



Life is what we make it, always
has been, always will be.

—Grandma Moses



Edit

Technology must serve everyone

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent remarks in Paris carry significance far beyond a technology conference. At a time when the world is debating the future of artificial intelligence and access to emerging technologies, his assertion that technology can lead to progress only when it is democratised offers a powerful and timely message. Equally important was his observation that for India, AI means 'All Inclusive'. The statement reflects a philosophy that has shaped India's technological journey over the last decade. Unlike many countries where technology has often remained concentrated in the hands of a few, India's approach has focused on using innovation as a tool for mass empowerment. The objective has not been technology for technology's sake but technology for people. The results are visible. India today hosts the world's largest digital identity system and one of the world's largest digital payments ecosystems. The fact that nearly half of the world's digital transactions take place in India is a remarkable achievement. It highlights both the scale and the success of India's digital transformation. What makes this achievement even more noteworthy is that it has been driven by inclusion. Digital platforms have brought millions into the formal financial system. People in remote villages can access banking services, welfare benefits, healthcare consultations and educational resources through technology. Digital governance has reduced barriers, increased transparency and improved service delivery. Technology has become an enabler of opportunity rather than a privilege reserved for a select few. Modi's remarks also come at a time when concerns are growing over unequal access to advanced artificial intelligence tools. Recent restrictions imposed by the United States on access to certain AI models for foreign nationals have sparked debate about the future of global technological cooperation. As artificial intelligence becomes increasingly important in business, healthcare, education and governance, limiting access raises questions about fairness and the widening digital divide. India's position offers an alternative vision. The belief that technology must deliver for all recognises a simple reality that the benefits of innovation are maximised when they are shared widely. Artificial intelligence should not become a tool that deepens global inequalities. Instead, it should be harnessed to solve real-world challenges, improve lives and expand opportunities for people across regions and income groups. India's own experience demonstrates the potential of this approach. From financial inclusion and telemedicine to education and agriculture, technology has been deployed at scale to address everyday challenges. The country's growing startup ecosystem and innovation-driven economy further underline its emergence as a global technology leader. The significance of India's message extends beyond national boundaries. As nations grapple with rapid technological disruption, questions of accessibility, affordability and inclusion will become increasingly important. The future of innovation cannot be built on exclusion. It must be built on collaboration and shared progress. The idea that AI should mean All Inclusive is more than a slogan. It is a vision for how technology should serve humanity. In a world where access to advanced tools is becoming a strategic issue, India's approach offers a valuable lesson.

Growing mistrust in India-Bangladesh relations

DR SATYAWAN SAURABH

India-Bangladesh relations hold special significance in South Asian diplomacy. India's political, military, and humanitarian support at the time of Bangladesh's independence in 1971 laid a strong foundation for friendship and trust between the two countries. Over the past five decades, significant progress has been made in many areas, including trade, security, energy, connectivity, water resources, and cultural exchange. India's "Neighborhood First" policy and Bangladesh's development-oriented foreign policy have also elevated the relationship to new heights. Nevertheless, recent years have witnessed signs of tension and mistrust in relations between the two countries. This situation underscores the fact that relations with neighboring countries are not driven solely by strategic interests, but also by sensitivities, public sentiments, and mutual respect.

India and Bangladesh share a border of approximately 4,096 kilometers, India's longest land border with any neighboring country. The two countries share deep cultural, linguistic, and historical ties. Over the past decade, significant progress has been made in land boundary agreements, border management, counter-terrorism cooperation, energy trade, and regional connectivity projects. Bangladesh is today a major trading partner for India and plays a vital role in connecting India's northeastern region with the mainland. Therefore, trust and cooperation between the two countries are essential not only for bilateral stability but also for the stability and prosperity of South Asia as a whole.

Recent changes in Bangladesh's internal politics have impacted bilateral relations. Changes in power, political instability, and competition among various political parties have led to divergent perceptions of India's role. Some political groups in Bangladesh have developed a perception that India is more sympathetic to a particular political force, while India has consistently prioritized stability and development. Whether factually correct or not, such perceptions undermine the atmosphere of trust and create a psychological distance in relations.

