

All is well that end's well

Everyone knows that UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi was not happy about the Congress manifesto. But here is the factual position: She wanted to know why the picture on the cover was so dark? When it was explained to her that the team that had prepared the draft had actually wanted to have a picture that had people, she was apparently not satisfied with the explanation. But before leaving, she said sorry to the team for being critical of a document that had seen nearly a year's work. Later, the team got a short note from Congress President Rahul Gandhi acknowledging the work that had gone into the manifesto. The team that finally prepared it was over the moon.

Police duty of a different kind

In the season of elections, here's some relief. The Uttar Pradesh Police has broken the back of a gang that used to steal bees. Apparently stealing apiaries — beehives in small boxes — is widespread in the state and thieves make a lot of money doing this. Ninety boxes of bees have been seized from thieves near Bulandshahar valued at ₹3.5 lakh. The gang was active in Haryana, Rajasthan and Western UP. Because you can only steal apiaries at night (you are liable to be attacked by bees during the day), a specialised team of policemen led by the UP police lay in wait for the thieves night after night until they were caught. The favourite stratagem for the theft was the deft use of cowdung, damp cotton wool and mud. The thieves are in jail on charges of dacoity. And the UP police is expecting to get a reward for their hard work.

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?

"The Congress in its manifesto, which is full of lies, has promised to remove the law that protects our forces in terror-affected areas. Removing this will actually help Pakistan. The Congress has always bowed down to terrorism."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Kolkata, April 3

CHECKLIST**BIHAR: CONSTITUENCIES TO WATCH ON APRIL 11**

Aurangabad: The *Mahagathbandhan* has given this seat to the Hindustani Awam Morcha, led by Jitan Ram Manjhi, while the Bharatiya Janata Party is fielding sitting MP Sushil Kumar Singh. The Rajputs are strong in this constituency that was held by top bureaucrat and former Congress MP Nikhil Kumar. Current Chairman of Finance Commission and bureaucrat NK Singh belongs to this family. The BJP appears to have an edge.

Gaya: This is a reserved constituency that is dominated by the Musahar (rat catcher) community. Gaya was on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's campaign itinerary and in his campaign meeting, he reminded people that the Congress was habitual in criticising those who worked with cleaners and brooms and that he was the one who washed the feet of those who cleaned toilets. This was odd because the Congress is not even contesting the seat: it has gone to Jitan Ram

Manjhi of the Hindustani Awam Morcha. Hard to see how the BJP will win this.

Nawada: By far the most interesting contest among all four — Giriraj Singh of the BJP who held the seat has been shifted to Begusarai and the seat has now been given to the Lok Janashakti Party. The candidate is Chandan Kumar, brother of mafia don Surajbhan Singh. The *Mahagathbandhan* has fielded Bibha Devi whose husband, who held the seat earlier, is in jail. Whom would you choose?

Jamui: Chirag, the son of Ramvilas Paswan is contesting the seat that he represented in the last Lok Sabha. Jamui has over 11 per cent Mahadalit population and is considered one of the safest seats for the NDA in Bihar after the BJP-JD(U) tie-up. Chirag is facing Upendra Kushwaha's Rashtriya Lok Samata Party candidate Bhudeo Chaudhary.

**OPINION**

INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

Congress promises radical, forward looking policies

Congress initiated liberalisation in 1991 with a new Industrial Policy. Taking note of the changes in the global economy and the Indian economy, Congress promises another radical, forward-looking Industrial Policy. The BJP Government mouths empty slogans. Its record is dismal in terms of the growth rate of industry sector GVA and gross capital formation in the industry sector. Congress promises to reverse these disappointing trends.

Congress promises to increase the share of India's manufacturing sector from the current level of 16 per cent of GDP to 25 per cent within a period of 5 years and to make India a manufacturing hub for the world. Congress believes that anything that can be made in another country can be made in India. Congress promises that it will adopt policies, formulate rules, levy taxes and reward entrepreneurship that will make India a renowned centre of manufacturing.

