

Book Review

Accelerating India: 7 Years of Modi Government: Edited by K.J.Alphons, IAS (retd), Member of Parliament, Oakbridge 2021 pages 338 price Rs. 795/-

V.Srinivas¹

K.J.Alphons, a distinguished civil servant, former Union Minister and Member of Parliament, an anti-corruption crusader has presented a timely tribute to Prime Minister Modi's achievements through an anthology of essays by eminent civil servants and domain experts qualitatively and quantitatively evaluating the policies of government in the period 2014-2021, their impact on the citizens and the Nation. The book focuses on critical policy areas of internal security, defence, foreign policy, economy, energy, environment & forest, industry, civil aviation, digital India; key social policy sectors of health, education, Swachh Bharat, drinking water and rural development, social justice and empowerment providing deep insights into the government policies and schemes, accelerating India's progress and rise in the comity of Nations.

K.J.Alphons is eminently qualified for undertaking this massive policy analysis having served as a civil servant, as a union minister and as the Member of Parliament. His grasp of public policy, breadth of understanding of key areas of governance that have resulted in the all round progress of India are visible in the structure and presentation of the book. Each of the authors have been distinguished civil servants in their own right, having played leadership roles in policy making and were pioneers in institutionalizing new India's governance models. The overwhelming message from K.J.Alphons's book is that India's governance models have evolved bringing significant benefits to millions of citizens through digital means, under the maxim "Maximum Governance – Minimum Government".

In his foreword, the National Security Advisor, Ajit Doval says Nation Building is a complex and painstaking process, which requires tireless efforts over decades to strengthen national security and channelize the collective energies of people behind a common objective. This is best reflected in the Prime Minister's focus on *sabkasaath – sabkavikas - sabkavishwas* which has taken development and prosperity to all 739 districts of India. India's resolve to protect its sovereignty, territorial integrity, the policy of zero tolerance on cross-border terrorism have enhanced its international credibility and resolve. The abrogation of Article 370 and Article 35A of the Constitution have enabled the full integration of J&K and Ladakh with the rest of India.

¹ V.Srinivas currently serves as Special Secretary to Government of India, Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions and Director General National Centre for Good Governance

In his overview chapter, the Chief Executive Officer NITI Amitabh Kant says Prime Minister Modi stands out as a true reformer who has worked with passion and visionary zeal, enabling India's reforms to gather unprecedented pace pivoting holistic social development. Empowerment of citizens through financial inclusion, access to education, rural sanitation, clean energy through LPG connections, housing for all, electrification and drinking water schemes, enhanced rural connectivity have represented significant milestones during Prime Minister Modi's tenure. This was possible by breaking down silos and making the bureaucracy work together as a team to deliver results on the ground.

In the chapter on Internal Security, former Home Secretary L.C.Goyal says that the surgical strikes of 2016 and the pre-emptive Balakot air strike in 2019, India has sent a loud and clear message to Pakistan that India is firm in the pursuit of zero tolerance for cross-border terrorism. This was possible because of a decisive and dynamic political leadership. The security situation in the North East has improved significantly enabled by peace talks with various insurgent groups and massive infrastructure and development projects. The arc of violence in Left Wing Extremist districts has been considerably restricted with strengthened security and intelligence mechanisms. The abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A through a legal constitutional process will bring about a new dawn of sustainable development, enduring peace and social harmony in J&K.

In the chapter on Defence, former Defence Secretary G.Mohan Kumar says Modi government has seen several bold initiatives to build defence capability and to achieve self reliance in defence manufacturing. Further the Government has shown a readiness to usher several welfare measures for servicemen and gender justice in granting one rank – one pension facility, building a war memorial in the national capital and allowing women to become fighter pilots in the Indian Air Force. Several key decisions to enhance India's strike capability have been taken, with procurement of Rafale aircraft, Chinook heavy lift helicopters, Apache attack helicopters and howitzers. The defence procurement procedure accorded highest priority to 'indigenously designed, developed and manufactured' in procurement. Other milestone decisions include the appointment of the Chief of Defence Staff, with the clear mandate to work towards the creation of theater commands in 3 years time and the corporatization of the Ordnance Factory Board. There has been a lot of stress on Make in India and the Quest for Self Reliance in domestic manufacturing for enabling a vibrant private sector industry ecosystem.

