



India calling

Indian prime minister
Narendra Modi woos
diaspora to boost
economic growth

REPORTS ON PAGES 4, 6 & 8

PHOTO: © AFP



Towards development... Mr Modi (front row centre) with global dignitaries at the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit 2015 in Gandhinagar. PHOTO: © AFP PHOTO/PIB

and a remarkably declining rate of economic growth in the last few years.

It was frustrating for them that the country that nurtured them was mired in poverty and afflicted with dismal infrastructure. Potholed roads, power shortage, beggars and slums were not part of the India of their dreams. India seemed to be failing rather than transforming itself.

The second generation of diasporic Indians found this even more difficult to digest than their parents. After all, their parents had sung the glories of India that did not match its visual representation. India's rapid economic growth had comforted first and second generation diasporic Indians but scams over the allocation of spectrum to telecom companies and coal-mining blocks that occurred just at the time when the growth rate had dipped, was the source of serious anguish. India was afflicted by what became famously known as "policy paralysis".

It was in depressive times such as these that along came a King Arthur-like Narendra Modi, who

gave the diaspora hope. He has sought to assure them of a corruption-free and growth-oriented India after presiding over a period of spectacular growth in his home state Gujarat as its chief minister. Moreover, the diaspora did not miss his election campaign, which was heroic in terms of his charisma and stamina. And, there seemed no doubt whatsoever that the Congress Party's prime ministerial candidate Rahul Gandhi was no match for Mr Modi.

Mr Modi was quick to reap the diasporic advantage during his trips to the US and Australia in 2014. He portrayed himself as a charismatic and heroic rockstar who was the ray of hope. In eight minutes at Central Park in September last year, he roused an American audience in a persuasive speech delivered with a vernacular English accent. He connected the West with India and ended with a Vedantic message of spiritual cosmopolitanism.

This was followed by an even more spectacular performance at Madison Square Garden. He is unparalleled in spontaneous Hindi delivered with perfect timing, intonation and without a script. At Madison Square Garden he roused the diaspora. India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru was a great orator but was quite condescending towards the diaspora. Prime ministers P.V. Narasimha Rao, Atal

RAHUL MUKHERJI

INDIAN prime minister Narendra Modi has secured a "prophet-like" status among diasporic Indians in the last few months.

India's booming growth in the 1990s and the early years of this millennium had led to a surge in diaspora pride. The diaspora is powerful. Diasporic Indian Americans, for example, are more qualified and enjoy more substantial earnings than the average US citizen.

They belong to the hardworking middle class who strove hard in a system that rewarded merit. They have been appointed as deans at Harvard, university professors at Columbia and Harvard, as CEOs of companies like Pepsi and Microsoft and have won the highest professional awards such as the Nobel Prize and the Fields Medal in mathematics.

Some have become heads of state and others such as steel magnate Lakshmi Mittal have gone abroad and worked hard to be counted among the richest. Such is their prowess that their influence was felt when India was negotiating the nuclear deal with the US. Last year alone, this diaspora sent US\$70 billion in remittances to India. These earnings are a healthy contribution to India's economic

India calling

security. It is no wonder, therefore, that Mr Modi has accorded the highest priority to wooing the Indian diaspora.

The diaspora in Singapore is quite influential. They have won Indian national awards and form a sizeable chunk of wealthy Singaporeans. Many leaders in the banking, IT, investment and the scholarly community are part of the diaspora. A large number of alumni from the Indian Institutes of Technology and the Indian Institutes of Management have made Singapore their home and are doing well.

The diaspora was deeply anguished by an India riddled by corruption, anti-corruption movements

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

FROM PAGE 4

Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh had realised the strategic value of the diaspora but lacked Mr Modi's spectacular appeal.

At the Madison Square Garden, Mr Modi made pointed references to "Bharat Mata" and how it was a diasporic "karma" (duty) to connect with the motherland. What, after all, are children without the mother! The status of the mother as the source of love has been a soft spot for Indian men and women. The speech hit the bullseye. And, the motherland even promised everlasting visas for all Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs). Not only was the idea of the motherland and the mother invoked, she was also seen to be giving. And, all this was in the context of a promise of a corruption-free, transformed and rapidly-growing motherland.

The performance at Madison Square Garden was repeated once again in Sydney with a similar effect. Even those who were sceptical of Mr Modi's credentials as a secular democrat began to buy into the Modi rhetoric of the arrival of a saviour. A call to diasporic Indians at the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (An-

India calling

Wooing the diaspora... Mr Modi delivering the inaugural address to the Indian diaspora at the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas 2015 in Gandhinagar, Gujarat.
PHOTO: PIB

WHAT THE INDIAN DIASPORA IN SINGAPORE SAYS ABOUT PM MODI'S CALL:
PAGE 8



nual Convention of Diasporic Indians) a few days ago reinforced this message.

Mr Modi, home minister Rajnath Singh, foreign minister Sushma Swaraj and chief ministers of states such as Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab and Kerala were seen engaging in dialogue and convincing the diaspora to invest in India, especially in their respective states. Just days before this convention the president of the World Bank had affirmed the soundness of India's growth strategy.