We will announce policies that will help India retain its leading position in the manufacture of engineering goods, petroleum products, gems & jewellery, drugs & pharmaceuticals, garments & textiles and chemicals.

We will announce policies that will help India gain a leadership position in steel, metals, cement, machinery, electronic goods, computer hardware, automobiles etc.

Congress will announce a 'Make for the World' policy under which foreign and Indian companies will be invited to invest in 'Exclusive Export-only Zones', manufacture and export their entire production, pay no indirect taxes and pay a low rate of corporate tax.

As the UPA did from 2004 to 2014, we will make a determined effort to revive stalled projects and bring locked-up capital to use and generate employment.

We will promote the manufacture and export of India's traditional products like handloom products and handicrafts that employ lakhs of persons. 08. Congress will acquire patents, create a patent pool and make advanced technologies available to small and medium businesses.

Controls have crept into the system in the name of regulations. Congress promises to do a quick review of the rules and regulations made by the BJP Government in the last 5 years and repeal as many of them as are necessary to free industry and business from the 'Control Raj'.

In the last 5 years, tax authorities have been given extraordinary discretionary powers that have throttled industry and come to be described as 'tax terrorism.' Investigative agencies have misinterpreted the laws and have instilled fear among businesspersons. Congress will review these discretionary powers and arbitrary actions and take steps to allow industry and business to function with a large degree of freedom.

We recognise the need to create lakhs of low-skilled jobs in order to absorb young men and women who have completed only a few years in school. Congress will launch 2 major programmes to be implemented through Gram Sabhas and urban local bodies that will create 1 crore jobs: a. Repair and restoration of water bodies ('Water Bodies Restoration Mission'); and b. Regeneration and afforestation of wasteland and degraded land ('Wasteland Regeneration Mission').

Congress will require businesses employing 100 persons or more to start an apprenticeship programme, impart skills, pay a stipend, and employ from among the trained apprentices whenever a job is created or becomes vacant in that business. We will amend The Companies (Corporate Social Responsibility Policy) Rules, 2014 to include 'Apprenticeship' as an additional activity.

We will identify new kinds of jobs that will emerge with the advent of new technologies and will offer opportunities to youth to acquire the skill-sets necessary for these jobs.

A basic weakness of the Indian economy has been infrastructure. Flawed design, inefficient execution, insufficient capacity and poor maintenance of infrastructure have dragged India's growth rate down. Congress promises to address these deficiencies with a combination of planning, technology, quality and accountability. All available models and instrumentalities will be used to build infrastructure—public sector, private sector and public-private partnership. Roads, railway and electricity are among vital infrastructure. They are also crucial public goods.

Cities, Urbanisation and Urban Policy India is fast urbanising. Nearly 34 per cent of our population lives in towns and cities and the number is growing. As in the rest of the world, India's cities can become engines of growth. The Smart Cities Mission of the BJP government, which replaced the successful JNNURM, was a colossal failure and a waste of money with no visible results.

Congress promises to augment the total length of national highways and increase the pace of construction. The focus will be on improved design and quality, maintenance and accountability. Congress promises to massively modernise all outdated railway infrastructure. New projects will be implemented in accordance with the best international standards of design and quality. Road construction and railways can be built using private capital and capacity. Congress will use sector-specific, tried and tested PPP models to increase the supply of these vital public goods.

Congress promises to review, re-formulate and implement the policy on spectrum and on exploration and extraction of natural resources. The policy will address issues of allocation, capital investment, enhanced production, transparency, efficiency, risk-reward concerns, environmental sustainability, inter-generational equity, accountability, competition and appropriate sectoral regulation.

We will formulate a policy on Clean Energy in existing power plants that use fossil fuels and promote Green Energy to enhance the share of solar and wind energy in the total supply of energy.

