

Message of H.E. Sunil Jain,

Ambassador of India to Kuwait, on the Republic Day of India (26 January, 2017)

On the happy occasion of our 68th Republic Day, I convey my heartiest greetings and best wishes to all our compatriots, friends and well-wishers in Kuwait.

The Constitution of modern India, which came into force on 26 January 1950, laid strong foundations of a democratic and secular State. Over these years, the Constitution, amidst many challenges that our country faced, has remained steadfast in its fundamentals, while remaining flexible and vibrant to accommodate various changes which the people of India desired.



A vibrant democracy has been India's most enduring identity ever since India adopted its Constitution that made it a democratic Republic with universal adult suffrage. India takes pride in being the largest democracy in the world. India is a pluralistic society, which is reflected in every aspect whether it is political

ideology, ethnicity, language, religion, cuisine or geography. In India, all major religions are adhered to and many languages spoken. India is truly a nation of "unity in diversity."

India's economy is presently undergoing massive structural transformation. India remains among the fastest growing large economy, with open investment climate.

Under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Government has taken various initiatives, including ease of doing business, transparency in governance, regulatory reforms, 'Make in India' campaign, 'Digital India' programme, 'Start-up India' programme, 'Smart Cities', 'Model Villages', 'Swachh Bharat' mission, introduction of Goods and Services Tax (GST), opening of new sectors for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and enhanced caps for existing sectors.

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Indian economy a powerhouse poised to drive global growth

India was the fastest growing major economy in the world in 2016 and will continue to grow more than 7 percent in 2016-17, says the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in its latest country assessment.

In economic terms the year gone by has been a banner year for India. In February, it pushed China aside to become the world's fastest-growing economy. And in October, the IMF projected that India would retain that title for the foreseeable future.

In late December of 2016, for the first time in over 100 years, India official overtook the United Kingdom to become the world's sixth largest economy. Economists had predicted India would overtake Britain by 2020, but this has happened some four years earlier than expected, spurred by the financial woes that the UK faced in the wake of the Brexit vote.

India's 2016 GDP of US\$2.3 trillion edged past the \$2.29 trillion GDP of the United Kingdom on 20 December. This narrow gap is expected to widen in the years ahead until 2020, and probably beyond, as India continues to grow at its current rate of 6 to 8 percent per annum, compared to UK's growth of



around 2 percent per annum. Rapid economic growth over the last 25 years has propelled India ahead of its former colonial ruler Great Britain and placed it just behind France, Germany, Japan, China and the United States, among the world's largest economies.

The combined impact of strong government reforms and inflation-

focused policies by the Reserve Bank that ensured lower-than-expected inflation, along with a price slump in global commodities and stable food prices, benefitted the Indian economy. India's foreign exchange reserves stood at \$360 billion by end of March 2016, as compared with \$342 billion at same time last year.

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AL AHLI BANK OF KUWAIT CONGRATULATES INDIA ON THE OCCASION OF ITS 68th REPUBLIC DAY





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Celebrating Indian Heritage

India's tally of World Heritage Sites reaches 35 as three locations, including a mountain, make it to the list

Earlier this year, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee added three new sites in India to the World Heritage List. The Nalanda University ruins, Chandigarh's Capitol Complex and the Khangchendzonga National Park in Sikkim were added to the list of protected sites in July at the 40th session of the committee, bringing India's total to 35 recognized heritage sites. The program to list and protect heritage sites around the world started in 1972 with the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World's Cultural and Natural Heritage being adopted by the UNESCO general conference. Over 44 years, 192 countries have ratified the convention, making it among the most adhered to global treaties.

The prestigious heritage list includes places recognized for their historical, cultural and scientific significance, and are legally protected from endangerment by human and animal trespassing. At present, 1,052 important world heritage sites across 165 countries are included in it - 814 cultural sites, 203 natural sites and 35 mixed sites (places that exhibit the qualities of natural and cultural significance). At 51, Italy leads the list of the countries with the most world heritage sites, followed by China (50), Spain (45), France (42), Germany (41) and India (35).

The Nalanda University is the most ancient university in the Indian subcontinent. Other sites across India in this illustrious list include the Taj Mahal in Agra, the monuments in Hampi, Goa's churches and convents, the Sundarbans in West Bengal and Assam's Kaziranga National Park.



Nalanda University ruins: The Nalanda site in Bihar comprises the archaeological remnants of a scholastic and monastic institution dating to the third century BC. Located about 100 km from Patna, Nalanda was a center of learning until the 13th century AD. Celebrated for its role in the transmission and dissemination of knowledge over an uninterrupted period of 800 years, Nalanda is also the most ancient university in the Indian subcontinent. The ancient university thrived under the culturally liberal Gupta Empire and the rule of Harsha, the emperor of

Kannauj. It was so revered that at its height, scholars and students from around the region, including China and Central Asia, thronged it.

Much of the site remained undiscovered until the 19th century when the Archaeological Survey of India began to excavate the area. A trove of excavated coins, sculptures and inscriptions have given great insight into the university's long and rich history.

What remains of the university is vast, extending around 1,600 feet north to south and around 800 feet east to west. The site includes stupas, shrines, viharas - residential and educational buildings - and important art works in stucco, stone and metal and excavations have revealed 11 monasteries and six major brick temples.

Although many details about Nalanda remain unknown, the site is believed to have been a flourishing center for Buddhism. In fact, the decline of the university coincides with the waning of Buddhism in India. The site is now a well-known tourist destination and part of the popular Buddhist tourism circuit.



Capitol Complex, Chandigarh: Chandigarh's Capitol Complex is part of 17 sites across seven countries. These are transnational serial properties chosen to celebrate the work of famed modern architect Charles-Édouard Jeanneret-Gris, better known as Le Corbusier. Tasked by the first Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to build a new capital city for Punjab and Haryana in the 1950s, Corbusier designed India's first planned city and what was meant to symbolize the future of modern India.

Recognizing Corbusier's role in the "invention of a new architectural language that made a break with the past," UNESCO

has listed it alongside National Museum of Western Art in Tokyo, the House of Dr. Curutchet in LaPlata, Argentina and the Unité' habitation in Marseille, France.

Spread over 100 acres, the Capitol Complex is popular among tourists. It is home to many administrative buildings and monuments, including the Palace of Assembly (Legislative Assembly), the Government Secretariat, the Punjab and Haryana High Court, the famous Open Hand monument, Geometric Hill and the Tower of Shadows.

Khangchendzonga National Park: Sikkim's Khangchendzonga National Park is India's first mixed world heritage site. Located in the



Himalayas in northeast India, the national park includes a vast diversity of valleys, plains, caves, lakes, glaciers and forests.

According to UNESCO, the park exhibits

one of the widest altitudinal ranges of any protected area worldwide and is home to the world's third-highest peak, Mount Khangchendzonga or Kanchenjunga.

Covering a quarter of Sikkim's area, the park is a favorite among trekkers for its biodiversity. Khangchendzonga is home to many animals such as the musk deer, Himalayan tahr, the red panda and the snow leopard. This makes it an important ecological site. It is also an important cultural site. According to folklore, the mountain, lakes, caves and other natural elements are important objects of worship for the indigenous community in Sikkim. These together with Buddhist beliefs form the basis for Sikkimese identity.

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Indian economy a powerhouse poised to drive global growth

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Lauding the market and policy reforms being implemented in India that have contributed to improving investor confidence in the economy, several global rating agencies, as well as the IMF and the World Bank (WB) have also delivered a positive outlook for the country.

The WB has forecast a GDP growth rate of 7.5 percent in 2016 followed by further acceleration to 7.7 percent in 2017-18 and 7.8 percent in 2018-19. For its part, the government expects the economy to grow at 7 to 9 percent and to double in size to US\$ 4-5 trillion in a decade, realigning India as the world's third largest economy in absolute terms.

However, India's growth story has not been without its share of growing pains. Many of the reforms being implemented, including the Goods and Services Tax (GST), which aims to create a unified national tax structure and deregulating the agricultural industry's fertilizer pricing have had its own share of complications and controversies. While the recent currency reforms, which overnight demonetized the Rs1000 and Rs500 that were in circulation, has led to hardships for ordinary citizens.

The government said it was forced to introduce the drastic measure in order

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India has played a major role in lowering global healthcare costs and saving lives, mainly through the production and export of generic drugs that are crucial to sustaining medical care in many parts of the world.



to fight several drastic problems that were hobbling the economy, including widespread corruption and pervasive tax evasion, as well as to strengthen its fight against counterfeit currencies in circulation and cross-border funding

for terrorist organizations.

The government's unexpected step to demonetize the two currency notes, which together accounted for nearly 86 percent of all currencies in circulation, bogged down business transactions, slackened salary payments, and caused winding waiting lines in front of banks around the country, as people gathered to deposit and withdraw cash before the year-end deadline.

