

## Rediscovering India

*Modi's Davos visit has helped India reclaim its due place in the world economic order*

It's all in the optics, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi was extremely aware from the moment he touched down in Switzerland and made his way to almost snowbound Davos. So, it was a statesman-like and dignified Modi who was on show for the world, and who held meetings with the Swiss president, Alain Berset, and Canada's Justin Trudeau. His speech too, was emollient, about global concerns that everyone in his audience could identify with: the environment, terrorism and globalisation. True, there were veiled swipes, like the reference to "good and bad terrorists" and even a critical mention of the "forces of protectionism raising their heads against globalisation". His message was clearly that democratic India was a force for good in the world. He left it unsaid, and allowed the audience to draw its own comparison between vibrantly democratic India and China, where autocracy rules supreme.

For over two decades, Indian politicians and ministers have travelled the world selling the message that India, with its one billion-plus population and rising middle class and youthful workforce, was a market that would yield rich dividends for global corporations. It's a measure of how far we have come that Modi didn't think it necessary to turn salesman and hard-sell India. He left the deal-making to the large delegation of businessmen and even the representative from Bollywood, Shah Rukh Khan, who together ensured that India made its presence felt at Davos. This was in sharp contrast to last year when Chinese leader Xi Jinping stole the show and India was nowhere in sight. Modi's whistle-stop trip was essential to re-establish India's place in the global economic order and to ensure that we do not fall out of sight at the annual get-together of the global elite.

But it has to be said that Xi Jinping travelled to Davos last year with a very clear goal. He was signalling to the world that China wants to step forward into the breach and take the place of the Americans who were looking inward and threatening to turn protectionist. Xi hinted at a world where China would be the leader of globalisation and also the global supremo. Modi, by contrast, had a more limited objective of emphasising that India is eager to be a part of a tech-led new world order, even if we may not be looking far into the future as the Chinese clearly are. Modi singled out renewable energy as an area where we are firmly on target to achieve our goals but in other areas he had to fall back on alliterative clichés like "democracy, demographics and dynamism". And though it's true that India has become an easier country to invest in, global businessmen are likely to be sceptical about the claim that "red tape has been replaced by a red carpet". Nevertheless, the Prime Minister sent out all the right signals and we can only hope that his trip will result in rich dividends.