Edited excerpts from the 2019 manifesto of the Congress I, April 5, New Delhi



ILLUSTRATION BY BINAY SINHA

From giving a near scare in the recent 2017 state assembly elections to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to losing key legislative members to the latter ahead of Lok Sabha elections 2019, the Congress party in Gujarat may seem to be losing the narrative. Not so, believes **Paresh Dhanani**, Congress' leader of opposition in Gujarat Legislative Assembly who has bagged a ticket from Amreli in the upcoming general election. In an interview with **Vinay Umargi**, Dhanani explains how the anti-incumbency mood against the Centre and state government will play in Congress' favour in Gujarat and why the party seems to be relatively silent ahead of elections. Edited excerpts:

'This poll will see urban people's ire'

You had a near win in 2017 before the BJP went on to form the government with simple majority. Has Congress let it slip since then?

It is a very wrong notion. We got 77 seats, there were four alliance partners that came up to 81. Out of the 16 constituencies, there were eight where we lost by below 1,000 votes, there were six where we lost by below 2,000 votes and two constituencies we lost below 3,000 votes. So, 81 plus 16 comes to 97 where we would have formed a government in Gujarat. People of Gujarat were in the mood of a change in regime in 2017 but we failed by mere margins. The people still have the same expectation:

Which will be fulfilled in 2019 elections.

The common man in Gujarat is aware that despite a BJP rule in both Gujarat and Centre since last five years, no new work has been undertaken in the state; nor has Gujarat benefited from a BJP government at the Centre. As the then chief minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi had raised 107 questions with the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) regime on issues Gujarat faced. After five years, the Gujarat Congress has been raising these same questions as the issues remain unresolved under his Prime Ministership.

In that case, what has been your

Making your old clothes count

Goonj has been distributing clothes to the poor for decades, but now it wants to make ordinary people a part of the solution, writes **Sneha Bhattacharjee**

It was a chance meeting in the winter of 1999 that changed the course of Anshu Gupta's life. Gupta, then a journalist, was on a reporting assignment when he was drawn to a rickshaw-puller, who carted unclaimed dead bodies to mortuaries in return for some cash. Most of the dead were migrants wearing tattered clothes.

The sight moved Anshu. He and his wife, Meenakshi, later went through the wardrobe in their two-bedroom house in Delhi's Sarita Vihar and counted the unused and unwanted pieces that filled the space. Between them, there were 67 pieces of clothing they did not need. What if their unwanted clothes could be reused and distributed among those who needed them?

This story about the start of Goonj, a non-profit organisation that works to redistribute discarded pieces of clothing among people who might need them, has been told and retold several times. But each time it acquires a new urgency as millions in the country still suffer from extreme deprivation with barely enough to cover themselves. Goonj has been working to meet their requirements for clothing for nearly two decades, but now it wants to take its effort one step further and craft a system to redistribute and recycle clothes systematically, and change the mindset about "donation".

"We're looking at two currencies here, one is urban surplus and the other is how this surplus can be converted for development," says Meenakshi, co-founder Goonj. She notes that the idea is to count the recipient of recycled

clothing as a resource rather than just an unknown face by incorporating them in the recycling and reusing process.

Goonj is attempting to draw the attention of the masses to the thought of empowering the rural poor so that they can take control of their lives and become a part of the solution that brings a change in their own lives, and consequently, in society. "We don't want people to look at us as just an NGO, we are a social enterprise run by the people who are making a living on their own by working with us," says Anshu.

At the heart of this change has to be a change in the mindset of those who donate clothes. "When you are donating something that you are not going to use any longer, it isn't really donating. You are simply 'discarding' what you do not need. Thus, it is important that people give mindfully," says Meenakshi.

The clothes people donate do not go to the poor directly. It first passes through Goonj's production unit where they are altered, washed and, if they are not wearable, they are repurposed.

Walking through the alleys where the production unit has been established in Delhi, one can spot women sorting and segregating the wearable clothes from the unusable ones and into clothes meant for the adults, for children, clothes that need to be washed, or discarded. Each unit has a certain number of women working on sorting, segregating, labelling, and packing the material.

The organisation has also set up units for keeping and segregating books, stationery, toys, footwear and the like. A separate unit takes care of all the 'discarded' pieces of

strategy for the 2019 general elections?