Despite these transient teething

troubles the government has remained committed to economic and policy reforms, as well as implementing initiatives such as the 'Make in India', 'Start-up India' and 'Digital India', which are seen as crucial to driving the Indian economy on its growth trajectory.

The 'Make in India' initiative aims to boost the country's manufacturing sector, which currently contributes around 15 percent of the GDP, and increase it to 25 percent by

introducing the necessary structural and regulatory reforms needed to encourage investments in this sector. The government also plans to create a National Investment Grid to map business opportunities across the country which will make it easier for investors, especially domestic investors, to access and explore investment opportunities.

Under the 'Digital India' initiative the government aims to focus on three core components of creating the necessary digital infrastructure, delivering services digitally and increasing digital literacy. As part of this initiative the government recently created a digital employment exchange that will facilitate employment by bringing together industries seeking suitable workers and job-seekers looking to find employment. As part of the 'Start-up India initiative the government recently unveiled the Start-up Action Plan, which besides providing no tax on profits for first three years and relaxed labor laws, will also establish a Fund of Funds for Startups. The fund, with a corpus of \$1.48 billion placed with the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), will extend support to startups and encourage entrepreneurship in the country. On another note, the government has also launched an

initiative to create 100 smart cities as well as to rejuvenate and transform 500 existing cities with a combined outlay of over \$14.8 billion. Smart cities are satellite towns of larger cities which will consist of modern infrastructure and will be digitally connected.

Meanwhile, the 'Pharma Vision 2020' by the government's Department of Pharmaceuticals and the Indian Space Research Organization's (ISRO) push to promote India's capabilities in the global commercial space market, are entrenching the country's manufacturing and technological prowess on the global stage. In the first week of February 2017, the ISRO aims to launch a record 103 satellites in one go using its workhorse PSLV-C37 (Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle-C37) rocket. In this multi-satellite launch endeavor it is worth highlighting that 100 satellites belong to foreign nations, including the US and Germany.

The government's plans to set up a \$640 million venture capital fund to boost drug discovery and strengthen pharmaceutical infrastructure as part of its 'Pharma Vision 2020' aims to make India a major hub for end-to-end drug discovery. India has played a major role in lowering global healthcare costs and saving lives, mainly through the production and export of generic drugs that are crucial to sustaining

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Vibheesh Tikkodi

Special to The Times



Since wresting independence from the erstwhile colonial rule of Great Britain in 1947, the transformation of Bharat, the name by which the country was known in ancient times, to India, has been both turbulent and vibrant.

The vision our great freedom fighters and martyrs had for independent India has not yet been achieved and we are still on the path of progress in realizing the dream of a country where all citizens live a life of peace, prosperity and wellbeing.

India is considered one of the fastest growing economies in the world, with steady growth being exhibited during recent years. Yet, India is considered as a developing nation. A developing nation means some regions have developed up to the standards we deem as developed, while others are only picking up the pace to reach there. In the continued effort to develop those regions that lag behind, the government has at different times formulated laws and rules for their uplift. But still the gaps remain unabridged.

In the past decades we have seen India emerging as a nation of great interest for other countries. While we have achieved significant progress and



growth in our economy, infrastructure, defense mechanism, knowledge, education and living standards, the undeniable hard truth is, this growth has in large measure been unbalanced. While a small section of society is remarkably well-off the vast populace continues to suffer from problems of poverty, malnutrition, poor transportation facilities and unemployment. Child labor, farmers' suicide, communal riots and other

social tensions continue to rake the country and project it in a very depressing manner. It is a disheartening situation for all citizens.

To an extent, stodgy bureaucracy with its tangling red tape can be blamed for this situation, but they are not the only factors that drag the nation behind.

One main reason which cannot be denied is the irresponsibility of citizens. India is one of the most

populated nations in the world and as a responsible citizen we have a greater role to play in society. But in most cases we either shirk that responsibility or deny it entirely.

Every citizen should be made aware of their responsibility and should voluntarily reach out for the betterment of society, whether he contributes in a small or large way. A contributory model of living in society can include small steps, such

as keeping our surroundings clean, taking care of the public property or imparting education to the underprivileged children.

Small startups and cottage industries that leverage locally available human resources could help with unemployment. Each locality could also form small groups that understand the requirement of the area and leverage the various plans being implemented by state and central governments. All of these small steps can come together to create the ripples that eventually bring about change in society.

However, for all of this to be realized, each civilized, educated citizen should consider the country as their own homeland. Patriotism in its full sense can be achieved only through internalizing this concept and not just by celebrating our independence or standing up for the National Anthem.

To bring about inclusive and integrated growth and help the country on its path of progress, every citizen must voluntarily contribute their efforts. We must learn to cross the barriers of religion, caste, region, gender and language, and to see ourselves as one people with pride in our unique Indian way of life. Only then can India realize its dreams of becoming a truly great nation.

Let us celebrate this 68th Republic Day of our nation with the above thoughts in mind and strive to realize it in every way possible.

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Think West: India's Gulf ties on an upswing

The economic and strategic partnership between India and the Gulf region has been transformed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's path-breaking visits to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and the return trip by Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi to New Delhi.



Spiritual home of Islam and the world's energy powerhouse, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf's most powerful economy, rolled out the red carpet early April to welcome India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi on his maiden visit to the country that has culminated in version 2.0 of India's multifarious relations with not just Riyadh, but also with the strategically important region. The atmospherics surrounding the visit symbolised a new energy and dynamism in relations between the two countries. Flags of India and Saudi Arabia, home to nearly three-million strong Indian diaspora, fluttered in the balmy desert breeze at the city square and on streets leading to the majestic King Saud Guest Palace where the Saudi monarch hosted the Indian leader and his entire delegation.

The two-day visit by PM Modi to Saudi Arabia (2-3 April), the first trip by an Indian Prime Minister to the world's largest producer of oil after a gap of six years, pitched the India-Saudi strategic, economic and energy ties onto a higher trajectory, and buttressed four key pillars of India-Saudi relationship: energy, business, security and diaspora.

Boosting strategic and security cooperation

The primary takeaway was a marked deepening of strategic and security partnership, with the two countries signaling a paradigm shift in their counter-terror cooperation by signing a crucial pact to target terror financing, and calling jointly for dismantling sanctuaries of terror. The first full-spectrum talks between PM Modi and the Saudi monarch King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud at the Royal Court in Riyadh on April 3 culminated in an all-embracing template for intensifying counter-terror cooperation that includes intelligence-sharing, joint action against illegal transfer of money and capacity-building to bolster cooperation in law enforcement, anti-money laundering, drugtrafficking and other transnational crimes. In a striking illustration of converging perceptions, the leaders of India and Saudi Arabia "rejected totally any attempt to link this universal phenomenon to any particular race, religion or culture." According to the joint statement, "They called on all states to reject the use of terrorism against other countries; dismantle terrorism infrastructures where they happen to exist and to cut off any kind of support and financing to the terrorists operating and perpetrating terrorism from their territories against other states; and bring perpetrators of acts of terrorism to justice."

Support for CCIT

Significantly, Saudi Arabia agreed to work with India and the international community towards the adoption of India's proposed Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism in the United Nations. Taking the long view, the two sides decided to blend intensified counterterror cooperation with joint efforts to promote cooperation in cyber security, including prevention of use of cyber space for terrorism, radicalisation and for disturbing social harmony. This enhanced counterterror cooperation comes in the backdrop of the rise of the IS in

the volatile Middle East region and shared apprehensions about potential terror strikes against India and Saudi Arabia emanating from different terror outfits. The pact to curb terror will reinforce recent trends of cooperation that has generated much goodwill in India.

Besides anti-terror cooperation, India and the Gulf's most powerful country also decided to bolster defense cooperation which will entail exchange of visits by military personnel and experts, conducting joint military exercises, exchanging visits of ships and aircrafts and supplying arms and ammunition and their joint development. Maritime security is also set to acquire greater salience, with the two countries declaring their intent to enhance maritime security cooperation in the Gulf and the Indian Ocean region.

Business Bonding

The talks in Riyadh marked a qualitative transformation of India-Saudi relations which will bring the two countries closer not only in the security realm, but will also widen the canvas of their economic partnership. In this regard, PM Modi's meeting with 30 top Saudi CEOs and Indian business leaders at the plush Council of Saudi Chambers of Commerce in the heart of Riyadh was an important exercise to change the narrative of India and the ease of doing business in the world's fastest growing economy. Underlining his commitment to enhance the ease of doing business in India, PM Modi pitched for a more diversified economic relationship, focused on joint investments and exploring new areas like renewables. "From petroleum to renewable energy, infrastructure, defense and agriculture, there is a tremendous opportunity for expanding our cooperation," he added.

