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## INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY: CHANGING DYNAMICS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

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India finds itself in an increasingly changing and ever evolving world system, one having trouble with converging on different platforms, having economic woes and a world which is fragmented in terms of policies and approaches to common problems. The aim is to move ahead with partner nations in different projects, which focus the aspirations of the nations involved and lead to a global scale development. India as a country, throughout history, has performed greatly when well connected globally. Since the ancient times, the nation has acted as an important trading, economic and knowledge hub for others and in fact, it has been in India's culture to seek a global family throughout its existence. This has been expounded through a much discussed and appraised concept of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, which means 'The world is a family'.

*Keywords:* *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, dynamism, non-alignment, 'Make in India', Eurasia.

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## ВНЕШНЯЯ ПОЛИТИКА ИНДИИ: ИЗМЕНЯЮЩАЯСЯ ДИНАМИКА, ДОСТИЖЕНИЯ И ВЫЗОВЫ

Абхиджит Сингх

Индия является частью постоянно меняющейся и развивающейся мировой системы, неспособной примирить противоречия, охваченной экономическими трудностями — в мире, фрагментированном с точки зрения политики и подходов к общим проблемам. Цель состоит в том, чтобы вместе с нациями-партнерами двигаться вперед в осуществлении различных проблем, фокусирующихся на надеждах народов и ведущих к глобальному развитию. На протяжении всей истории Индия достигала многого, будучи тесно связанной с окружающим миром. С древних времен Индия была важным торговым, экономическим и образовательным хабом для многих, и, в целом, стремление к глобальной семье народов составляет часть индийской культуры, что выражено в популярной и активно обсуждаемой древней концепции *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, что значит «весь мир — семья».

*Ключевые слова:* *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, динамизм, неприсоединение, «Делай в Индии», Евразия.

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## INTRODUCTION

The term 'foreign policy' has been defined by scholars in various ways; however, they are certain that it is concerned with behaviour of a state towards other states. Foreign policy can be defined as a sum of the State's objective goals to fulfil its international commitments and realise its interests in the international system. Foreign policy is a political tool as well as an extension of decisions of the State. Foreign policy suggests an approach of the state regarding its positioning on number of international issues. It also determines, to an extent, friendly and unfriendly positions in the international system. George Modelski defined it as 'the system of activities evolved by communities for changing the behaviour of other states and for adjusting their own activities to the international environment. Foreign policy must throw light on the ways states attempt to change, and succeed in changing the behaviour of other states' [Modelski, 1962, p. 6]. 'The international environment plays an important role in shaping the foreign policy of every state. Since foreign policy in general is about the interaction of a state with another, this interaction only takes place at the international level and as such, cannot be ignored in analysing the foreign policy of any state' [Bojang, 2018, p. 2].

After the collapse of Soviet Union, the world saw, for a span of ten years, the phenomenon of a sole superpower and the inherent dangers and problems associated with too much power concentrated at one place. The US dominance was effectively challenged by the rise of two Asian giants, India and China. The distribution of power in the international system has been witnessing continuous change since late 2000s. The change in the power structure is not just brought about by the variables concerning hard power but economy also played an important role in deciding the might of the nation in the international system. The new era ushered in a technological competition between the contending states. Artificial intelligence, Internet, machine learning and robotics even as issues like climate change, food insecurity and terrorism threaten to disrupt the progress of mankind.

India's foreign policy in the twenty-first century has been dominated by the quest for creating an enabling environment in its neighbourhood and the world, which allows its economy to grow, its society to develop. India, the second most populous country, the world's largest democracy and one of the most diverse nations when it comes to its social composition, makes it a perfect contender for being among the leading nations of the world when it comes to international system and India's say in it. After three decades of reforms and opening up to the outside world, India faces new challenges to its security and the requirement of an increased flow of capital, technology, ideas and innovation for its accelerated transformation.

