

# Agenda 2020: Building a good society

Here are nine basic issues that must be addressed to realise that goal



TARUN DAS

As 2019 closes on a low note, eyes turn to the next year and the overriding priorities for 2020. Is a turnaround possible? Not just economic recovery but also of sentiment and confidence. There are nine basic issues which need to be addressed.

First, the critical need for dialogue, where we not only talk to each other but, equally importantly, listen to each other. And find a middle way. Indians

need to get back to a dialogue mode, speaking and listening. And, as necessary, use neutral moderators and facilitators to bring people together to a shared view.

Second, through a process of dialogue, build mutual trust. Society is facing a deficit of trust. All players are responsible for this — business and industry, civil society, political parties, politicians, government etc. No single section is solely responsible for this distressing situation of lack of mutual trust. The first step of dialogue will help bridge the trust deficit. This is achievable and must be attempted in 2020.

Third, fundamental to all communication and activity is transparency. And, this concerns all, impacts all and involves all. The transparency agenda calls for a new leaf to be turned in the hearts and minds of people, especially those who are seen to be “leaders” and “spokespersons”.

Fourth, somewhere along the way, we have forgotten the value of simplicity. And, when one tries to form an

image of simplicity, the life in village, rural society generally prevails. Gandhiji was perhaps the most recognised person for his simplicity and, with it, directness. Recapturing the norms of simplicity would be an important agenda for 2020.

Fifth, there is a preoccupation in India, especially urban India, with all things “big” and “ugly” (not beautiful). When solutions are discussed, they are also “big”, involving high cost and complex mechanisms to follow through. A much more manageable way forward is to think of multiple “small” solutions, which are also much easier to implement. For example, in creating jobs, the real answer lies in micro entrepreneurship, not with large companies with large capital-intensive investments. Micro entrepreneurship is really beautiful in every way — in terms of investment and effort, in terms of self-employment and employment, in terms of dignity, in terms of staying where one’s roots are (the village), in not disrupting the family system and so on.

“Small is beautiful” and far easier to achieve quick results and gain benefits. 2020 needs to see a shift in priority to the “small”.

Sixth, 2020 also needs to see us re-focus on implementation as distinct from announcements and promises. And, if the new focus is on “small” and “medium”, the implementation part will be much easier. The lack of implementation has been a source of great concern. This needs to be set right in 2020.

Seventh, the world is being swept by a technology tsunami which is impacting the lives of everyone. In this scenario, India’s technology initiative becomes very important to fuel development and growth. With near-700 million people living in the rural areas, India particularly needs to focus on technologies to improve the lives of the rural and agricultural population. More than ever before, this must be a priority for 2020. For this, the focus must be on agricultural technology, the use of space technology for crop forecasting, energy

technology to make available supply of decentralised green power, education and health care technologies for distance support, to mention just a few.

Eighth, 2020 needs to see a change in the lifestyle of people, with firm focus on fitness irrespective of the weather and by changing diet habits. Physical and mental fitness are connected with productivity and efficiency. Indians need to make a new beginning.

Ninth, and the final point, relates to values. India is known for its spiritual roots and strengths. Indians need to revisit and review the values they believe in, the values they live by, the values which are central to their lives. A good society can only happen if people have good values and 2020 is a year for deep introspection and action.

India, and Indians, have much to ponder and work on. As the country is in its 73<sup>rd</sup> year of Independence it is time to get the basics right so that our children and grandchildren inherit a nation more at peace with itself.

---

*The author is former director general and chief mentor, CII*