

Dear member,

The January 26th marked the 59th year of the republic since India became free. There are multiple symbolisms associated with the day itself, going back to January 26, 1930, when the Indian National Congress Party sought full independence from Britain and more evocative moment of January 26, 1950 when Dr. Rajendra Prasad became the first president of the republic.

The 58years of republic took us to greater heights and filled us with better hopes and aspirations. Economic reforms and revolution in the global telecommunications exposed us to the world. And, we are no longer satisfied with a "third world status". We want to do better and become a great nation. The world is closely taking notice of India. Its proven information technology prowess and its managerial talent is a premium world wide. Recent large scale acquisitions of foreign firms by Indian corporates boosted India's confidence.

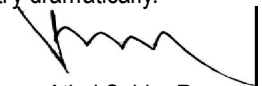
However, challenges too are daunting. India's labor force is expanding. In order to turn this growing force into a demographic asset rather than a liability, it is extremely essential that India maintains its present annual growth rate at 8-10 percent. In fact, maintaining the current annual growth rate also becomes an inevitable factor to overcome the recent inhospitable international environment caused by spiraling oil prices and the US credit crisis possibly triggering a recession in the world's biggest economy.

In order to obviate the new challenges India needs to initiate an era of second generation reforms while vigorously implementing and pushing the on going ones. The reforms that are mostly urgently required are in the critical areas of infrastructure, education and health. We must upgrade our roads, rails, ports and airports, railways, telecommunication networks and generate more power and energy to the levels of the countries we want to compete with. An average Indian needs to access the market. He needs roads and transport to reach his produce where they are in demand and he needs power to run the machines that will enhance his productivity. But he also needs to understand the world in which he lives and to acquire skills that will be useful there. He has to be in good health if he is to work productively.

To begin with we must truthfully and honestly universalise our school education – primary and secondary, create access to public health for every Indian specially women and children with a set of time frame. The government needs to quickly act upon on the suggestions of the National Knowledge Commission of 2005 on a good number of significant areas aimed at creating a knowledge economy. A large number of suggestions of the Commission on education, health and information technology have not seen the light of the day.

Regretfully enough, it appears we are not ready as yet and there are too many leakages in our system even acknowledged by the President, Smt Pratibha Patil, in her maiden republic day address. She said, a large number of welfare schemes such as – Bharat Nirman, National Rural Employment Guarantee Program, Rural Health Mission and Sarva Siksha Abhiyan were meant to improve people's lives, but they were ridden with implementation bottlenecks. While calling for 'appropriate remedial answers', the President called upon all the concerned such as local-self government bodies to improve delivery mechanisms as they are 'closer to implementation levels'. The entire government machinery has to work to fulfill the aspirations of the people with greater transparency. Every citizen, government, civil society, non-governmental organisations will have to work collectively for the growth of society.

The strides made by the economy so far may have resulted in the emergence of India as a powerful player on the global stage as the president said, but if India has to be a great nation, it must first improve the quality of life within the country dramatically.



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