The globalised world is a boon for every country but it poses its own challenges. In the face of massive rise in trade, exchange of goods and services, flow of labour and technology, in an increasingly interconnected world India needs to adjust to its needs and interests for the long run. The rise in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Per Capita Income (PCI) and other variables of the human development index necessitates that the country keeps working to securing vital energy lines and resources for development. It also becomes vital for a country to seek international norms while dealing with issues like open channels of communication, investment climate among nations and global institutions, to maintain open sea lanes of communication, seek trade and investment opportunities overseas while opening up itself to the outside world, and work through multilateral institutions to secure a rules based order and liberalised trade and investment regime.

Over a period of time, India has adopted its foreign policy objectives according to the dynamism of the international situation and contoured its approach, which serves its interests in the best possible manner. India has traditionally concentrated on its immediate neighbourhood and periphery to secure a stable environment for its growth. South Asia, in particular, has a special place in India's foreign policy. India is working towards building stronger relations with Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar, Maldives and Pakistan. India is also focussing on engagement with China on a bilateral front and trying to maintain a cordial state of affairs with its neighbour. On the bilateral front, the Doklam standoff with China has been set aside following the summit meeting between the two leaderships last year, and the process of finding cooperative adjustments with China is one of the important goals of the Indian Foreign Policy to keep overall peace in the Indian subcontinent.

### **THE BEGINNING: POST 1947**

The Indian independence paved a way for the hopes of the Indian people and India as a nation to have its own say in its foreign affairs. The factors required for a nation to become a great power were present and it was necessary for the leadership to tap the potential and realise the great heights that India as a nation could achieve in the community of nations. 'Study of its history reveals that India has a distinctive feature: only India and China embody a civilization in a single large nation-body politic' [Cohen, 2001, p. 51]<sup>2</sup>. India was one of the founding members of the United Nations when it was formed in 1945. Though India became a sovereign nation in 1947, yet its unique status and potential as a major player allowed it to be an original founding member of the UN.

In addition, India ranks second in terms of its population and it is the seventh largest country in the world. It is the only country, which despite being a part of the continent, is described separately as a subcontinent owing to its unique geographic location and its geo political implications for the South Asian Naval trade. An entire ocean is named after the country because of the strategic location it occupies in the global trade routes and it is equally important for the rest of the world to acknowledge the same.

It is not just these geographical or geopolitical attributes, which transformed India in a powerful state. India's journey to a power was full of inner contradictions and it witnessed a slow start in the beginning owing to certain limitations. The economic issue was the major problem for India because of the colonial exploitation it witnessed for two centuries. The lack of national power in terms of economic size and defence capability was a major hindrance in the goal of becoming a global power. It was a major country, but its sphere of influence was essentially limited to the South Asian region. Given those circumstances, India's foreign policy options have remained rather constrained.

During the initial days of Cold War, India had to cope with internal limitations coupled with the cold war rivalry between the two great superpowers. It was the backdrop of the Cold War that India developed the policy of non-alignment and it was a major pillar of India's foreign policy until 1971. The policy meant alignment to neither the US camp nor the Soviet camp. The policy further charted a new course for the adherents of this policy so that they found each other and supported each other to exist independently without acting on the basis of 'Cold War camps'. The most im-

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<sup>2</sup> Cited in [Horimoto, 2017, p. 466].

portant non-aligned countries such as Indonesia, Yugoslavia, and Egypt were main actors along with India in the non-aligned camp.

The non-alignment policy had been the official one of India even in the 1970s, but there was a big change when India formally signed the 1971 treaty with the Soviet Union in the wake of the Bangladesh Liberation War. Several factors were responsible for this including a rapprochement between China and US (Ping-pong diplomacy<sup>3</sup>) and the declaration of China and Pakistan as 'all weather friends'.

### **THE READJUSTMENT IN THE 1990S**

The 1990s was a difficult period for India as the country lost a trusted friend with the collapse of Soviet Union while itself facing worst economic issues. The country was on the verge of defaulting on its foreign debt borrowing when it was decided to open up the economy and let globalisation enter the Indian markets. It was an entirely new environment, the change was sudden, and hence it took time for the country to adjust to the new realities that the changed international arena offered. This presented difficult challenges for India because 'India has generally seen itself as a world power in making, and conducted its regional and international relations on this basis. The result has been insignificance abroad, suspicion in the region and turbulence at home' [Thakur, 1992]<sup>4</sup>.

