

● ABROGATION OF ARTICLE 370

Building future opportunities

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A YEAR AGO, we saw the bifurcation of the state of Jammu & Kashmir into the Union Territories (UTs) of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh. As evidenced in the last one year, it has provided the new UTs with a plethora of opportunities to improve economic and industrial landscape and accelerate the pace of growth and development.

The potential both the UTs hold for sectors such as tourism, hydropower, horticulture, floriculture, bio-medical plants, food processing, handicrafts & handlooms has been known to all. However, when it comes to attracting investments and realising the potential in these sectors, we have not even touched the tip of the iceberg. As an investor, besides other factors of production such as the availability of raw materials, manpower, capital and market, the other key fundamentals that one looks at is the availability of land and also the laws, its provisions and acts that are going to help in facilitating and driving business.

As states, based on their natural strengths and endowments, vie to attract investment with the spirit of competitive federalism, there is a need for uniform applicability of laws across all states in India. The change in status of this region has made it possible for industrialists from anywhere in the country to set up enterprises, which, to my mind, is one of the biggest factors that will spur industrialisation, growth and multiply job opportunities for local youth.

In the past year, the local administration of J&K UT has been proactive to promote trade-related activities and infrastructure. The CII has been privileged to have partnered with the administration to reach out to investors and industrial fraternity in all major industrial centres, including Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Ahmedabad, Kolkata, Chennai and Hyderabad.

The response from industry to these road-shows in each of these cities has been enthusiastic. With support from the CII, as many as 168 MoUs worth ₹13,600 crore have been signed for investments in J&K.

The UT has done well to showcase investment opportunities in sectors like horticulture and hydropower. The administration had plans to reach out to global business community, and hold mini-conclaves in Jammu and Srinagar to listen to the local entrepreneurial community. However, the outbreak of the pandemic has, like in other places, put a temporary roadblock, which would be overcome soon.

The CII has maintained its presence in Jammu and the valley through its zonal councils and offices, and considering the special needs of Ladakh, we have formed a zonal council for Ladakh with a representative office in Leh.

Covid-19 has slowed business activity, and while we wait for things to normalise, this could be an opportunity to strengthen the infrastructure and connectivity in the region. Besides, we also need to actively engage with the local youth by encouraging them to develop and upgrade their skill-sets, which will not only make them readily employable but also empower them to start their own ventures.

Going forward, to leverage its inherent strengths and to accelerate the pace of growth, J&K UT has to work on a mission mode and address the challenges that act as bottlenecks. The administration needs to place great emphasis on inter-UT and intra-state road connectivity, especially in reaching out to rural areas. Also, the industrial and urban infrastructure needs to be strengthened.

The MSME sector has a significant presence in J&K, both in terms of value addition and in creating employment opportunities. To enhance their competitiveness, the CII suggests developing a holistic strategy to help them become globally competitive. The Jammu region has emerged as a hub for pharmaceutical manufacturing. With a proactive industrial policy of the government, the UT can attract significant investments in pharma and biotechnology sectors.

I feel the government of India, in the past one year, has levelled the field for Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh to integrate in the country's growth journey, and the onus is now on all of us in industry, government and society alike to hand-hold our brethren of J&K and Ladakh and make them a part of our nation's growth journey.

The Centre has levelled the field for Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh to integrate in India's growth journey; the onus is now on all of us to take them along
