

STEP TOWARDS EMPOWERED INDIA

The launch of the 'Swasth Nari, Sashakt Parivar Abhiyaan' marks a critical turning point in India's approach to women's health and family welfare. The campaign, whose name translates to Healthy Woman, Empowered Family, is more than just a health initiative-it is a visionary step towards transforming the socio-economic landscape by recognizing that the well-being of women directly translates into the well-being of families, communities, and the nation at large.

In a country where women often bear the brunt of both economic and emotional labour within the family, their health is unfortunately not always given the priority it deserves. Nutritional deficiencies, reproductive health issues, anaemia, mental health problems, and lack of access to regular checkups continue to plague women, especially in rural and underprivileged urban areas. The Swasth Nari, Sashakt Parivar initiative seeks to address these long-standing challenges through an integrated and holistic approach.

At its core, the Abhiyaan promotes regular health check-ups, menstrual hygiene awareness, nutritional support, maternal health counselling, and access to family planning resources. By collaborating with local health workers, NGOs, and community leaders, the campaign aims to penetrate deep into rural and marginalised societies where traditional barriers often restrict women from seeking medical help. This grassroots involvement is critical because true impact lies in changing mindsets alongside policies.

What makes this campaign especially promising is its family-centric approach. It recognizes that a woman is not just an individual, but the pivot of a family unit. When a woman is healthy-physically, mentally, and emotionally-she can better care for her children, contribute more effectively to the household economy, and participate actively in society. Studies have repeatedly shown that investments in women's health yield high social and economic returns, from reducing maternal and infant mortality to increasing girls' school attendance and labour force participation. Importantly, the Abhiyaan also focuses on awareness and education. By incorporating health education and awareness sessions into community outreach programs, the campaign aims to dismantle age-old taboos around menstruation, reproductive rights, and mental health-subjects often shrouded in silence and stigma. When women are equipped with knowledge and confidence, they are more likely to make informed decisions, not just for themselves but for their families as well.

However, for the Abhiyaan to succeed, sustained political will, adequate funding, and continuous monitoring are essential. Mere symbolic gestures will not bring about real change. The government must ensure that health infrastructure, especially in rural areas, is strengthened and that ASHA workers and local volunteers are adequately trained and compensated.

From Decay to Dynamism: How Modi is Rebuilding Urban India

■ HARDEEP S PURI



decades after Independence, India's urban spaces were an afterthought. Nehru's fascination with Soviet-style centralisation gave us the likes of Shastri Bhavan and Udyog Bhavan, concrete monoliths already crumbling by the 1990s, monuments to bureaucracy rather than service.

By the 2010s, central Delhi presented a dismal sight: potholed avenues, drab and leaking government buildings, and peripheral roads in NCR that were hopelessly jammed. Expressways were scarce, metros were confined to a handful of cities, and civic infrastructure was visibly decaying. A country aspiring to global leadership had a capital city that reflected only neglect.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi changed that trajectory. He placed cities at the heart of the national development agenda, treating them not as burdens to be managed but as engines of growth and symbols of pride. The transformation is visible everywhere. The Central Vista redevelopment turned Kartavya Path into a people's space, the New Parliament into a future-ready institution, and Kartavya Bhavan into a streamlined hub for governance. Where once there was decay, there is now ambition and confidence.

The scale of this change is backed by numbers. Between 2004 and 2014, cumulative central investment in India's urban sector was around ₹1.57 lakh crore. Since 2014, that figure has risen to nearly ₹28.5 lakh crore, a sixteenfold increase. In Budget 2025-26 alone, the Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs was allocated ₹96,777 crore, with one-third for metros and a quarter for housing. This unprecedented financial commitment is reshaping the urban fabric at a pace never

seen before in independent India.

India's broader economic and digital surge amplifies this momentum. Today, we are the world's fourth-largest economy at roughly \$4.2 trillion, with digital rails powering everyday life. UPI just crossed 20 billion transactions in a single month and handles over ₹24 lakh crore in value monthly. Over 900 million Indians are now online, and 56 crore Jan Dhan accounts anchor the JAM trinity that delivers subsidies directly and transparently. This scale of formalisation and fintech adoption is uniquely Indian, and profoundly urban in its impact.

The metro revolution illustrates the transformation on the ground. In 2014, India had about 248 km of operational metro across five cities. Today, over 1,000 km span more than 23 cities, carrying more than one crore passengers daily. Dozens of new corridors are under construction, from Pune and Nagpur to Surat and Agra, making urban commutes faster, cleaner and safer. This is not just steel and concrete; it is reduced travel times, cleaner air, and millions of hours of productivity returned to citizens.