In the chapter on Foreign Policy, former Private Secretary to Prime Minister late Shakti Sinha says that Prime Minister Modi's foreign policy has been about the relentless pursuit of national interests with a willingness to go beyond the doctrinaire approach of the past. India is not only a part of the Quad but also a part of the SCO, taking part in trilateral dialogues with Japan and USA as also with China and Russia. India has also developed close relations with Saudi Arabia and Israel. Several foreign policy achievements stand out – the neighborhood first policy seen in relations with Bhutan,

Maldives, Sri Lanka, the visits of 2 Presidents of USA to India, the Howdy Modi event in Texas, the commitments made by India at the Paris Climate Conference, the strategic relationship with Israel and the ability to connect with diaspora to help advance India's interests.

In the chapter on Education, former HRD Secretary Vrinda Sarup highlights the features of the New Education Policy 2020 expected to bring the most significant reforms in India's education system. The NEP 2020 seeks to create multidisciplinary institutions, which permit students to have a multidisciplinary approach for undergraduate courses, by integration of arts subjects with science. The bachelor's degree would vary from 3 to 4 years, the Masters degree would vary from 1 to 2 years. The NEP 2020 commits to significantly raise the educational investment by Centre and States to 6 percent of GDP at the earliest.

In the chapter on Swachh Bharat, former Secretary Water and Sanitation Parameswara Iyer, says that the Swachh Bharat Mission, inspired and led by Prime Minister Modi represents India's sanitation revolution and one of the biggest behavior changing mass movements in the country. On October 2, 2019, Prime Minister Modi announced India was free from open defecation. The SBM approached behavioral changes through mass media, village volunteers and creating a Jan Andolan by involving people from all walks of life. Achieving an ODF India in record time meant that India has achieved the Sustainable Development Goal 6.2 – Sanitation for All, 11 years before the target date of December 2030.

In the chapter on Transport and Highways, the author K.J. Alphons and Advisor NHAI Vaibhav Dange say that, the road sector has witnessed proactive governance with innovative finance instruments like masala bonds, toll operate transfer facilities and MOU between NHAI and SBI for long term unsecured loan for 10 years. The period also witnessed streamlining procedures for land acquisition, bidder information management systems, alignment of national highways. Several important road projects were completed including bridges, ring-roads and expressways. In addition, the road transport sector witnessed a number of green initiatives like implementation of BS-VI emission norms and promotion of electric vehicles. The Motor Vehicle Act was simplified for simplification of driving licence procedures and enhanced safety of passengers.

In the chapter on Agriculture, former Secretary Agriculture Ashish Bahuguna says that the intentions of the government were to provide a new and better deal to farmers by doubling farmer's incomes by 2022. The pathways for this were to increase productivity, effective and efficient use of inputs, crop intensification and diversification, reduction of post harvest losses and increasing non-farm employment. More rural markets were created, investments in warehousing and processing were enhanced, electronic marketing encouraged and procurement other than wheat and paddy by FCI was increased to bolster prices. A direct cash transfer scheme, Pradhan

Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi was announced which transfers Rs. 6000/- per landholder farmer per year to enable them to lead a life of dignity and respect. However it soon became clear that the policy environment in Agriculture needed to be drastically revamped for these measures to bear fruit as the agriculture sector was beset with too many constraints. Hence 3 agri-legislations were enacted – the first to allow the farmers the freedom to sell their produce outside the regulated markets, the second to promote contracts for cultivation and sale of farm produce to bulk users and others on preset terms and conditions and third to remove limits on stocks of agri-produce. These statutes are the sine-qua-non for agricultural growth and prosperity.

