

Sardar Patel Memorial Lecture-2020 by EAM Dr. S. Jaishankar: India and the Post-Covid World

October 31, 2020

It is a great privilege to be invited to deliver the Sardar Patel Memorial Lecture this year. An important tradition, one that actually started the year I was born, these lectures have been delivered by a galaxy of eminent leaders, scientists, policy-makers and intellectuals. I am very aware of the many footsteps that I am following today. That I represent Gujarat in the Rajya Sabha makes me even more conscious of this honour. And as someone seeking to connect my world of diplomacy, to Sardar Patel's record of taking on challenges of national development, I can think of no better subject than to focus on India's response to the world after the Novel Coronavirus.

2. This pandemic has been the most devastating global event in living memory for most of us. Its cumulative impact, in terms of lives and livelihood lost, is truly hard to quantify. Because we are more developed and inter-connected now, its implications for quality of life have been very profound. In many ways, the upheaval can be comparable to the devastation caused by a major conflict. Yet, it is also very different in terms of its impact within societies and between nations. How it will change our lifestyle is still an unfolding experience. What we can clearly see is that at the level of individuals, families, societies or even nations, many prospects have changed significantly. There are, of course, opportunities embedded in this crisis and their realization will be one test of leadership. At a collective level, we are still limited by our imagination to fully grasp the complications of an era we have now entered. And it is when contemplating these uncertainties that came upon us so suddenly, that the value of leadership in difficult circumstances is really recognized. In the history of modern India, few symbolize that more appropriately than Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

3. Seventy-five years ago, both the world and India were in the midst of a different kind of turbulence, one no less in its seriousness. The Second World War had just ended, comprehensively overturning the global order. New centres of dominance emerged with very different interests and outlook. Forces set into motion, some predating the conflict, eventually ended colonial rule in vast parts of the globe. At home, of course, the endurance and determination of our pioneering independence struggle finally prevailed. But it did so at the cost of the partition of our country, with all its accompanying consequences. This was the context when Sardar Patel ascended the leadership stage and took on immediate challenges of nation building. He was already recognized as amongst

our pre-eminent leaders, admired for his political vision as much as for his organizational skills. On the assumption of power, he took on the most difficult responsibilities of governance, characteristically setting his personal interests aside. And it is this period of his national leadership that holds the most relevant lessons for us today.

4. In the popular mind, Sardar Patel is seen as responsible for the accession of Jammu & Kashmir, Hyderabad and Junagadh. In reality, his contribution was even greater. In fact, these examples – challenging as they were – took place on a firm foundation that he had laid through a set of high-stakes and fast-paced negotiations with many other Princely States. Because these events happened within India, we tend to think of them as politics rather than diplomacy. But as V.P. Menon has so ably chronicled, the exercise involved the toughest negotiations we can imagine. And whether it is in their objective, strategy or tactics, they remain worthy of deep study even today.

5. Sardar Patel is also rightly associated with refashioning the civil services for independent India. He could do so because his administrative acumen commanded deep respect in both the state machinery that we inherited and the one that was then grafted on it. At the same time, the Sardar remained very much a man of the people. His ability to harness the energies of the masses to the important issues of the day was legendary. His economic thinking has perhaps got less attention in history than it deserves. He clearly recognized the importance of rapidly building national capabilities by promoting greater entrepreneurship. When it comes to national security, of course, he was undoubtedly the most hard-headed and practical. Distracted neither by political romanticism nor theoretical constructs, he saw the world for what it was, and strategized accordingly. We also know that he was prescient about challenges beyond our borders. His famous exchange with Pandit Nehru in November 1950 set out their contrasting world views. As he helped steer India through challenges fundamental to our national consolidation, the Sardar set out some basic approaches that are relevant even today. These can serve as an inspiration when we address the issues arising from an extraordinary pandemic.