India's call to its diaspora is one of the most persuasive and successful aspects of prime minister Modi's governance. There are many low-hanging fruits such as implementing investments by persons of Indian origin that can be easily plucked. This government is more likely to be adept in picking such low-hanging fruit than making long-term changes in the regulatory environment or reducing corruption by changing electoral laws.

The diaspora has the power to invest. It can bring new technology and management practices, and add to the knowledge base of the motherland. This power should be deployed responsibly. First, if the diaspora feels that its experience abroad has taught it all the lessons that India needs to learn, that will be a mistake.

India has peculiar problems that need a home-grown understanding. Its founding fathers, like Mohandas Gandhi, spent considerable effort learning about India to understand the country from an indigenous perspective. Moreover, iconic figures such as Gandhi, Nehru and Jayaprakash Narayan were seriously worried about the poor. Second, India's experience with democracy and secularism is quite remarkable. If the diaspora uses its might to undermine Indian pluralism, this will be striking at its very roots.

The diaspora can nevertheless play a historic catalytic role in Indian investment. Everyone expects the Indian economy to grow – some even expect that it will grow as rapidly or even surpass China in the next couple of years. And, a poor country that grows rapidly is the ideal investment destination.

India bemoans a 5 per cent growth rate with limited natural resources when countries like Russia, Brazil and South Africa are often not even achieving half that rate. The country's stock markets have welcomed Mr Modi. India today is an excellent investment destination for the diaspora because investment in India has never been easy. Considering the government's interest in wooing the diaspora and its commitment to economic growth, this is an excellent occasion to reap the benefits of being a foreigner of Indian origin.

Rahul Mukherji is associate professor in the South Asian Studies Programme in NUS. He is concurrently honorary senior fellow and head (research) at the Institute of South Asian Studies, NUS. His two recent books are The Oxford India Short Introduction To The Political Economy Of Reforms In India and Globalization And Deregulation: Ideas, Interests And Institutional Change In India.

“AS A third-generation Singaporean of Indian origin, I see PM Modi’s call as indeed very timely and most welcome. He has created a lot of excitement among the Indian diaspora, like me, who are still very connected to India. Many Indians who have left for other countries are now going back and, with their return, they will bring with them intellectual and financial knowledge as well as expertise and capital that will help to transform the country. At Raffles Park (a luxury villa project in Bangalore), we have attempted to bring world-class design and quality standards to India. My belief in India and the role of the diaspora since the days at Scotts Holdings and now at Raffles Park and SilverNeedle Hospitality has never waned. I see India as a destination for investment opportunities and am very encouraged by the changes being made and PM Modi’s recognition of the role the diaspora can play.”

– Mr Iqbal Jumabhoy (right), group CEO, SilverNeedle Hospitality Singapore



India calling

What the Indian diaspora in Singapore says about PM Modi’s call

“PRIME Minister Narendra Modi’s call to ‘Make in India’ has resonated with many Persons of Indian Origin (PIO) across the globe.

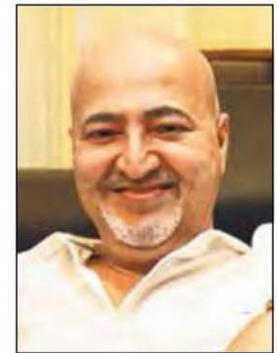
“Firstly, this call, unlike in the past, has been clearly calibrated not only to attract foreign direct investment (FDI), but also to retain it in the country for a long period by vastly improving the living conditions and fixing the infrastructure woes which has, hitherto, been the Achilles heels for FDI.

“Towards this the BJP government has embarked on efficiency, cleanliness and courtesy drives to improve the living standards in the country. And helping this effort is the rise in nationalistic pride of many Indians who see themselves as instruments for change in the new resurgent India.

“Indeed in my frequent travels to India, I have lately noticed the usual bribes being forsaken with beaming pride and a sense of righteousness. All this portends a great beginning by the immensely popular prime minister whose humility and simplicity continues to strengthen the country despite the various challenges.

“The synergy between India, which is a major content maker for the entertainment industry and Singapore, which is a low cost funding base, is likely to play an important role in the future.”

– Mr Deepak G. Gurnani (above), director, Tequila Shot Entertainment, who heeded Mr Modi’s call to “Make in India” and set up the production house in Mumbai last year. He has been in Singapore for 24 years.



“I FEEL it’s an appropriate calling which will resonate well with the current breed of talented NRI/PIOs settled internationally. Especially considering the very dynamic buzz that PM Narendra Modi has created, there is an allure to all things happening in India. But, frankly, one has to be realistic considering that the diaspora now has access to instantaneous information about what is regularly happening in India. Therefore, the perception must match the reality as much as possible. Besides, there are many ways to participate in India’s growth story without actually having to be there physically. Thus, that segment of the diaspora that can indirectly help

strengthen India should also be tapped. I’m optimistic that the next few years hold a lot of promise for India and it is perfectly correct for PM Modi to expect the diaspora to play its part.”

– Mr Atish Mody (above), managing director, Batavia Eximp & Contracting, who has been in Singapore for 32 years

