

# A prosperous UP holds the key to India's big economic leap

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Visit any city of Uttar Pradesh on any given day, irrespective of the time, the chances are that you will notice a marked difference from what it was around a decade back. From Noida to Agra and Kanpur to Banaras, you will find glittering markets, malls and business activities everywhere. Talk to anyone in the State and the individual is bound to assert that the law and order situation is perfectly fine.

Welcome to new UP, which is attracting tourists and investors in hordes and economic activities are progressing thick and fast.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is spot on when he says that his state has moved out of the BIMARU category and is on its way to becoming a "saksham" state. Yogi's remarks come in the wake of NITI Aayog indicating recently said across India, around 13.5 crore people moved out of multi-dimensional poverty between 2015-16 and 2019-21.

The districts with maximum reduction in poverty in the state are Maharajganj (29.64%), Gonda (29.55%), Balrampur (27.9%), Kaushambi (25.75%), Lakhimpur Kheri (25.33%), Shravasti (24.42%), Jaunpur (26.65%), Basti (23.36%), Ghazipur (22.83%), Kushinagar (22.28%), and Chitrakoot (21.40%). Those who know UP would tell you that these districts were really in a bad shape.

The Bimaru (sick in Hindi) acronym has often been used to refer to Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, usually to imply that these states lagged in terms of economic growth, health care, education, and other indices.

Growth in Uttar Pradesh, with its large population and low per-capita income, is vital for India to reach its \$10 trillion goal and transforming itself. With the new delimitation underway, the state will be more politically important than today.

Transforming UP to play a larger nation-building role in India's economic path requires a new trajectory of growth focusing on multiple layers within its society and dynamic political leadership. India can succeed as a major political power if Uttar Pradesh leads the way. UP needs specialized industries like electronics component design, defence parts manufacturing and pharmaceuticals with a significant R&D and IP production component for higher value.

Citing the Niti Aayog report, the Adityanath-led government claimed that the State had registered the maximum drop in the number of poor among all States and Union Territories (UTs) from 2015-2016 to 2019-2021. The National Multidimensional Poverty Index has revealed that of the 13.5 crore people overcoming multidimensional poverty during this period, around 3.43 crore people from the State got out poverty, which is a staggering number.

Having taken estimates from all States, UTs and 707 administrative districts, the report pointed out that the sharpest reduction in multidimensional poverty was in Uttar Pradesh, followed by Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Rajasthan. The finding also revealed that number of poor decreased rapidly in the villages across the state, the government claimed, adding that positive results have also been seen on the parameters related to health, education and standard of living of the poor in UP.

Echoing the findings of NITI Aayog report, Manish Mittal, an Agra-based entrepreneur and Rotary Club head, says that the mood in the entire State is upbeat given the rapid progress across all fields. "Trust me, our business is doing well and we are poised to take a big leap in terms of economic growth. There is work for everyone if he is willing to work," he said.

The Niti Aayog report says that the number of poor deprived of nutrition came down to 18.45% in 2019-21 from 30.40% in 2015-16. The mortality rate of children and adolescents also improved, falling from 3.81% in 2015-16 to 2.20% in 2019-21.

Even maternal health improved significantly as maternal mortality rate decreased from 25.20% in 2015-16 to 15.97% in 2019-21. Also, the percentage of poor with no access to cooking fuel was 17.95% in 2019-21 against 34.24% in 2015-16. The figure of people deprived of drinking water in 2019-21 was 0.93% as against 2.09% in 2015-16.

It goes without saying that Adityanath has done well for the state that was previously known for its backwardness. Today, the world recognises that Uttar Pradesh is a state where 5.5 crore people have risen above the poverty line in the last six years, which is no mean feat.

Actually, such development and public welfare works could have been done earlier also but the previous governments lacked the will to go about them. They exploited farmers, and traders, did injustice to youth and endangered the safety of women.

Economic growth is the most potent driver of poverty reduction and improvement in living standards across the world. In India, such an achievement can happen with a transformed and robust Uttar Pradesh.

(The author is Delhi-based senior journalist and writer. He is author of Gandhi's Delhi which has brought to the forth many hidden facts about Mahatma Gandhi)