We cannot compete with BJP's crony money in campaigning. We are a farmers' and common man's party. Social media has also seen BJP silencing Congress' voice. Verified Whatsapp and FB pages have been cancelled by the government through misuse of power. But our party workers known as *jan mitra* (public's friend) have conducted the ground work for us. More than 47,000 booths across the state have been covered and since last several months we have been running a door-to-door campaign. We have worked on our weaknesses within the party in Gujarat. Organisational strengthening within the Congress has also been a continuous process. We have devoted partyworkers who are revolutionary in a non-violent way.

The BJP has been a party that has misused government machinery to instill fear among common man and lost his trust. On the contrary, we have been regaining that trust that we lost in 2014 elections and we will soon see the results on May 23.

Soon after the state assembly polls in 2017, Congress was confident of winning anywhere between 8-12 out of the total 26 Lok Sabha seats. Where do you stand now in your estimates?

There was a change in voting pattern between 2009 and 2014 where our vote share fell and the BJP gained. This was a combination of people's ire against the Congress and the BJP's machinations. However, it is now clearly visible on the ground that the pre-2014 promises have not been fulfilled by the BJP such as bringing black money back, addressing Article 370 in Kashmir, joblessness or farm loans. Not only has the ire against Congress subsided among the people of Gujarat but the charisma of Narendra Modi has waned and people are now coming to their senses. It is on the back of these issues that we believe the tide will turn in our favour and we are confident of winning all 26 seats in Gujarat.

The Congress had said that it would announce candidates a year before but didn't do so. Also, in recent months the party has seen a setback with some of its leaders joining the BJP. Is there a leadership deficit in Gujarat Congress now?

We did announce but only to the potential candidates, telling them to strengthen the party and asking them to join programmes to mobilise common man. The party has

made efforts to identify potential candidates since last six months. And the names that the state leadership chose, the national leadership has also endorsed after people's choice. Congress is a movement not a mere party, hence we don't see such things as a setback.

Hardik Patel is unable to contest on a Congress ticket. There is also the possibility of Alpesh Thakor's exit from the party.

In a bid to hide their weaknesses and lack of integrity, the BJP and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) has been spreading rumours of dissent and infighting within the Congress party. The Congress is both morally strong and united.

This will be proved by our party workers in the upcoming elections. As far as Hardik is concerned, one needs to ask why is the government afraid of a 26-year-old youth contesting elections. The government has misused its power and presented half truths to prevent Hardik from contesting but I am confident that the people of Gujarat will reply through their votes. Also, BJP's candidates are not adept at running government and so the ruling party is luring able leaders from the Congress by hook or crook. During the 2017 assembly polls, the BJP government in Gujarat struggled to make it to the 100-seat mark. Now, the party is preparing for Modi's return after it loses 2019 elections to present him with an able govern-

ment in Gujarat by luring able leaders from Congress.

The Congress has largely been known as a rural party, especially in Gujarat. Will the urban areas be a concern in the upcoming elections?

In any case, several people who have migrated from rural areas to urban areas irrespective of caste or religion are with the Congress and so are the farmers as well as small and medium enterprises in the non-urban areas. On the other hand, the urban areas house a large number of Gujarat businessmen who are very protective of their businesses and capital and, therefore, flexible in how they vote. As such the urban community is now divided. The voting pattern during polls in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh where Congress won has seen a turn among urban areas where communities that never chose Congress voted for it. Similarly, in 2019, the urban people's ire will emerge in voting.



PARESH DHANANI

Leader of Opposition, Gujarat legislative assembly

In a bid to hide their weaknesses and lack of integrity, the BJP and the RSS has been spreading rumours of dissent and infighting within the Congress party. The Congress is both morally strong and united. This will be proved by our party workers in the upcoming elections



PIC COURTESY: GOONJ

ON THEIR OWN Work being done by one of the rural communities in Mandla, a tribal district in the east-central part of Madhya Pradesh

clothes and converts them into trendy bags, wallets, pouches, etc. "Not a single piece of cloth is left unused in Goonj," says Meenakshi.