With Saudi Arabia planning to set up \$2 trillion fund, PM Modi invited Saudi Arabia to be a partner in India's growth story and encouraged Saudi Aramco, SABIC and other Saudi companies to invest in the infrastructure sector in India and to participate in projects creating mega industrial manufacturing corridors, smart cities as well as the Digital India and Start up India programs. In this context, the signing of the framework agreement between the General Investment Authority in Saudi Arabia and Invest India will spur investments by the private sectors in the two countries. In a cheering assurance for India, Saudi Aramco is looking at India as its No. 1 target for investment. "The two leaders agreed to transform the buyer-seller relationship in the energy-sector to one of a deeper partnership focussing on investment and joint ventures in petrochemical complexes, and cooperation in joint exploration in India, Saudi Arabia and in third countries," said the joint statement. PM Modi's trip to Saudi Arabia coalesced multiple strands of India's Think West policy, which entails accelerated across-the-spectrum engagement with the West Asia region, the source of over 60 percent of India's energy supplies and home to nearly eight million-strong Indian community.

Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi's visit to India

This Think West policy has coincided with the Act East policy by the Gulf countries, which are

looking at the India opportunity anew, a new synergy which has also been reflected in the visits by PM Modi to the UAE in August last year, and the return visit by Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan to India (10-12 February, 2016). In a special gesture, PM Modi received him at the airport, signifying India's intent to scale up the India-UAE relationship. The big takeaway from the Crown Prince's visit was an upgradation of economic partnership and the unveiling of a concrete plan to rope in the UAE as a preferred partner in India's growth story. PM Modi invited UAE companies to participate in projects creating mega industrial manufacturing corridors, including the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor, and also invited UAE to participate in the Digital India and Start up India programs. Building on the Infrastructure Fund unveiled during PM Modi's trip

to Dubai last year, the UAE has underlined interest in investing in infrastructure development in India, especially in priority areas such as railways, roads, ports, and shipping, which is crucial in reaching the \$75 billion target for UAE investments in India's infrastructure development plans. Another important development was the decision by Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) and the Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Ltd. (ISPRL) to conclude negotiations for establishing a Strategic Petroleum Reserve in India in near future. The security and strategic cooperation between India and UAE is set to be enhanced with plans to expand cooperation in counter-terrorism, maritime security, and cyber-security. Additionally, the two countries are looking to identify projects for the joint production of defense equipment in India.



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Message of H.E. Sunil Jain,

Ambassador of India to Kuwait, on the Republic Day of India (26 January, 2017)

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The outcome of these initiatives is visible from India's improved global rankings on diverse indicators. India's rank has gone up in World Bank's Doing Business Report. India is fast closing the gap between business practices in India and the best in the world. We are ranked third in the list of top prospective economies for 2016-18 in the World Investment Report 2016 released by UNCTAD. Our rank improved by 32 positions in World Economic Forum's 'Global Competitiveness Report 2015-16 and 2016-17'. We improved 16 places in 'Global Innovation Index 2016' and 19 positions in the World Bank's 'Logistics Performance Index of 2016'.

The 'Make in India' initiative, aimed at making India a global hub of

manufacturing, design and innovation, has now made our country the 6th largest manufacturing country in the world. It is already a centre for R&D and innovation as well as technology start-ups. The Indian start-up industry has over 20,000 companies, creating over US\$ 80 billion of value and employing nearly 325,000 people. A large number of young Indians are employed in the Indian IT industry, which itself is generating revenues of over US\$ 170 billion and exports of over US\$ 110 billion annually. In 2016, there was 90% increase in number of mobile phone units manufactured in India. Many leading companies in the auto sector have setup various new assembly lines and greenfield units in India.

The Indian Parliament passed the constitutional amendment for Goods and Services Tax (GST) last year, which

is one of the most crucial indirect tax reforms in the history of India. GST provides a single tax framework across the country for all goods and services thereby mitigating double taxation and creating one window for market operations. GST is expected to be implemented from July 2017 and is estimated to add about 2% to India's GDP growth.

Hon'ble Prime Minister took a bold step on 8 November 2016 to root out the menace of black money, corruption, terrorism financing and counterfeit money in the country. India is now marching ahead confidently towards a digital economy with less cash use. In a bid to further push adoption of e-payments in the country, our Prime Minister on 30 December 2016 launched an Aadhaar-based mobile payment application called

BHIM (Bharat Interface for Money). BHIM is a biometric and rebranded version of UPI (Unified Payment Interface) and USSD (Unstructured Supplementary Service Data).

In order to create a conducive business climate in the country and to attract investments, the Government has now allowed 100% FDI in civil aviation and food processing sectors while easing norms in defence and pharmaceuticals. It also tightened the local sourcing policy for single-brand retail trading,

besides easing conditions in broadcasting carriage services, private security agencies and animal husbandry. In the defence sector, the policy has been changed to allow 100% FDI by doing away with the condition of access to "state-of-the-art" technology, which has been modified to "modern or for other reasons". In the case of private security agencies, FDI up to 49% is now permitted under the automatic route and up to 74% through the approval route. To promote manufacturing of food items, 100% FDI under the approval route for trading, including through e-commerce in respect of such products manufactured or produced in India has been permitted. In a major move, the Government also allowed 100% FDI through the automatic route in the marketplace format of e-commerce retailing. Since 2015, the States in India, in association with the World Bank, are ranked on the basis of their business policies and procedures on agreed parameters. Andhra Pradesh and Telangana jointly topped the World Bank-compiled ranking of Indian states for bringing in reforms to improve ease of doing business.

For the benefit of foreign investors, an Investor Facilitation Cell has been created to guide and assist the investors. We are making it easier for companies to restructure and exit. The enactment and implementation of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code is a crucial step towards ease of exit in India. New Commercial Courts are being set up to fast track resolution of commercial disputes. Arbitration laws have also been amended to fast track the proceedings. We have set up the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund in collaboration with foreign funds to finance various development projects in infrastructure sector viz. upgradation of roads, railways, ports and developing of industrial corridors across the country. Beginning this year, the average time for pending IPR application will come down from 5-7 years to 18 months and Trade Mark registration to 1 month (down from 13 months). The time taken to obtain environmental clearances for projects has already been brought down from 600 days to 180 days. The aim is to reduce this to 100 days. We want the world to "Make in India", "Make for India" and "Make for the World".

India will soon have over a billion phone connections with an urban teledensity of around 154%. We have 350 million internet users. We are bringing in last mile connectivity to nearly 100,000 villages across the country. The 'Startup India' program aims at converging innovation and technology with entrepreneurship for our tech-savvy youth. Through the 'Skill India' initiative, we are trying to synergize the skills to the market requirements. By 2020, the average age in India would be 29, thus making India the youngest country in the world, with 64% of population in the working age group.

India is the largest producer, consumer and exporter of spices and



spice products. India's fruit production has grown faster than vegetables, making it the second largest fruit producer in the world. India's horticulture output, comprising fruits, vegetables and spices, is estimated to be 283.4 million tonnes in 2015-16. It ranks third in farm and agriculture outputs. Agricultural export constitutes 10% of the country's exports. India is the largest producer of milk, accounting for 18.5% of the total world production. It also has the largest bovine population. It is the second-largest producer of sugar and the sixth-largest exporter of sugar. India is a leading country in coconut production and productivity in the world.

The Government is committed to create and maintain a robust countrywide network of road infrastructure. To this end, road projects of 10,000 km were awarded in FY 2015-16 while 6,029 km of roads have been constructed in FY 2015-16. The Ports & Shipping sector has also seen tremendous growth in the last two years. The capacity of Indian ports has increased by 50 million tonnes in the last six months owing to successful completion of ongoing projects.

India has made remarkable progress in the field of Science and Technology. This is evident from building super computer to indigenous space programme; Mars Mission to Chandrayaan; Antarctic mission to oceanographic research. We have always believed in Technology with a human face. After the success of India's Mars Orbiter Mission 'Mangalyaan', the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) successfully launched a record 20 satellites in a single mission in June 2016. In September 2016, ISRO launched SCATSAT-1, for weather related studies and seven co-passenger satellites, including three from Algeria, one each from Canada and USA. This was the first mission of PSLV in which payloads were launched into two different orbits.

