

Digitisation: India's magic bullet

- 800 million on social grants

- 40 million houses built in 10 years

■ Edward Mumbuu

New Delhi - After 75 years of independence, the world's fastest-growing economy India looks to the next 25 years with sheer ambition and optimism.

This is the view of Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, the country's foremost diplomat.

Jaishankar recently made these observations during a roundtable discussion with senior African journalists and editors who were on a week-long familiarisation visit to the Asian powerhouse, where he also went to great lengths to explain "what makes India tick".

It was apparent from Jaishankar's supposition that the power of using digital tech is India's silver bullet to economic growth and development.

Digital power

"What happened with us is that 10 years ago, we started this practice by creating unique digital identities for all our citizens. The prime minister himself understood the value of everybody having a digital identity. Then, we pushed everybody to have their own bank

account. At that time, a lot of people with very low incomes did not have bank accounts, and banks had rules that you needed 'so much' money to open a bank account. We pushed the banks, saying even if someone has no money, open the account," the External Affairs Minister of India narrated.

He added: "The result of these kinds of pushes is that today, as a government, when we want to do something for our citizens, we just ask 'What's your digital ID number?'. Then I will check if your digital ID number and bank account number tally, and whether it tallies with your phone number. Once you have the system mapped out, it enables the government to deliver benefits and create a sort of welfare society on a massive proportion."

The ever-candid Jaishankar did not paint an all-glossy picture, admitting that despite a booming economy, at least 800 million people are on the country's social safety net.

India's population currently stands at 1.4 billion, meaning more than half its population receives social grants.

"In terms of population, roughly the African population is the population of India, 1.4 billion. We give every month 5kg of food to 800 million people. What it has done in the last few years, it has ensured that nobody goes hungry in this country.

"You would ask me, 'what is the difference?'. The difference would be, before, I would send the food, but there was no guarantee that we are hungry and got the food. Maybe the food stops with you, and you sold it to somebody else. Today, it helps because I [the government] can verify through digital IDs. Secondly, we transfer money directly into the bank accounts of these people. So, by making all the adults and non-adults have bank accounts, we make sure the money goes to you personally."

The digital system has also allowed the Indian government to extend loans to at least 400 million of its citizens.

"We've also been able to increase health coverage in a similar way. The government gives free health or very subsidised health, which covers a little over one-third of our



Ambitious... External Affairs Minister of India, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar. Photo: Contributed

population," he added.

What is more, in the last 10 years, the country built 40 million houses for its citizens.

"Our average household is five people. Which means 200 million in this country have got houses which they did not have before, and we verify exactly who got the house. The houses are meant for low-income families, so we know who is and who is not eligible," he said.

Another thing the Indian government has done is creating a conducive environment for business by removing bureaucratic bottlenecks, cutting regulations, improving infrastructure and synergising government departments.

The journalists were drawn from 15 countries. Namibia had two representatives. India forecast annual growth of 7.3% in the fiscal year ending in March, the highest rate of any of the major global economies, providing a boost for prime minister Narendra Modi ahead of the national elections scheduled to be held before May.

Analysts in that country agree that growth exceeding 7% for a third year in a row in the context of a global slowdown would help Modi win a third term to rule Asia's third-largest economy.

"10 years ago, we were the number 10 economy in the world. Today, we are number five. We can see the world has changed. We can see the US today is different. Europe is different and China," he continued.

Ties that bind

On the India-Africa relationship, Jaishankar had this to say: "We have always regarded our relationship with Africa as a unique relationship because of a certain deep solidarity that comes from our shared colonial experience. In the last five years, a very large number of the new embassies we have opened are mostly in Africa.

"Today, we have a diplomatic presence in at least 43 African countries. Our target was 47. We have development projects in many of them. For a lot of our African partners, we would be among the top five economic partners, sometimes one, or two or three.

We see the rise of Africa as central to the rebalancing of the world."

"In our view, the natural diversity of the world, the natural balance of the world, was impacted by the colonial period. Until we really see to some degree the revival of Asia, until we see this happen to a lot of the continents, the world is not back to where it should be," he said.