It was just not a strategic loss for India, but it also lost its biggest trading partner. The demise of the Soviet Union and the Gulf war raging in the Middle East concocted the perfect recipe for India's 'times of trouble'. Oil price spikes and a sharp reduction of home remittances from the Indians overseas in the Middle East added to the already dwindling economic situation of the country. It had no alternative but to seek assistance from IMF loans and agree to the Structural Adjustment Programme<sup>5</sup> of the IMF. In return for that assistance, India was required to deregulate its economic system and to open up its economy, abandoning the closed character it had maintained during the Cold War period. P. V. Narasimha Rao became Prime Minister in June 1991 and in the following month introduced economic liberalization, privatisation and globalisation for the Indian economic system to get back on track.

The transformation of the Indian economy and the crash of the Soviet Union, along with the changed international structure, have compelled India to overhaul its foreign policy altogether. Many foreign policy initiatives were launched in the 1990s. India had to recalibrate its foreign policy in a way, which allowed it to handle the geopolitical realities of the time and in an attempt to improve the prospect of US — India partnership. The then (1992) Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao visited the US. For India, the US has been until now a friend who could also be a bit harsh and a bit neutral depending upon the variables, which guided the relations between the two countries.

There was an attempt to mend bridges between China and India because of the new economic realities. It was necessary for India to prosper economically, so that the 1991 crisis could not repeat and for that peaceful border was a vital condition. Narasimha Rao's China visit in 1993 was

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<sup>3</sup> Ping-pong diplomacy refers to the exchange of table tennis players between the United States and People's Republic of China in the early 1970s that began during the 1971 World Table Tennis Championship in Nagoya, Japan.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in [Horimoto, 2017, p. 468.]

<sup>5</sup> Structural adjustment programmes consist of loans provided by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to countries that experience economic crises. Their purpose is to adjust the country's economic structure, improve international competitiveness, and restore its balance of payments.

one such attempt and it resulted in the Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity concerning the lines of actual control between India and China. The 'Look-East' Policy<sup>6</sup> has been followed since 1993. This new orientation resulted in India achieving the status of a Dialogue Partner of ASEAN in 1994 and becoming an ARF member the next year. India was seen as an important player in the region by other member states as an effective counter to the growing China.

Not the East Asian nations, India also started focusing on the African continent realising early that the resource rich continent is an important player in consolidating and securing India's future energy and raw resources requirements. During the second half of the 1990s, India set up its first strategic partnership with South Africa in 1997. In the 1990s, India's major foreign policy initiative was to develop a close relationship with nations based on real time issues. This phenomenon of forging partnerships based on realist assumptions helped India to establish, as of 2015, strategic partnerships with 28 countries. At the end of the 1990s, India successfully tested and established itself as a nuclear capable state (1998). Those nuclear tests marked the entry of the country into the coveted nuclear capable club.

All these policy initiatives helped India forge a new image for itself with an ever-increasing influence it received with each successful technical and political outcome. India has been viewed as a country with 'good intentions' for the fellow countries. It is in India's basic foreign policy goals to cooperate rather than confront. This results in India treating separate states on a case-by-case basis, which led to a somewhat hazy picture regarding India's objectives. Naturally, India's foreign policy invited various critiques: 'Even as India's rise in the inter- state global hierarchy continues steadily, its policymakers still act in the international arena as if India can continue to afford the luxury of responding to foreign policy challenges on a case-by-case basis with no requirement for a long-term strategic policy framework. The same adhocism that had characterized Indian foreign policy in the past lingers'<sup>7</sup>.