6. Even before Covid-19 engulfed the world, it was apparent that the international system we had got used to was under great stress. Its causes were multiple and complex, and they enhanced each other. A set of issues centred around disenchantment with a globalization that created unequal gains within societies and among them. Looking back, it is evident that the economic interests of a few prevailed at the expense of the livelihood of many. The rationale of collective global advancement gradually lost credibility as a consequence. The resulting class wars in the developed world contributed to growing political insecurity in many cases. A second phenomenon, one more extended in its time frame, was the rebalancing of the global economy and thereafter, of world

politics. It was inevitable once independent nations emerged that there would be new centres of production and consumption. Its unfolding may have its own complexity that depended on national policy choices. But the larger trend was, in many ways, unstoppable. After all, no era in history can be frozen to the perpetual advantage of the temporarily ascendant. Yet, when this happened, it unleashed a range of competitions and frictions that characterize current international affairs.

7. The combination of these two created a third set of challenges for the established global architecture – a radical change in the weightage of world powers, along with an accompanying behavioural shift of dominant ones. In particular, the rise of China and the repositioning of the United States have deep relevance. As interests and models became more difficult to reconcile, the resulting frictions brought into the open issues that were dormant till then in the international discourse. To add to all these is a transformation of the metrics of power in an era of higher technology reliance and greater inter-dependence. Political influence became less dependent on raw military strength and increasingly shifted to utilizing instruments like finance, trade, connectivity, data and technology. The cumulative effect of these multiple happenings is visible today in more players, contested rules, conflicting agendas and sharper disputes. The Covid-19 pandemic could well be the last straw on the back of a fraying global consensus.

8. If the world carried the burden of pre-existing conditions even as it was hit by the pandemic, India was no exception. The conventional narrative in that regard tends to focus on issues of finance and trade, with some social and political problems added for good measure. But a truly self-critical assessment of the last quarter century would raise deeper questions about our very understanding of reform and globalization. It is often said that in India, we do the changes we must, rather than the changes we should. In other words, we react to the crisis of the moment and slip back into a default position of complacency once that appears addressed. And the truth is that this is pretty much what has happened to us since the early 1990s. Debates on reform have focussed largely around different aspects of the economy, industry and commerce, perhaps natural if we recall that the triggering crisis was a balance of payments one. But the undeniable reality is that large swathes of economic, social and human activity were left untouched. Whether it was agriculture or labour, education or administration, the power of vested interests kept the impulses of further reform well at bay. Our human development indices then naturally did not improve. And requirements of urbanization remained as ineffectively addressed, as the demands of rural growth. Not just that, the absence of progress across the social front began to tell increasingly even on the economic one.

9. This domestic scenario was mirrored by an external strategy that also limited India's competitiveness. In the pursuit of globalization, we entered into arrangements with short-term calculations. India imported to consume, trade, and profit rather than to absorb, innovate and produce. The over-leveraging of low cost options from outside obviously eroded domestic manufacturing. Not coincidentally, despite fairly high economic growth, India's employment challenges also started worsening. The consequences of this on sustaining demand and promoting production unfolded over time. Quite unconsciously, we began to perceive in the efficiencies of others a solution for our own limitations. And with that, the cause of reform remained at a level that was comfortable for the order of the day. If self-assessments remained positive, it was because they were based on benchmarking ourselves against our own past, rather than vis-a-vis competitors. That many others, including in our near proximity, had raced ahead always had explanations. By the second decade of this century, these realities have caught up with us. It has led to a growing realization that globalization without a strategy is like driving without a destination. And the true yardstick for reform can only be its impact on comprehensive national power.

10. Policy-makers across the world dealing with the impact of the pandemic are now focussed on economic and social recovery. Nations have made decisions in line with their particular circumstances, many conscious that the real challenges still lie ahead. Addressing both lives and livelihood has been an overarching concern for all. Expectedly, this is India's primary pre-occupation too at this time. The pathway to recovery, however, also has steps of resilience that reflect the pandemic experience. These could be in terms of the more direct concerns, as in the health and pharmaceutical sectors. Or they could be broader, covering domestic manufacturing, distribution and consumption. Perhaps more than we realize, rapidly creating a pandemic response infrastructure and meeting huge socio-economic needs during a crisis has created a new level of expectations. If the Indian public has shown commendable fortitude and discipline in the face of adversity, it was in no small measure due to leadership and motivation. Today, however, it is essential to think through strategies that would help put that behind us. But precisely because the pandemic has brought to fore many shortcomings, this is also an opportunity to contemplate deep reforms.

