Harsha Kakar

Over the past seven and a half decades India has grown multi-fold. It is a nation with a strong economy, democracy and a powerful military. Global leaders rush to initiate economic deals and gain a foothold into the growing Indian market. It is considered a net security provider in the region as also an important member of any security coalition in Asia. For ensuring continued economic growth, national security remains paramount. Other than 1962, India has displayed its ability to thwart any threats to its territory.

75 years of independence and India still possesses un-demarcated borders. Very few nations in the world face two nuclear powered adversaries, one on either side, seeking its territory, as India does. India has fought a collection of wars since independence, including the 1971 war, resulting in the creation of Bangladesh, yet has been unable to buy peace. Both its major adversaries, Pakistan and China, operate in collusion, in a desperate bid to destabilize India. In fact, with passage of time, India's security threats have grown, rather than recede. These threats impact national development as scarce resources are diverted for enhancing national power to ward off security challenges.

India's security threats are multiple, ranging from internal, external, terrorism and hybrid. Internally, apart from the Naxal movement in central India, there are insurgencies in the Northeast, some of which are currently latent, but have the possibility of being exploited by adversaries. Terrorism, a growing global threat, also impacts India, mainly J and K, which Pakistan continues to support and ferment. Local participation does exist, though numbers are not alarming. Cyber threats are ongoing as part of hybrid warfare. Informational warfare, spreading fake news and seeking to break the Indian social fibre remain a major concern.

The LAC with China and the LoC with Pakistan remain active and need securing. China has, in recent times, displayed an intent to grab Indian territory by resorting to salami slicing. India has been able to push Pakistan back and hold the Chinese at bay. The regional security environment, stemming from an unstable Afghanistan will impact India in the near to mid-term. South Asia will remain affected by regional disagreements, instability and a pushing China seeking to edge out Indian influence from the region.

What should India aim to do? To push back China, India must seek to enhance its economic power. Unless India grows economically, the gap with China will continue to rise. The larger the gap in comprehensive national power, the more adventurous will China act. Simultaneously, India must enhance its engagements with like-minded nations to build coalitions against China. The greater the global push against Chinese offensive actions the more China will be forced onto the backfoot.

The third aspect which India must consider is enhancing military capabilities, whether these be in terms of firepower, intelligence, UAVs, cyber or creating deterrence against any misadventures. In this, India must raise and equip its mountain strike corps for operations in Ladakh. Finally, India must continue developing its border infrastructure, an act which threatens Aksai China. Unless it threatens Chinese vulnerabilities, China will never back down. China respects power and that is what India should seek to project.

Pakistan has been deterred by Indian punitive punishments. It has been

> No nation can secure itself if it is dependent on imports for building its military capabilities. There will always be riders and restrictions which can impact preparedness at crucial moments.

Security Challenges Galore

compelled to limit levels of terrorism on Indian soil. Simultaneously, external factors including a deteriorating internal security scenario in Afghanistan and its western provinces have placed brakes on Pakistan's Kashmir policy. These brakes are likely to be temporary. The possibility of collusion between Pakistan and China remain high. India can no longer have the luxury of employing the army in controlling the Kashmir and Northeast militancy's. It will have to train its Central Armed Police Forces to handle them, leaving the army to cater for external threats.

Internally, India must seek to engage in dialogue with Naxals and other groups threatening India's development and internal cohesion. The government must climb down from its pedestal to seek a solution for lasting peace and amalgamating these groups into the mainstream. These groups are aware that they will not succeed and must be given an opportunity for dialogue.

In the immediate neighbourhood India must remain the nation which can be depended upon. Indian largesse has helped these nations grow and the process must continue. They must realise that aligning with India would ensure their development and India has no territorial ambitions beyond its own borders. Unless our neighbourhood is secure from Chinese influence, India's security will always remain a matter of concern.

Management of defence at the national level is currently undergoing a transformation, an act which should have happened decades ago. This transformation should lead to the forces having a greater say in national security planning and decision making, rather than being relegated into the background as currently. This transformation should enhance capabilities and ensure bang for the buck in defence planning and procurement.

No nation can secure itself if it is dependent on imports for building its military capabilities. There will always be riders and restrictions which can impact preparedness at crucial moments. In addition, availability of spare parts will be dependent on diplomatic ties. A strong internal technological and military production base is essential for a nation seeking to be a global military power. For long India depended on its ordnance factories and DRDO, output of which was poor in quantity and quality. This resulted in banking on imports. More impetus needs to be given for enhancing capabilities of the domestic defence industry.

National security and national development are two sides of the same coin. One cannot happen without the other. If India, as a nation has to develop, then national security is paramount. Funds for national security can only flow from economic development. A realistic defence budget must be the order of the day rather than resorting to adhoc allocations post emergence of a threat.

Over decades, India has developed in every sphere. It is a nation with potential to grow and be a major economic and military power. This would enhance India's diplomatic outreach. However, its security challenges remain a stumbling block to development. Unless these are given due weightage, they will impact development.

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How Healthy is India

Dr Sanjay Kumar Bhasin

On 15 August 2021 when we celebrate 75th day of independence from the Colonial rule, it is important to review what we have achieved in these 74 years.