## INDIA AND RUSSIA

Indo-Russian relations have been marked by several factors. India maintained friendship with the Soviet Union during the 1970s and the 1980s. Even after the Union devolved into Russia and several independent republics, India established its strategic partnership in 2000 with Russia preceded only by South Africa (1997) and France (1998). India and Russia have held bilateral annual summits since 2000. At that time, Russia was the only country with which India held a regular summit, which is a constant phenomenon in Russia- India bilateral relations till date.

At the global level since the 1990s, India has always been active at different multilateral groupings. India participated in the IBSA (India, Brazil, and South Africa) Dialogue Forum established in 2003, the most important agenda of this forum being a demand for the change in the composition of the UN Security Council. Those three countries have common traits being democracies and leading candidates to become in future permanent members of the UN Security Council.

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<sup>6</sup> India's 'Look East' policy is an effort to cultivate extensive economic and strategic relations with the nations of Southeast Asia to bolster its standing as a regional power and a counterweight to the strategic influence of the People's Republic of China.

<sup>7</sup> Pant H. V. The Trials of a Rising Power. *Livemint*. 29.12.2009. <https://www.livemint.com/Opinion/rixr6JJXrpGS3lgYj4YxVP/Harsh-V-Pant--The-trials-of-a-rising-power.html> (дата обращения 09.10.2022).

India joined another multilateral forum consisting of the Brazil, Russia, India, and China (BRIC), which was established in 2009 and renamed BRICS when South Africa joined it in 2011. The major feature of BRICS has been in successfully bringing together all the major countries that are emerging and dominant economies. The forum primarily addresses the means of improving the global economic system and reforming international financial institutions. It has discussed the issues, which are a concern of the group as a whole.

India has been actively looking for forums and platforms to improve its diplomatic standing and influence. At the same time, the efforts are also made to keep everyone on board for greater support and manoeuvrability at the international level. The idea of *Sabkā Sāth, Sabkā Vikās, Sabkā Vishvās* (Together with Everyone, Progress for Everyone, Trust for Everyone), is the motto of the India's foreign policy. India's regular diplomatic contouring helped it to get membership in the SCO, which is characterized as Eurasian political, economic, and military organization. India has maintained observer status since 2005, mirroring US attendance of the Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). India, along with Pakistan, signed the memorandum of obligations on 2016, thereby starting the formal process of joining the SCO. Both were designated as full members in 2017.

Moscow has consistently championed the admission of India to the SCO to balance China's dominance and strengthen the group's power. However, China has objected to India's membership under the pretext of a lack of standards and procedures. Subsequently, China has favoured reviewing its unofficial moratorium on admitting new members in the wake of the planned drawdown of the US-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). China has prepared its own *quid pro quo* of India's membership by admitting Pakistan as a full member, whereas other countries aspiring to be full members have been shelved. The two organizations of the BRICS Summit and the SCO have a common trait: Russia and China are members. India has been carefully walking the diplomatic walk in both these organisations to keep peace near home and to assimilate and consolidate its power in every geographical region in more than one way. India is aware of the fact that Russia's presence in both organisations works in its favour while Moscow perhaps is also having a win-win situation where it can keep China in check just by the presence of India as a balancing force. For India, the SCO also carries a significant implication in terms of its Central Asian diplomacy, which is yet to be fully explored politically and economically. Central Asia is one region where India treads carefully since it has been identified traditionally as the 'Backyard of Russia' and it is quite sensitive to any changes that might come up in the region. For India cannot and will not risk any diplomatic manoeuvre, which puts its relations with Russia in a jeopardy.

## FOREIGN POLICY SINCE 2014

The present day diplomacy of India is rooted in its realisation of its potential and its impact on world affairs. There has been a focus on pursuing more independent and realist foreign policy with greater degree of freedom. There is a continuous attempt by the leadership to resist any attempt from the outside, which might offset any interest vital to the country. As the Indian Foreign Minister remarked at Raisina Dialogue, 'It is better to engage with the world on the basis of "who we are" rather than try and please the world'<sup>8</sup>. India is confident about its identity and priorities, the

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<sup>8</sup> Need to put behind idea that others define India: Jaishankar. *India Today*. April 27, 2022. URL: <https://indiatoday.in/india/story/jaishankar-idea-of-india-world-raisina-dialogue-ukraine-war-1942580-2022-04-27> (дата обращения 07.10.2022).

world will engage with India on its terms. This foreign policy stance is indicative of a basic change in the way national interests are pursued by India in the International system.