The issue of sharing the Teesta River waters has long been a major bone of contention between the two countries. For Bangladesh, the Teesta River's waters are vital for agriculture and livelihoods. For many years, a proposed agreement has been pending for various reasons, leading to a feeling in Bangladesh that its concerns are not receiving the necessary priority. The role of states in India's federal system also complicates the issue, but the delay in resolution has fueled mistrust. Building long-term trust appears difficult without equitable and sustainable management of water resources.

Border issues have also caused tensions in relations. Smuggling, illegal immigration, and border security challenges have often led to unpleasant border incidents. Incidents involving civilian casualties have generated widespread reaction in Bangladesh and impacted India's image. Although the border security agencies of both countries are making efforts to enhance coordination, such incidents continue to create negative sentiments among the public. Borders between neighboring countries are not just a matter of security, but also involve

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Issues such as the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) have also raised some concerns in Bangladesh. Although India has repeatedly clarified that these are internal policies, concerns have been expressed in Bangladesh that they could have an indirect impact on future relations between the two countries. In interna-

Social media and digital media have also impacted relations. Today, misinformation, misleading propaganda, and content inciting nationalist sentiments spread rapidly. Even minor incidents are often exaggerated on digital platforms, leading to misunderstandings between citizens of both countries. In such an environment, the responsibility of governments and media institutions to promote fac-

tionalize high-level political dialogue. When there is continuous communication between the top leadership of countries, the potential for misunderstandings is reduced. People-to-people contacts should also be enhanced through education, culture, sports, media, and tourism. Trust between citizens is as important as trust between governments. Cultural proximity is a major strength of both countries

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Trade imbalances are also a contributing factor to mistrust. Although bilateral trade is growing steadily, India appears to be benefiting relatively more. Bangladesh has long sought better access for its products to the Indian market and a reduction in non-tariff barriers. Persistent imbalances in economic relations can also impact political relations. Therefore, making the economic partnership more balanced and inclusive is the need of the hour.

tual dialogue and effectively control disinformation increases.

The biggest challenge facing India is to strike a balance between its strategic interests and the sensitivities of its neighbors. As a major regional power, India's policies naturally impact its neighbors. Therefore, an approach focused solely on national interests is not sufficient; it is equally important to understand the concerns and expectations of neighboring countries. Similarly, Bangladesh must understand that India's security concerns, especially those related to the Northeast region, are of utmost importance to it. Both countries must respect each other's legitimate concerns.

To restore trust, concrete steps are needed to resolve outstanding issues. Prioritizing the Teesta Water Treaty can send a positive message to both countries. Adopting a humanitarian approach to border management, increasing joint patrols and technical cooperation are also essential. To reduce the trade imbalance, Bangladeshi products can be given greater opportunities in the Indian market. Accelerating energy, transportation, and connectivity projects can make the economies of both countries more interdependent.

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Promoting cooperation through regional forums such as BINSTEC and BBIN would also be useful. Regional cooperation based on shared economic and strategic interests can help reduce mistrust. Joint efforts in areas such as climate change, disaster management, maritime security, and energy cooperation could bring the two countries closer.

Ultimately, India and Bangladesh's relations are not just a partnership between two countries, but a special relationship forged by history, culture, language, geography, and shared struggles. The tensions and mistrust that have arisen in recent years certainly highlight the importance of maintaining a balance between sensitivities and strategic interests in relations with neighboring countries. Based on a spirit of dialogue, cooperation, mutual respect, and shared development, both countries can transform current challenges into opportunities. If India and Bangladesh rebuild their relations on a new foundation of trust, not only will bilateral ties become stronger, but the path to peace, stability, and prosperity in South Asia will also be more paved.

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Life-Saving Medicines, rising costs and struggles of the Common Man

LALIT GARG

India is steadily moving forward with the dream of becoming a developed nation. The vision of a "Developed India" by 2047 is being reiterated time and again. Amid claims of massive infrastructure growth, digital transformation, remarkable space achievements, and economic progress, a fundamental question continues to arise: Can a nation truly be called developed if ordinary citizens are forced into debt because of illness? If the ever-increasing cost of medicines and medical treatment determines the thin line between life and death? If healthcare becomes a privilege of economic capacity rather than a basic right? At a time when inflation is already burdening common households, the decision of the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) to permit significant price hikes in certain life-saving medicines and vaccines has become a matter of serious concern. The approval of price increases—reportedly reaching nearly fifty percent for some cancer drugs, anti-tetanus serum, and essential childhood vaccines—has created a new crisis for millions of families. This issue is not merely economic; it raises profound questions about social justice, human compassion, and the very concept of a welfare-oriented state.

