

# Separatist movements and regional conflicts: The battle for sustainable growth

## INDIA'S RAPID RISE

India's rise in the past decade has come about because of its government carrying out economic reforms, opening up its economy to the outside world, and by giving priority in its international relations to the achievements of its economic objectives. Thus, during this period, its imaginative private sector succeeded in taking advantage of globalization. At the same time, India's business leaders, scientists, and engineers have made rapid advances, particularly in the fields of information and biotechnology, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

However, for India to continue its rapid rise, it will have to overcome formidable internal challenges such as the slow pace of progress in making growth inclusive and issues of governance—particularly those related to rampant corruption, terrorism, and rising violence. Other obstacles in the way of India's continued rise are its half-finished economic reforms, inadequate access for a large majority of people to education and health care, gender inequity, and problems related to urbanization, environment, and infrastructure. On the external front, problems hampering its rise are its troubled immediate neighborhood, slow progress in regional cooperation, unresolved contentious issues with Pakistan, and vulnerability to global problems such as climate change, food, and energy security.

## INCLUSIVE GROWTH AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION

So far, India has not succeeded fully in realizing the higher ideals associated with democracy and has not met the bare minimum expectations particularly of the urban poor and the deprived rural population. Decline in the availability of public health care and the poor quality

BY KANT K. BHARGAVA AND  
PAWAN K. CHANKOTRA

Kant K. Bhargava is a retired ambassador and former secretary general of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation.

He has resided in Canada since 1998 and has also worked as a fellow with the Centre for the Study of Democracy at Queens University in Kingston, Ontario and as an external associate at the York Centre for International and Security Studies at York University.

Pawan K. Chankotra is a research scholar at Punjab University in Chandigarh, India, and is now a permanent resident of Canada.

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of public education for a large number of people are serious issues.

## GOVERNANCE ISSUES

*Corruption* is a real problem though an overrated factor. The scale of it today seems monumental, and it does need to be controlled. However, the current exclusive focus on corruption will prove to be a mistake.

*Abysmal human development* is a more serious obstacle in the way of India's continued rise. Lack of availability of food, water, housing, electricity, fuel, affordable and safe public transport, basic health amenities, and banking facilities have led to the vast majority of Indians living in squalor and in much worse conditions than others are in the

most deprived parts of the developing world.

*The nexus of caste and ritual status* has weakened but will remain in the near future. In politics, caste members are now forming themselves into larger horizontal groups with the result that leaders of the lower castes are now in a position to influence the decision-making process.

*The poor law and order and internal security situation* is mainly a result of lack of judicial and police reforms, feelings of alienation, and loss of entitlements. The shortage of labour in managing security and the lack of capacity of training institutions/establishments are important challenges that demand the serious attention of the Indian state. Managing turbulence in Indian society will remain an important task because about half of the population is below the age of 25 and willing to take on the low risks associated with a profession like crime. Speeding up the judicial process is another important challenge for Indian democracy.

*Separatist movements* among the ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities in India generally arise as a result of feelings of discrimination and threats to their identities. This discrimination leads to alienation and at times, they resort to violent means. The militants/insurgents in the northeastern region have largely given up insurgencies because of the combination of military action against them and the welfare programs and negotiations initiated by the Indian government.

*The Naxalite movement* has now spread to seven states of India in districts numbering around 250. The Indian state has drawn a distinction between terrorists who indulge in the indiscriminate acts of killing innocent civilians and other kinds of militants, such as Nax-

alites, who are involved in the political assertion of what they consider their rights. The Indian authorities are willing to explore the possibility of entering into meaningful negotiations with them but have met with little success so far. Rural development schemes such as the *Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act* (MNREGA), started by the Indian government in Naxalite-affected areas received an encouraging response from the people and has performed much better there than in the rest of country.

There is also the *problem of people with multiple identities* living in border areas. The resolution of their problems requires innovative approaches in the context of appropriate border policy and management practices that take into account their interests and requirements. This is particularly true for the northeastern region, which has only a few kilometres of borders with the rest of India and more than a thousand kilometres of borders with foreign countries.

### **TROUBLED NEIGHBOURHOOD**

Military conflicts between India and some of its neighbours, the trust deficit, and the lack of sufficient people-to-people contacts are factors hampering all-round cooperation that is in the interests of both India and its neighbours. Lack of proper intraregional and inter-regional connectivity constitutes serious impediments not only for India's continued rise but also for its connectivity to rest of the world. Border trade and border management policies have neither kept pace with the rising demands of people living in the neighbouring regions nor for facilitating optimal economic cooperation between India and its immediate and extended neighbourhood.

### **GLOBAL ASPIRATIONS AND TROUBLED TIMES**

Of late, India's "look east" policy and active diplomacy in developing closer relations with central and west Asian countries as well as with African countries have yielded good dividends. Its participation in groupings of the G8 and

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G20, and its active role in BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China), IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa), and the East Asian Summit (EAS) is recognition of the reality of India's rise and also of its global aspirations. At the same time, the combination of India's dramatic economic growth and emerging geopolitical situation is creating an overall favourable external climate for its continued rise.