The tilt witnessed in the foreign policy is result of a shift in the thinking of the leadership since 2014; it was decided to actively participate in the global happenings rather than being passive watchers. The necessity to have a separate viewpoint was what contributed to the aggressive stance of the India's reinvigorated foreign policy choices. 'When the Modi government rose to power, Sandy Gordon of the Australia National University noted the government's attempt to "play both ends against the middle"<sup>9</sup>, especially since this approach has been a classic feature of Indian foreign policy. Under this scenario, India would seek the best deal it can from China, both economically and in terms of a possible border settlement, while attempting to maintain its hedge against a possible difficult rise of China with powers such as the US and Japan' [Horimoto, 2017, p. 487].

'Self-reliance has become a popular rhetorical force within which to organize collective Third World responses to failed development strategies and the lack of success of New International Economic Order demands' [Tickner, 1986, p. 461]. There has been an increased focus on making the country self-reliant in every field. The programmes like 'Make in India'<sup>10</sup>, 'Self Reliant India Programme'<sup>11</sup> have received a major push from the leadership. These domestic policies were framed to have a more independent and strong say in the international system. 'PM Modi has been practicing his policy of expediting economic growth and expanding defence capabilities to create a rich and powerful nation. For Modi, a strong economy means not only the economy per se, but also the infrastructure of his diplomacy. "A strong economy is a base of effective foreign policy". He appears to be implementing his foreign policy from the perspective of geo-economics rather than geopolitics' [Horimoto, 2017, p. 487–488].

Though the going has been smooth but not without challenges. There has been at some point a clash between foreign policy objectives and domestic realities, the latter sometimes running counter to the former. The issue has arisen of a Trade Facilitation Agreement with economic benefits said to be worth 1 trillion US dollars. India agreed to join it in December 2013 in Bali with a grace period of four years with regard to its agricultural procurements. However, in July 2014, India took back its decision due to considerations of farmers' concerns. It must be noted that anything which is intended to enhance a country's image in the international system must conform to the domestic policies. 'Narendra Modi's slogan of "Make in India" must be seen in the context of the interests of consumers and other relevant parties in India. He must cope with the difficult political dichotomy of localism versus globalism' [Ibid, p. 488].

## CONCLUSION

One of India's most coveted achievement is a renewed engagement with ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), concentration on connectivity projects both in terms of digital cooperation and cultural engagement. India's defence ties with Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indo-

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<sup>9</sup> Gordon S. Will China 'Wedge' India and the US? *South Asia Masala Blog*, June 05, 2014. URL: <http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/blogs/southasiamasala/2014/06/05/will-china-wedge-india-and-the-us/#more-5530> (дата обращения 05.10.2022).

<sup>10</sup> 'Make in India' is an initiative by the Government of India to make and encourage companies to develop, manufacture and assemble products made in India and incentivize dedicated investments into manufacturing.

<sup>11</sup> Built around five pillars of Economy, Infrastructure, Systems, Vibrant Demography, and Demand, the package was aimed at and opening up new avenues of trade, investment, and employment in the post-pandemic economy.

nesia and the Philippines have reached new heights. The concept of Indo-Pacific has acquired a new definition and it is now much more relevant and active than at any other time in history. The Quad is another successful story of India's long-term association with the values of Democracy, Rule of Law and its respect for the International Law. It is an informal organisation having four mature democracies of the world representing one of the technically most advanced nations coming together to realise the goals of world peace and harmony. India's concept of the Indo-Pacific coincides with that of the ASEAN — that the Indo-Pacific<sup>12</sup> is an inclusive concept.