Urban connectivity has been rewritten. NCR's choked peripheries are being decongested by the newly inaugurated UER-II, Delhi's third ring road, linking NH-44, NH-9 and Dwarka Expressway to ease traffic at chronic bottlenecks. India's first Regional Rapid Transit System, the Delhi-Meerut RRTS (NaMo Bharat), is already running on major sections and nearing full commissioning, slashing end-to-end travel to under an hour. These high-speed, integrated systems are defining a new metropolitan logic for a new India.

Expressways are recasting inter-city movement. The Delhi-Mumbai Expressway, the Bengaluru-Mysuru Expressway, the Delhi-Meerut access-controlled corridor, and the Mumbai Coastal Road are shortening distances and cleaning city air by taking long-haul traffic out of local streets. Atal Setu in Mumbai, the nation's longest sea bridge, now seamlessly connects the island city to the mainland. The Mumbai-Ahmedabad high-speed rail, India's first bullet train corridor, is

advancing apace and will anchor a Western growth spine.

Inclusion has remained central. PM SVANidhi has extended collateral-free credit and digital empowerment to over 68 lakh street vendors, helping micro-entrepreneurs rebuild livelihoods and enter the formal economy. PM Awas Yojana (Urban) has sanctioned more than 120 lakh houses, with about 94 lakh already completed. Millions of families once confined to slums now live in secure pucca homes. These are not just statistics; they are transformed lives and aspirations unlocked.

Energy reform is improving daily urban life. Where kitchens once depended on costly and uncertain cylinder bookings, piped natural gas (PNG) is increasingly the norm, safer, cleaner and more convenient. City Gas Distribution has expanded from just 57 geographical areas in 2014 to over 300 today. Domestic PNG connections have risen from about 25 lakh to over 1.5 crore, while thousands of CNG stations power cleaner public transport. Turning a tap for fuel is now a reality for millions of urban homes.

India has built the confidence to host the world. Bharat Mandapam successfully hosted the G20 Leaders' Summit. Yashobhoomi has emerged among the largest convention complexes globally, capable of welcoming tens of thousands of delegates. India Energy Week has drawn the global energy ecosystem to Bengaluru, Goa and New Delhi, signalling that our cities can convene the world at scale and with style. None of this would have been imaginable when dilapidated halls and crumbling stadia defined our civic infrastructure.

Transport modernisation is happening at scale and speed. Operational airports have more than doubled, from 74 in 2014 to about 160 today, thanks to UDAN and sustained investments. Vande Bharat now runs on over 140 services, cutting travel times across regions. Over 1,300 railway stations are being modernised under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme, with more than a hundred already inaugurated. In Delhi, the expanded Terminal-1 has lifted IGT's capacity past 100 million passengers per annum, putting our

capital in the global big league.

Sensible tax policy supports consumers and growth. The recent GST rationalisation moves most goods and services into 5% and 18% slabs, with steep rates reserved only for select sin and luxury items. Essentials from personal-care items to many household durables have seen rate cuts; small cars and two-wheelers now attract lower GST; several medicines and medical devices have become cheaper. For urban households, this means lower monthly bills, stronger consumption and a virtuous cycle of investment and jobs.

Having represented India abroad for decades as a diplomat, I saw firsthand how cities serve as the face of a nation. Vienna's Ringstrasse, New York's skyline, or the boulevards of Paris all embodied national ambition. It was clear to me that global perception begins in urban spaces. This conviction has guided my work in urban affairs: to ensure that Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Ahmedabad and our other cities reflect the confidence, modernity, and aspirations of a rising India. Just as my diplomatic career taught me the value of projecting India's image internationally, my ministerial role has been to make our cities worthy of that image.

This is the arc of transformation: from post-Independence neglect to Modi-era modernisation. From Shastri Bhavan's decay to Kartavya Bhawan's ambition. From potholed roads to expressways and high-speed corridors. From smoke-filled kitchens to piped natural gas. From slums to millions of Pucca homes. From crumbling halls to world-class convention centres. From a hesitant capital to a confident global host.

India's ancient cities like Pataliputra and Nalanda once embodied the heights of urban civilisation. Today, under Prime Minister Modi, Indian cities are again on that path, modern yet humane, ambitious yet inclusive, global in outlook yet rooted in our values. New Urban India is not being built in a day. But it is being built every day, brick by brick, train by train, home by home. And it is already transforming the lives of millions.