Our foreign policy is focused on a broad range of global issues that serve the broader interests of humanity. We work with other countries to tackle issues of common concerns, such as international terrorism, climate change, energy security, food security, and the reforms of multilateral institutions, including the UN Security Council. The significance of the Gulf and Middle East region in the ambit of our foreign policy cannot be overemphasized. We are each other's extended neighbourhood and the security, stability and prosperity of countries in this region is imperative for peace and economic development in India. GCC is one of our largest trading blocs, meeting a large percentage of India's crude oil and LPG requirements and hosts about 8.5 million Indians. In the fiscal year 2015-16, India-GCC trade was nearly US\$ 100 billion and

Continued on Page 10

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As India celebrates the National Girl Child Day on 24 January, which is aimed at reducing female foeticide, improving the skewed sex ratio and educating girls, it is a matter of grave concern that discrimination, violence and lack of equal opportunities continue to haunt them. Concerned over the diminishing number of girls, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (Save the Daughter, Teach the Daughter) campaign last year. The idea was to improve child sex ratio – the number of girls born for every 1,000 boys – and gender equality through access to education. Despite successive governments' efforts, the child sex ratio dropped from 964 in 1971 to a low of 918 in 2011.

A United Nations survey presented a grim scenario when it observed the decline was reported in more than two-thirds of districts in the country between 2001 and 2011. What is reprehensible is that the problem is worse in urban areas. For example, Delhi recorded one of the lowest child sex ratios of any state, with 871 girls born for every 1,000 boys in 2011. Condemning the selective abortion despite its ban, PM Modi said: "Girls are commonly killed in their mothers' wombs and we don't feel the pain. We don't have a right to kill our daughters." At a time when social indicators like maternal mortality have improved due to the efforts of the government, the increasing number of female foeticide cases poses severe challenges.

A 2011 study published in a British medical journal found that as many as 12 million Indian girls may have been selectively aborted between 1980 and 2010. In fact, the objective behind celebrating the National Girl Child Day was to create social awareness about



Transforming India through **EDUCATING GIRLS**

the importance of girl child in society and to create better opportunities for her welfare. It is in this context that several girl child specific schemes were launched by the Government of India to end the discrimination they face. Beti Bachao Beti Padhao has been designed to focus on 100 gender critical districts where the child sex ratio is particularly low by enforcing existing laws that criminalize pre-birth gender selection and by improving girls' school attendance, among other measures.

The main thrust of the campaign is that there should be 1,000 girl child births for every 1,000 male child births. Sukanya Samridhi Scheme, launched last year, is aimed at encouraging people to save for education and marriage of girl child.

Under the scheme, the accounts can be opened in the name of two girl children up to 10 years of age in post offices or scheduled commercial banks. With a minimum investment of ₹1,000 a year, the scheme offers 9.1 percent annual interest. Though the money can

be withdrawn only after the girl attains the age of 21, premature withdrawal of 50 percent of the amount at the end of the previous financial year is allowed for the purpose of the girl's higher education or marriage after she turns 18. The idea is to encourage financial inclusion and increase domestic savings. The Balika Samridhi Yojana, which was started in 1997, was aimed at changing the negative attitude of families and communities towards the girl child by increasing enrolment and retention of

girls in schools; raise the marriage age of girls and creating income opportunities and activities.

The scheme involved a gift of ₹500 to the mother on the delivery of a baby girl and an annual scholarship for education till Class X. The amount of scholarship increased with the girl moving up in classes. It was noticed that early and forced marriage stood in the way of girls' progress. Girls, who are child brides, miss out on education and are more vulnerable to physical and sexual violence, and bear children before they are physically or emotionally prepared. The cycle of violence that begins in girlhood carries over into womanhood and across generations.

The idea behind the scheme was to address their needs and unlock their potential. Similarly, the Women and Child Development Ministry came out with a scheme called Dhanalakshmi to make cash transfer to the girl child family to ensure immunization, school enrollment and maintenance up to the Class VIII.

Under the Right to Education Act, free and necessary education to the girl child has been made available. Then there are self-help groups in order to make better the livelihood of girls in rural areas. The success of these schemes can be gauged from the fact that more and more girls are today creating a niche for themselves and bringing laurels to the country. However, there is an urgent need to adopt and implement laws and policies to end early and forced marriage. The government's efforts can succeed if communities are also mobilized against the practice. Until we create awareness about the benefits of women education, these programs will not bring about the desired result.

Indian economy a powerhouse poised to drive global growth

INDIA- A SNAPSHOT

- India is the seventh-largest country by area, the second-most populous country and the most populous democracy in the world.
- India measures 3,214 km from north to south and 2,933 km from east to west with a total area of 3,287,263 square km, of which land area constitutes 2,973,190 square km and water area accounts for 314,070 square km. India's coastline of 7,517 km stretches along the mainland and the coastlines of Andaman and Nicobar Islands, as well as Lakshadweep Islands.
- Latest figures (July 2016) reveal a population of 1,326,801,576 people, with a gender ratio of 944 females to 1,000 males. With a population growth rate of 1.58 percent, India is expected to become the most populous country in the world by 2022.
- For administrative purpose India is divided into 29 States and 7 Union Territories.
- Total literacy across India is 74.04 percent (Male 82.14% and female 65.46%)
- Life expectancy is 66.97 years (men), 69.42 years (women)
- Airports Authority of India (AAI) manages 125 airports in the country, which includes 18 international aerodromes, 78 domestic ones and 26 civil enclaves at defense airfields.
- The Indian Railways network extends over 67,312 km, with 12,617 passenger and 7,421 freight trains plying each day from 7,172 stations carrying 23 million travelers and 2.65 million tonnes (MT) of goods daily.
- India's road network of 4.87 million km is the second largest in the world. With the number of vehicles growing at an average annual pace of 10.16 percent, Indian roads carry about 65 percent of freight and 85 percent of passenger traffic. India also has 14,500 km of waterways that ferry people and goods.

Continued from Page 4

medical care in many parts of the world. Indian drugs are exported to more than 200 countries in the world, with the US as one of the key markets.

India's cost of pharmaceutical production is significantly lower than that of the US and almost half of that of Europe, which gives the country a competitive edge over others. Currently Indian pharmaceutical sector accounts for about 2.4 percent of the global pharmaceutical industry in value terms and 10 percent in volume terms. It is projected that by 2020, India will be among the top three pharmaceutical markets by incremental growth and sixth largest market globally in absolute size.

The Indian pharmaceuticals market increased at a Compound annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 17.46 percent during 2005-16 with the market increasing from US\$ 6 billion in 2005 to US\$36.7 billion in 2016 and is expected to expand at a CAGR of 15.92 percent to reach \$55 billion by 2020. With 71 percent market share, generic drugs form the largest segment of the Indian pharmaceutical sector. Generic drugs also account for 20 percent of global exports in terms of volume, making the country the largest provider of generic medicines globally and this is expected to expand even further in coming years.

The steps taken by the government in recent times have shown positive results with economic activities witnessing significant growth in the financing, insurance, real estate and business services sector. Analysts are confident that powered by greater access to banking, technology adoption, urbanization and other structural reforms India could grow at a potential 8 percent on average in the mid-term to 2020 and probably well beyond.



WISHING ALL OUR INDIAN FRIENDS A HAPPY REPUBLIC DAY FROM ALL OF US AT BEC!

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India's success story in space technology seems to defy gravity, considering Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) string of spectacular achievements. The list includes completing India's very own satellite based navigation system, launching the country's pioneering mini space shuttle and making history by putting 20 satellites in orbit in a single launch. A revisit to the moon is among the romantic outings India has on its anvil. On 22 June, 2016, exactly at 9:26 am, an Indian rocket lifted off from the island of Sriharikota on the coast of the Bay of Bengal in Andhra Pradesh and created history for the Indian space agency. The Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV-C34) put in orbit 20 satellites in 26 minutes. This is no mean feat.

ISRO chairman Dr. AS Kiran Kumar simply described the successful mission "a job well done". The PSLV in its 36th launch weighed 320 tons, and was as tall as 44.4 m, which is the average height of a 15-storey building. With this launch, ISRO achieved 35 consecutively successful launches of India's smaller rocket. In 2008, ISRO launched 10 satellites in a single mission, using the PSLV, creating a world record. Today, the world record for successfully launching maximum number of satellites in a single mission is held by Russia, which in 2014, put in space 37 satellites. In this record breaking mission, ISRO lofted 17 satellites from foreign vendors out of which 13 belonged to the US and others from Germany, Indonesia and Canada. According to Dr. Jitendra Singh, Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office and in-charge of space affairs, "through launch of these 17 foreign satellites, Antrix Corporation Ltd has earned revenue of 10.24 million Euros and US\$ 4.54 million." This was the



single largest number of satellites to be launched by an Indian rocket for America. Interestingly, for the first time India orbited a Google-owned satellite.

Terra Bella, a Californian company part of the global behemoth, Google, launched a 110 kilo high-tech Earth viewing satellite SkySat Gen-2. This Google owned satellite, the company says will be used for mapping inventories. Foreign vendors are increasingly opting to launch their smaller satellites using Indian launchers; this is not surprising since it is estimated that it costs up to 50 percent less to launch satellites through

ISRO

Dreams big, Delivers big!