India has always worked according to its ancient belief of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, the belief, which holds high the principle that this entire earth represents a family and every single nation is connected to each other through familial bonds. In the light of its foreign policy principles, India seeks cooperation and harmony and does not seek to isolate any country against anyone's interest. South Asia remains central to the concept and it seeks cooperative arrangements for the development and prosperity of all in the region. India's ties with ASEAN have progressed steadily and India has managed to tie together a string of arrangements in the field of maritime domain awareness.

India along with ASEAN, China, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea is actively working to negotiate a deal, which will boost the Regional Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Partnership (RCEP) Agreement. This would be far reaching agreement in terms of volume of trade and services being exchanged once it kicks off officially. The India-Africa partnership is monitored closely by the Indian leadership and a fresh push is given to an already existing channel of communication and cooperation with the African States.

Based on the 10 guiding principles delineated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India is making a steep progress in extending its reach to its Western neighbour. India has a huge presence in the African continent with a huge diaspora and billions of dollars in investment in energy sector. India's rising need of energy also makes it necessary for the nation to tread carefully in the regions as the rising global tensions over the Iranian nuclear programme continues cast a doubt on the energy security of India. In a scenario of any disturbances in Iran, which directly affects its energy security and connectivity with Central Asian states, India is careful of establishing channels of communication with Central Asian republics in more than one possible manner.

Beyond India's periphery, the country has been actively pursuing the Eurasian economies for closer connection and cooperation. The Indian engagement has expanded with the country's inclusion in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). It is working towards an economic arrangement with the Eurasian Community; Europe, where it has forged close ties with countries like Germany, France, Spain, Italy, the UK, etc.; and Latin America, with whom trade and investments have flourished and natural resources have become a new area of collaboration<sup>13</sup>.

Russia continues to be a reliable and long-standing defence partner but both sides are exploring new avenues of reinvigorating the economic partnership, following a summit meeting last year in Sochi

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<sup>12</sup> The Indo-Pacific, sometimes known as the Indo-West Pacific or Indo-Pacific Asia, is a biogeographic region of Earth's seas, comprising the tropical waters of the Indian Ocean, the western and central Pacific Ocean, and the seas connecting the two in the general area of Indonesia. The Indo-Pacific has been seen as a continuum across the two oceans joined together by its main trading channel, the straits of Malacca. Two broad reasons explain the rise of a strategic imagination of the Indo-Pacific. First, the growing footprint of China across the length and breadth of the region and second, the relative decline of the U.S. alliance system and its strive for resurgence.

<sup>13</sup> Wadhwa A. India's Foreign Policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. *India Perspectives*. 2019. 3. URL: [https://www.india-perspectives.gov.in/en\\_US/indias-foreign-policy-in-the-21st-century/](https://www.india-perspectives.gov.in/en_US/indias-foreign-policy-in-the-21st-century/) (дата обращения 09.10.2022).

between the two leaderships. Relationships with Israel, South Korea and Australia have also seen expansion. India's relationship with the United States has assumed a 'multiple levels of cooperation' character. Defence, science and technology, engagement with the Indian diaspora as well as trade and investment are some of the most important support columns of the Indo-US engagement. In the multilateral arena, India is an active member of the G-4 club, which actively pushes the cause of India's induction in the Security Council permanent membership. India's claim to the permanent membership is backed by India's record as an actively functioning democracy, its contribution in various peace keeping mission of the UN, a large population and its economic might in the international system.

India is one of the most vocal speakers on the issues like climate change and it has been leading in attempts to change the situation. The Indian Prime Minister launched the International Solar Alliance in 2015, which represents 121 countries. It is working with regional organisations like IORA (the Indian Ocean Rim Association) to develop blue economy in the region, and has always advocated a comprehensive convention on combating terrorism, at the international level. It has taken the lead in reform in global governance — be it the UN, international financial institutions, or the G20 and is all set to chair the G20 in 2022. In the final analysis, India's foreign policy is being shaped on the requirements of its domestic constituencies, its programmes for development and its desire to bring in technology and capital for its economic and scientific progress.

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