India Inc backs Aatmanirbhar pitch, vax diplomacy, puts focus on job creation

Times News Network

Mumbai: India Inc has put its weight behind the Aatmanirbhar Bharat campaign and the government's vaccine diplomacy even as it cited job creation as the biggest challenge facing the country.

Captains of industries, during a CEO panel discussion at The Economic Times Awards for Corporate Excellence 2020 on Saturday, said the production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme, along with indigenous solutions, digital transformation and clean energy transition will create opportunities and make India an export hub. They also commended vaccine diplomacy.

Larsen & Toubro CEO S N Subrahmanyan said that the biggest crisis facing India today is the creation of jobs. "...and like the famous economist John Keynes suggested," Subrahmanyan said, "holes may have to be dug in the ground and then filled up with concrete and steel, hoping that it enables job creation." "The PLI scheme, monetary easing and feel-good factor of not relying on other countries will lead to indigenous solutions for supply chain problems," he said, adding that China is not the only country that can provide cost-effective economical solutions.

JSW Group chairman Sajjan Jindal said that after the border tension, the steel-to-sports conglomerate stopped imports from China. "The good fallout of that is that a lot of industries have come up, which are now supplying to us." Jindal expressed hope that the government does not come down heavily on inflation pressures by restricting the growth in the economy.

In his welcome speech, Times Group MD Vineet Jain said that businesses that are inherently more vulnerable than others in a crisis such as this need an economic stimulus to stay viable. These businesses included hospitality, real estate, and media. He also called for avoiding large-scale lockdowns as authorities address the emerging second wave of Covid. "It'll hit small and medium businesses, and the millions of people they employ, the hardest. What we need is strict enforcement of Covid protocols, targeted containments, and vaccination on a war footing," he said.

Deloitte

The Economic Times Awards
for Corporate Excellence

The job uncertainty triggered by Covid has highlighted the need for social security, said HDFC Life Insurance MD Vibha Padalkar. Large sections of the workforce are in sectors that still do not have an assured pension. Pension assets as a percentage of GDP are less than 5%, which is woefully inadequate.

'INDIA POISED TO HEAL REST OF WORLD'

"The RBI has tried to be as proactive as possible to deal with challenges arising out of Covid. I would like to assure everyone that it shall be our endeavour to continue to be proactive and focus completely on supporting growth, while maintaining price and financial stability

Shaktikanta Das | GOVERNOR, RESERVE BANK OF INDIA

"There can be no greater security for a family than a home. People feel healthier, happier, safer, and more prosperous when they have a home. At HDFC, we will continue to strive towards helping more Indians to become home-owners

Deepak Parekh | CHAIRMAN, HDFC

"It is heartwarming to receive this award in the year that Hero MotoCorp has crossed the monumental milestone of 100 million units in cumulative production and sales. This is not just Hero's achievement, it is a significant landmark in the 'Make in India' initiative. This was possible because we at Hero have been the pioneers of this journey of making in India for the world

Pawan Munjal | CHAIRMAN, HERO MOTOCORP

"I never dreamt a year ago I would have to raise capital, take risks, face huge uncertainty and ramp up like an entrepreneur. Being in business for 20 years, I did not think we'll have to face these challenges. It is overwhelming that we've been able to perform and deliver a vaccine to the world

Adar Poonawalla | CEO, SERUM INSTITUTE

"My father set us on this journey of caring and healing. Healthcare is so important to our nation and India is now poised to really heal the rest of the world. This acknowledgement to healthcare says that this is a job well done, but there is a long journey ahead

Suneeta Reddy | MD, APOLLO HOSPITALS

"A clear realisation that the government cannot do everything is leading to a change in corporate and individual behaviour. A good start will be a more focused CSR. The digital infra for public good which covers UPI, eKYC, and Aadhaar, coupled with a shift in industry telecommunication allows us to pole-vault in the transformation of society

Aditya Puri | FORMER MD, HDFC BANK

THE WINNERS

BUSINESS LEADER OF THE YEAR | Pawan Munjal, Hero MotoCorp

BUSINESSWOMAN OF THE YEAR | Suneeta & Preetha Reddy, Apollo Hospitals

ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR | Adar Poonawalla, Serum Institute

COMPANY OF THE YEAR | HDFC

EMERGING COMPANY OF THE YEAR | ICICI Lombard

GLOBAL INDIAN OF THE YEAR | Piyush Gupta, DBS

BUSINESS REFORMER OF THE YEAR | Shaktikanta Das, RBI

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD | Aditya Puri (HDFC Bank)

CORPORATE CITIZEN OF THE YEAR | Tata Consultancy Services

ET EVOKE AWARD FOR SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR | Anshu Gupta / [illegible], [illegible] Foundation

If India is saving less, it most certainly has been spending and shopping more. Customers have structurally moved towards shopping online. Pretty much 100% of pin codes in India shop online now, and even in terms of the diversity of stuff that they buy, said Amazon India head Amit Agarwal. He highlighted that entrepreneurs have been coming up with specific need-based products and online has been an enabler to their businesses.

Amazon saw 1.5 lakh businesses come online for the first time during the pandemic. A third of that came online using a non-English language. As many as 70,000 became exporters, creating global brands and shipping products that exceeded $1 billion in value. "An Aatmanirbhar Bharat has to start with an Aatmanirbhar Indian, and that implies unleashing the potential of every citizen," Agarwal said.

Jindal also said that India has a unique opportunity to lead the transition from a fossil-fuel economy to a green energy one. "If the government takes a view to make India coal-free by 2025 or 2030, where Coal India and coal mining must shut down, it will be a big statement. But this is something that we as a country need to do," Jindal said. A lot of companies are doing the R&D and JSW Steel is also working overtime to see how it can convert existing steel plants and reduce its carbon footprint. It is looking at hydrogen as a possible solution, the business tycoon said.

Bhavish Aggarwal, co-founder of ride-hailing firm Ola, said Covid has changed the way societies see climate change risks. Not just India, governments around the world have pledged their support for transition to sustainable mobility and sustainable energy, Aggarwal said. "Our ambition is to build a global business in electric mobility out of India."

According to Deloitte India CEO N Venkatram, the country has shown that we can build businesses of international stature and scale, whether delivering groceries or building electric vehicles. "These enterprises of scale are critical because they create an associated ecosystem of smaller businesses and jobs," said Venkatram.

In her address to India Inc, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman pointed out that the three Aatmanirbhar packages announced in the wake of the Covid lockdown amounted to a stimulus equivalent to 15% of the country's GDP. "We are infusing greater capital expenditure in infrastructure, this will create assets, wealth and have a multiplier effect. There are also a few lesser-known points in the Budget which will have a great impact on agriculture, industry, and SMEs," she said.