Introspection

Modi has also taken steps to attract global companies, including Apple and Japanese companies, to set up factories in India, while increasing spending to build roads, ports and airports. India's agriculture, manufacturing, tech development and pharmaceutical industries form part of its economic nerve centre.

"We have completed 75 years of independence. Whenever you have a kind of round number [significant number], you typically do an amount of introspection and stocktaking, which is what we have done. So, a lot of the debate in this country right now is how have we done, and what should we be doing for the next 25 years," Jaishankar said. He continued: "The second is that in our own politics, the current government led by prime minister Modi, we are coming to 10 years in office, two terms. We will be having elections next year [this year], we will see how that goes. But when you do 10 years in office, it's also a time to look and see how you've done, and what you would like to do."

Last year, India hosted the G-20 summit, which for Jaishankar was their biggest event on the calendar.

The summit saw India fight tooth and nail for the inclusion of the African Union in the G-20.

"It [G-20] was a big responsibility and a lot of complications which came with that responsibility, including how we would get these 20 countries to agree on something. And we did manage to do that. We were able to lead a substantive G-20, which had many outcomes on sustainable development growth, in terms of addressing debt issues, development issues, looking at green growth. These were notable achievements, also looking at the permanent presence of the African Union in the G-20," he stated.

- emumbuu@nepc.com.na



LIVESTOCK AND LIVESTOCK PRODUCTS BOARD

Vacancy

The mission of the LIVESTOCK AND LIVESTOCK PRODUCTS BOARD (Previously Meat Board of Namibia) is to promote a conducive environment for sustainable livestock production, market growth and diversification for livestock, meat and livestock products.

The LIVESTOCK AND LIVESTOCK PRODUCTS BOARD is looking for a suitably capable, experienced, qualified and mature:

STATISTICIAN (Trade Division)

The incumbent will be responsible for research, collection and dissemination of market intelligence based on data examination, as well as critical enquiries as required for the benefit of internal and external users. The core function of this position is to implement the Livestock and Livestock Product Board function as a reliable and authoritative source of a well-researched informational and advisory industry, and market intelligence for the livestock and meat economic sector in Namibia, as well as to provide statistical analysis and forecasting potential trends in the sector.

KEY REQUIREMENTS

- Minimum of 3 years' experience in statistics or data science or similar environment/industry.
- Strong computer based data gathering, processing and reporting skills.
- Sound knowledge of the Livestock and Livestock Products industry, especially in the marketing channels, as well as a broader background of the farming systems.
- Knowledge of the communal livestock farming sectors especially with regards to cattle, sheep, goats and pigs.
- Proven experience in data collection, processing and/or database administration and dissemination.
- Valid code BE Driver's License.
- Namibian Citizen.

QUALITIES REQUIRED

- Capability to work independently with occasional supervision.
- Capability of handling heavy workloads effectively, efficiently, professionally and against deadlines.
- Analytical mind with the ability to interpret and analyse data, information and statistics.
- Excellent proficiency in written and spoken English.
- Knowledge of other indigenous languages will be an added advantage.
- Analytical mind and ability to analyse data and information.
- Capability to produce high quality reports with graphs, tables and diagrams.

ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS

- National Diploma in Statistics or Agricultural Economics at NQA Level 6 with Statistics (Quantitative Methods), Economics or Mainstream commercial discipline / Degree in Economics/ Commercial Discipline/ NQF Level 7 (Econometrics as a subject).
- Excellent MS Word, MS Excel and MS PowerPoint competence as well as knowledge and/or experience in the use of statistical software such as SPSS, STATA, R, etc. for data analysis

CLOSING DATE: 25 January 2024

Prospective candidates should send an application letter, CV and copies of supporting documents to:

MEAT BOARD OF NAMIBIA

Human Resources Department, 30 David Hosea Merero Road
PO Box 38, Windhoek, Namibia, ENQUIRIES: Tel. 061 275 830