11. In a sense, a foundation for that has been laid by a set of initiatives since 2014. National campaigns addressed a wide range of challenges that were traditionally excluded from the debate on reform. They ranged from financial inclusion to digital delivery, both on a mass scale; from power and water for all, to affordable housing; education and toilets for girls to sanitation and cleanliness; urban planning and rural incomes, to accelerating infrastructure building; from digitization and formalization to skills development; as well as promoting start ups, entrepreneurship and innovation. The message was of

improving human development indices, making basic amenities available, leapfrogging using digital mediums, empowering the aspirational, and expanding opportunities and benefits while strengthening skills. No less important was making change into the theme of a people's movement. By doing so, it finally put behind us the colonial mindset that the people and the Government are two different entities.

12. This commitment to societal transformation was clearly appreciated by the public at large, as evident in the electoral outcome of 2019. Today, these experiences have helped lay the groundwork for more sweeping changes that were long awaited. The recent reforms in agriculture, labour and education are particularly notable, aimed as they are at freeing these sectors from the constraints of an era long gone by. Liberating the farmer from the middleman will obviously have profound implications for agriculture. Similarly, modern labour codes will expand employment and provide for wider benefits. Educational changes have not only introduced more flexibility but made us more employment friendly. Indeed, when set against the backdrop of massive social welfare programmes and digitally-assisted delivery, it tells us how much more reformist a human-centric approach to governance can be.

13. Policy reforms, however, require practical support, and that too has been forthcoming in different ways. Manufacturing generally and MSMEs are getting the attention and support now that they have long deserved. More than the sectors themselves, India appears to be freeing itself from the economic outlook of the period that followed the demise of the Sardar. There are other areas as well where the winds of change are blowing, not least in the entrenched domains of administration and civil service. It is clear by now that Sardar Patel's vision of creating the best policy outcomes needs refreshing. A renewed stress on specialization, performance and delivery is, therefore, particularly welcome.

14. We must have no illusions that the road to recovery and beyond will be a long and arduous one. Looking at the horizon, there are lessons from experiences of others that India needs to imbibe, whether in terms of human resources, social infrastructure or economic capabilities. Basic amenities of power, water and housing can no longer be treated as a luxury. Nor can education, healthcare, skills and employment remain just options for some. In particular, a greater focus on technology and manufacturing is central to India's prospects. Digitization could well hold the key to the credible emergence of social welfare in a nation with limited resources. This is important to recognize given the growing expectations of aspirational thinking.

15. A commitment to promoting more employment-centric growth may be assisted by labour reforms and skilling programmes. But, it also sees a strong and sustained effort towards making it easier to do business. Paradoxically, it

has to overcome an earlier encumbering of the economy in the name of being pro-poor, when the reality was that it shrank employment opportunities. Some of the answers also lie in the purview of our trade policies that have not done our interests adequate justice. Let us not forget that in a world where trade wars and technology battles are likely to be more commonplace, de-industrialization is truly akin to unilateral disarmament. But making it easier to do business is not just an economic objective; it has enormous social and even strategic implications. In the final analysis, it is central to the rapid strengthening of India's comprehensive national power. And where reform itself is concerned, India would truly arrive when we internalize that this is an endless process with ever-widening application. Serious powers know that this journey really does not have a destination.

16. Challenges for national growth and development are not limited to the socio-economic domains. Addressing governance deficits and implementation shortcomings are a major part of the solution. The problem, of course, comes in many forms and variations. They range from outdated policies and inadequate frameworks to casual implementation or even downright neglect. At the end of the day, it is as much about capabilities as it is about strategizing. If we bemoan the limitations of border infrastructure today, we must ask ourselves the reasons for their current state. After all, the periphery will reflect in large measure the capabilities, or their lack, in the heartland. Leaving parts of the country underdeveloped or under-governed has its obvious risks, more so at the border. It also cannot be that we rise to special challenges, while neglecting the daily routine. Safeguarding borders, for example, is a 24x7 exercise, not only an appropriate response to an emerging situation.

