

Business Standard

UNGA Prez Francis lauds digitalisation, infrastructure investment in India

The UN leader lauded India's use of digitalisation to alleviate poverty

Press Trust of India |



Dennis Francis | Photo: The United Nations official website

UN General Assembly President Dennis Francis has lauded India's use of digitalisation that has helped achieve financial inclusion and poverty reduction, underlining that this gives the country a comparative advantage and its lessons can be shared with the global community.

Let me say first of all that since I've been to India, every time I think of India, I think Incredible India'. And I mean this in all earnest .And I saw it when I was there. The specific example to which I can refer is India's

use of digitalisation, Francis, President of the 78th session of the UN General Assembly, told PTI in an exclusive interview here.

He referred to the country's tourism tagline of 'Incredible India.'

Francis was in India from January 22-26 this year on an official visit, during which he held a bilateral meeting with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar in New Delhi and also travelled to Jaipur and Mumbai.

During the visit, his interactions with government officials, civil society members and think tanks focused on issues such as sustainability, multilateralism, accessibility, and digital public infrastructure.

The UN leader lauded India's use of digitalisation to alleviate poverty and bring millions of people into the formal economic system simply through the use of a handset and a digitalisation model.

He underscored that digitalisation is important because it is productive, it drives cost down, makes economies more efficient, makes things cheaper.

He cited the example of digitalisation helping Indian women, and farmers across the length and breadth of the country and in far-flung places to negotiate their prices, deal with banks and make payments without having to leave their homes, farmlands or areas.

All of this is helping to make the economy of India much more competitive. So I think this is an area in which India clearly has a comparative advantage and has lessons that can be shared with the international community.

Francis also pointed out that during his visit to India, he was impressed with the level of investments being made in infrastructure development across the country.

He stressed that infrastructure is one of the areas of economic activity known to boost growth in any economy because it creates huge demands for materials, labour, and inputs and provides jobs.

Because of the multiplier effect, growth literally gallops, he said.

I noted when I was in your country recently, India and I was really quite impressed with this - the extent of investment being made in infrastructure in India, not just highways but even rail and monorails, he said.

He said that countries invest heavily in infrastructure because infrastructure integrates markets, and brings people together but it also has an immediate and consequential impact on growth.

Francis however stressed the need for building infrastructure sustainably in the current times of extreme climate events.

If the infrastructure is built in a sustainable way, if it is resilient and can therefore withstand external shocks and stresses, it means that the economy is able to bounce back more quickly from that event, less jobs are

lost and it requires less in the way of investment to get things working and moving again in the economy, he said.

It makes sense to use sustainable materials and methods, and invest in sustainable infrastructure because it minimizes the overall disruption in the economy, he said.

Francis will convene the UN's first-ever Sustainability Week' April 15-19 at the world body's headquarters that will feature dedicated events focused on sustainability in critical sectors such as tourism, infrastructure connectivity, transport, energy and debt.

He has said that the goal of the week will be to unleash progress across the 2030 Agenda towards a more sustainable future as we also ready ourselves for the Summit of the Future to be held in September 2024 during the high-level General Assembly session.

Last year, India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj highlighted at the world body the impact of financial inclusion on the social and economic empowerment of people in India.

She had noted that in 2009, only 17 per cent of adults in India had bank accounts, 15 per cent used digital payments, one in 25 had a unique ID document, and about 37 per cent had mobile phones.

These numbers grew exponentially and today, tele density has reached up to 93 per cent, over a billion people have a digital ID document, and more than 80 per cent have bank accounts.

As of 2022, over 600 crore digital payment transactions were completed per month.

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