One of Goonj's most important initiatives has been the "My Pad" campaign, wherein it makes cloth pads, and distribute them among women in rural areas. "More than the distribution of these pads, it is the conversation with the rural women that is often a herculean task," says Meenakshi.

With over 4,000 tonnes of material being distributed every month, Goonj is now looking at funding to take care of the logistical aspects of its work. "We want people to realise that giving us the material is just one part. What we need, in fact, is not just a material contri-

but also funding to reach more people," says Anshu.

"People need to realise that we're not just collecting clothes but are also converting donated clothes into usable ones for someone who needs it. Our efforts involve all possible resources around us, and to sustain them, all kind of help is required," he adds.

Goonj has over 900 people working across the country in different units and capacities. All the items in their office and units are donated products. Mindful of the environment, the organisation and its workforce are extremely particular about what they use and throw—even a stapler pin is sold as scrap so it can be recycled.

The makeover of Sensex

Only seven companies survive from the original list

It is a truism that equities offer higher long-term returns than other financial assets. This is certainly the case with the Sensex, or the BSE Sensitive Index. Over the 40 years that the Sensex has, sort of, been in existence, it has delivered compounded capital gains of about 16 per cent per annum, along with 1.5 per cent in annual dividends. That beats inflation comfortably. The Sensex was actually launched in 1986. The BSE compiled it as a ready reckoner to track the combined share prices of the 30 largest listed companies in India. The methodology was adopted from the venerable Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA) of the New York Stock Exchange, and a base

year of 1979-80 was chosen. Hence, though only 33 years old, the Sensex's history reaches back 40 years.

The tectonic shifts in the economy across those four decades are illustrated by changes in the index composition. As companies gain (or lose) market value and sectors gain in importance, they move in (and out) of the index. Only seven companies survive from that original list of 30 — namely (in alphabetical order), Hindustan Unilever, ITC, Larsen & Toubro, Mahindra & Mahindra, Reliance Industries and the Tata twins — Tata Steel (then known as "Tata Ordinary") and Tata Motors (aka "Telco"). The current index includes several entirely new sectors

which did not exist in 1986. There were no listed banks in 1986, for example, since the entire sector was nationalised. Banking is now the single-largest sector by weight. The Sensex set includes five private banks with just one public sector bank. Add in non-banking financial companies, and the sector is, by far, the most important index component. India's information technology industry was barely conceptualised in 1986 and there were no listed IT companies. IT is now the second-largest sector by weight. There are two listed mining conglomerates including a public sector unit, and another Sensex PSU is a producer of crude oil and natural gas. There are six listed automobile companies — there were only three in 1986.

The 2019 Sensex also includes a private telecom service provider with 350 million subscribers, and another company, which is nominally classified as a refiner/marketer of fuels, also owns a large telecom service with

280 million subscribers. This was unthinkable in 1986, when getting a landline meant being on the waiting-list for years. Old-style commodity businesses such as cement producers, textile manufacturers and paper mills have gradually been shouldered out by these new upstarts that were only allowed to start operations after the New Economic Policy of 1991. The index composition also shows the increasing importance of private consumption since banking, finance, telecom, automobiles *et al* are largely driven by retail consumption.

Liberalisation came relatively late to the investment industry itself. Private mutual funds, exchange-traded funds, and ULIPs were not allowed to provide services until the 21st century. This means that, in many ways, the returns indicated by the Sensex were just a theoretical construct for the first 15 years or so of its existence. There were no index funds or ETFs available to capture

index performance; there was only UTI, which offered strange instruments with no correlation to stock-market movements. Individual investors punted as they pleased, trading paper certificates in an opaque system of open outcry where huge brokerages were charged and transactions rolled over for years on end. Indeed, the creation of a financial regulator, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi), triggered a strike in April 1992 by the brokers who controlled the BSE. That strike led directly to the discovery of the Harshad Mehta scam. The legendary "Big Bull" couldn't liquidate his stock positions to return cash "borrowed" from the banking system.

