

The true wealth

We often speak of India's rise in terms of numbers such as growth rates, infrastructure, investment and global standing. These are visible markers of progress. They are easy to measure and easy to celebrate. But beneath all of this lies a quieter, more fundamental truth that no nation can truly move forward if its people are not healthy. Health rarely dominates headlines the way big-ticket development projects do. Yet it shapes everything. A workforce battling illness cannot deliver its full potential. Families pushed into poverty by medical expenses cannot contribute meaningfully to economic growth. Children struggling with poor nutrition or untreated conditions cannot build the future we so often talk about. In many ways, the story of development begins not in boardrooms or construction sites, but in hospitals, homes and daily habits. It is telling that this concern is now being consistently echoed at the highest levels. Whether it is President Droupadi Murmu underlining the link between health and self-reliance, Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaking about affordable healthcare for all or Vice-President C P Radhakrishnan stressing the need for a healthier lifestyle, the message is clear. A healthy India is central to the idea of a developed nation. The burden of disease in India continues to be both a medical and economic challenge. Illness does not just affect the individual. It disrupts entire families. High treatment costs, especially for serious conditions, can wipe out savings built over years. In rural and remote areas, access to timely diagnosis and quality care still remains uneven. These gaps slow down not just personal recovery but also national progress. Efforts have been made to address this. Initiatives like Ayushman Bharat have expanded financial protection for millions. The push towards building new medical institutions and improving digital health services is helping bridge distances that once seemed insurmountable. But access alone is not enough. India's healthcare approach must shift from being largely reactive to strongly preventive. This means investing in awareness about nutrition, encouraging regular physical activity and giving mental health the attention it deserves. Good health is not created in hospitals alone. It is built through everyday choices like what we eat, how we live and how seriously we take early signs of illness. At the same time, responsibility cannot rest solely with the state. Healthcare is a shared space. Institutions must function with efficiency and compassion but individuals must also take ownership of their well-being. A culture that values health as much as it values success is essential. The vision of Viksit Bharat will remain incomplete without Swasth Bharat. Economic strength and human well-being must go hand in hand. One cannot sustain without the other. The real measure of progress is not just how fast a nation grows, but how well its people live. India's future will not be defined only by what it builds, but by how strongly and healthily its people stand.



“He is a wise man who does not grieve for the things which he has not, but rejoices for those which he has.”

—Epictetus



■ ENSUING ELECTIONS

DUBIOUS INTENT & PROMISES

■ DHURJATI MUKHERJEE

Lack of decency and morality are political trends reiterated by leaders. The clamour raised by some states and drama enacted specially by West Bengal, regarding SIR (special intensive revision) bear testimony they don't want the mandatory revision. Is it because the parties don't want elimination of false voters or have any other intention? The coming elections are a wake-up call for other more crucial elections in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra next year.

With election campaigning started with dates announced in four states and one UT, starting from April 9 in Puducherry and ending in West Bengal on April 29, political violence has already started. Also, in Tamil Nadu, successive Dravidian governments have invested in women-centric welfare schemes from marriage initiatives and TMC has followed in West Bengal. Similar initiatives also exist in Assam. However, whether these schemes help in improving conditions of rural women, needs a close watch.

It is generally believed that competitive welfarism shifts electoral politics away from male political brokers, who stitch together caste or religious coalitions. Across poll-bound states, young voters evaluate government less through ideological narratives than through perceived performance. Education and job opportunities are in a precarious condition in West Bengal and Assam but the governments in these states have done precious little.

It may also be mentioned that minority citizens in these poll-bound states exceed those in the rest of India. From an eighth in Tamil Nadu to two-fifths in Assam and Kerala and even in Bengal religious minorities matter electorally. Whether political misgovernance and wanton corruption will matter remains to be seen but the aspirational youth are disappointed with the leadership.

Apart from this, political leaders have started making promises as their only intention is to woo voters and capture power by hook or by crook. There is no political ideology outlined by them, but dubious intentions and false promises are becoming manifest with each passing year. Added to this, violence before and after polls has led reinforced 'criminalisation of politics'.

This apart, dynasticism in politics has been manifest since the times of Indira Gandhi. It's well-known that collective federalism and inner-party democracy has been absent both at the Centre and in most states. While Vajpayee did not dominate his Cabinet the way that Modi does, state chief ministers never sought to speak in sycophantic terms of their prime minister as they do now. Since May 2014, much of the resources of the Union government and the ruling party have been used to boost the image of the Prime Minister, who carries in his person the past, the present and future of the Indian nation and of Indian civilization itself.