ISRO. The PSLV has become a reliable, bankable and precision launcher which makes India an attractive destination for countries looking for a cheap and reliable option to launch satellites. Till date, ISRO has launched 113 satellites of which 74 came from 20 different countries. In the bargain, ISRO has earned over \$120 million in revenue for the country.

ISRO finally grows wings!

The calm of a hot and sultry morning at Sriharikota was shattered exactly at 7 am on May 23, 2016, when India's brand new rocket that carried India's mini space shuttle into space blasted off from India's rocket port. For the time in its history, ISRO grew wings as it embarked on a never before space flight that made history. The Indian space agency undertook the maiden launch of its very own indigenously made version of a 'Space Shuttle', a fully Made in India effort. Congratulating the scientists, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "the dynamism and dedication with which our scientists at ISRO have worked over the years is exceptional and very inspiring".

Yes, the big powers abandoned the idea of a winged reusable launch vehicle but India's engineers believe the solution to reducing cost of launching satellites into orbit is to recycle the rocket or make it reusable. Scientists at

ISRO believe they could reduce the cost of launching stuff into space by as much as 10 times if re-usable technology succeeds, bringing it down to \$2,000 per kilo.

Re-usable Launch Vehicle - Technology Demonstrator (RLV-TD) was the first time ISRO launched a space craft which had delta wings and after launch it was glided back onto a virtual runway in the Bay of Bengal after its nearly 13 minute flight.

The only countries that have attempted operational flights of a space shuttle are America, which flew its space shuttle 135 times and then retired it in 2011. The Russians made only a single space shuttle called it Buran. It flew into space just once in 1989. After that the French and Japanese have made some experimental flights.

Signaling success!

Recently, ISRO made a special dash to complete India's NAVIC - 'Navigation with Indian Constellation' when the last of the seven satellites was successfully placed in the orbit by the PSLV on April 28, 2016. The Indian satellite constellation is already providing day and night coverage of the navigation signal throughout the Indian region. This is a unique achievement by ISRO.

PM Modi took forward a germ of an idea from former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's tenure when during

the Kargil conflict with Pakistan, New Delhi was denied access to the best quality satellite based navigation system signals it desperately sought to annihilate with pinpoint accuracy the reinforced bunkers on the high hills made by the Pakistanis. The first round of the National Democratic Alliance government laid the foundation for the swadeshi GPS which Modi has fulfilled.

Other than India, globally, satellite-based navigational signals over South Asia are provided only by the American constellation of the Global Positioning System (GPS) and the Russian constellation that uses a system called GLONASS. It is ISRO's claim that the Indian navigation system is superior to both these systems for the South Asian region. Moreover, the American and Russian systems use 4 times as many satellites for their systems, making NAVIC (like a lot of ISRO's technology) frugal, operating with seven satellites. It must be clarified that the Indian NAVIC provides a regional signal while the American and Russian systems have global footprints.

When required India's footprint can also be made global by augmenting the number of satellites. NAVIC's assured signal coverage extends over the country and about 1,500 km beyond Indian borders, and experts explain the rationale for this as being based on the current threat perception that exists for the country. Later this year, ISRO is all set to test India's monster rocket - the Geo-synchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle - Mark III - capable of putting up to eight tons in low earth orbit. Next year if all goes as per plan, the country's second mission to the moon Chandrayaan-2 will lift off, which will among other things soft land India's Tricolour on the lunar surface, India reaching for the stars!

Message of H.E. Sunil Jain, Ambassador of India to Kuwait, on the Republic Day of India (26 January, 2017)

Continued from Page 8

accounted for about 15% of our global trade. On the bilateral front, India's relations with Kuwait remain warm, close and friendly. Our relationship extends beyond historical and cultural linkages to encompass political, trade and economic interests. Kuwait is a major and reliable crude oil and LPG supplier to India. India has consistently been among Kuwait's top trading partners and the total bilateral trade during the fiscal year 2015-16 was US\$ 6.2 billion. Indian EPC companies viz. Larsen & Toubro, Dodsai, Shapoorji Pallonji, Punj Lloyd, Essar, Simplex Project Ltd. and Kalpataru Transmission Ltd. are executing various projects in Kuwait in the hydrocarbon and construction sectors. High-level visits and other exchanges between our two countries have helped in further strengthening and deepening of our bilateral ties. The visits of His Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the Amir of Kuwait to India in June 2006 followed by the visit of His Highness Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Prime Minister of Kuwait in November 2013 have provided impetus to our growing bilateral relations.

Gen. (Dr.) V.K. Singh, Minister of State for External Affairs visited Kuwait from 6-7 September 2016 and had wide ranging talks on various issues with the Kuwaiti Deputy Prime Minister & Foreign Minister, Minister of Social Affairs & Labour and Governor of Farwaniya. During the visit, Hon'ble Minister unveiled the life-size bronze statue of Mahatma Gandhi at the Embassy premises on the morning of 7 September 2016. The Mahatma Gandhi statue was made by the renowned Indian sculptors Mr. Ram Vanji Sutar (a Padma Bhushan awardee) and his son Mr. Anil Ram Sutar. This is the first statue of Gandhiji in the whole of Gulf region. Gandhiji's message of truth, peace, communal harmony and non-violence is even

more relevant in today's world when we see violence and intolerance, radicalization and extremism and the menace of terrorism spreading in many parts of the world. Significantly, Dr. Bader Hamad Al-Essa, Minister of Education and Higher Education, Kuwait participated in the UNESCO International Conference on the Prevention of Violent Extremism through Education held in New Delhi from 19-20 September 2016.

The 3rd India-Kuwait Foreign Office Consultations were held in New Delhi on 16 November 2016 and the 5th meeting of the India Kuwait Joint Working Group on Labour, Employment and Manpower Development was held in New Delhi on 14-15 December 2016. A 3-member delegation from the Office of Comptroller and Auditor General of India participated in the 8th India-Kuwait Joint Seminar on "Role of Supreme Audit Institutions in Good Governance" held from 7-10 November 2016 in Kuwait and also signed an MOU with the State Audit Bureau of Kuwait.

Continued on Page 9 A Protocol amending the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement between India-Kuwait was signed in Kuwait on 15 January 2017. The Protocol amends the types of Kuwaiti taxes in Article 2 of the Agreement and Article 26 on exchanging tax data, both on individuals and corporates. The India-Kuwait DTAA agreement has been into effect since 17 October 2007.

An 11-member Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit-2017 delegation visited Kuwait from 9-10 October 2016 and held meetings in the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Kuwait Chambers of Commerce & Industry (KCCI), Kuwait Petroleum Corporation and Kuwait Ports Authority. An MOU between the Government of Gujarat and Indian Business & Professional Council, Kuwait was signed during the visit.

Mr. Mohammad Abdullatif Al-Farhoud, CEO, Petrochemical Industries Company (PIC), Kuwait

along with a delegation from KCCI attended the 8th Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit held from 10-13 January 2017 in Gandhinagar, Gujarat. Mr. Nizar Al-Adhani, Deputy Chairman and CEO of Kuwait Petroleum Corporation accompanied by two members of KNPC attended the PETROTECH-2016 at New Delhi from 5-7 December 2016. The Ministry of Commerce & Industry of Kuwait with the participation of 8 Kuwaiti companies organized a Kuwait Pavilion at the India International Trade Fair in New Delhi from 14-27 November 2016. The Embassy organized an "Indian Handicrafts and Handloom Exhibition" and a "Know India" seminar for the travel and tour operators in Kuwait on 23 October 2016. We are working closely with Kuwait to further intensify bilateral engagements at all levels.

It is heartening to know that the Indian community in Kuwait has reached 9.2 lakh persons, according to the data released by General Department of Residency, Kuwait in October 2016. The presence of large dynamic Indian community in Kuwait plays an important role in the strengthening and deepening of bilateral ties. Our community is present in almost all segments of Kuwaiti society and their contribution to the socio-economic development and prosperity of Kuwait are highly appreciated.

It has been Embassy's constant endeavour to improve the quality of its services given to the community. To protect the interests of Indian workers coming to Kuwait, the Government of India has implemented the e-Migrate system since June 2015. Such initiatives will help in protecting the rights of our workers going abroad and ensure accountability of their recruitment agents in India and their foreign employers.