The BSE is now a listed corporate entity and the Sensex has, in many ways, been superseded by the broader Nifty. But it remains a unique artefact with India's financial history embedded within its meandering journey northwards.

Getting clean air back

Air pollution can be brought down to near permissible levels within five years with the use of the right regulatory and policy instruments

AJAY SHANKAR

The good news is that finally there is a National Clean Air Program to mitigate the real health crisis that air pollution is causing. The task is daunting. All new programs need substantial funds for the subsidies and grants that are the normal instruments of implementation. The fiscal deficit will, however, be higher in the coming financial year and the new government would need to again move towards fiscal rectitude. The provision of large budgetary resources for clean air may, therefore, be difficult. So the challenge would be to make a major dent without much money. Fortunately, there are some zero and modest cost options, which can have a major impact and require only policy and regulatory interventions.

The zero cost option for getting air pollution from burning of crop residues down to zero would be for the thermal power stations of the region to offer an attractive enough price for the supply of briquettes made from crop residues. The price signal would get competitive private investment into briquette making plants. The farmers would get a price for their crop residue and some increase in their incomes. The additional cost, if any, that the power plants would incur by the use of briquettes instead of coal would be a pass through in their regulated tariff. The impact on the final consumer would be negligible. All that would be needed is a policy mandate to thermal power plants and regulators.

Electricity and gas cylinders are reaching all rural households through *Saubhagya* and *Ujjwala* programmes. Cow dung is presently used for cooking and is a significant source of air pollution. The Power Distribution Companies could announce a sufficiently remunerative tariff for the purchase of electricity generated from cow dung. This could be a separate earmarked component of the Renewable Energy Purchase obligations of the Distribution Companies. A policy mandate to the Regulators would be needed. There are mini plants, which convert cow dung into gas and compost and use the gas, to generate electricity. Private investors would then put up plants in villages and pay a price for cow dung. Cattle owning households would get some additional income. With this they would find it easier to pay for clean energy, electricity, and gas, for cooking. In a few years all the cow dung in the country could be converted into clean energy and would cease to cause air pollution. The additional cost to the consumer of electricity as a result would be marginal.

Electric vehicles do not pollute the air. To begin with, the Transport Authorities in the more polluted areas, such as the National Capitol Region, could announce that from, say, 1st January 2020, all new as well as replacement permits for taxis, three wheelers, and mini buses for local public transport would be given only for electric vehicles. This would give enough time for the electric vehicle manufacturers in India to ramp up production. They have the electric vehicles. The local authorities should get a sufficient number of charging stations in place by then. The cost of these electric vehicles have come down considerably. The Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) is providing electric vehicles to the government at the existing market rates. These do not need subsidies for public transport. Purchase of electric vehicles for personal use would rise only after



people get used to electric taxis. However, the electric two wheelers have become so economical that they only need the network of charging stations to dramatically increase market share. But buses need subsidies as their costs are still quite high. Subsidising electric buses by fully foregoing the goods and services tax (GST) would be amply justified. It may be noted that London is mandating that all taxis be electric to address growing concerns there about air pollution.

Micro, small and medium industries cause considerable air pollution as they use coal and other polluting energy sources. A rapid extension of the gas grid to cover all urban areas and industrial clusters would enable these industrial units to use clean gas as their energy source. All households would also switch over to piped gas for cooking. Imported liquefied natural gas (LNG) based fuel would be able to cater to the full demand. This can be done without any subsidy. The distortion of dual pricing in gas; one for domestic gas and one for imported LNG has outlived its rationale and needs to go. There should be only one price for all consumers as is the case with petrol and diesel.

Then there are old coal fired stations in and around urban centres. These can easily be closed to reduce air pollution. This should pose no difficulty as the country has surplus power capacity. The recent closure of the Badarpur thermal plant is a good example. Such closure

of old polluting plants would also reduce net carbon emissions as the newer plants are more energy efficient. In addition, the increased demand for electricity from newer plants would, to some extent, mitigate the risk of these plants becoming NPAs due to lack of demand.

