

Notes from Davos: India @ Davos 2023

By Ajay Khanna, ET CONTRIBUTORS Last Updated: Jan 14, 2023, 07:03 PM IST

Synopsis

India has a strong representation and has one of the largest contingents. The Ministerial delegation includes four cabinet ministers, Smriti Irani, RK Singh, Mansukh Mandaviya and Ashwini Vaishnaw. Three ministers are first timers in Davos; but if last week's preparatory meeting was any indication, the ministers are already up to speed with their narrative on India.



India lounge being readied

Last few days, we have witnessed a severe cold wave in Delhi and North India. At 10 degrees centigrade I am struggling in Gurugram. I was imagining my plight when I reach [Davos](#) over the weekend for the [World Economic Forum \(WEF\)](#)—at present the temperature is minus two degrees centigrade and is forecast to drop to minus 14 degrees! Brrrr! I am told Davos has had some snow, though it is not going to be as white as it was in 2018 or 2020.

This year's WEF, which begins on 16 January, is probably one of the earliest; normally it begins little under a week later on 21 January. For years, we would watched the Republic Day parade and also celebrated the National Awards (Padma Shri, Padma bhushan). Given the early start this year, I should be back in the capital for the Republic Day parade and the must watch Beating the Retreat.



India @Davos 2023

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I understand the preparation for [Davos 2023](#) was launched almost immediately after the May 2022 meeting under the guidance of the coordination group helmed by Commerce minister Piyush Goyal (He will be missed this year) and Anurag Jain ,Secretary, DPIIT. CEO of Niti Aayog Parmeshwaran Iyer is a welcome addition this year.

There is a record participation by state governments--Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Punjab. In fact, if Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka had not dropped out last minute, this would have been an impressive six states.



The Indian Industry participation is led by CII President Sanjiv Bajaj (following his father's footsteps). CII, formed a steering committee months ago under Bajaj and Sunil Mittal. The industry delegation should top 100, especially if you add spouses and is the who's who of India Inc. Besides Bajaj and Sunil Mittal, the delegation includes Gautam Adani,

Mukesh Ambani, Natrajan Chandrashekar, Kumar M Birla, Rajan Mittal, Shyam and Hari Bhartia, Nadir Godrej, Roshni Nadar Malhotra, Nandan Nilekani, Sajjan Jindal, Vijay Shekhar Sharma, Byju Ravinderan, Adar Poonawalla, Shobana Kamineni, CP Gurnani, Rishad Premji to name a few.

Soft Power

The CII team, led by Chandrajit Banerjee, will be coordinating multiple events including breakfast sessions, extremely sought after and well attended the India Reception, Bollywood Night (Revived with live signing by Kanika Kapoor and DJ Deepstar), media and CEO roundtables, nightcaps and so on.

A new addition this year is the “Spirit of India” at select bars and locations where Indian wines, beer, whiskey would be served with Indian snacks. Old timers would recall we did this in 2006 under India Everywhere campaign led by yours truly under the Chairmanship of one and only Nandan Nilekani! So the CII India campaign @ WEF 2023 in coordination with DPIIT, invest India and state Governments and Indian corporates and media houses is quite strong.

Desi Food

CII India Reception will feature cuisine by [Taj Hotels](#) and Tricolour woollen stoles as giveaways. Taj Hotels are back in Davos and will prepare an Indian cuisine during the duration of Davos for India lounge. One can look forward to Indian breakfasts, lunches and high tea at the India lounge on the Promenade (open to white badge holders only I am told!) Taj is bringing a team of 25 cooks and chefs to Davos this year. I recall in 2005, I called on Late Krishna Kumar at the Bombay House and requested his support to sponsor the grand soiree at the Congress Centre for the India Everywhere Campaign in 2006. I was pleasantly surprised when the ever graceful Kumar, readily agreed and then invited me to a cup of coffee! I wanted to specially mention this anecdote as a tribute to him and his vision to build Brand India.

Mall Road

Like any hill station in India, Davos too has its Mall Road—the Promenade, which extends from the Davos Dorf to Davos Platz. It is, like on any Mall Road, where all the action happens. Most of the restaurants and shops are taken over by various corporates and countries. India & Indian companies is hosting over 10 lounges on the Promenade.



India will have two new lounges – one inclusivity lounge and second sustainability lounge. Three Indian state lounges hosted by Maharashtra, Telangana and Tamil Nadu will showcase their respective pitches to attract investments. (I believe one thought doing the rounds is to collapse everything into one big India Lounge in future). These lounges also offer a good place to meet , network, especially since meeting places are at a premium in Davos; Tamil Nadu is offering

free Wi-Fi and [south Indian](#) food on the house. One of the company – Davosworks – which does these lounges, billboards, outdoors advertising, also has Indian connection!

India Inc Calling

There are several events led by Indian companies. The Tech giants like [Infosys](#), [Tech Mahindra](#), [Wipro](#), HCL and of course [TCS](#) realised the importance of making connections at Davos. The party hosted by TCS is a big draw, especially with great food, great organisation and the presence of the Tata chief Chandra.

The Diaspora

Not to mention, Indian Diaspora's presence, especially from USA, Europe, Middle East and Far East. They include Punit Renjan, Ravi Agarwal, Gita Gopinath, Raghuram Rajan, Lakshmi Mittal, Manvinder S Banga, Satya Nadella to name a few.

This year, Sri Sri Ravishankar is back in Davos in addition to a number of social entrepreneurs. Schwab Foundation and [Jubilant](#) Bhartia Foundation have been recognising the social entrepreneurs in India and the winners are in Davos. This year's winner Aniket from Haqdarshak, will be joined by Ajaita Shah, a finalist. Ajaita is launching an initiative called "She-Leads-Bharat" in Davos on investing in one million rural Indian entrepreneurs to impact 100 million rural families in partnership with Government of India, Jubilant Bhartia Group and UBS.

Despite the sub-zero temperatures, I am looking forward to my annual rendezvous with Davos. Watch out for my next post from the snowy climes of Davos.

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