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Navigating and Reshaping India's Global Alliances

■ IQRA NISSAR

In the complex arena of global geopolitics, India is making a subtle and calibrated shift in its foreign policy. This move is primarily motivated by escalating tensions in trade relationship with America, a partnership once celebrated as the defining alliance of the 21st century. While Washington becomes more protectionist, New Delhi is not only expressing its concerns but it is also proactively seeking out alternative multilateral forums, as observed recently, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and BRICS, to diversify its economic relations and demonstrate its strategic autonomy. This strategic shift is not easy, however, considering it's undercurrents with some of its members. This maneuvering highlights India's challenge-maintaining a crucial partnership with the West while fostering relationships in Eurasia to safeguard its economic and strategic interests.

From Strategic Partners to Trade Adversaries

The United States-India relationship during the post-Cold War period has been built on a convergence of strategic interests, including counterbalancing China, fighting terrorism, and promoting democratic stability in Asia. This partnership has matured into a strong economic relationship, with two-way trade in goods and services of over \$130

billion. But underpinning this large number is an old problem of friction over trade behavior that has been aggravated by the "America First" agenda of the Trump. At its heart is a policy difference at the very foundation. The US has repeatedly raised objections to India's use of tariffs and its alleged unfair trade activity. The main issues are Digital protectionism and America First Reciprocity.

American technology companies have raised concerns about India's data localization requirements, which force companies to shift all of their data within Indian borders, and its apparent bias towards domestic industries in respect to digital payments systems. The US has been protesting India's exceptionally high tariffs on many categories of US imports from electronics to medical devices to agro-products like almonds, apples and milk. Most importantly, these demands for reciprocity are seen as threatening India's development goals. India sees these measures of protection as a developmental objective to support its infant industries, and, to guard the security of its vast agrarian economy and the data security of its people.

The American pressure is seen as an effort to impose open markets for its dominant firms to the detriment of India's economic progress and strategic independence. This deadlock has pushed

India's strategic minds to seek options outside Washington. Uncertainty of the U.S. trade relationship has added new urgency to the necessity of diversified supply chains, markets for exports other than the United States, and allies who don't condition relationships on adjusting to a Western-driven economic model.

The Complex Reality of SCO and BRICS: Platforms of Convenience, Not Ideology In seeking alternative alliances, India has intentionally turned to the east and north, actively interacting with the China-dominated Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the Russia-backed BRICS group.

These are not blocs of like-minded friends but fields of complex and at times competing interests, and India must navigate them cautiously. The recent SCO Summit at Tianjin, China, and the present US-India trade tensions serve to highlight the intricacies spelt out in the relationship. These forums, while presenting alternative alignments, are riddled with cross-cutting interests, which require skilled manoeuvring by New Delhi to protect its sovereignty as well as economic interests. The 2025 SCO Summit was a watershed for India in that it showed a warming of India-China relations amid the two countries' past border conflicts.

Chinese President Xi Jinping's meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi led to agreements to resume direct

flights, re-open trade routes, and strengthen bilateral relations-moves that could boost economic cooperation in the face of strained Western ties. Major deliverables were the Tianjin Declaration, which denounced the Pahalagam terrorist attack in Jammu and Kashmir, consistent with India's anti-terrorism policy, and the creation of an SCO Anti-Drug Center and Development Bank. These projects encourage regional security and infrastructure financing, which can be of benefit to India's connectivity aspirations.

Nevertheless, the China-dominated SCO framework and membership of Pakistan create complications; New Delhi has to balance Beijing's power while challenging Islamabad's role in cross-border terrorism.

Modi's priority on having a "special and privileged" relationship with Russia at the summit also depicts India's balancing act, utilizing Moscow's influence as a counter to US pressures. This circumpect involvement is reflective of the fact that SCO is not an allies' bloc but a platform of complex interests, in which India pursues its agenda against extremism and separatism without complete convergence. The USIndia trade war has amplified this tilt and taking it to the level of a diplomatic crisis, Trump's duties of 50% on Indian exports affected up to seventy percent of

shipments alongwith 25% retaliatory duty on India's purchase of Russian oil. This is part of a broader US effort to counter China and to punish countries like India for not decoupling entirely with Russia during the Ukraine war. There has been recent de-escalation, as Trump and Modi resumed trade talks, but the invitation to G7 allies to impose tariffs on India suggests volatility remains.