Old commercial vehicles cause considerable pollution and need to be fully replaced with BS VI compliant new vehicles at the earliest; within 3 to 5 years. A regulatory fiat of scrapping all these vehicles across the country would be the way forward. The phasing out would not run into resistance and become far smoother if an attractive enough price was given for trading in of the old vehicles. An efficient system for scrapping these with full traceability would also need to be put in place. Government would need to fully finance this. But the outgo of money would be sufficiently offset by the additional GST revenues from the higher sales of commercial vehicles.

Air pollution levels could conceivably be brought down to near permissible levels within five years with the use of the right regulatory and policy instruments. Subsidies should be introduced only where there is no other option. But then it should be amply provided so as to achieve the objective fully.

The writer is former Secretary, Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion, Government of India

Simple ideas to transform India

ANIL AGARWAL

India is currently the largest democracy and one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. The entire world is keeping a close watch on our country as almost one billion people will cast their votes to elect a government that will be entrusted with the duties of taking the country forward, and making India an even more powerful nation in the next five years.

The average age of India's population today is 25 years and the country is known for its hard working and intellectual workforce. However, with escalating unemployment, many people, especially talented youngsters, are heading overseas for job opportunities.

Such brain drain needs to be curtailed and citizens need to be encouraged to choose careers most suitable to them. They should be provided with platforms to succeed in careers that divert them from mainstream jobs. We can take a cue from the US with its Liberal Arts universities helping about 35 per cent of the population to explore other career opportunities. This broadens the student's perspective and will lead them to a totally new career focus like painting, art, theatre, sports, and so on. Alternative career options should be encouraged through prestigious social recognition by parents and society at large.

The growth of a start-up culture is in the right direction. The government has done a fabulous job of creating an environment conducive for start-ups. Financial institutions all over the world are looking at optimum ways to deploy funds, and the most popular one is micro finance. Providing loans of up to ₹2 lakh will provide the much-needed impetus to the common man with an Aadhaar card. They will be encouraged to come up with thousands of new ideas to deploy that money. They will become entrepreneurs and have an independent livelihood, and going forward, will create jobs instead of seeking jobs. Data clearly shows that the least bad debts arise from micro finance.

Public sector enterprises, including state-owned banks, are the backbone of India. Empowering these PSUs and PSBs and giving them a free hand to operate and take decisions will help generate employment and speed up development. These need to be provided with global funds, independent boards and minimum interference in decision making. This will raise their performance manifold and create a huge number of jobs.

India has around 650 districts which have very effective district collectors, who can be honed as business development managers in their areas, whether it is agri-

culture, sport, mining, education or tourism. They can develop their strategy and have the final authority once the policy decisions have been taken by the government. The responsibility will lie on them as the buck will stop with them. This structure will surely transform the country.

Traditionally, India has always been an agrarian nation with agriculture being the backbone of the economy. Massive strides have been taken on the agricultural front to make India self-sufficient in our food requirements. India is a large country which has been blessed with rich resources both over the ground as well as underground. To finance and monetarily support India's growing welfare and developmental spending, the nation needs to look "underground" towards its huge but yet untapped mineral and oil and gas resources. These yet-to-be-tapped natural resources could be tapped by PSUs or private participants and the funds thereby generated be used for various purposes.

The government needs to act strongly on the auction of raw materials for the aluminium and steel industry. India is facing a surge in import bills through imports of aluminium and iron ore, hurting the economy significantly. It has surplus capacity yet it imports over 50 per cent scrap and primary aluminium, losing \$3.5 billion per annum and lakhs of jobs to other countries. A uniform import duty of 10 per cent on both scrap and primary aluminium will encourage the domestic industry and avoid dumping.

Encouragement to explore and produce natural resources in India will lead to greater self-reliance. Natural resources require processing, which will help create thousands of SMEs who will create quality products and millions of jobs. Self-reliance will also help save billions of dollars in imports, which can be ploughed back into social development.