During 2016, the Embassy attested a total of 73,330 employment contracts (50,314 in private sector and 23,016 in domestic sector) for recruitment of Indian workers in Kuwait. The

Embassy also issued 96,229 new passports in 2016, as compared to 87,083 in 2015, showing a healthy increase of over 10%. Currently, there are 286 Indian Associations registered with our Embassy in Kuwait. During 2016, Embassy Auditorium was used for 28 socio-cultural events organized by various Indian Associations. To boost travel of Kuwaiti nationals and expatriates in Kuwait to India, the Embassy has been providing multi-entry business visas (5-year and 1-year), tourism visas (6-month), medical visas (1-year) and visas for study purposes. The Embassy issued 13,880 visas in 2016, vis-a-vis 13,259 visas issued in 2015, which shows an increase of 5% compared to 2015.

The Embassy continuously strives to improve the quality of its services and has taken several measures for the welfare of the Indian community in Kuwait. Our community can reach us 24x7, in cases of emergency. The Embassy has the "Consular Open House" facility where any Indian national can meet a senior consular official without appointment. The Embassy's "Indian Workers Welfare Center" has been providing the much needed support system to our workers with its help desk, labour complaints desk, free accommodation and free initial legal advice. Addressing the issues concerning our community remains our priority and these would be dealt with utmost sensitivity and care.

On this joyous occasion of our Republic Day, I wish every Indian in Kuwait good health and happiness. I also take this opportunity to convey best wishes from the Indian leaders for the continued good health and well-being of His Highness the Amir, Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Crown Prince, Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, His Highness the Prime Minister, Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and the friendly people of the State of Kuwait.

-Jai Hind!

India to become hub of skilled manpower

Since the launch of the Skill India programme, a number of training institutions have tied up with the state governments to enroll maximum number of youth.

Even a year after the launch of the 'Skill India' program, a lot of impetus is being given to it as the initiative aims at training the youth of the country in specific skills through which they can earn a livelihood and live with pride.

With an aim to generate surplus manpower of, at least, five crore over the next decade with skilled labor, India will be able to tackle global challenges. It is estimated that a meager 2.3 percent of the workforce in India has formal training as compared to the UK (68 percent) and the US (80 percent).

Since the launch of 'Skill India', a number of training universities, institutes and schools have mushroomed across the country and tied up with the state governments to enroll the maximum number of youth. So far, over 55 lakh people have received training and 23 lakh people have been employed. Over the last year, the number of training centers crossed the 3,000 mark and the Government has tied up with around 250 training partners.

The campaign's vision is to train over 40 crore people by 2022 in different skills. 'Skill India' resolves to bridge the digital divide by providing basic digital literacy opportunities to all skill-seekers. The web skilling opportunities come with the convenience of learning and practicing skill-nuggets with a mobile app as well. The ambitious program completed one year in July 2016 and on the first anniversary of the initiative, the Minister of State for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (independent charge), Mr. Rajiv Pratap Rudy, reinforced the commitment promised by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. During an event in New Delhi, in the presence of President Dr. Pranab Mukherjee, Rudy outlined the following programs that will chart the way forward.

Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana-2

As of 18 July, 2016, 17.93 lakh candidates were trained out of 18 lakh who enrolled. In 2015, the scheme had an outlay of Rs 21,500 crore, with a target to cover 24 lakh persons within the next year under skill training (including 10 lakh under Recognition of Prior Learning). PM Modi this year approved the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) with



an outlay of Rs 712,000 crore to impart skilling to one crore people over the next four years (2016-2020). Under this scheme, around 60 lakh youth will get trained and skill training would be imparted based on industry-led standards aligned to the National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF). There will be special focus on placement of trainees along with incentives. This scheme will emphasize on skill training as per international standards for employment in Gulf countries, Europe and other overseas destinations. Students undergoing training in high-end job roles will be provided scholarships.

India International Skill Centers

The first anniversary of 'Skill India' saw announcement of 50 India International Skill Centers, slated to open by the end of 2016. In the first phase, 15 centers were launched by President Mukherjee.

These will be set up through National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and will implement the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) and Pravasi Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PKVY) to the youth seeking global mobility for jobs. The first 15 centers will be in Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Jharkhand, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Punjab and Rajasthan.

India Skills Online

President Pranab Mukherjee inaugurated India Skills Online, a national competition under the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) and NSDC, to select the best talent to lead India's participation at the biennial World Skills International Competition scheduled at Abu Dhabi in 2017.

National Labour Market Information System (LMIS)

It is a single window to aggregate supply- and demand trends in the Indian skill development ecosystem. This is an integrated set of institutional arrangements, procedures, mechanisms and data



systems designed to produce labor market information as per global standards and best practices. Through LMIS, statistical and non-statistical information on labor market will be generated. The National Skills Development Agency (NSDA) is designated as the lead agency for the development of the national LMIS.

National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme

This ambitious scheme has an outlay of Rs 10,000 crore with a target of 50 lakh apprentices to be trained by 2019-20. The scheme would be implemented by Director General of Training (DGT) under MSDE. It provides for incentivizing employers to engage apprentices. Apprenticeship training is considered to be one of the most efficient ways to develop skilled manpower. It aims to achieve the objective as stated in the National Policy, 2015. The policy proposes to work proactively with the industry including MSMEs to facilitate 10-fold increase in opportunities by 2020.

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Most Beautiful

Indian states to visit

With diverse natural and urban landscapes, cultures and cuisines, India is a country that never ceases to amaze any tourist that travels to its lands. No doubt that when confronted with this vast array of wonderful travel opportunities, choosing the right place to visit is one of the most difficult tasks. From stunning beaches, religious sites and historical monuments to hill stations, India has it all. Here is a list of the 10 most beautiful Indian states to visit.



Kerala: Referred to as God's own country, Kerala is one of the prettiest states and seemingly has it all. It is home to some of the most stunning beaches including Kovalam, Muzhappilangad, Varakala, and many more. It also boasts breathtaking hill stations, gripping waterfalls, historical places, two national parks and 12 beautiful wildlife sanctuaries. For those in search of a serene hill station, Munnar is always a good option. In any case, the very peaceful

atmosphere of Kerala, strongly encouraging responsible travel and eco-tourism, will not cease to impress.

Rajasthan: Known as the land of kings, Rajasthan is a stunning state full of stories of wars and victories, romance, misfortunes and glories. What's more, these folkloric tales



of love and heroism are not only part of the local people's collective memory, they are also physically reflected in Rajasthan's many

monuments, magnificent palaces and forts. This magic state is thus rich in traditions and culture, but is also home to stunning desert safaris, sand-dunes, breathtaking wildlife and forests. Must-see destinations include Jaipur, Udaipur, and Jodhpur among many others.

Goa: Increasingly known around the world for its beautiful beaches, Goa is a destination not to be missed when visiting India. Sunsets at the golden sand beaches are simply breathtaking, and the local cuisine, which includes many seafood dishes, is mouthwatering. Goa also offers



travelers the opportunity to engage in many water sports, such as wind surfing and water skiing. This is one of India's smallest states, but one with an old town, and a very unique ethnicity and culture. While wandering across Goa, you will come across Hindu temples, Portuguese churches, and stunning wildlife sanctuaries.



Punjab: Punjab is by far one of the most beautiful states to visit in India with its iconic Golden Temple located in Amritsar. Known for its delicious cuisine, ethnic and religious diversity, and history - especially its Sikh religious history - Punjab makes the perfect destination for those looking for local culture and stories of ancient empires. Heading to the villages is a must to experience true Punjab culture. Travellers should also aim to attend the flag lowering ceremony which takes place at Wagah Border.

Himachal Pradesh: Himachal Pradesh, the Land of the Gods, is famous for its stunning Himalayan natural landscapes and breathtaking hill stations. Dharamsala, Manali, and Kullu are



some of the most visited destinations in this hilly state, offering pristine natural beauty. The snowcapped Himalayan peaks and the stunning lakes are mesmerizing. In this state, travellers can engage in a number of outdoor activities

which include paragliding, rock climbing, mountain biking, heli-skiing and much more.



Uttar Pradesh: What is India's architectural answer to love? The stunning Taj Mahal located in Agra of course. What about spirituality and salvation? Located along the river of the Ganges, the answer lies in Varanasi, India's oldest city. As such, Uttar Pradesh is one of the prettiest states, home to major historical, religious and architectural Indian destinations. In addition to the Taj Mahal and Varanasi, one of the most important pilgrimage places, namely Ayodhya, together with one of India's holiest cities, Allahabad, are also located within the beautiful state of Uttar Pradesh.



Gujarat: Located on India's Western coast, Gujarat is a breathtaking state attracting close to 19 million visitors a year. Known for its rich culture and history, and its traditional handicrafts, the state has a number of attractions which include archaeological sites, beaches and temples. As the one and only home to the Asiatic Lion, Gujarat is considered to be one of Asia's most protected areas in terms of wildlife. It is also the birthplace of Mahatma Gandhi.



