

Swachh Bharat is world's biggest social movement, will help India meet UN goals: PM

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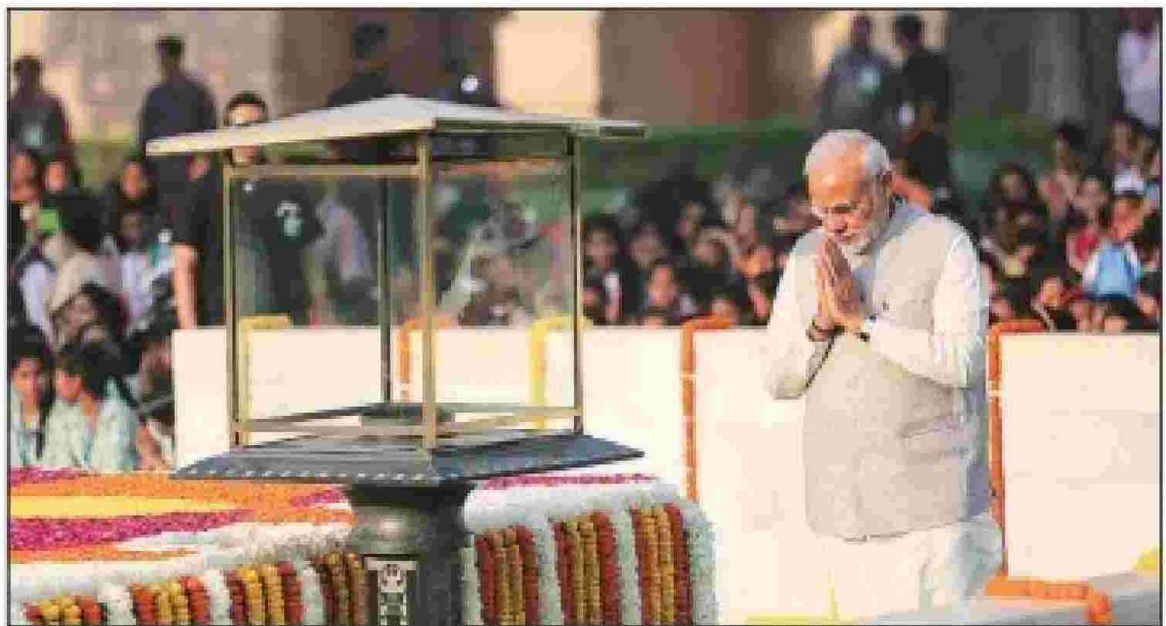
MARKING THE start of year-long celebrations in the run-up to the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi in 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi Tuesday said that his government's flagship Swachh Bharat Mission has had the biggest domino effect in the world. During the freedom struggle, he said, the Mahatma had said that given a choice between *swatantrata* and *swachhata* (independence and cleanliness), *swachhta* should be given priority.

Addressing the concluding session of an international sanitation convention — held during the Swachhta Hi Seva campaign, it was attended by sanitation ministers and leaders in WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) from across the world — Modi said: "Gandhi spent his life in pursuit of independence. But even he gave priority to cleanliness over independence."

In order to help the world attain total sanitation coverage, the Prime Minister said, four Ps are important — political leadership, public funding, partnership and people's participation.

"Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is proving to have the world's biggest domino effect," he said. On the gains made by the mission, he said prior to 2014, rural sanitation coverage was

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi pays homage to Mahatma Gandhi on Gandhi Jayanti at Rajghat, Tuesday. *Tashi Tobgyal*

Swachh Bharat

38 per cent and, in the last four years, it had increased to 94 per cent.

“Five lakh villages and 25 states have got the Open Defecation Free tag. Four years ago, 60 per cent of open defecation in the world was in India, today it has fallen to less than 20 per cent. In these four years, not only have we constructed toilets but over 90 per cent of the toilets are being used regularly,” he said, attributing the success to behavioural changes brought in by the campaign.

Referring to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, one of which is free-

dom from open defecation, Modi said that India will achieve the United Nations General Assembly’s SDGs ahead of its 2030 deadline.

Present at the session where the Prime Minister spoke were UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Hardeep Singh Puri and Water and Sanitation Minister Uma Bharti, in charge of the mission in urban and rural India respectively.

Stating that the Clean India Mission builds on Gandhi’s genius and lifelong quest for human dignity, Guterres said that marking the birth anniversary of Gandhi “by honouring his long record of advocacy

and action on this vital issue is a fitting tribute to this great human being and example for all us”. Adding that even today an estimated 2.3 billion people globally do not have basic sanitation facilities, he said, “I believe that what’s happening in India is quickly changing the statistics.”

As part of the event, the Ministry of External Affairs got its missions abroad to involve singers and musicians from 124 countries to pay homage to Gandhi through his favourite devotional song ‘Vaishnava Jan To’, a Gujarati hymn penned by the 15th century poet Narsinh Mehta. A medley version of the hymn by artists from over 40 countries was launched at the event.