Finally, India needs to build upon its 5000-year-old history, rich culture, monuments, museums, royal palaces, coastline, hills, deserts and places of tourist interest. These could be handled by professionals who will provide world-class maintenance, making them attractive for the global and Indian tourist. This will encourage tourism immensely and create massive job opportunities in the tourism sector.

I am sure political parties will include and address these through their manifestos for the forthcoming elections, as these are quite relevant for the nation's development. Once implemented, these ideas will lead to job creation and poverty alleviation, and will take India a step closer to the super power that it aspires to become.

The writer is Executive Chairman, Vedanta Resources

▶ OTHER VIEWS

Big step by Lightfoot

Chicago elects the first black, gay woman as its mayor

In his January 2017 farewell speech in Chicago, outgoing President Barack Obama, talking about the threats facing American democracy, touched upon the toxic persistence of racism, and spoke of how "Hearts must change". In the same speech, he also said, "I've lived long enough to know that race relations are better than they were 10, or 20, or 30 years ago — you can see it not just in statistics, but in the attitudes of young Americans across the political spectrum." Now, in what seems to be an effort to pick up on the cues of the former president, Chicago has become the largest American city to elect a black woman as its mayor earlier this week. A former prosecutor, Lori Lightfoot, 56, is also the first openly gay mayor to hold office in the city. And, she defeated another African-American woman, former alderman, Toni Preckwinkle.

Obama had risen through the ranks in this territory, serving three terms in the Illinois Senate from 1997 to 2004. Lightfoot's win, in the context of contemporary American politics, goes some way towards dulling the sharp divisiveness that has marked the Trump presidency. Trump has supported an assortment of anti-gay measures. His views on women have been regressive. Lightfoot's victory is a significant electoral fightback. She is armed with an encouraging liberal legacy as well: Chicago elected its first black mayor in 1983 — Harold Washington. In 1909, the civil rights organisation, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), was first estab-



lished in Chicago. At her election night party, Lightfoot told the crowd, "You did more than make history. You created a movement for change". Her victory is a heartwarming moment.

The Indian Express, April 5

Don't shame rape victims

A Court of Appeal will help Supreme Court focus on weightier matters

The Congress manifesto promising a Court of Appeal between the high courts and Supreme Court is a sensible proposal that must be top priority for the next government irrespective of the party that comes to power. Currently, Supreme Court is weighed down hearing sundry appeals, special leave petitions, and other original litigation leaving little time for constitutional matters or select cases of public importance. Constitution was the court's focus area in the initial decades since Independence. But with India's economy taking off and litigation also rising proportionately with the stakes, SC has become the final word on even routine cases like business disputes, dishonouring of contracts, and even bail matters. Congress's proposal of a Court of Appeal "to sit in mul-

The Times of India, April 5

Outer clarity

India must make a forceful case against weaponisation of outer space

The Indian Space Research Organisation's successful April 1 launch of the PSLV-C45 rocket that placed 29 satellites in three different orbits is remarkable both for the complex set of multi-tasking the mission accomplished and for the timing. Coming three days after ISRO and the Defence Research and Development Organisation knocked out a satellite in a Low Earth Orbit with a direct hit, it would appear that the Indian space programme stands galvanised and poised for a giant leap. The dexterity with which so many satellites, most of them American, were placed in three different orbits certainly showcases both the reliability and the expertise that ISRO offers. This is not a new development. In February 2017, the PSLV-C37 placed 104 satellites, 96 of them from the U.S., in

one go. Equally important, just as the February 2017 launch also placed the fifth of the Cartosat 2 series in orbit, an earth observation satellite with cameras that have a resolution of less than a metre, the PSLV-C45 placed EMISAT, which can, among other things, aid in electronic intelligence. That is precisely why the government should articulate much more clearly the doctrinal aspects of the space programme, as well as the deterrence sought to be achieved by it. India must communicate its peaceful intentions just as it showcases its capabilities, so as to contribute to a better understanding among countries it hopes to deter and thereby reduce the chances of wrong inferences being drawn in crisis situations.

The Hindu, April 5