Progress in Pockets

What Could Be "New" About the 'New India' That Breaks Away from Clichés and Euphemisms

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When A. P. J. Abdul Kalam decided to write about India of the future in the mid-1990s, he had a 25-year timespan to keep. "We used to discuss the optimistic—inhind.

India 2020: A Vision for the Next Millennium was published in 1996, during Kalam's tenure as chairman of the Technology Information, Forecasting and Assessment Council (TIFAC). It was written with his friend and then TIFAC executive director U.S. Rajan.

The book was well received as no one had ever attempted to imagine India as a developed country. Kalam was well positioned to envision the contours of a developed India. He was the celebrated project director of India's first satellite launch vehicle project, the chief of the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme and chairman of the committee to self-sustain itself by 1999 to achieve the 70-30 import-export ratio of defence equipment. The book focused on five areas—agriculture and food processing, education and health care, information and communications technology, infrastructure development, and self-reliance in critical technologies.

Later, with Professor PN Bhartia, former director, IIT Madras, Kalam explored the contradictory di-
mension to rapid arms and presented his view on urbanisation.

After being elected president of India in 2002, Kalam made persistent efforts to harness the spirit of "develop India." As co-author of his biography Wings of Fire, published in 1999, and member of his speech-writing team, I have been closely involved in breathing the dream of making India a developed nation.

India has indeed developed. But not the way he envisaged. In 2013, he involved me in writing. "Spreading the Circular Economy: A Path to Indus-

trisation, achieving a perceptual change, a different kind of mindset at the individual and community

level, which the mindset was fundamental to be a nation, especially a democratic nation, to become a developed country. A change in mindset did happen, to an extent. In 2014, India voted in the 

Archives. With change in the vote, Kalam departed to India in 2018, as a hopeful new.

It is a new mindset that in the areas of information and communications technology, reliable and quality power, and surface transport and defence, India has done remarkably well.

Growth in agriculture and food processing had happened, but benefitted mostly more than the farmers. Education and health care have been thoroughly commercialised. Ayushman Bharat has finally arrived, but there is huge mismatch of money going to the inefficient and, at times, benighted way of our public hospitals.