

Op Ed on “Accessible Bharat Abhiyan”

India needs “Accessible Bharat Abhiyan”, the Strategic Initiative to Empower Specially Abled People

With the new NDA government in India led by Shri Modi, we can see the wave of CHANGE coming. From unprecedented International diplomacy to attract investments in India to monthly review of plans and progress in different departments to see the vision of India materialize as committed in the BJP manifesto is a welcome change from the politics of yesteryears when election Manifestos were fantasy on colorful paper to be trashed as soon as elections were over.

Our government and especially our PM, knows by experience in Gujarat that Infrastructure is the backbone of growth and economic development and to do that India has to become the Investment Magnet for the world. His focus on developing world class infrastructure to connect all the corners of India and the remotest villages using roads, rails and internet is right on the Bull's Eye and it will benefit not only today's population but the generations to come.

In this highly charged, dynamic and progressive era, we should think about and integrate all Indians including the PwDs (Persons with Disability) in this development path. Accessibility of the physical environment starting from the home to the road, through the bus to the school and from the college to the work place for all the PwD is critically important. Today when we are envisioning and planning India of tomorrow with infrastructure that is comparable to the developed and also some of the developing countries, we cannot forget that it essentially means that all PwD have access to every place just like a person who is not a PwD. This State of the Art infrastructure can be the pivotal transformational beginning for approximately 7 crore Specially Abled People (Persons with Disability), towards a bright future.

Accessible Bharat Abhiyan is the manifestation of the Idea that we must integrate the need of “Accessible Infrastructure for a Barrier-Free Environment” for all the PwD with the grand plan of Infrastructure development in India. In our opinion we could not have asked for a better opportunity to take a giant leap with the momentum already existing and synergizing the goals so that we can cover a lot of ground in a short time with maximum impact and the biggest bang for our Rupee, if I may say so...

As is self-evident, Accessible Bharat Abhiyan (ABA) is envisioned to be the First Nationwide Initiative to create Awareness, Build Partners and Support Mechanisms (like budget provisions, IT systems, designs and solutions per Indian conditions etc.) in the first phase and start implementing in phases with total conviction to achieve the Goal of Barrier-Free Bharat for all its citizens in the next decade. In the BJP election manifesto 7 specific commitments were given for the PwD in India and the implementation of those commitments is the basis of the Idea of ABA. The key Goals of this Strategic Abhiyan are

1. Unified efforts by all the stakeholders from Central Government, State Governments, Communities, Public and Private sector corporations and Civil Societies to attain 80% retrofitting of all existing infrastructure by 2020 to make it Accessible for all.
2. All new infrastructure planned and implemented in India from 2015 onwards should be Accessible according to Universal Accessibility Standards.
3. Introducing Accessibility and Universal Design and compliance related educational and technical courses in all relevant engineering, architecture, planning and management degrees/diplomas so that we create a qualified workforce that is well versed in planning, implementing and maintaining the new infrastructure.
4. Creating awareness and sensitivity at all levels of social structure to inculcate the consideration for PwD by everyone in all aspects of everyday living by education, example and legal mandate with effective implementation mechanisms.

5. Foster innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship in the youth to develop indigenous designs and solutions appropriate for Indian conditions for providing the accessibility to all types of disabled people of our country.

If we can create a ripple effect of awareness in today's Indian society by meeting the abovementioned goals by 2020, we can be living in a country that can proudly proclaim to be an Inclusive Society like many other Developed and developing countries. ABA's social awareness campaign will yield Social Mindset Change that will be opening up to rapid assimilation of PwD in the mainstream of India from Educational Institutions, Corporate houses, Administrative and Executive offices to the Echelons of political power thus creating an environment of equality, dignity and Independence for all citizens in the true sense.

This can very well be India's Golden opportunity that has social, economic, psychological and real measurable upside in bettering the Standard of Living for all Indians.

If you are interested in learning more about the Accessible Bharat Abhiyan (ABA), please contact the author at pranavpwd1995@gmail.com and provide the feedback and suggestions.

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