In the chapter on Health, former Secretary Health Preeti Sudan says that the National Health Policy 2017 was operationalized with the launch of the Ayushman Bharat with its twin pillars of Health and Wellness Centres and Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana in 2018. 1,50,00 peripheral centres in rural and urban areas are to be upgraded to health and wellness centres by 2022. Further the scheme aims to provide insurance cover on a cashless and portable basis for 50 crore Indians. A number of measures were taken to strengthen, augment and redesign existing initiatives including the National Health Mission. Sweeping reforms were introduced in Medical Education with the establishment of the National Medical Commission and tertiary health care capacity was enhanced by upgradation of 75 medical colleges and 22 new AIIMS. India's public health response to the COVID-19 pandemic was centred around the essentials of test, track, isolate and treat. Investments in health sector were enhanced to manage surveillance and contact tracing, augmenting medical oxygen supply, establishing the PM CARES fund and global pioneering effort of development of vaccine within a year of the pandemic. India's vaccination drive began on January 16, 2021 and by October 2021, India had administered 100 crore citizens.

In the chapter on Economy, former Chief Information Commissioner Bimal Julka and Anantha Nageswaran say that Modi government was successful in maintaining India's macroeconomic stability in the face of the severest crisis in the pandemic. India's foreign exchange reserves are at a record high, and despite the pandemic inflation remains within historic ranges. The Indian rupee has been stable and fiscal deficit is on projected lines. The Direct Benefits Transfer and JAM Trinity have ensured that government benefits in cash and kind reach the poor without leakage. The enactment of the Goods and Services Act and the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code represent significant progressive steps. The Production Linked Incentive schemes have been expanded to incentivize electronics and pharmaceutical ingredients, mobile phones and the National Asset Monetization Plan has been announced.

In the chapter on India's Covid Response, Principal Economic Advisor Sanjeev Sanyal says that Indian government prioritized on saving lives while providing cushion for the most vulnerable sections of society and business sector. Several lessons learnt from the second wave of the pandemic resulted in significant policy corrections in India's pandemic response.

In the chapter on Industry – The Way Forward, Chairman and CEO Hero Motocorp and Vice Chairman CII Dr. Pawan Munjal says that the way forward is to boost consumption spending by further reduction in GST rates, expedite implementation of the PLI scheme for auto sector and release delayed payments to MSMEs. Other measures suggested include improving ease of doing business by effective implementation of the online single window system.

In the chapter Indian Civil Service, former Additional Chief Secretary Kerala says that India needs karmayogis who will be friends-in-need for the common man. The Mission Karmayogi seeks to create a future ready civil service by synergizing training standards, an integral part of which is the Integrated Government Online Training (iGOT) to enable civil servants to undergo continuous training. Further the Modi government has displayed a zero tolerance to corruption with dozens of civil servants being dismissed from service.

In the chapter Digital India, the author K.J.Alphons and IT Expert Akash Alphons say that the Modi government foresaw the role of technology in the development of India way before others. Digital India was announced as a technology led intervention for inclusive growth and empowerment of common citizens. The Bharatnet seeks to connect all 2,50,000 gram panchayats by optical fiber. As a next step, 6 lac villages will be connected by optical fiber broadband. Other major telecom sector reforms include the smooth rollout of 4G services in India, expansion of the Common Services Centres and using the JAM trinity as the foundation for DBT. Financial inclusion through the India Post Payment Bank, providing more and more digital services on UMANG app have enhanced government's credibility. The rapid implementation of mission mode e-governance projects: e-hospital, e-NAM was seen, with MyGov platform being used for engaging with citizens.

In the chapter on Environment and Forest, former Secretary Forest and Environment C.K.Mishra says that Prime Minister Modi led the Indian initiative to be amongst the few countries which are on track to achieving its commitments to Paris Agreement of holding global warming to below 2 degrees Celsius. India has given a clarion call to the world that environmental protection is critical for survival not only of humankind. The Prime Minister has also started a revolution in the field of renewable energy with the launch of the international solar alliance. Ujala and Ujjwala schemes were implemented as clean energy projects.

In the chapter on Drinking Water, Additional Secretary & Mission Director National Jal Jeevan Mission Bharat Lal says that Prime Minister Modi envisaged the Jal Jeevan Mission – Har Ghar Jal scheme to provide a functional household tap connection in every rural home by 2024. Tap water connection in every home brings dignity to the people and brings in ease and convenience in accessing safe water. Hitherto nearly 10,000 villages have achieved 100 percent coverage.