West Bengal: The capital city of West Bengal, namely Kolkata, is known as the 'Cultural Capital of India', the 'City of Palaces', and even the 'City of Joy'. No doubt that the sumptuously rich and elaborate mansions which lie all over the city played an important role in giving Kolkata such a reputation. The city's vibrant culture also includes a highly developed arts, film and theater scene.

Karnataka: Karnataka is one of the states that can be proud to have it all. Indeed, it is home to some of the most diverse landscapes, with white waterfalls, mist covered hills, lush green forests, palaces and even historical ruins. Coorg is a must visit destination for those in search of a breathtaking hill station. Mysore, the city of palaces, Gokarna, a place where travelers can find the most pristine beaches, and finally Hampi, a world heritage site, are all also worth visiting.

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Traverse the Best Rural Destinations

Rural tourism allows travellers to discover a side of India that not many people have experienced before. In rural parts of India lie areas with untouched natural beauty, where hospitality comes innately to the people and a traditional, natural way of life can still be experienced.

As you set off the beaten path, get involved in the vibrant culture of India's villages, indulge in delectable local cuisines, uncover ancient traditions, rejuvenate your spirit with the region's folk music & dances, discuss local legends and stories around a bonfire, and explore century-old indigenous art forms.

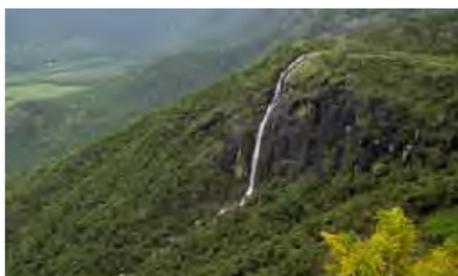
Here are some of the best Indian rural destinations.



Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu

Steeped in marvelous heritage, the Chettinad region in south India eloquently illumines the past and its heart lies in the village of Karaikudi. Here visitors can behold specimens of architectural brilliance, each of them giving a cue into the vision, endeavor and character of a great civilization. The people of the Chettinad area, the Chettiars or Nagarathars, have a unique style of living infused with a spectacular sense of artistic perfection. They built palatial mansions in the 19th century, and embellished these home fortresses with an uncommon finesse. The mansions are a treasure trove offering visitors an insight to the multifarious elements of Chettiar lifestyle such as intricate wood carvings on doorways and furniture, Athangudi floor tiles, silk-smooth Chettinad egg plaster work, and fascinating pillars.

Restoration activities have been recently energized with focus on traditional skills, art forms and even festivals - like Kavadiattam and Karakattam and the traditional Jallikattu bullfight.



Anakkara, Kerala

Anakkara is a magical parcel that presents fascinating people with a rich culture, and gorgeous landscapes that have an entrancing effect. This is an experience for those who yearn

for the unusual. The village of Anakkara, situated in the evergreen forest belt of the Western Ghats, boasts mist-clad hills and valleys; lush tropical vegetation; fragrant coffee, tea, pepper, vanilla and cardamom plantations. This gives the area an exquisite and distinctive beauty. A guided walk in the spice and herbal gardens is a sensual experience. Witness the mixed farming practices of villagers, hitchhike on a bullock cart, pick up organic spices, sip some mature coffee in a village coffee shop, lunch at a tree house with a stunning view or try out Ayurvedic treatments and preparations. There are varying ways to have fun.

Samode, Rajasthan

Ride a camel through Samode's alleys, and marvel at the intricacies of craftsmanship - ornate windows and frescoes in addition to a grand assortment of colorful artifacts. Catch a glimpse of a boundless sweeping desert as you are captivated by the magic of Samode village, tucked around a low-lying outcrop of the Aravali hills on one of the gateways to Shekhawati region - lies in the exciting patterns of daily life where people are introduced to crafts and craftspeople. You can experience a farm stay on the outskirts of Samode, where the rural lifestyle encompasses agriculture and cattle rearing, all this backed by legendary Rajasthani hospitality and great meals.

Lachen, Sikkim

The Lachen village that clings to the grassy mountain slopes of the eastern Himalayas in the state of Sikkim has many incredible attributes. Lachen radiates charm, life and color. Prayer flags fluttering in the chilly mountain breeze embody not only a strong Buddhist sentiment, but also stand testimony to the indomitable disposition of the Lachen community.

Lachen, which literally means 'Big Pass', is nestled in a valley of mixed conifer and Rhododendron forests, against a backdrop of imposing snowcapped peaks, glaciers and rock cliffs.

Hot springs, lakes and celebrated trek routes dot the vicinity of Lachen, but the most incredible sight is the world's third highest mountain, Kangchendzonga that is part of India's high altitude National Park. The village is unique in more ways than one and a stay with the locals is the best way to be introduced to the novelties. Watch them make cheese called the Churpi and yak butter, and you can even try your hand at milking a yak. Unique to this region is also the mountain sheep called Byangluk, found in the upper reaches of Lachen, reared for meat, and also for wool used to weave traditional blankets and carpets.

Jyotisar, Haryana

Embark on a spiritual quest and be rewarded with the glorious heritage of sacred Indian thought. Jyotisar is the celebrated place where one of the most important scriptures of India, the Bhagawat Gita, was taught by Lord Krishna.

Devotees and tourists congregate at Jyotisar Temple through the year, especially during solar and lunar eclipses, the time considered auspicious for holy dips in the Brahma Sarovar. The sound and light show held near the Jyotisar Temple recreates episodes from the epic Mahabharata and is an event not to be missed. For a taste of the rustic, participate in the many proceedings at the village like paddy transplantation and wheat harvesting. The villagers are primarily engaged in agriculture and cattle rearing.



From Jyotisar, tourists can visit many interesting places of religious interest, including the Gurudwaras, Sthanesvara Mahadev Temple, Birla Gita Mandir, Sheikh Chehli's Tomb, Harshka-Tila archaeological site, Bhisma Kund and Srikrishna Museum.

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A Gourmand's Shore

The brilliance of India's coastal cuisine possibly surpasses the beauty of the 7,517-km coastline itself.

There is a reason why coastal cuisine and seafood go hand in hand. They have been promoted likewise. Seafood is not only readily

available on the coast, but widely eaten as well - and this includes the vintage yet stunningly contemporary coastal cuisine of India.

But that is not all to this lesser-explored food culture that predates the Silk Route and is considered to be made for the sophisticated palate. Baked fish and coconut curries are just appetizers to this 21-course sit-down meal, each course comprising, at least, 100 select dishes. Sample this: The 7,517-km coastline gives India its favorite tiffin - idli, vada and dosa - just three

items of the five dozen-odd appams, chakulis and pirhas made in this region. It gives us the fritters (pakoras) including the famous vada of vada pav, bhel, jhalmuri and banana chips - a few of the hundreds of snacks that the southern half of India doles out including the famous fried chicken, popularly called Chicken 65. The famous fried fish, pathuri maach (that led to the iconic Parsee patrani machchi) and the stew (that made South the oldest innovator of curries) come from this region. The coconut chutney is one among the several relishes in coastal Indian cuisine, including the tomato khatta (that changed Spanish salsa), curd dips and wood apple chutney.

The oil-free kottu, which inspired the jalfrezi later, is again the gift of the coast. It has the largest section of innovative desserts including the Kerala black halwa, the hard-to-replicate mutts mala; the delicious khaja, Mysore pak and the unignorable rosgulla and its brethren.

Beside popularizing the art of creating dishes that cater to all the five palate senses, coastal cuisine has been at the forefront of a innovations as well, partly thanks to the maritime trade that brought the best of influences to the coast and partly due to the communities that made the coast their home. For instance, poee - a Goan bread - became the first unleavened bread to enter the Indian culinary ledger which till then was predominantly rice, puri and appams, chakulis and pithas made of fermented rice batter. The Goan bread eventually became the bun and led to the emergence of vada pav. Likewise, laddoo and kashtayam were easy ways to administer medication, but soon became sweetmeats. Rasam, of India's traditional consommé, was developed both as an appetizer and health builder. Such was the addiction to rasam (and payasam) that Vasco da Gama actually borrowed Zamorin's two cooks so he could relish it on whim. Sol kadi had the same fan following and made kokum as popular an export as palm toddy and coconut sugar. As for the laddoo, the interesting mélange led to the birth of chikkis or pralines. Legend has it that Lonavala's famous Maganlal chikki began as a way to sustain the rail workers who didn't have time for a lunch break.

