



INDIA TOWARDS 21st CENTURY

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The entire nation today stands enthused and feels invigorated in every sector, to take such steps which can fulfill the Prime Minister's exhortation that each system in the country should speedily usher itself into the 21st Century.

What does this really imply? The first thing that "India towards 21st Century" implies is that we should view "future" more seriously than, as a tradition bound society, we normally do.

After all, a majority of us will be living in the "future". A majority of us individually, collectively and as a nation will be achieving things in the "future."

The question, therefore, arises: Do we know what kind of future we as individuals and as a social collectivity are seeking?

The second thing that the slogan "India towards 21st Century" implies is that if we have an 'individual' or a 'corporate' "view" of the future, then we better begin to prepare for it from today onwards.

Thus all corporate entities have an obligation to undertake long range planning.

At the individual level it is a "call" for becoming an inventive and a creative person.

In terms of managerial culture it means that we need not constantly be backward looking. We need not wait for "events" to overtake us or to hit us while we are unprepared for future "crisis" or future "opportunity." In short, all systems from today onward should **commit** resources based on a long range view of the future.

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The third important implication lies in developing professional groups who know how to "scan" and "interpret" the future. They have to be trained to pay full time attention to "scan" the future.

(ii) Undoubtedly, today, some such activities are being carried out by a half/dozen private and public organisations in India. But not all functionaries carry out or use the right forecasting methodologies and techniques.

The first basic requirement of looking into the future is to broadbase and reorganise the information and data base in a given organisation - - what we now call the Management information System (MIS).

The second thing is that each organisation should set up a group consisting of persons who are well versed in interpreting data, carrying out Trend analysis, who know how to apply statistical methods, against a time frame. This group should also be well conversant with systems analysis, forecasting and programming. Such a group would constitute an Early Warning System (EWS).

The combination of MIS and EWS then ideally constitutes that professional unit, which can help an organisation to draw perspective plans and to identify sector by sector the real building blocks on which each sector can intelligently, conscientiously, and in the context of a preferred future, move towards the 21st Century.

In the governmental sector, its planning process provides the only vehicle of change through a five year plan.

Apparently when the Prime Minister suggests that all systems should think in futuristic terms and should move speedily towards the 21st Century, he is ⁱⁿ unmistakable terms demanding that the professional world of this country, sector by sector, set up:

(a) Future scanning groups

- (b) draw long range perspective plans; and,
- (c) the Indian educational and training network should have educational courses to train and develop forecasting groups for different organisations.

(iii) All this also implies that the current-day investments, be they for an Annual Plan or a Five Year Plan, should be made only after sufficient effort towards environmental scanning has been undertaken.

In other words, in the public administrative context, the options for the Seventh Five Year Plan would have to be based on a "vision" and full awareness of the expectations of a given system for its likely expansion and growth for the next 20 years, to encompass the time-frame of the Seventh, the Eighth Five Year Plan, the Ninth Five Year Plan and the Tenth Five Year Plan. The four Five Year Plans for the period 1985-2005 A.D do constitute the major period of "transition". Each plan should become the foundational building block for the succeeding plan to enable this nation to realise a certain preferred future for India.

Secondly, it also implies that considering that our national resources are finite in nature, we need to draw up material balance statement, to examine our national requirements, to develop the infrastructure and to gear all systems to work to fulfill the tomorrow's needs of a billion Indians who will be with us in less than 7000 days.

(iv) Finally, to conclude, whatever else may be important for those who swear much too much by "past" and "day-to-day" current obligations, "no dynamic and alert system can survive without paying attention to the future.

All sectors, hereafter, have to work in a systematic and a planned manner.

The time has come that a massive effort should be launched for three things:

Firstly, in our schools and colleges, in our universities, we should introduce formal or non-formal education in technology forecasting, technology assessment and future-related studies.

Secondly, all systems, as in Poland and in many other countries, must draw their Perspective Plan for the next 20 years. The current choices for physical and fiscal outlays should emerge out of such an analysis.

And, finally, systems which have become too rigid and inflexible must promote a great deal of experimentation, innovation to encourage creative efforts at the individual and collective levels within the broad national guidelines.

If this is done, one should sincerely feel, that we would have taken the first few necessary steps in our long march of ushering India towards the 21st Century with strength and pride.

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