In the chapter The Green Energy Revolution in India and Electricity for All, former Chief Secretary Assam, Jiten Khosla says that India's electricity regulatory system is integrating renewable energy and its utilities are undergoing transformation, greening their energy mix and establishing smart grids accommodative of renewable energy. The policy focus on renewable energy has attracted investments and India has 3 of the 5 largest solar parks with the Bhadla Solar Park having a capacity of 2255 MW. KUSUM scheme for farmers envisages to promote the setting up of renewable energy power plants by individual/ groups of farmers. Green energy corridors are being built in the renewable energy rich States.

In the chapter Industry and Labor, former Labor and Employment Secretary Gauri Kumar says that there was a massive increase in the number of active members in the Employee Provident Funds and Employees State Insurance Scheme. Four Labour codes were enacted in 2020, Industrial Relations Code, 2020, the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020, the Code on Wages and the Code on Social Security which will unshackle India's workforce from the complicated laws during the licence raj.

In the chapter on Rural Development, former Secretary Rural Development Jugal Mohapatra says that the two flagship programs for Rural Development – the MGNREGA and the PMAY (G) were better designed to improve their last mile delivery. The goal was to provide much needed employment to households whose livelihoods were severely affected in the pandemic and to attain the Prime Minister's goal of 'housing for all' by 2022.

In the chapter on Indian Railways, former Chairman & CEO Railway Board Vinod Kumar Yadav says that Safety reigns Supreme in the Indian Railways. Capacity enhancement measures were undertaken with the National Rail Plan 2030 for development of infrastructure and catering to traffic needs. Multi-tracking of the 14000 kms network, electrification of the entire railway network, upgrading speed potential of important routes have been planned as part of vision 2024. The Bogibeel road cum rail bridge was inaugurated in 2018, greatly improving connectivity in North East. Dedicated freight corridors have been accelerated and first ever high-speed rail (Mumbai-Ahmedabad) is under execution. The Railways has witnessed organization restructuring in 2019, with unification of 8 organized Group A services into the Indian Railways Management Service. New passenger services using PPP has been envisaged.

In the chapter Tourism and Culture, former Culture Secretary Ravindra Singh and Tourism and Hospitality Expert Taru Bahl say that Prime Minister Modi gave the vision of Ek Bharat Shresht Bharat in 2015. The Museum of Prime Ministers is being developed at the NMML and the National War Memorial and Museum was inaugurated in 2019 at India gate. A stimulus package was announced for tourism industry, and development of tourism sites with e-ticketing, night illumination was pursued. Prime

Minister Modi gave the call for an International Yoga Day and the scope of the IDY on June 21 was extended with mass celebrations in India and over 150 countries.

In the chapter on Civil Aviation, former Chairman Airports Economic Regulatory Authority of India S.Machendranathan says that the main focus of the New Civil Aviation Policy 2016 has been to promote regional connectivity and make air travel affordable to masses. UDAN scheme has become the flagship program of the government and the scheme has been a tremendous success in opening up new routes in connecting new towns. The privatization of Air India has been announced. The Vande Bharat Mission responded to the evacuation requests of Indian citizens.

In the chapter on Urban Sector, former UN Civil Servant O.P.Agarwal says that Modi government adopted 100 cities were adopted under the Smart Cities Mission and 500 cities were adopted for improvement of basic services. The Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban) converted several cities like Indore, Bhopal, Vizag into role models of cleanliness. The central vista redevelopment project seeks to create a common central secretariat to house all ministries.

In the chapter on Social Justice and Empowerment, former Central Information Commissioner Sudhir Bhargava says that Modi government has displayed considerable sensitivity towards the SC's, ST's, OBC's and economically weaker sections and launched several educational, economic and social initiatives to enable them to live productive, safe and dignified lives. The SC and ST Prevention of Atrocities Act 1989 was amended to make it more robust and stringent to address the issues of continuing atrocities against SC's and ST's. Modi government brought systemic changes in the scholarship schemes by ensuring digitization of the entire process of providing scholarships. Further, Modi government took the historic decision to fulfill the mandate of Article 46 and amended the Constitution in January 2019 to provide reservation for economically weaker sections.

To conclude, author K.J.Alphons says that Prime Minister Modi has built the basic foundations for the poor to live a dignified life, to have decent jobs. Prime Minister Modi is a staunch believer in job creation by the private sector.

A thoroughly enjoyable read.

.....