

# In Search of a Leader

India needs a visionary like Lee Kuan Yew who pulled Singapore from third world poverty to first world prosperity

**:: Pankaj Murarka**

**T**he biggest challenge facing post-colonial states has been to achieve growth, development and social objectives, which took centuries in the West, in a much shorter time period under much more complex circumstances. One country that has achieved that with impeccable execution and emerged as the most successful economic model in the world is Singapore.

From a tiny island being used as a British naval base at the time of independence in 1959 with abject poverty, no natural resources and a divisive polyglot society to being the most powerful financial centre of the world with a prosperous society and a modern state the transformation of Singapore in just under four decades has been nothing short of miraculous.

## The Changemaker

The one person who had the vision and foresight to dream such a transformation and execute it is none other than Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore's first prime minister. LKY, as he is popularly known, was the prime minister of Singapore from 1959 to 1990 during which time Singapore's per capita income climbed from \$400 to \$12,200 in an environment of immense political and economic transformation around the world.

He had the courage to dream of a society that not only survives but prevails through excellence. While he fully understood the challenges of lack of natural and financial resources and a large population to feed, he dreamt of building a society where superior intelligence, discipline and ingenuity would substitute for lack of resources.

Every time he faced a challenge, he thought through strategically, converted the handicap into his biggest strength and came up with a long-term winning solution. It is this strategic thinking and skillful execution over the years that have transformed Singapore from a third world country to a prosperous and peaceful society in the world.

With Chinese economic growth dipping, it's high time for India to usher a new set of reforms to unleash its untapped potential to claim its rightful



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place in the world. And for India to truly realize its potential we need a decisive break from the 'business and politics as usual' of the past. We need a new growth model. And a new leadership. India needs a leader who can channelize the inherent strengths of India for achieving our developmental and social goals.

## Push Forward Reforms

India needs structural reforms and not incremental reforms to unshackle the enormous potential of this great country. We have to begin the process of reforms by bringing about change in the mindset of the political class so that it becomes tuned to receiving the positive signals that market economy radiates and to be willing to accept and acknowledge change. Also, our politi-

cians can certainly do with some more credibility.

Judiciary is the guardian of any democratic system. In a vibrant democracy, it is essential to provide speedy justice to ordinary citizens. And while India does have an independent and active judiciary, we need to carry forward the process of judicial reforms with agility. And for that revisiting our archaic laws and plugging loopholes in the systems is the first step.

Foreign policy and internal se-

curity are matters that need immediate attention. India has to shed its feeble foreign policy approach and assume its responsibility of global leadership seriously. It has to be far more assertive in its foreign policy especially in the light of an ambitious China. At the same time, India has had a history of troubled neighbours. It's high time we become more decisive in dealing with them on one hand and at the same time invest in their prosperity for prosperous neighbours will yield rich dividends for India.

India adopted the Nehruvian socialism model post-independence. While Nehruvian socialism could have been the right model during that period of high population growth and increasing dependency ratio, we have carried it too far. Today In-

dia is on the right side of the demographic curve and will be largest supplier of labour to the world over the next decade. India needs to put 30,000 people to work on an everyday basis for the next 20 years. And this can only be achieved by reviving India's manufacturing and transforming into a global manufacturing hub.

## Harnessing India's Potential

Given the magnitude of inefficiencies in our society, there are enough low-hanging fruits in terms of structural economic reforms that can be unleashed in a short span of time and the impact of these reforms can be far reaching in reviving India's growth. Areas like land, labour, agriculture, infrastructure, railways, water, mining, tax laws are all in dire need of structural changes.

India's state-owned enterprises have enormous potential and strengths. But due to poor governance, mismanagement and leaky business practices, they have been corroding and have been a burden on the exchequer for long. We have to set this right, make them globally competitive.

The sustained high growth model that China pursued has led to a decline in its poverty ratio from 85% in the 1980s to less than 10% currently and in the process it managed to pull 680 million people out of poverty. We should certainly aim to eradicate poverty from our country over the next 10 years and this can only be achieved through sustained high economic growth.

To achieve all this and much more in a reasonably short period of time, we need a leader who can galvanize the wisdom of the intelligentsia, the energy of the youth and the indomitable spirit of entrepreneurs to enable this great idea called India get its rightful place in the world. For this, India needs its own Lee Kuan Yew. Have we discovered one? ■

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The writer is head, equity, Axis AMC