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View: Post-Covid recovery or beyond, this budget will shape India's strategic global role
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The Indian budget is a unique happening. Few polities combine a single occasion to address the immediate and the long-term challenges — or, indeed, the macro picture and its granular details. Even taking that into account, this year's budget is of exceptional significance. For an India that is recovering from the Covid pandemic, it is a pathway to rebuilding and revival. And for the world, an insight into the prospects of one of its leading economies.

As foreign minister, my view of this complex and wide-ranging exercise is naturally a strategic one. It focuses on the impact of the budget on our comprehensive national power. Whether it is post-Covid recovery or setting future directions, it will determine India's role in the emerging global order.

In many ways, the groundwork of the budget was laid even as the pandemic was in full force. A bold lockdown decision was accompanied by extensive social support measures and a rapid expansion of health infrastructure. Rather than attempt a frontloaded reflation of demand while the pandemic was on, we took a more confident approach of addressing the economic recovery itself.

Therefore, targeted economic packages, and critical reforms and initiatives were undertaken. Those in agriculture, manufacturing, labour and education were particularly notable. At the same time, immediate relief was provided by taking care of the vulnerable, financially or by providing food rations. The approach was to keep policies people-centric, to expedite and facilitate rapid recovery, and at the same time, to gear up to meet greater aspirations at home. The needs and expectations of India have changed after the pandemic. Which is why this budget is so different.

Its six pillars make their own statement. That health and well-being is given first priority underlines the importance of this domain. Conceptualised in an integrated manner, this can have enormous socioeconomic consequences. The stress on capital and infrastructure brings out their centrality to revival and growth. The focus on inclusive development reflects the importance, among others, of agriculture, fisheries and migrant workers. It reiterates an outlook towards the vulnerable already in evidence during Covid.

The reinvigoration of human capital recognises how key that is to expanding manufacturing and the knowledge economy. Strengthening innovation and R&D are the logical requirements to promote talent and create value. And 'minimum government, maximum governance' has been enhanced by effectively utilising our digital potential. In short, this is truly a budget that expresses confidence in Aatmanirbhar Bharat.

The FM offered some glimpses of its repercussions for the world. Investing in India will become friendlier and possible over a wider canvas. The production-linked incentives will encourage global supply chains to incorporate our capabilities. Infrastructure expansion will facilitate those trends. Where human capital is concerned, greater social investments will expand the reservoir of skills. Understandings, such as with Japan and the UAE, can make

them globally available. And stronger research and innovation at home can make itself similarly felt up the global value chain. Larger vaccine production and more virological research facilities will be welcomed beyond our boundaries.

Aatmanirbhar Bharat is about creating stronger capacities at home to make a more effective contribution globally. The 'Pharmacy of the World' has gained widespread appreciation, for medicines as much as for vaccines. But the world is today looking for much more from India. It urgently requires additional engines of growth to de-risk the global economy. It is also searching for trusted partners and resilient supply chains.

If India is to step up to that challenge, it must create robust capacities at home. That can only happen when we make the investments necessary to build domestic strengths, modernise our infrastructure and upgrade our skills. All of that is facilitated by a larger enabling environment that provides basic necessities to all while promoting education, skills, employment and innovation. The 2021 budget addresses all these issues. By doing so, it ensures that the world can count more on India.