

A job well begun

At the halfway-mark, the Modi government has brought transparency, bolstered the economy and focused on the welfare of the vulnerable



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FROM A DECADE-LONG scam-tainted rule to being counted as one of the brightest economic spots in the world, India's growth story during the first half of the NDA-II's term was marked by a series of transformative initiatives that not only enhanced the country's image internationally, but also sought to improve the living standards of every Indian, particularly those at the bottom of the pyramid. As we herald the new year, it is also time to look with satisfaction at the completion of the halfway-mark of NDA-II, while chalking out the roadmap for the future.

From day one, the welfare of the poor, farmers, women, workers, small traders and other vulnerable sections, topped Prime Minister Narendra Modi's agenda. The twin menaces of black money and corruption were the biggest hurdles to growth. While seeking to improve the living standards of vulnerable sections, the PM trained his guns on tackling black money and corruption. This has been consistently demonstrated — from constituting a Special Investigation Team to unearth black money stashed abroad to the historic and revolutionary decision to invalidate Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 notes. The latest relief measure announced by the PM to the poor, middle classes, farmers, women and senior citizens shows that he is not only living up to the expectations of the people, but also has been successful in delivering a scam-free and transparent administration — this perhaps could be described as the biggest achievement in recent times.

Soon after coming to power, Modi focused on strengthening India's ties with its neighbours, symbolised by inviting the heads of SAARC nations to his swearing in. He reached out to build personal relations with world leaders, including Barack Obama, Shinzo Abe, Vladimir Putin, Angela Merkel and Francois Hollande. An important offshoot of his engagement with world leaders and India's role as a responsible nuclear state has been the inking of agreements with Canada, Australia and Kazakhstan for the supply of uranium to meet India's nuclear energy needs.

Further steps taken by the government not only sought to sustain and improve the economy at the macro-level, but also to provide a social security net to deprived sections through the creation of Jan Dhan accounts, Mudra bank and insurance schemes. Controlling inflation, opening up new vistas for FDI, increasing spending on infrastructure and dismantling red tape were among the measures that helped the GDP register more than seven per cent growth. Following the invalidation of high value currency, there could be a little slowdown in the economy. But in the long-term, the GDP is expected to improve as the informal economy vastly reduces and the formal economy expands.

Apart from initiating reforms in various sectors, leading to an improvement in India's ranking in "ease of doing business", the government brought in transparency and accountability. The best examples of transparency relate to the auctioning of spectrum and coal blocks, not mired in any controversy unlike the unsavoury episodes witnessed during the UPA regime. Here, I would like to emphasise that Modi protected wealth (minerals, spectrum, coal), created wealth (infrastructure growth) and distributed wealth (social security measures).

Make In India, Skill India, Digital India and Clean India are among the innovative campaigns that are shaping India's growth story. For instance, the FDI inflows under Make in India were to the tune of \$120 billion till September, 2016. Five major industrial corridors are coming up across the length and breadth of the country as part of the prime minister's vision to increase the contribution of the manufacturing sector to 25 per cent of GDP from the existing 16 per cent.

The Skill India scheme aims to reap our demographic advantage with youth comprising 65 per cent of the country's population. Impressive results are being seen on this front. The scheme seeks to create a vast base of skilled manpower, not only to script India's growth story, but also meet the needs of other countries. The importance attached to the mission could be gauged by the fact that for the first time since Independence, a separate ministry for skill development has been created.

The Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is the other major scheme which virtually turned into a massive public movement. More than three crore toilets have been constructed, while over 1.3 lakh villages and 480 towns and other cities are now open defecation-free.

In agriculture, the PM is determined to ensure that farmers are not affected by the vagaries of nature and their incomes grow. As many as 37 million farmers have been covered under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, while 1.3 million hectares were brought under micro-irrigation through the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana. The e-National Agriculture Market also aims to empower the farmer. With digital transactions getting a huge fillip, farmers stand to benefit immensely as more *mandis* get linked to e-NAM.

I would like to conclude by quoting the prime minister's words: "I believe India is standing at a watershed moment, on the cusp of actualising its inherent potential as a developed nation and global leader. An India where the farmer is happy, the trader is prosperous, every woman is empowered and the youth gainfully employed. An India, where every family has a house and every household has access to the basic amenities of electricity, water and a toilet."

True to his commitment towards "*sab ka saath, sab ka vikas*", Modi is leaving no stone unturned to ensure the welfare and uplift of various sections, particularly the vulnerable groups.

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