In the states also this is glaringly evident. The degradation of the Indian party system is complete with one set of political parties becoming family firms and another set becoming quasi-religious cults, exalting their leader as a religious god. It's quite discernible that the broader consequences of this depressing trend have led the country towards autocracy far away from democratic pluralism. There is much talk of 'Viksit Bharat' and

good governance, but doubts arise whether the current genre of political leaders have the capability to lead the country forward in a sincere and judicious manner. Undeniably, some politicians may be highly educated and sincere but are often side-tracked in their own parties while a small coterie wields power.

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lashed, recently a fresh controversy arose with a chapter on 'Corruption in Judiciary' in a Class VIII NCERT textbook. And though Union education minister offered an unconditional apology, the Supreme Court banned the book and rightly stated that it is "a well-orchestrated conspiracy" to defame only the judiciary.

All the above impact democratic functioning. Besides, there are analysts who be-

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There is no fellow-feeling in their addresses to the community but one based on castigating other opponents and spreading venom and hatred. There is a steady rise of hate speech in public domain. In 2025, 1318 verified in-person hate speech events targeting religious minorities were documented by India Hate Lab across 21 states, one UT and NCR of Delhi. This implied a rise of 13% in hate speeches compared to such incidents in 2024 and a 97% spike from the corresponding figure in 2023. Another report of Centre for the Study of Organised Hate had found a significant rise in such hateful speeches in 2024, which was incidentally an election year, with BJP leaders bearing a disproportionate share of such utterances.

It's clear that political representatives, specially those belonging to the ruling dispensation, have willingly failed the test of fraternity, putting a question mark on the democratic process and cleanliness and decency of the political system and its future generation. The other example is of freebies, wherein it's evident these are offered to win elections, instead of sharing their ideological position on issues and awaken masses about their sharing responsibility in building a just social order. Notably, Supreme Court recently questioned state governments' tendency to dole out freebies such as free electricity, particularly before elections, across the board without distinguishing between the well-off and the poor. The judgment stated: "The economic development of the nation will be hampered with this kind of largesse distribution ... We are on the fact as to why are schemes being announced just before elections?" It suggested political leaders, social activists and other stakeholders resist such freebie schemes. while neglecting expenditure in the realm of public roads, hospitals and schools.



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Sadly, the top court's orders won't be entertained by political parties. Some leaders suggest the welfare approach is being negated by the judiciary, but fact is opposite. State governments, which are in dire financial stress, announce schemes a few months or even days before elections or raise the amounts earmarked in the schemes to attract voters.

Independent analysts note the lure for power arises from the fact that political leaders, both at the apex level and the grassroots, end up making big bucks. A state level leader or that in the district makes crores of rupees within a span of three to five years as seen in Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Karnataka, U.P. and other states.

While corruption in politics is well-established,

lieve that digitization to check fraud is not a solution, rather aids it some way or the other. Recall, the CAG who Murthy warned (on December 16 last year) that hundreds of crores of rupees were flowing through the direct benefit system, in referring to PM Awas Yojana, and other such schemes without mandatory checks, leading to corruption.

The reason why the young, educated people are wary of political leaders and refrain from joining politics is not far to seek. Only those who are half literate and can't find any job opportunities join political parties and turn into mastaans (ruffians) and extort money for unethical and official deals. Even money for mid-day meals or awas yojana are subject to cut money.

Therefore, there is need for a drastic transformation, which is easier said than implemented. Dedication and sincerity must be inculcated in the political system, as parties largely serve their interests and needs. The political system can't deliver good and inclusive governance, if a change is not in place. --INFA

Strengthening India's Path to Power Leadership: How India Is Energising a New Growth Story

■ MANOHAR LAL

The ancient prayer "Tamo Ma Jyotirgama" – lead us from darkness to light – captures not just a spiritual aspiration but the story of modern India. Over the last decade, we have translated this ethos into reality, transforming an electricity ecosystem once defined by chronic shortages into one of the world's fastest growing, most diversified and reform driven power markets.

As India positions itself as a global manufacturing hub, a burgeoning digital economy and a responsible clean energy leader, the power sector has become the bedrock of our national competitiveness.

In the last decade, we have added significant generation and transmission capacity, bringing national energy shortages down from 4.2% in FY 2013 to 0.03% by FY 2025. In FY 2025 alone (up to January 2026), a record 52.53 GW capacity from all sources has been added, the highest ever in a single year, surpassing the previous best of 34.05 GW in 2024.