### **AGENDA FOR RISING INDIA**

Multipronged and joint approaches are needed that encompass economic policies, including galvanizing India's second green revolution for agricultural development, affirmative action, and strengthening the role of technology, innovation, and entrepreneurship for societal transformation. In addition, the involvement of the private sector, civil society, and NGOs are *sine qua non* for India's development as well as for its growing leadership role in the world.

First, in this context, India needs to give priority in its economic policies to ensuring inclusive growth and social development and to carrying out more economic reforms.

Second, there is a pressing need for the improvement of governance in general and especially as it relates to the border states.

Third, India must strengthen its science and technology base, encourage a culture of entrepreneurship, *indovation* (innovation in Indian context), peace, and rule of law.

Fourth, it needs to undertake even, unilateral measures and devise innovative policies for the strengthening of regional cooperation. These measures should be supplemented by the organization of regional political consultations with other countries of South Asia on international and security issues.

Fifth, it needs to work proactively with other countries concerned about inter-regional and pan-Asian cooperation.

Sixth, India should devote more attention to strengthening its bilateral relations with countries like Canada and Australia, which are rich in resources, good destinations for Indian students for higher education, and can be important partners in innovation, science, and technology. At the same time, it should continue its present focus on strengthening its relations with the United States, other BRIC and ISBA members, the European Union, members of ASEAN, the East Asian Summit, and Organization of African Unity (OAU).

Seventh, within the framework of the G8 and G20, India should work for innovative approaches to global issues such as climate change, food and energy security, promotion of democracy, and strengthening of development cooperation.

Eighth, India should encourage and support the engagement of the Indian diaspora living in G8 countries and other important countries for building comprehensive partnerships between them and India.

### **THE NEW CONSENSUS**

India's internal problems and its troubled, immediate neighbourhood are formidable obstacles to its continued rise. However, the global environment, per se, is likely to be helpful in this respect. Despite several obstacles, there are a number of reasons to be optimistic about India's continued rise. Fixed

or any other kind of wage labour. The mainly urban, upper-middle-class people who need their services bargain, usually on their terms and conditions, with the informal labourers. Some at the informal labour market get work, while others do not. These people do not perform a specific job in a specific sector; they perform whatever assignment they get.

## POLITICS OF MIGRATION

Migration from UP has been a burning political issue both in UP and in the places to which people have immigrated. Although the migrants from the central, eastern, and Bundelkhand regions of UP, along with those from Bihar, have long been targets of political games in several parts of India, during the past five years, they have been subjected to violence and humiliation in Mumbai, the capital city of Maharashtra state. The Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS), a political party, headed by Raj Thakre, a splinter group of Shiv Sena, accused the migrants from UP and Bihar of having usurped the economic opportunities of the natives of Maharashtra. The MNS launched a violent broadside against the migrants, which evoked sharp reaction in eastern UP and Bihar. A group of politicians from UP attributed the migration from their region to Mumbai to the lack of opportunities in their home state. They contended that their region remains disadvantaged because of the discriminatory policies of central and state govern-

[T]he informal economy that has emerged as a parallel source of employment could be more accurately classified as “disguised unemployment” and “underemployment.”

ments, and that the solution to this lies in providing overall development for the region. However, such development requires that the region become a state.

## DEVELOPMENT DILEMMA

While migration is an issue of concern, the mainstream political parties have not put forward viable policy initiatives. Nevertheless, development or underdevelopment is an issue for those leaders demanding the creation of separate (regional/subnational) states for three major regions of UP: western UP, eastern UP, and Bundelkhand.

There is a development dilemma in the state; development in UP, as in several Indian states, has become embroiled in competitive politics. In the political

process, development has been relegated to the background. An insightful example of this can be seen in the politics of land acquisition for the development of roads and residences. Any move, whether by the government or the private sector, to introduce development policies provokes opposing reactions informed by electoral and populist considerations.

So the development dilemma in UP remains unresolved. All traditional occupational sectors—agriculture, service, traditional handicrafts—defined by the traditional *jajmani* (patron-client) system either have become unattractive or have collapsed. This has occurred along with the erosion of the traditional caste hierarchy. The result is an increase in workers in the informal economy and increased long- or short-distance migration.

What might the alternatives be—heavy industries, cottage industries, or service sector as a part of development model in the state? Three legacies, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s, Chaudhari Charan Singh’s (ex-prime minister of India, a source of inspiration for the OBCs and peasantry), and Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia’s (the social leader and an ideologue of the OBCs), which have inspired social engineering in UP, have more differences than similarities. The competitive politics and populism, which their followers and others engage in, pushes the development agenda in the state to the background. 

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## Separatist movements continued from page 39

investments have increased as high as 35 percent in recent years. India’s labour force is likely to increase annually by 1.7 percent for the next 30 years. On the other hand, demand for labour in several countries will go up because of a decline in their birth rates. This will provide opportunities for Indian skilled workers and professionals to work abroad and encourage brain gain from which India too will benefit greatly.

India’s middle class, which is a strong force for sustained growth, is likely to increase from a current 10 percent of the

population to 90 percent of the population by 2039.

Continuity and change will condition the dynamics of India’s rise. High growth rates are by no means preordained; but the next decades will surely witness the gradual rise of democratic India to the top of the pyramid. Devising much-needed technological innovations, and developing consensus concerning the right ideas for economic reforms, policies, and development programs will help in the realization of this immense promise. 