17. Our own debates in regard to national security need to recognize this value of putting in place the requisite structures and systems. Advocating sweeping solutions without laying the groundwork may be dramatic politics; it is not serious policy. On the contrary, our experience in the last few years in expediting the creation of border infrastructure in the North shows how much difference sharper focus and better implementation can make. Breaking down silos and ensuring a more integrated governance process is just as important to performance. It has been a major priority in the last six years, especially in national security. This shift from declarations to delivery is very much in keeping with the outlook of the Sardar. Underlying it is, of course, a basic willingness to fully recognize the challenges that the nation faces. By playing down issues like cross-border terrorism or competitive geopolitics, there has been a tendency to look away from the hard choices. In a more difficult world, that is going to be less possible.

18. The quest for a more perfect union is one that is pursued by all diverse societies and federal polities. Indeed, if there is one area on which Sardar Patel left an indelible imprint, it is in national integration. As a civilization that values unity in diversity, it is vital that we nurture the bonds that bind us together. Our journey in the last seventy-three years has not been without its obstacles. If we have successfully surmounted them, it is in large part due to a national determination that emanates from the Sardar's legacy. But there are issues left over from his era where neglect has been rationalized to great measure over the years. Catering to vested interests or ignoring ground realities cannot serve us well. World politics is extremely competitive and others are constantly looking for weaknesses within. Our deep underlying pluralism that harmonizes so much diversity is our civilizational strength, not a contemporary creation. We know this intuitively; the rest of the world will always struggle to understand. An India that is true to its roots will always be strong and resilient. Our thinking is best driven by self-belief and national awareness. Sardar Patel repeatedly cautioned against submitting our positions to the interests and judgement of others. That holds true as much now as it did then.

19. While there is much to be done at home, it is also true that this cannot be divorced from global happenings. The world is, at the very least, a shaper of domestic developments; and at times, even a driver in certain respect. To give practical effect to an agenda of recovery, resilience, and reform, it is necessary to fashion a strategy at multiple levels. That would start with building capabilities at home, but do so recognizing the value that the external world can bring to this process. To facilitate that, India must build optimal relationships with key international players and groupings. At the same time, the larger landscape and the institutions that inhabit them should remain favourably disposed. The pursuit of these objectives constitutes the core of our foreign policy. As the post-pandemic agenda acquires greater urgency, there will be a parallel increase in the vigour in implementing these approaches. The challenge here, however, is that the Covid-19 has added to the complexity of a world order that was already in transition. Therefore, getting our foreign policy calculations right is key to the effective realization of domestic development.

20. In the saga of modernization, foreign collaborations and transactions have been the basis for absorbing better technologies and practices. Identifying and facilitating these inputs became the priority of the foreign policies of countries that were more focused on rapid development. We saw this in both East Asia and South East Asia. In our case, there was an expectation that the opening of the Indian economy after 1991 would create similar outcomes. A quarter century later, it is apparent that this has not been the result. Instead of absorbing technologies and enhancing our capabilities, we have allowed subsidized imports to substitute our own production. The result is the hollowing out of sectors and

an undermining of small and medium enterprises that constitute the backbone of any large economy. This cannot be allowed to continue.

21. Looking back, it is difficult to think of any comparable economy that has leveraged its market access so inadequately. Some of the responsibility can be rightly laid on the arrangements that were negotiated in this period. But there is also the larger reality of market distortions and non-market players. Yet, the powerful narrative of political correctness kept us on a questionable path for too long. Today, an ability to think for ourselves creates an outlook more in consonance with our national interest. In approaching foreign partners, we need to accurately assess their complementarity, before reaching understandings. There can always be a case for flexibility and even generosity towards friendly neighbours. But as a rule, reciprocity and mutual benefit must guide our thinking. That past experiences have not always worked well, however, does not make the argument for engaging the world weaker. On the contrary, post-Covid recovery necessitates both a stronger international collaboration at home and a larger economic participation abroad.