Total electricity generation has increased from 1,020.2 BU in FY 2014 to 1,830 BU in FY 2025. Per capita consumption has risen from 957 kWh in 2014 to 1,460 kWh in 2025, reflecting economic growth and improved access. This has ensured that every home, farm and industry has the

reliable power it needs, and India is now the third largest producer and consumer of electricity in the world.

While we can generate over 520 GW of electricity, the real test of a system is its ability to manage peak load without operational stress. In the summer of 2024, peak demand reached a record 250 GW and was 242.49 GW in FY 2025. Earlier, such spikes might have strained the grid, but our load dispatch centres successfully managed them with almost zero energy loss. This resilience is enabled by one of the world's largest synchronous grids, with 120 GW inter regional transfer capacity, integrating the country into "One Nation One Grid One Frequency".

Equally inspiring is not just how much power we generate, but how we generate it. The share of non fossil capacity has risen rapidly, enabling India to achieve its NDC target of 50% cumulative non fossil electric capacity nearly five years ahead of schedule, underscoring our clean energy transition and climate commitment.

Since 2014, the power sector has been reshaped by mission mode schemes that have expanded access while driving a sustainable transition. Deen Dayal Upadhaya Gram Jyoti Yojana electrified every village in India, followed by Saubhagya, which brought electricity to millions of households, making energy access a reality for all.

Another transformational reform is the introduction, in September 2025, of separate connec-

tivity for solar and non solar hours at the same ISTS substations. Solar projects receive access during solar hours, while storage and wind projects receive non solar hour access. This unlocks large unutilised transmission capacity, accelerates commissioning of renewable and storage projects without surplus lines, reduces transmission costs and improves utilisation.

Digital empowerment is a vital component of our modernisation story. Under the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS), with an outlay of ₹3.03 lakh crore, we are rolling out smart prepaid meters nationwide, transforming the interface between utilities and citizens. The scheme has already delivered results: AT&C losses have fallen from 21.91% in 2021 to 15.04% in 2025, and under recovery per unit supplied has dropped from 69 paise to 6 paise.

As our digital economy accelerates, anticipating future demand is as crucial as managing the present. Data centre capacity is expected to grow from 1.4 GW to 9 GW by 2030, with these facilities alone likely to consume about 3% of India's total electricity.

Meeting this massive, continuous power demand from AI, R&D and other technology driven ecosystems sustainably is our next milestone. As renewable energy expands, energy storage becomes critical. India is developing pumped storage projects and battery energy storage systems at scale to ensure that our burgeoning digital infrastructure is powered by clean energy. The Na-

tional Green Hydrogen Mission is positioning India as a global hub for clean fuels, supporting grid stability and higher renewable penetration.

We are also taking decisive steps in nuclear energy, an essential part of a low carbon, reliable power mix. Our target of 100 GW of nuclear capacity by 2047 and the SHANTI Act, 2025, affirm our technological sovereignty and create the legal and policy framework for private sector participation. What we now need, and what this summit can catalyse, are global partnerships in technology, financing and supply chains.

To power Viksit Bharat, accelerate electrification across the Global South and build a resilient, future ready energy ecosystem, we must move from ambition to coordinated action. This is the moment for governments, industry leaders, innovators and global partners to co create a new energy architecture that is clean, reliable, digitally integrated and globally interconnected.

India must champion cross border electricity collaboration; invest boldly in next generation transmission, digital grid intelligence and OSOWOG aligned market mechanisms; and accelerate deployment of renewables, hydropower innovation, flexible gas assets and clean energy for the digital economy. This momentum must be reinforced by stronger coordination between Transmission System Operators and Distribution System Operators, and by a unified Power Sector Roadmap to 2047 that makes India a global model of resilient, sustainable and af-

fordable electrification.

Against this backdrop, the Bharat Electricity Summit 2026 at New Delhi, assumes special significance. It comes at a pivotal time as the nation accelerates its transition toward a sustainable, secure and technology driven power ecosystem.

With its theme "Electrifying Growth. Empowering Sustainability. Connecting Globally," the summit will showcase India's leadership in the global energy transition, bringing together different stakeholders. It will highlight India's commitment to modernising infrastructure, expanding renewable capacity and strengthening grid reliability. The Summit will serve as a national and global platform for collaboration, policy dialogue and investment mobilisation.

We estimate investment potential of over US\$345 billion in electricity generation and over US\$68 billion in transmission and distribution by 2032, with energy storage alone offering an opportunity of over US\$35 billion. This is anchored in real demand, as India's total generation capacity already exceeds 520 GW and is expanding rapidly, even as grid emissions intensity declines.

Let us unite to energize Viksit Bharat and illuminate the Global South's path to shared prosperity.

(The author is Union Minister of Power, Government of India)