Thirty two crore Indians attained freedom 75 years back on 15th August with only 18.33% of the population being literate, women constituting only 8.86% (01 out of 11 being literate) and life expectancy stood at 32 years. Boosting healthcare infrastructure of the country was a daunting task for builders of Modern India, with only 50000 doctors and 725 healthcare centers at their disposal. Healthcare in India is an ancient phenomenon; during Buddha's time (6th BC) hospitals were constructed to look after the handicapped and the poor. King Ashoka (273-232 BC) constructed outstanding hospitals in India and study of Medicine at its bloom in India as has been mentioned by Arabian and European travelers in their books. Portuguese brought concept of Modern Medicine to India, British and French build approximately 7000 hospitals in India.

How the Healthcare System Progressed:

Immediately after independence Ministry of Health made health as priority in a series of 5-year plans and ultimately National Health Policy was endorsed by Parliament in 1983. India has a 'universal multi-payer health care model' paid for by a combination of public and private health insurances along with the element of almost entirely tax-funded public hospitals. Along with Allopathy, the Indian government also accepted Homeopathy, Ayurveda, Naturopathy, Yoga, Unani and Siddha as valid alternative medicine approaches. A three-tier structure defines the Indian healthcare system-primary, secondary and tertiary care services, wherein; the delivery of services is extended right from sub centres to super specialist hospitals. Central Government also ventured to focus on higher education, research and national health programmes. It also launched the CGHS (Central Government Health Scheme) for government sector employees.

India slowly and steadily increased number of Medical Colleges, Hospitals and Dispensaries. India has an estimated 714 thousand hospitals beds spread out over 69 thousand hospitals including around 1.1 million beds in private hospitals, outnumbering the public hospitals. At present India has 43,486 private and 25778 public hospitals in place with 59,264 ICUs, and 29,631 ventilators in private and 35,700 ICUs beds with 17,850 ventilators. With this India ranked 11th with a score of 24 in health services, and 9th under Personalized Technologies indicator with a score of 30. But despite all the progress in India, it is not a global leader as it contributes for a third of the world's poor; putting India at 131st rank out of 188 countries in United Nations Development Program report of the Human Development Index. The doctor-to-patient ratio remains abysmally low, at 0.7 doctors per 1,000 people against World Health Organization (WHO) average of 2.5 doctors per 1,000 people. But in spite of all odds, India has excellently controlled 06 major killer diseases, eradicated Small Pox and controlled AIDS exponential growth.

Present Health Status of India:

Our major health indicators are disheartening. India contributes to 15% of the global maternal deaths. MMR at 130 (2021) for every 100,000 live births is worst than neighboring countries like Thailand (20), Sri Lanka (36), and China (27). Similarly, our Infant Mortality Rate at 28.86/1000 live births at 50th place out of 222 countries, is much more than Sri Lanka (8), Nepal (25), Bangladesh (23), and Thailand (7), China (8) etc. Around 43% of Indian children are underweight today, in comparison to Pakistan (32%), China (4%), and Brazil (2%). According to the NFHS-4 data, only 62% of our children are fully immunized. Furthermore, India has the global rank 1 for tuberculosis (TB), contributing to 27% of the global notification of TB cases. Other developing Nations are placed much better than India. Non-communicable diseases burden is also much more with over 69 million diabetics in India and more than 1 million smoking-related deaths. Average age of the first heart attack among Indians is 53 years, 5-10 years earlier than in other nations.

India's share in the global burden of diseases is quite significant (20%). India has only 9% of the global community health workers, 8% of the doctors globally (7.7 lacs in 2017), 8% nurses, 6% of the beds for patient care and only 1% laboratory technicians. India's health-care access and quality index is even lower than small countries like Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal. Our public health financing is amongst lowest in the world, varying from 1.2% to 1% of the GDP.

Stressful Areas:

India's healthcare system has been battling various issues, including the lack of infrastructure, less-than-adequate human resources, unmanageable patient-load and population growth. High out-of-pocket expenditure remains stress factor with 65 per cent of medical expenses in India are paid out of pocket by patients (ranked 10th worst out of 185 countries). While public hospitals offer free health services, these facilities are understaffed, poorly equipped, and located mainly in urban areas. Preventive health has taken the back seat. Teaching institutions are fast becoming treatment centres severely affecting quality medical education.

India at 75 still have a long way to go before we can confidently say that our healthcare system is strong enough and is accessible to each and every citizen, irrespective of their ability to afford the same.

Conclusion:

Health, both physical and behavioral, is something that is of utmost importance to any nation if it wants to progress. India at 75 still have a long way to go before we can confidently say that our healthcare system is strong enough and is accessible to each and every citizen, irrespective of their ability to afford the same. On the positive side, Indian healthcare has surely come a long way post-independence. We have been slowly but gradually moving in the direction. Even though the healthcare infrastructure calls for a major overhaul, India has been able to put itself on the world map when it comes to medical tourism. Alternative treatments like Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy have also seen a boom especially in the last decade or so. Accessible and Affordable healthcare in the public sector can considerably reduce the rise in dependence on private institutions. National Health Policy (NHP) 2017 with target of 'Health for All' at an affordable cost must focus towards proactive healthcare, not reactive healthcare. For that health and wellness centres (HWCs) component should get equal attention as the Ayushman Bharat scheme, the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) and universal health insurance scheme are getting. 75 onwards, India has to constantly keep working in the direction. Government initiatives and schemes, public private partnerships (PPP) in health, private sector hospitals, increasing awareness about health insurance and even start-ups in the space that use technology to reach a wider set of audience, hold the key in creating a robust healthcare ecosystem that will benefit the maximum number of our citizens. Citizens of the country hope that healthcare budgets shall be increased in view of the needs of the Nation for its lasting progress as Progress of the Nation is determined directly by the Health of its Citizens.

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