22. Assessing opportunities must be supported by improving methods of doing business. In real life, G2G arrangements tend to be complicated and time-consuming. The urgency of the challenge is better met by approaches that yield larger benefits in a shorter time frame. Strengthening the enabling environment for a more effective participation in global supply chains becomes a priority. Encouraging our own businesses in that regard and improving the domestic investment climate are obvious corollaries. For those of us in the Government, a stress on G2B must parallel that on G2G. Experiences of other high growth economies highlight the importance of dedicated Government efforts to bring critical global capacities to our country.

23. Trust and resilience are two characteristics that will command a premium in the post-Covid times. The pandemic came when global suspicions were already rising and trade frictions were well advanced. The behaviour of states during this period only further highlighted the value of more dependable supply chains. In some cases, they may be shorter; in others, they could simply be more trusted. It is also essential to realize that there has been an evolution in our very understanding of national security. The world was already visualizing economic security as its intrinsic element. To that, can now be added the requirements of health security as well. And increasingly, data security. In fact, a combination of these developments has also revived a debate on strategic autonomy. Paradoxically, this is now felt more in the developed, rather than developing nations. And on economic and technology issues, rather than just security interests. For India, it is imperative to participate vigorously in the coming global conversations and in the framing of contemporary policies.

24. Over the last two decades, we have firmly established a global ‘techie’ reputation that helps both business and branding. The pandemic has now shored up the perception of India as the pharmacy of the world. After all, we not only ramped up production to meet a spike in global demands but actually supplied medicines to a 150 countries, many of them on a grant basis. The attention is also shifting to the difference we will make in ensuring that vaccines for the Covid are affordable and accessible. There are other areas as well where Indian talent can make a global impact. As the world moves towards a knowledge economy, the salience of engineering and innovation will only grow. Applications of technology will also create an ever wider domain of services. Even agriculture holds new possibilities, once it is liberated from the current constraints. Like many others, we approach the world to a considerable degree as a marketplace. But given our expanding talent pool, we also visualize it as a global workplace. If mobility is already so significant in our calculations, the work-from-home culture spawned by the pandemic could well open up new vistas.

25. Unlocking the potential of global cooperation requires strong relationships with major powers. In the past, the nature of the world order imposed its own constraints in that regard. In many cases, the political and security overlay impacted collaboration in all other areas. A strong bloc mentality also inhibited serious cooperation beyond formal partnerships. Our own capabilities being less, we held neither great attraction as a market nor wielded much influence as a producer. All of this has changed considerably in our favour. India is one of the primary beneficiaries of the wider dispersal of power, the greater spread of prosperity and a looser global architecture. We may still have a long way to go, but our stature grows with each passing day. While that also means that we have to do more, this shift in sentiment is a powerful factor that must be fully leveraged. And doing that means a more imaginative diplomacy that engages multiple partners to secure optimal outcomes. It, of course, also recognizes that the very nature of global interactions is now less rigid. But while softer hands are needed to manage a wider canvas, our positioning and standing would depend very much on critical bilateral relationships.

26. As India rose steadily in a changing world, a key element of that journey was its expanding ties with major power centres. In virtually every case, the content of its ties grew substantially, whether weighed in terms of politics, security, economy, technology or community. Some nations were more openly supportive of India’s rise; others took nuanced positions. The extent of convergence also inevitably varied, not just by the partner but on occasion, even by geography. While each was naturally unique, what they shared was a common realization of global multi-polarity and inter-dependence. India’s own growing capabilities and

influence made it a bigger factor in their calculations. Management of these relationships, especially in a more frictional world, is not an easy challenge.

