

View: Hardselling India, changing Davos

Synopsis

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By **Sreeram Chaulia**

Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#)'s participation in the [World Economic Forum](#) (WEF) in [Davos](#), Switzerland, on January 22-23 is a landmark moment for India. It's also a signal of the country's growing international confidence.

Modi is the first Indian PM to attend the WEF since 1997. He will be pulling out all stops to project India as a leading power at this elite platform where global CEOs, politicians and thinkers interact, bargain and shape opinion.

The timing of Modi's debut at Davos is opportune as he seeks to accelerate the increase in inward foreign direct investment (FDI) into India since he took office in 2014. With economic indices and interest rates inching up in Europe and the US, there is a danger of emerging markets like India losing their sheen in the minds of investors and governments sitting atop sovereign wealth funds.

By hobnobbing with an estimated 120 CEOs of top commercial, financial and technological firms, as well as at least one dozen heads of State at Davos, Modi wants to drive home the message that they should keep faith in India as a steadily improving land of unrivalled opportunity.

Modi has always sought international input and affirmation to catalyse his mission of transforming India. Even as the narrative within India about his performance and management of the economy has lately acquired a critical edge, he has hit back at sceptics with a series of foreign 'thumbsups' gestures.

The upgrade of India's credit rating by Moody's (the first such since 2004), its leapfrogging 30 places in the World Bank's [Ease of Doing Business](#) Index, and its highest ever ranking of 40 out of 137 countries in the WEF's Global Competitiveness Index are a few recent standouts at a time his opponents at home have been highlighting the mishaps resulting from initiatives like [demonetisation](#) and GST.

At Davos, where the mood is resoundingly liberal, Modi will promote his credentials as a dogged reformer who has implemented tough measures that are changing India for the better. In the 2017 edition of WEF, China's President Xi Jinping had hogged the limelight by positioning his country as the anchor of a second phase of globalisation, in contrast to the dark, anti-globalist mood in the West. Taking a leaf from the Chinese, Modi has secured his spot as the keynote speaker at the plenary session this time. He will use that unique prime time pulpit to showcase India as an innovation

hub and a benign democratic power which is stabilising the world through its responsible foreign policy.

If China strutted around at Davos 2017, India will not-so-subtly be saying now that it too matters, and is rising in a manner more respectful of human rights and of the sovereignty of partner nations.

Modi's strategy of sponsoring a variety of marquee events at the WEF, and ensuring that India grabs maximum attention, is part of his momentum-generation diplomacy that utilises public relations and optics to wow large international audiences and win their trust. Cynics who point to the unrepresentative make-up of WEF, and of its hardcore pro-capitalist ideology, might wonder why Modi is going all out on a charm offensive in an institution that does not cater to the interests of the poor masses in India and across the world.

But Modi's pragmatic foreign policy outlook is to extract whatever value he can get from any important global centre of capital and knowhow for India's onward march. To boot, the sizeable Indian delegation of corporate leaders, Cabinet members and Chief Ministers he is spearheading, could actually contribute to altering the WEF's very look and purpose, which till now has been an exclusive hang-out of privileged white western males with others looking on from the sides.

(The writer is dean, Jindal School of International Affairs)

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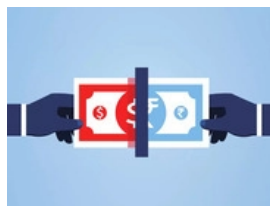
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