

**Opening Remarks by Shri K. C. Pant, Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission
on the occasion of the Release of the Report of the Committee on “India
Vision 2020” on 23rd January, 2003**

Every country needs a vision statement which stirs the imagination and motivates all segments of society to a greater effort. It is an essential step in building a political consensus on a broad national development strategy, which encompasses, inter-alia, the roles and responsibilities of different agents in the economy, such as Central, State and local government, the private corporate sector, the small and tiny sector, people’s organisation etc. It must identify potential risks and bottlenecks and their possible solutions in order to mobilise efforts in a focussed manner. It is clear, therefore, that to meet these objectives, a vision statement has to operate at several levels of generality and specificity.

In order to address these issues, among others, the Planning Commission constituted a Committee on Vision 2020 in June, 2000 under the chairmanship of Dr. S. P. Gupta, Member, Planning Commission. This initiative brought together over 30 experts from different fields. Their deliberations, extending over a period of more than two years, have raised a range of interesting possibilities, critical issues and crucial decision-points for future action by government and private bodies. The collective views of the Committee have now been distilled in the Report that it has presented to the Government.

This Report examines a very wide range of important issues, but the ones that stand out most powerfully are employment and education. In order to ensure access to food and other essentials of a healthy life for all citizens, India faces the challenge of generating 200 million new employment opportunities over the next two decades. This report calls for raising employment generation to the top of the nation’s development agenda and marshalling all available resources to create productive employment opportunities for all job-seekers. It goes even further by identifying the sectors which offer the greatest potential for job creation as well as critical policy issues that need to be addressed in order to fully tap that potential.

Education is the second main thrust area of this vision document. Greater coverage and better quality education at all levels from basic literacy to hi-tech science and technology is the essential prerequisite for raising agricultural productivity and industrial quality, spurring growth of India’s burgeoning IT and biotechnology sectors, stimulating growth of manufactured and service exports, improving health and nutrition, ensuring domestic stability and enhancing the quality of governance. The report calls for concerted efforts to abolish illiteracy, achieve 100 per cent enrollment at primary and secondary levels, and broaden access to higher education and vocational training through both traditional and non-traditional delivery systems.

The document also examines issues related to population growth, food production, health, vulnerable sections of the population, transport, communication, energy self-sufficiency, water conservation, air quality, trade, investment, peace, security and governance.

In the year 2020 it envisions that India's 1.35 billion people will be better fed, dressed and housed, healthier, more educated and longer living than any generation in the country's long history. Illiteracy and all major contagious diseases will have disappeared. School enrolment from age 6 to 14 will be near 100 per cent.

According to this report, today's inequalities between different age groups, sexes, income groups, communities and regions will come down dramatically. Regional disparities however will remain visible, though all regions will have advanced significantly in these two decades. India 2020 must be one in which all levels and sections of the population and all parts of the country march forward together towards a more secure and prosperous future.

Cell phones, computers and the Internet will permeate every aspect of life and every corner of the country. Computerisation of education will dramatically improve the quality of instruction and the pace of learning. Computerisation in government will streamline procedures and response times to a degree unimaginable now.

However, the report feels that major environmental issues will still remain a serious concern. Urban air pollution will probably be brought under control by strict enforcement of motor vehicle emission standards and widespread use of ethanol-blended motor fuels, but water shortages in major metropolitan areas will continue despite a national programme to popularise water harvesting techniques in both urban and rural areas. A massive afforestation programme will reverse the depletion of forest areas, raise the nation's Green cover to 33 per cent of area, generate millions of rural employment opportunities, and provide abundant renewable energy from biomass power production.

India will be much more integrated with the global economy and will be a major player in terms of trade, technology and investment.

Rising levels of education, employment and income will help stabilise India's internal security and social environment. A united and prosperous India will be far less vulnerable to external security threats.

A more prosperous India in 2020 will be characterised by a better-educated electorate and more transparent, accountable, efficient and decentralised government.

All in all, it covers almost every facet of existence of our nation and of our people not only as it should be, but as it can be.

I commend the Vision 2020 Committee and especially Dr S P Gupta for preparing this document that will provide a framework and perspective for those in government and the private sector who are tasked with formulating initiatives for national prosperity.

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