27. In respect of the United States, successive Governments on both sides have steadily pursued what has become a non-partisan endeavour. A strong economic and technological complementarity, also reflected in their work culture, has laid a strong foundation. And the diaspora has been a very effective bridge. But it is in the face of emerging multi-polarity that both nations have developed a serious interest in more intensive engagement. There are few domains that their agenda have now left untouched. As their comfort levels improved, hesitations of history have been gradually put behind. Compulsions of the global scenario will create stronger convergences that bode well for the future direction of ties.

28. Where China is concerned, ties were stable for three decades as the two nations addressed inherited challenges and new circumstances. Peace and tranquillity in the border areas provided the basis for expanded cooperation in other domains. But as the pandemic unfolded, the relationship has come under severe stress. To restore normalcy, agreements between the two countries must be respected scrupulously in their entirety. Where the Line of Actual Control is concerned, any attempt to unilaterally change the status quo is unacceptable. The relationship cannot be immune to changes in the assumptions that underpinned it. Large civilizational states re-emerging in close proximity will not have naturally easy ties. Their interests are best served by a sustained engagement based on mutual respect and mutual sensitivity.

29. In a world with so many changes underway, India's relations with Russia have held remarkably steady. The strategic logic that has sustained this relationship since its early days still remains largely relevant. Collaboration in a range of sensitive domains has been its hallmark. Societal sentiment has traditionally recognized the special nature of the ties so far. Increased economic substance in their cooperation has also added greater ballast to the ties. As both countries take stock of the post-Covid scenario, the intersection of their interests is likely to continue.

30. Insofar as Europe is concerned, India's engagement in recent years has transcended the focus on its larger members. Those have been consolidated, even as we have sought a deeper relationship with the EU collective. The partnership with France has assumed strategic connotations; ties with Germany are coming into their own; there is greater engagement with sub-regions of Europe, definitely more conversations with Brussels and probably, a refreshing of traditional ties with UK. As a region full of capabilities, resources and best practices, Europe is a natural partner for a more ambitious India. Its revived interest in the Indo-Pacific strengthens the relevance of this engagement. Shared values and systemic trust mean more as geopolitics becomes sharper.

31. At the opposite end of the world, there is an equally strong case for accelerating the partnership with Japan. Responsible for catalyzing many aspects of India's modernization, its true potential is still far from realized. Today, the bullet train project promises to be the new flagship initiative, one that could profoundly change India's transportation, urbanization and technologies. Japan can make a difference to India's participation in global supply chains. The two nations cooperate closely on reforming multilateralism and have a strong shared interest in shaping the contours of their regions.

32. While engaging the different poles of an emerging global order, India will continue to give the utmost attention to its immediate neighbourhood. In the last few years, this was visible in political attention, as much as in commitment of resources to building connectivity. As an outlook, the Neighbourhood First policy remains generous and non-reciprocal in creating the basis for shared activities in different domains. The initial fruits of these endeavours are already in evidence, with projects taking off across South Asia in power, roads, rail, energy, etc. The flow of people and goods within the region has consequently improved discernibly. In taking this forward, we would do well to remember that all neighbourhoods are a mix of emotions and economics. Each, in their own way, are a reality and need to be addressed continuously. However, the more transient political issues will not distract us from the larger goal of creating a shared space of common prosperity. The challenge of cross-border terrorism, though, is one of a kind. We have to be uncompromising in combating it. If regionalism is to seriously develop, it would need not only a positive approach towards trade, connectivity and contacts but also an abjuring of terrorism as state policy. Covid-19 has impacted every state of South Asia and their common recovery is contingent on their collaborative efforts.

33. In recent times, India has also become more conscious of the extended neighbourhood, that is so much a part of its history and heritage. This awareness has been propelled by a variety of economic, political, cultural and diaspora factors. It has unfolded through an Act East policy that encapsulates the ASEAN and beyond. Our partnership with Australia underlines how far that has taken us. It is also expressed in the SAGAR outlook that provides a template to engage our maritime neighbours. And it is visible in a noticeable level of attention given now to Israel, the Gulf Kingdoms and Iran. Their aggregate impact has been to broaden the operational arena for Indian interests, while simultaneously drawing on a larger circle of resources and friendship. These proximate regions are naturally the most intense when it comes to economic activities and diaspora presence. They were also the most affected, therefore, when the pandemic led to an economic slowdown. The benefits of our recent cultivation were evident in mitigating the consequences for India. As the world limps back to greater

normalcy, the enhanced quality of these relationships can help in the early revival of opportunities.

