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Impact of Rapid Technological Change on the Achievement of SDGs

INDIA STATEMENT

By

Ambassador Tanmaya Lal, Deputy Permanent Representative

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Mr. President,

The human story is in many ways the story of technology.

The genius for technology has continuously shaped human lives, societies and civilizations. From shaping of stone tools and control over fire, we have come a long way to the excitement of robotics and artificial intelligence. Along the way we have seen critical advancements such as extraction and use of metals and different forms of energy.

Technology improved life spans; provided food for expanding populations; drove globalisation and landed man on the moon. We have even come closer to the prospect of annihilation due to manmade factors.

Mr. President,

The 20th century saw science improve our understanding of the building blocks such as the atom, the gene, and the byte. It led to technologies that manipulate these to generate immense power in energy, medicine and ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies).

The ever increasing pace of innovations in areas such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Robotics, Synthetic Biology, Digital Networking, Big Data Analytics, 3D Printing, Nanotechnology, Internet of Things, FinTech, New Materials, Unmanned Vehicles as part of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) impacts a whole range of activities such as manufacturing and services, healthcare, education, development, renewable energy, geospatial information management, space technology, and even warfare.

Their convergence is facilitated by the emergence of digital platforms; and reduction in entry cost for innovators. They are once again completely altering businesses and the ways in which people interact with one another and with governments.

Mr. President,

Although technology is neutral, its deployment and access to its benefits are not.

While emerging technologies from cyber to genetic engineering and artificial intelligence can transform lives for the better, disparities in access to such technologies exacerbate the existing inequalities and create new fault-lines.

There are other associated concerns such as cyber security; possible cyber attacks on critical infrastructure; privacy of personal data; ethical issues regarding genetic manipulation; and obsolescence of certain jobs and industries, that also need to be addressed.

Each industrial or technological revolution has had winners and losers among communities and even nations. We cannot afford it now.

The ever-increasing pace of technological change and its convergence and uncharted potential impacts on human lives, economies and polity requires a serious discussion among us all and the various stakeholders on the possible need and scope of international cooperation and governance in certain areas.

We, therefore, welcome today's discussion on the impact of this rapid change on the achievement of 2030 Agenda. We also look forward to receiving the report of High Level Panel on Digital Cooperation set up by the Secretary General.

Mr. President,

India has consistently recognised the value of deploying science and technology to improve lives of peoples. From green revolution in food security to remote sensing for agriculture and fisheries and disaster risk reduction, to nuclear energy for healthcare, we continue to invest in S&T for sustainable development.

A major transformational intervention has been the use of ICT to leapfrog and upscale financial inclusion. This is being achieved by inter-linking biometric-based unique identity system, opening of bank accounts and use of smart phones, especially for the poor and marginalised to enhance the outreach and delivery of Government services while improving transparency and reducing corruption.

ICT tools are also being effectively deployed for improving the access and quality of education and healthcare services, including through tele-education and tele-medicine. Geographical Information Management systems are being deployed to provide information about water, crop inventory, and other natural resource availability, early warning for natural disasters etc.

Increasing emphasis is laid upon imparting vocational skills that would help people in finding appropriate employment opportunities.

One of our flagship programmes is called 'Digital India', which seeks to use such technologies in a range of sectors and also bridge the digital divide.

Mr. President,

Technology is a cross-cutting enabler for sustainable development, economic growth, social inclusion and environment sustainability.

In an inter-dependent world, the risks of uneven economic growth, development, climate change are also globalised. It is in our collective interest to collaborate to provide a more equitable access to technology. Commercial interests have to be balanced against larger good.

Mr. President,

To conclude, the transformative impact of emerging technologies for greater good is clear even as the other implications are not fully understood. These require greater discussion and understanding and a sense of collaboration for our collective interest.

I thank you.