

Breaking the status quo

The NDA government is determined to undertake reforms in all domains



M. VENKAIAH NAIDU

Change is the key for progress. Fulfilling the dream of Resurgent India through a series of reformatory initiatives has been the leitmotif of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi ever since it was swept to power.

From introducing a biometric attendance system for government employees, to selecting unsung heroes for the Padma awards, to ensuring transparency in the funding of political parties, the Prime Minister is seeking to transform the mindset of individuals and the functioning of institutions. This was also reflected in the presentation of a single, all-encompassing Budget by doing away with a separate Railway Budget.

Status quoists fear change, but visionaries with courage and conviction are capable of taking game-changing decisions in the larger interest of the nation. It is time for citizens to realise that Mr. Modi is singularly focussed on ushering in total transformation in every walk of life and making every Indian a proud citizen of a 'clean, transparent and resurgent India'.

Transforming India

The decision to demonetise high-value currency notes and other changes are marked by the Prime Minister's motto of Reform, Perform and Transform. The intention to transform India for a better future was reflected in one of the government's earliest decisions: winding up the Planning Commission and setting up NITI (National Institution for Transforming India) Aayog to provide directional and policy inputs to the government.

Similarly, another major initiative that fetched the government lakhs of crores was the transparent auctioning of natural resources like spectrum and coal blocks. This was in contrast to the scam-tainted allocations conducted during the previous United Progressive Alliance regime. During the last two years, the NDA government has put an end to a discretionary-based system and moved to a transparency-oriented one.

Acceptance of the recommendations of the 14th Finance Commission to devolve 42% of the funds to States and 5% to local bodies from the divisible pool is a clear example of Mr. Modi's belief in cooperative federalism and in the spirit of Team India.

President Pranab Mukherjee, in a recent address to Parliament, mentioned that the luminous path of social transformation and reform shown by Guru Gobind Singh and saint-philosopher Ramanujacharya serves as a beacon for all and "is an inspiration to my



GAME CHANGER: "Narendra Modi is focussed on ushering in transformation in every walk of life." The PM in Varanasi as part of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. PHOTO: PTI

government".

With the government according priority to the welfare of "Gaon, Garib, Kisan, Mazdoor, Mahila and Yuva", various schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana for financial inclusion, and the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, have made a huge impact at the grass-roots level. Already an unprecedented 26 crore accounts for the unbanked have been opened under the Jan-Dhan scheme, while over ₹2 lakh crore has been provided under the Mudra Yojana for unfunded small businesses, with 70% of the loans availed of by women entrepreneurs.

Cleanliness is next to godliness, to use a clichéd phrase. Unfortunately, importance was never attached to vital aspects of cleanliness by most till this government launched the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, which virtually turned into a people's movement. As a result, over 450 cities, 1.4 lakh villages, 77 districts and three States have declared themselves as open defecation-free. A remarkable transformation in the attitude of the people has made this possible. More than three crore toilets have been constructed under the mission.

Another initiative that focussed on changing attitudes was the Give it Up campaign. Following the Prime Minister's appeal to well-to-do families, over 1.2 crore consumers voluntarily gave up their LPG subsidy. A whopping ₹36,000 crore has been saved by preventing leakages after the direct benefit transfer of Jan Dhan, Aadhar and Mobile. Similarly, PAHAL, the world's largest cash benefit

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transfer scheme for providing LPG subsidy, has resulted in saving over ₹21,000 crore in the last two years. It is heartening to note that Chandigarh and eight districts in Haryana have been declared kerosene-free.

As part of the government's vision to double the income of farmers by 2022 and prevent farmers' suicides, schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana and the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana, to provide crop-risk coverage at low premium and expand irrigation facilities, have been yielding good results. In order to ensure easy credit to farmers, the corpus of NABARD fund has been doubled to ₹41,000 crore. Steps taken by the government, including increasing minimum support price for pulses and the procurement of eight lakh tonnes of pulses, have controlled their prices.

Another revolutionary initiative has been the Beti Bachao, Beti Padoo scheme. Over one crore accounts have been opened and more than ₹11,000 crore has been deposited under the Pradhan Mantri Sukanya Samridhi Yojana, which seeks to ensure a secure future for the girl child. The government has also enhanced maternity leave from 12 weeks to 26 weeks.

The game-changing decision to demonetise high-value currency was aimed at bringing a major transformation in the attitude of people as part of the measure to curb corruption and un-earth black money. With all the money coming back into the banking system following the demonetisation of old ₹500 and ₹1,000 notes, there would be surplus liquidity for banks and this would naturally result in lower interest rates and increased access to credit. Also, more money would be available to the government for spending on social welfare schemes. The Economic Survey has indicated that growth would rebound after the hit due to the demonetisation. A success story of this saga is the popularity of BHIM (Bharat Interface for Money) for mobile App-based payments.

Other schemes that seek to bring about transformation include One Nation, One Market; the Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana; supply of 20 crore affordable LED bulbs; Mission Indradhanush; Stand Up India; Start Up India; repealing over 1,100 outdated laws with another 400 to be abrogated in the near future; and providing minimum monthly pension of ₹1,000.

The government's agenda

The transformation-driven agenda of the government was also reflected in the 2017-18 Budget in which political funding reforms were announced by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley. Now, a political party can receive a maximum amount of ₹2,000 in cash as donation and every party has to file its returns. The Reserve Bank of India Act is also proposed to be amended to enable issue of electoral bonds.

The Budget summed up the agenda of the government — Transform, Energise, Clean India. According of infrastructure status to affordable housing is a huge step. Also, the allocation under the Housing for All scheme was enhanced to ₹23,000 crore as against ₹15,000 crore, in this year's Budget.

Similarly, the usual practice of segregating plan and non-plan expenditure has been done away with. Reforms to be undertaken in the University Grants Commission, according greater autonomy for good quality institutions and ranking them on the basis of excellence and creation of innovation fund for secondary education are all aimed at bringing about transformation.

While the list of such revolutionary initiatives is exhaustive, it is suffice to say that this government is determined not to be swerved from the path of transforming the nation by undertaking reforms in all domains, irrespective of the attempts by naysayers and status quoists to place hurdles in its way.

M. Venkaiah Naidu is Union Minister of Urban Development, Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, and Information and Broadcasting.