This kind of action drives India toward SCO and BRICS for economic strength. Within BRICS, which welcomed Indonesia as a member in 2025, India calls for solving trade deficits and reform of global governance with a focus on climate financing, governance of AI, and multilateral reforms, all consistent with India's leadership of the Global South. This mirrors India's balancing act between Eastern multipolarity and Western alliances. In the end, with the SCO's multipolar thrust and US trade belligerence, India's diplomacy exemplifies realistic prudence. By participating in these platforms, New Delhi diversifies alliances, combats isolationism, and promotes national interests such as security and development. Success, though, depends on dampening risks from paramount players like China and Russia to ensure these fields benefit, not detract from, India's global profile. This navigation is crucial in a fragmented world order, where alternative alliances offer

opportunities but demand vigilance.

The Way Forward

India's future foreign policy trajectory is not about choosing between the United States and the Russia China axis. Rather, it will be defined by a sophisticated and long-term strategy of multi-alignment-interacting with all parties to optimize its national interest. India will continue to deepen its security partnership with the United States and its Quad allies (Australia and Japan) as a crucial counterbalance to China in the Indo-Pacific. At the same time, it will hold on to its defence relations with Russia, an important provider of military equipment, and continue to engage with the SCO to keep itself firmly seated at the

Eurasian table. This requires embracing inherent contradictions, e.g., buying Russian oil in defiance of US objections, and justifying it as a necessary step to manage domestic inflation. India's renewed interest in SCO and BRICS is a pragmatic move in the face of this changed reality. It is a calculated gamble that it can navigate the rivalries within these groups to secure its own interests, all while keeping its options open with the West. Ultimately, India's long-term vision is to develop its own indigenous economic and technological capacities to the extent that it is an indispensable global power in its own right and not just a swing state.

Dr. Visveshvaraiya: Engineer the great

■ ER. PRABHAT KISHORE

Many sages, great men and personalities have taken birth on the pious land of India, who have shown a new path to its prosperity and development by their great deeds.

Dr. Mokshagundam Visveshvaraiya, a great engineer, efficient administrator, true nationalist and the backbone of development, was among these precious gems. Service to the nation was his aspiration, his motto and his life. Even at the age of 92 years, in 1952, he did the wonderful job of connecting the two scattered banks of the river Gangaat Mokama (Bihar) through a rail-cum-road bridge (RajendraSetu), which was then beyond the imagination of the common man. This immortality on the soil of Bihar is still inspiring people to keep moving forward by refreshing their memories.

Dr. Mokshagundam Vishvesvaraiya was a divine gift to Bharatvarsha. He was born on 15 September 1861 in an ordinary Brahmin family in Mudanahalli village of Kolar Mandal of Karnataka (erstwhile Mysore State). His mother was Mrs. Srekkamma and father was Sri Srinivas Shastri. Only four years before his birth, the great revolt of 1857 took place for the liberation from the slavery of the British. When Visveshvaraiya was only 15 years old, his father died. Then the destitute mother went to her maternal home with him. Despite his poverty and dep-

rivation, this child did not lose courage and continued his education by taking tuitions. He completed his graduation (Honours) examination from Central College Bangalore under Madras University in 1880. Thereafter, he enrolled in Civil Engineering at the Engineering College in Pune, from where he secured first class in the engineering examination in 1886 and for which he was awarded the "James Varkle Award". He got a lot of support from his maternal uncle Sri Ramaiah and the erstwhile Mysore state in pursuing higher education.

Dr. Visveshvaraiya started his public career in 1984 as an Assistant Engineer in the Public Works Department of the then Government of Mumbai. In 1893, he got the "Sugar Varese and Water Works" constructed, for the purpose of supplying drinking water from the Sindh river. He first introduced the Tatil system for proper use of irrigation water. In the year 1901, he presented a report on the block system of irrigation before the first Irrigation Commission in India, and showed the way to the economy. His invaluable contribution is the design and construction of fixed roller and driven gates at Khadgwasla Dam and Gwalior Dam in Pune.

Due to his sharp intellect, hardworking personality and amazing work ability, he reached the post of Superintending Engineer in the year 1904 at the age of just 33 years. In

the same year he became a member of the Institution of Engineers, London. It was a big deal for an Indian to reach the post of Superintending Engineer during the British rule. By then, Dr. Visveshvaraiya had made his mark in the field of construction. The construction work of "Sugar Varese and Water Works" brought him all India fame. E. K. Ronald, the then Chief Engineer of the Public Works Department of the Government of Mumbai, addressed him as the "Wonder of India". He served the Bombay government till 1908. Due to day-to-day neglect by the British rule, he resigned from the service of the Bombay Government in 1908.

