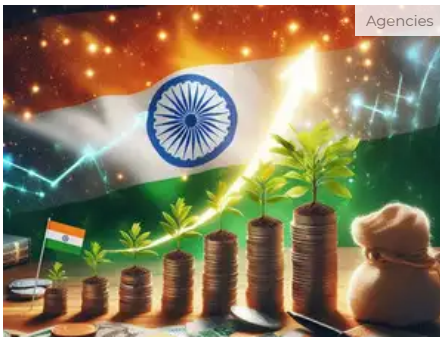


The policy pivot: India's strategic shift for 2047

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Synopsis

India, showcasing remarkable 7.8% GDP growth, is poised for global prominence amidst uncertainties. The 12th PAFI Forum outlined a strategic policy pivot for India by 2047, focusing on global collaboration, inclusive growth, state-level innovation, and strategic public affairs. This vision aims to transform India's potential into a trustworthy, citizen-centric leadership position.



Indian economy (Image for representation)

India stands at a critical juncture in its trajectory. The global environment is characterised by uncertainties, with conflicts and trade disputes disrupting supply chains, climate change posing threats to livelihoods, and technological advancements reshaping societal norms at an unprecedented pace. Amidst this turbulence, India emerges as a symbol of resilience. With a remarkable 7.8% GDP growth in the first quarter of 2023, the nation is poised to ascend to global prominence.

In this context, public policy must transcend reactive measures and assume a guiding role. This was the central theme of the 12th Annual Forum of the Public Affairs Forum of India (PAFI), held in New Delhi under the auspices of “India and the World—Collaboration, Connectivity, Competitiveness.” Commemorating PAFI’s 18th anniversary, the forum convened esteemed leaders from government, business, diplomacy, academia, and civil society. Notably, it witnessed the publication of “The Policy Pivot: India’s Strategic Shift,” an anthology comprising 25 essays that offer profound insights into India’s future trajectory.

The discussions did not focus on incremental solutions, but rather on the transformative potential of India’s actions by 2047. From these deliberations, 18 broad suggestions emerge, categorised under four distinct themes. These suggestions are not mere prescriptions, but rather contemplations on how India can transform its potential into a leadership position.

1. India & The World: Geopolitics & Geoeconomics

India must transform turbulence into an opportunity, acting as a bridge between competing blocs and a voice for the Global South. In the current global landscape, influence is less dependent on military might and more on supply chains, standards, and trust. Aligning domestic reforms with external trade agreements will enable India to establish itself as a hub of credibility.

Similarly, India's greatest global strength lies in predictability. Consistency in policy, fairness in regulation, and credibility in diplomacy can foster enduring partnerships when the world seeks reliability.

2. National Priorities for Inclusive Growth

India's next phase must prioritise growth with depth—resilient supply chains, rational tariffs, deeper capital markets, and globally competitive industries that distribute benefits across society. To sustain this momentum, institutional reform is imperative: expedited judicial processes, simplified laws, modern policing, and accountable regulators will foster trust.

Urbanisation will define India by 2047. Half of the country's population will reside in cities, necessitating municipalities to be empowered with resources, autonomy, and professional capacity to design ecosystems where housing, employment, transportation, and sustainability converge. The bureaucracy must transition from command-and-control to facilitation.

The momentum of deregulation and the Goods and Services Tax (GST) must continue, simplifying processes and advancing decisively toward trust-based governance. Simultaneously, growth and sustainability must progress concurrently. Scaling solar, wind, electric vehicles (EVs), and green hydrogen is crucial; however, environmental clearances should be streamlined to prevent bureaucratic hurdles from hindering green growth.

India's Demographic Dividend: Nurturing Growth and Prosperity

India's demographic dividend presents a unique opportunity for economic growth and development. To capitalise on this potential, it is imperative to nurture this dividend through targeted interventions such as large-scale skill development, apprenticeships, lifelong learning, and women's empowerment.

Protecting Vulnerable Workers

A significant challenge lies in safeguarding the livelihoods of gig and informal workers. These workers often lack access to essential safety nets, making them susceptible to exploitation. Therefore, it is crucial for the government to implement robust measures to provide them with adequate support and protection.

Securing Digital Sovereignty

India's digital sovereignty is paramount for its long-term growth and development. To achieve this, the government must invest heavily in strategic sectors such as semiconductors, secure electronics, and trusted data ecosystems. Additionally, it is essential to ensure that ethical AI deployment practices are adopted to narrow divides and promote inclusive growth.

3. State-Level Initiatives for Growth

India's growth trajectory will be significantly shaped by the performance of its states. Therefore, administrative reforms are of utmost importance. These reforms should focus on reducing the burden of approvals, eliminating inspector raj, and leveraging technology to streamline decision-making processes. States must also take proactive steps to provide genuine support and guidance to enterprises, moving beyond annual business summits to foster a collaborative and supportive environment.

Parliamentary Legitimacy and Structural Reforms

Parliamentary legitimacy is crucial for the enduring implementation of structural reforms. Parliamentarians should serve as steadfast anchors of continuity, ensuring that these reforms transcend political cycles. States, on the other hand, can harness their potential as engines of innovation. Many national reforms have originated locally, and benchmarking, competition, and cross-learning can create a virtuous cycle of policy innovation across the federation.

4. Public Affairs and Governance: Strategic Approach

Policy effectiveness hinges on its co-creation. Structured consultations before legislation can mitigate resistance and foster a sense of shared ownership. Indian enterprises must also transition from protectionist measures to performance-oriented strategies. This involves competing globally through innovation, responsible investment, and trust-building.

Public affairs has emerged as a strategic profession, with many leaders assuming the role of "Chief Geopolitical Officers" for their organisations. These leaders interpret risks, build trust, and shape partnerships, playing a crucial role in shaping India's foreign policy.

Strengthening Public Affairs Profession

To enhance the effectiveness of public affairs, it is imperative to strengthen the profession through training, ethics, and recognition. By equipping public affairs professionals with the necessary skills and knowledge, we can ensure that they effectively engage with stakeholders, advocate for public interests, and contribute to the overall well-being of society.

Closing Reflections

Enhancing Governance: Speed, Fairness, and Citizen-Centricity

Inclusive growth is a non-negotiable aspect of India's development. Bridging the rural-urban divide, closing gender gaps, and ensuring universal digital access are essential components of this goal. India's greatest asset lies in its trustworthiness. By seamlessly integrating reforms in land, labour, and capital with technology-driven "smart tape" and streamlined approvals, governance can be transformed into a fast, fair, and citizen-centric system.

The 12th PAFI Forum transcended the mere gathering of individuals; it served as a compelling call to action. The Policy Pivot underscored the imperative to transform abstract concepts into tangible outcomes, grounded in trust and purpose.

From the cautious liberalisation of the 1980s to the ambitious vision of [Viksit Bharat](#) 2047, the fundamental principles of public affairs have remained consistent: foster unity, establish trust, and guide policy with humility. As PAFI celebrates its 18th anniversary, its mission has become unequivocal: to strengthen the profession, deepen dialogue, and advocate for effective implementation.

The global community looks to India with anticipation, viewing it as a growth engine, a reliable partner, and a nation capable of establishing benchmarks in governance and sustainability. Ultimately, predictability is our aspiration, but it is

the realisation of possibility that we strive to achieve. This is India's policy pivot: never centred around power, but perpetually focused on purpose, imbued with optimism, trust, and confidence in the future.

— *Ajay Khanna is Co-Founder, Public Affairs Forum of India, and Chair of its Annual Forum: Views are personal*

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