


THE CHANGE THAT WE NEED

Invest in health and education



■ Aditya V. Agarwal ■

INDIA IS a land of paradoxes that may confuse any discerning observer. We take pride in being the sixth nation in the world to send a mission to the moon or to be a member of the elite trillion-dollar club of global economies. However, as per government data, more than 22 per cent of our population lives below the poverty line. India is getting stronger, but its problems are multiplying. As per the World Bank data, till 2006, the country had 60 million chronically-malnourished children, that is 40 per cent of the world's total. Last year, 2.1 million children died due to malnourishment. While 65 per cent of our population is dependent on agriculture, it contributes only 18 per cent to the GDP.

Government data shows that 14 million people are added to the job market every year. The dimension of the problem is huge as half of India's present population is below 25 years of age while 40 per cent are below 18. Unfortunately, due to huge under-investment in education, a mere 20 per cent job-seekers receive proper vocational training. Though the rate of employment has gone up to 2.6 per cent, it is abysmally low to accommodate the growing brigade of job-seekers. Reports suggest that nearly 600 million people still do not have access to proper electricity and more than 50 per cent of the populace have no access to clean drinking water.

Thus, the task of creating a better India is daunting. Just as India's economy is growing, so are its regional disparities. The rising standard of living of the people in developed states has no reflection on their poor neighbours. No wonder, stark regional discrepancies have paved the way for violence and separatist movements. To make a better India, we need to emphasise on education, healthcare and agriculture. It is imperative for us to grow at eight per cent to make a dent in poverty.

There had been hardly any investment in education. While 96 per cent children are enrolled in primary education, half of them leave before they reach 14. Half of the teachers do not turn up. We also need huge investments in healthcare. Besides education and healthcare, the other major impediment is lack of infrastructure. We need huge investments in infrastructure, especially in roads, ports, railways and airports.

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