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- ❖ **ASEAN-Japan Relations**
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Third Concept aims at providing a platform where a meaningful exchange of ideas can take place among the people of the Third World. The attempt will be to communicate, debate and disseminate information, ideas and alternatives for the resolution of the common problems facing humankind. We welcome contributions from academics, journalists and even from those who may never have published anything before. The only requirement is a concern for and desire to understand and take the issue of our time. Contributions may be descriptive, analytical or theoretical. They may be in the form of original articles, reactions to previous contributions, or even a comment on a prevailing situation. All contributions, neatly typed in double space, may be addressed to:

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Designed by: Pt. Tejpal

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Worrisome Indicators

Undoubtedly, Prime Minister Narendra Modi tried to project a rosy picture of India in his recent debut address at Davos to garner investment from the foreign investors on the strength of burgeoning economy, commitment to the process of globalization and climate change in accordance with the Paris accord; nevertheless, ground realities within the country and recent indicators released by international organizations hardly support prime minister's claims. Perhaps encouraged by the optimism relayed by World Bank and IMF in their recent estimates that India's economy would be the fastest growing economy in coming years, the PM declared that Indian economy would reach to five trillion US dollar economy by 2025. Some economists have lamented that PM Modi's flaunting of his economic reforms at Davos belie the strong undercurrent of discomfort at home in the wake of growing unemployment, downslide in manufacturing and the underlying adverse impact of demonetization and hurried implementation of the GST, the promised benefits of which are yet to show up.

Media reports indicate that even domestic players have cut back on investments because lack of demand has rendered existing capacity useless and the RBI survey for quarter ending September 2017 indicates that domestic industry is operating at only 70% capacity. The creation of new jobs is nowhere close to optimal and many experts opine that in the absence of secure livelihoods from the farms to the factories, the mere of opening of bank accounts for the poor has done little for financial inclusion. Disquieting indicators are emerging from Oxfam's recent report about income disparities in India. PM Modi's hour-long speech at Davos emphasized on India's support for globalization and criticized protectionism being exercised by developed countries. However, media reports make it discernible that in December 2017, the government imposed stiff tariffs on imports of cellphones, video cameras and televisions, a move which points towards protectionism. While pointing out that India is confronted with a challenge in terms of imports, some economists opine that India is keen to attract foreign manufacturers without appearing to violate international trade norms with a view to leveraging its market size to drive industrial policies to spur greater high-tech manufacturing in the country and it is where these experts warn that such a move is prone to cause greater trade friction.

Undoubtedly, India has played an important role under the Modi regime in sealing the Paris Agreement on Climate Change but indicators point that India has walked the talk on its commitments, especially in the renewable energy. It has been pointed by some climate experts that the steps to promote renewable energy in the country have been let down by the lack of planning or coordinated efforts within the government. While asserting that a lack of regulations for wind power has hamstrung the sector, these experts lament that solar power industry has also been squeezed by a narrowing pipeline of auctions. It is pointed out that Modi government's reported move to stall the imports of cheap solar modules from China and elsewhere are likely to undermine the renewables industry. Modi government's reported move to impose 70 percent tariffs on imported solar panels is also disputed by some experts. While conceding that imposition of stiff tariffs could spur domestic production of solar panels, experts also opine that such a move could lead to expensive solar power far more expensive for the domestic consumers and, in turn, slow down India's fight against the vagaries of climate change. India's progress on climate change in the post-Paris phase is far from satisfactory. Pollution, both aerial and water, is assuming serious dimension in India. A recent report on ranking of countries on pollution by Yale's Centre for Environmental Law and Policy showed India falling to 177 out of 180, down from 156 in 2016. On the other hand, China has improved its ranking appreciably. These are disturbing indicators. Present dispensation has ambitious plans and its strategy of staking high claims in international fora should match with domestic achievements, otherwise hollowness of such claims entails the possibility of undermining nation's interests. There is need to walk the talk. Domestic stability and prosperity are a sine qua non for garnering foreign investment. If such a state of affairs is allowed to prevail, attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) would remain a chimera.

— BK