The reality of healthcare in India is well known. Government data indicate that a substantial proportion of citizens continue to bear medical expenses out of their own pockets. Illness no longer remains solely a health crisis; it often transforms into an economic catastrophe. There was a time when people commonly fell into debt because of wedding expenses. Today, however, a serious illness can financially devastate an entire family. The treatment of cancer, heart disease, kidney ailments, and other complex medical conditions often demands lakhs of rupees. If the prices of life-saving medicines continue to rise, healthcare will become increasingly inaccessible for the poor and lower middle classes. The NPPA has justified these price revisions by citing rising production costs and the risk of shortages in the market. According to this argument, pharmaceutical companies may discontinue production if they cannot recover their costs, resulting in a lack of availability of essential medicines. While this reasoning may hold economic merit, an important question remains: Can life-saving medicines be treated like ordinary consumer goods? Should there not be a balance between reasonable profit and social responsibility in the healthcare sector?

Healthcare and education are the two most fundamental pillars of any civilized society. Unfortunately, both sectors in India have witnessed growing commercialization over

the years. Escalating hospital charges, expensive diagnostic tests, unnecessary medical investigations, high equipment costs, and now rising medicine prices are collectively making healthcare unaffordable for ordinary citizens. Medical care increasingly appears to be transforming from a service into an industry. Hospitals often seem more like corporate enterprises than centers of healing. Patients are frequently viewed as customers rather than individuals seeking care. This trend not only widens economic inequality but also deepens social divisions. Even today, quality healthcare remains largely accessible to those with stronger financial resources. Poor citizens are left dependent on overcrowded government hospitals with limited infrastructure and resources, while affluent individuals can afford advanced treatment in state-of-the-art private facilities. Is this the social justice envisioned by the nation's founders? Is this the India that the freedom fighters dreamed of building?

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, several welfare-oriented initiatives have been introduced. Schemes such as Ayushman Bharat have provided relief to millions, while the establishment of Jan Aushadhi Kendras has improved access to affordable medicines. Nevertheless, significant structural challenges continue to persist in the healthcare system. If medicine prices continue to rise and private healthcare remains

largely unregulated, the benefits of these initiatives may be substantially diluted. The real challenge lies in placing healthcare at the center of public welfare rather than leaving it entirely to market forces. The government's responsibility extends beyond announcing schemes; it must also ensure that every citizen has access to affordable and quality healthcare. Stronger price controls on life-saving medicines are essential. Government hospitals must be adequately supplied with essential drugs. Procurement systems should be transparent and accountable. The government can also provide targeted subsidies and support for the production of critical medicines so that the burden of rising costs does not fall entirely on patients.

At the same time, health insurance coverage must be expanded significantly. Millions of poor and lower-middle-class families remain outside the protection of any meaningful insurance framework. A major illness can wipe out their lifetime savings. Health insurance should not be limited to hospitalization expenses alone; it should also cover essential medicines and long-term treatments. Furthermore, the government should periodically conduct independent reviews of pharmaceutical pricing and cost structures. If production costs have genuinely increased, the evidence should be publicly disclosed. Greater transparency would strengthen public trust and help prevent unjustified price es-

calation. The primary objective of healthcare policy should be to strike a fair balance between corporate profitability and citizens' rights. The vision of a developed India in 2047 cannot be measured solely through skyscrapers, expressways, digital networks, or GDP growth. Its true success will be judged by the well-being of its most vulnerable citizens. If a farmer, laborer, employee, or low-income worker cannot access dignified medical treatment during illness, claims of development will remain incomplete.

The need of the hour is not merely a debate on medicine prices but a comprehensive reassessment of the entire healthcare system. Healthcare is not a luxury; it is a fundamental human right. In a nation where citizens are denied the opportunity to live healthy lives, the glow of economic progress inevitably fades. It is time for governments, policymakers, medical professionals, pharmaceutical companies, and society at large to work together to ensure that healthcare remains an instrument of public service rather than merely a source of profit. Otherwise, the dream of a developed India may shine brightly in statistics while millions continue to struggle in the darkness of illness, debt, and helplessness. As India moves toward the centenary of its independence, this remains one of its greatest moral and humanitarian challenges—one that demands urgent and meaningful solutions today.