Due to his ability, efficiency, punctuality, selfless devotion to the nation, the Maharaja of Mysore State Shri Krishnaraj Wadiyar appointed him as the Chief Engineer of the statein the year 1909. From 1909 to 1912, he was the chairman of the Mysore State Technical Education Committee. He not only gave shape to the big irrigation projects in the Mysore state, but also gave a new dimension to the railway system. The Krishnasagar dam built by him on the Kaveririver was the largest reservoir in India at that time and for this, a tunnel of about 2.8 km long dug in the mountains was the first great construction in the field of Indian engineering. The Vrindavan Gardens adjacent to the Krishnasagar Dam was like a worthwhile attempt to bring heaven to earth. From 1912 to

1916, he served as the 19th Diwan of the Mysore State, during which he proved that he was a successful engineer as well as an efficient administrator; dedicated social worker and an accomplished politician by executing several development works.

Dr. Visveshvaraiya not only contributed as a successful engineer in the state of Mysore, but also made a lot of efforts for the promotion of education. In 1913, he established the Agriculture School and in 1916 the College of Engineering. Along with Mysore and Mumbai, the history of grandeur and development of cities like Sangli, Baroda, Ahmednagar, Nagpur, Bhavnagar, Rajkot etc. is the result of Dr. Visveshvaraiya's thinking and action. Due to his tireless efforts, the University of Mysore was established in the year 1916. Setting up the Bhadravati Steel Plant in Mysore had then become a challenge, as the economy of the project was questioned by the British consultants. But Dr. Visveshvaraiya got it completed by making it a matter of prestige and the steel produced from this plant was exported to advanced and developed countries like America.

After being parted away from the post of Devan of Mysore, he held important positions such as officer, chairman and advisor in several government, semi-government and non-government establishments and organizations. He successfully discharged his administrative and political

responsibilities as the head of the scholarship institution for the students of backward classes in 1916, as the chairman of the political committee of all-party representatives in 1922, as the director of the Tata Iron & Steel Company and as the president of the Indian Economic Conference in 1927, and as the chairman of the Bangalore Riot Enquiry Committee in 1929. Impressed by his achievements, the then Nizam had taken his services for the reconstruction of Hyderabad city. He did many development works like protection from floods of Musiriver in Hyderabad, sewerage, drinking water supply, road construction etc.

Dr. Visveshvaraiya's suggestion was at the core of the protective measures to get rid of the scourge of the Koshiriver in Bihar. The Dimna Nala Dam (1947) in the state of Bihar and the Hirakund dam in the state of Orissa are also a part of his plan. He traveled to America and Europe with the aim of opening a workshop for motor vehicles and aircraft in the country. Due to his invaluable and sincere services to the nation, Dr. Visveshvaraiya was awarded the highest national title of "Bharat Ratna" by the Government of India in 1955. In 1961, on his birth centenary, the Government of India saluted the work of this great personality by issuing a special postage stamp in his honour. Dr. Visveshvaraiya also authored some well-known and popular books named "Reconstructing India", "Planned

Economy for India", "Unemployment in India, its causes and cure" and "Memories of my working life" etc.

As a result of showing his charisma in every field of construction, he was honoured by the British Government with the distinction of "Compendium of the Indian Empire" in 1911 and "Knight Commander of the order of Indian Empire" in 1915 and lateron "Sir". Due to his extraordinary talent and acumen, he got C.I.A. certificate in 1911, D.M.C. by Kolkata University in 1913, K.C.I. in 1915, I.L.D. by Mumbai University in 1918, D.Lit. by Kashi Hindu Vishwavidyalaya in 1939. In 1944, Patna University has honoured him with D.Se. and many other degrees.

Dr. Mokshagundam Visveshvaraiya was rich in innate talent and was never afraid of hard work. This eccentric personality who nurtured "simple living high thoughts" never used government resources for personal gain. Not only was he praised openly for his role and contribution in the new construction of India, but he was also called the "Vishwakarma of modern Bharat". This immortal engineer, who scored a brilliant century of his life, breathed his last on 14 April 1962 and left this elusive world forever. The great personality and creativity of Dr. Mokshagundam Visveshvaraiya, the epitome of nation building, is now our eternal source of inspiration.

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