Yet another popular dish that coastal cuisine excelled in was stir fry satays. According to old Sangam literature, the Chola kings preferred a mutton dish that was made thus: large pieces of the thigh portion marinated with pepper, dry ginger paste, then roasted in fire on wooden skewers and tossed with arugampui (Bermuda grass) for flavor. This is said to have influenced Chengiz Khan who adopted the dish in parts to sustain his army and eventually created the first form of what the world knows as kebabs. The art of flavoring rice - not with stock but a spice or two - was yet another innovation from coastal India. While the origin of flavored rice dishes like curry leaf rice or coconut rice was necessity based - rice is an anecdote in every meal - not many know that it was Asia's first pilaf, which unknowingly created the first fried rice.

The legend has it that when Ma Huan arrived in India as part of the Imperial Chinese fleet under Cheng Ho in 1403, he was stunned to find pilafs. It is said that he stayed back to learn the art of

making it and also discovered many versions of using it. The iddiappaim is said to have inspired the Chinese, who visited India to sell their silkware, to create noodles and later, egged the Arabs to develop the popular sewiyan.

The handmade sewiyan was the first industry that was footed by Arab traders, who settled in the Muziris, as an alternative to the long grain rice they had back home. It was the Sangam Era mappillai samba rice that supposedly reached the Ottoman Empire that led to the creation of pulav and paella in Spain. Of course, there is an argument made in favor of the muri ghonto, a Kalinga-Bangla specialty and a port delicacy at Kalingapatnam and Tamralipta, which could have inspired the paella, given the use of seafood and parboiled rice. Much like how the mutton chukka of Karikal Chola time inspired the Indonesian satay and the Sikanderi raan led to the creation of the kutti chara - a whole goat stuffed with chicken or arikadaka - mussels and rice flour cooked in - shell. It wasn't just the art of stuffing that coastal India was known for. Two of the interesting culinary techniques that emerged from the coastal India was the no-oil cooking (santula and patua for example) and the art of combining vegetables with meat for flavors like the Bengali chorchuri.



Another example of culinary brilliance in the coastal cuisine is the ingenuity to use a plant completely. So while the banana fruit is used as ready sweetener for breakfast (chuda-dahi-banana or pottu-sugar-banana), the flower was used initially to create a variety of kebabs and koftas that eventually was adopted for meat-lovers. In fact, manja (banana stem) much like yam and jackfruit, was as big a part of the meat eating community of coastal India as for non-meat lovers.

The Bahmani kings, who eventually toppled the Vijayanagara Empire, were instrumental in popularizing yam and jackfruit by making traditional dishes part of their elaborate meal which were later picked by Shahjahan to be a part of his feast. According to old Silk Route ledgers, the all-popular phirni first came to the southern coast of India as bahtiyeh from Khuzestan (Iran) along with balal, a tangy style of corn on the cob. Bahtiyeh, which in its earlier iteration was a gruel of rice powder and milk boiled together, was incorporated into the payasam category and refined further by adding jaggery and cardamom. While it developed into a grainy kheer in the south, in Odisha, it developed into gointa gudi or what many food historians today believe could have led to the idea of rasmalai and the Maharashtrian modak.

26
JANUARY

HAPPY REPUBLIC DAY GREETINGS
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Celebrate with TRICOLOR food recipes

India is celebrating 68 glorious years of its Constitution coming into force. While some things like sitting huddled in front of the TV with your family to watch the parade are an intrinsic part of the day's celebrations, there are other innovative ways to bring the patriotic fervor into your home. Whip up these easy tricolor recipes in the colors of the Indian flag and celebrate this Republic Day the foodie way.

Tri Color Cake



Ingredients
 345 gms (3 cups), sifted All-purpose flour
 1 tbsp Baking powder
 1/2 tsp Salt
 226 gms (1 cup) Unsalted butter -at room temperature
 320 gms (1 & 2/3 cup) Granulated white sugar
 4 Large eggs
 2 tsp Pure vanilla extract
 240 ml (1 cup), Milk
 1 tsp Orange/saffron liquid food color
 1 tsp Dark green liquid food color
 Whipping cream to cover

Directions: Preheat oven to 180 degrees C (350 degrees F) with rack in center of oven. Butter or spray with a non-stick vegetable spray, three 9 inch x 2 inch (23 x 5 cm) cake pans. Then line the bottoms of the pans with parchment or wax paper and then spray the paper. In a bowl, sift or whisk together the flour, baking powder, and salt.
 With a hand mixer, beat the butter

until soft and creamy for about 1-2 minutes. Gradually add the sugar and beat until light and fluffy for about 3-5 minutes. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Scrape down the sides of the bowl as needed. Add the vanilla extract and beat until combined. With the mixer on low speed, alternately add the flour mixture (in three additions) and milk (in two additions), beginning and ending with the flour.

Evenly divide the batter between the three prepared pans. Add the orange/saffron liquid color to one pan and whisk to blend the color all over homogeneously.

The liquid color tends to stick to one place; you have to give little effort to mix it thoroughly. Add dark green liquid color to another pan and mix similarly. Leave the third pan as it is. Smooth the tops of the batters with the back of a spoon or an offset spatula.

Bake all the cakes together in a big oven for 27 to 35 minutes; the time to bake will be more or less same. Keep checking after every 10 minutes.

Place the cakes on a wire rack to cool, in their pans, for about 10 minutes. Then invert the cakes onto a plate. Remove the parchment or wax paper and re-invert cakes so that tops are right side up. Cool completely before frosting.

Meanwhile prepare the frosting by whipping the double cream until soft peaks form and the volume has increased four times. Keep it in the fridge to chill so that it is easy to spread over the cake.

Once the cakes are completely cooled, prepare for frosting. The top of each cake should be perfectly plain. If the top has become dome shapes (which is quite normal), cut it off and make a perfect plain for the cake to hold the frosting.

Now apply the cream over the top and also on the sides and using a spatula cover the cake all over. Smooth the edges and you are done.

Paneer Tikka



Ingredients
 200 grams Cottage Cheese cut into cubes
 2 tbsp Fresh Cream
 2 tbsp Green chutney
 2 tbsp Mango pickle
 4 tbsp Cashewnut paste
 4 tbsp Fresh cream
 4 tbsp Grated cheese
 White pepper powder to taste
 1/2 tsp Green cardamom powder
 Salt to taste
 Chaat masala to taste

Directions: Divide the paneer pieces equally into three different bowls. Add mustard paste to one, green chutney

to the second and mango pickle to the third bowl and mix well. In a separate bowl, make a marinade of cashewnut paste, fresh cream, cheese, white pepper powder, green cardamom powder and salt. Mix well. Divide the marinade into three portions and add one portion to each of the three different bowls.

Set aside for thirty minutes. Arrange the marinated paneer pieces on skewers in a pattern of green, white and orange. Set aside for ten minutes. Heat a non-stick pan and grill the skewers till golden brown. Serve hot sprinkled with chaat masala.

Ingredients
 4 cups Milk
 2 tbsp Lemon Extract
 3 Cups Sugar
 9 Cups Water
 1/4 tsp Rose Essence
 1/4 tsp Cardomom Powder

Directions
 First add the milk in a clean vessel and bring it to boil. Do stir in between to avoid burnt bottom. Mix 2 tbsp water to the lemon extract and keep it aside.

Once the milk starts to boil, turn off the flame. Start adding the lemon extract to the milk, little by little at regular intervals and keep stirring. The milk will start curdling. Let the curdled milk rest for 5 minutes.

Take a clean muslin/cotton cloth and place it in a strainer. Pour the curdled milk into the cloth. The water (Whey) will be drained away and the milk solids will remain in the cloth.

Run the milk solids under cold water, to remove the sourness of the lemon. Then gather the sides of the cloth and



squeeze the milk solids to remove excess water. Set this packet over the strainer or just hang this cloth for 30 minutes, so that the excess water gets drained off. The resulting product from this step is paneer / Indian cottage cheese that is used in various Indian cuisines.

Optionally, when making paneer, use a heavy weight on top of the packet, to firm it up and make it hold its shape. We do not need to use the weight here while making rasgulla.

Now, remove the paneer from the

cloth and start kneading it with your palms for 10 minutes. Knead until you end up with a smooth soft ball. Divide into 3 equal portions. Add green and orange food color to 2 of the portions. Knead them until the color mixes evenly. Leave the third as it is.

Make small sized balls from the dough by rolling them between your palms. It is important to make a smooth and perfect round shape or else they might break when soaking. Keep them aside.

Now prepare the sugar syrup by adding water and sugar into a bottom heavy pan, stir them until the sugar dissolves. Add the cardamom powder and rose essence to the sugar syrup and once it starts boiling, introduce the prepared balls into the boiling syrup. Turn the flame to medium and allow the rasgullas to cook for about 15- 20 minutes. Cover the pan and check that it is cooked properly at regular intervals. The rasgullas will double in size. Turn off the flame and let them cool down to room temperature. Then, refrigerate and serve chilled.

Wishing all Indians a Happy Republic Day

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