. The final phase must focus on optimisation and achieving best possible standards across all sectors.
- Monitoring and evaluation must be integral to this transformation journey. We need real-time tracking of key indicators, regular independent assessments, and robust feedback mechanisms that allow for course correction when needed. The role of civil society organisations, including research and advocacy groups like ours, will be crucial in providing independent oversight and evidence-based policy inputs.
- **Social Cohesion**

The success of any transformative journey hinges on the strength of our social fabric. Social cohesion is a prerequisite and byproduct of growth. We must actively foster a culture of mutual respect, inclusivity, and shared responsibility. This involves addressing societal divides through policies that bridge economic and social disparities, promote equitable access to opportunities, and celebrate India's pluralism as a source of strength. A

cohesive society enables us to move forward as one, united in purpose and vision.

- **Political Consensus: Cooperative Federalism**

India's diversity is both its strength and its complexity. Cooperative federalism must underpin our governance model, ensuring genuine collaboration between the Centre and States. Political consensus on key national reforms—ranging from economic policies to environmental strategies—will accelerate progress and reduce inefficiencies. Mechanisms like empowered intergovernmental councils and shared accountability frameworks can institutionalise cooperation, fostering a unified approach to achieving our shared goals.

- **Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas**

This guiding principle encapsulates the essence of inclusive development. "Sabka Saath" emphasises collective participation; "Sabka Vikas" ensures no one is left behind in the pursuit of prosperity; and "Sabka Vishwas" fosters trust among all stakeholders, including marginalised communities. "Sabka Prayas" indicates that efforts need to be made by everyone. Translating this philosophy into actionable strategies requires deep engagement with grassroots voices, transparent governance, and a commitment to equity. This

ethos must serve as a moral compass, guiding us toward a Viksit Bharat where every citizen feels empowered and valued.

## **Conclusion**

As I conclude, let me emphasise that this transformative journey is not just about policies and programmes – it's about realising the dreams of 1.4 billion Indians.

The reforms I have outlined today are ambitious, but they are achievable with collective will and sustained effort. We aspire to be a global power which we can achieve only through continuous growth of eight percent annum, which is not impossible but tough. Our organisation commits to supporting this transformation through continued research, advocacy, and implementation support.

The India we envision must be more than just an economic powerhouse – it must be a nation that combines prosperity with sustainability, technology with humanity, growth with equity, and security from enemies. This is our responsibility to future generations.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to engaging in a meaningful dialogue about these ideas during our discussion session.