34. India will approach the world in a more proactive way in the aftermath of the pandemic. Some of that will be driven by a global vision of its interests that it has steadily developed over the years. Whether it is a deeper commitment to Africa that underlines our historical solidarity, or initiatives from the Caribbean to South Pacific that drive our developmental vision, this is a statement of our own evolution. The pressures of the pandemic will naturally impart a different urgency to such engagements. Where we can make a difference to the recovery and revival of others, we will do so unhesitatingly. In terms of harnessing global capabilities, diplomacy abroad will match the boldness of reforms at home. And we will take a much more holistic approach to policy challenges and their delivery prospects. Indian diplomacy will be more integrated with our defence and security needs, more supportive of our economic and commercial interests, more aware of our technology capabilities and offerings, and more sensitive to the diaspora. We will strive to be the exemplars of Team India, truly working as one so that our goals are met and our vision realized.

35. India will enter the UN Security Council for the eighth time as a non-permanent member on 1 January 2021. With the passage of time, the case for a permanent presence has only grown stronger. Starting now, we will press strongly for reformed multilateralism that would make the UN more representative of contemporary realities. Naturally, our priorities will reflect our national interests; but they will also speak for the larger developing world constituency that we represent. Voicing their concerns and needs has become even more important in the aftermath of Covid-19.

36. India's response to overcoming this turbulence and uncertainty is articulated in the vision of Atma Nirbhar Bharat. In the words of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, "it is not just about competition, but also about competence; it is not about dominance, but about dependability. It is not about looking within, but about looking out for the world. So, when we say Atmanirbhar Bharat, we mean an India that is, first of all, self-reliant. A self-reliant India is also a reliable friend for the world. A self-reliant India does not mean an India that is self-centered."

37. This worldview captures the agenda of recovery, resilience and reform that is the imperative of our times. The prospect is of a self-confident and self-sustaining India whose greater capacities will make it a more effective player in the global arena. It means policies that will promote and encourage our own entrepreneurship and innovation. But it also proposes initiatives that open the pathway to greater international collaboration. Striking an optimal balance between what we need to build at home, what the world has to offer, and what we can contribute, is not an easy exercise. But the surest way of getting it right

is to see it through the lens of overall socio-economic progress. And it takes a humanistic Government to understand this clearly.

38. India represents one-sixth of humanity and its success and failure will, in many ways, shape its future. While we may be numerically strong, our influence is still not proportionate to our capabilities or potential. As someone who was quintessentially Indian, Sardar Patel would surely approve of a greater national self-confidence being expressed on the global stage. Whether it is in terms of our heritage like Yoga or Ayurveda, our initiatives like the International Solar Alliance or the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, or indeed strategic concepts and diplomatic platforms that serve our interests, we are making commendable progress. India is today more Indian abroad; the world is also more cognisant of this reality. And this is not just about abstract ideas and intangible activities. Taking care of its people is an intrinsic element of the rise of a nation. For some time now, our pride in the achievements of the diaspora has been matched by looking after our nationals abroad. The pandemic was an exceptional test of resolve. But the Vande Bharat Mission emerged as proof of the capabilities of New India. I take this opportunity to salute all those who made it happen.

39. Sardar Patel steered India through the immediate aftermath of Partition and shaped the firm establishment of our modern nationhood. He left us with his dreams of an India that would take its due place in the comity of nations. But he also provided us the inspiration to traverse that pathway with determination. His assessment of the landscape and the hurdles that we may face was always grounded in realism.

40. As we near the 75th year of our independence and seek to overcome an unexpected challenge, transforming this crisis into opportunity would surely be his way of responding. After all, iron men not only determine events in their own time but remain an inspiration that lasts years beyond.

New Delhi

October 31, 2020