

# To Make Every Single Day Women's Day

Democracy remains the key to women's equality

International Women's Day serves to remind us, lost, as we tend to be, in the hurly-burly of daily toil, of a vital goal of equality that has not only not been achieved ever since it was recognised as a vital part of social emancipation but appears as remote today as it was a decade ago. Gender equality should not be the concern of women alone, but of all citizens who want to live in a democratic polity and an equitable society. Sure, this cannot be achieved by dedicating one day to the cause. But that one day should serve to re-examine the work agenda towards equality and rededicate every organisation to this goal.

In India, the next step towards gender justice varies, depending on one's location. In some parts, it is ending female foeticide and getting girls into schools. In some circles, it is progressing to paternity leave. In some religions, it is ending bias rooted in personal law, in others, it is bringing tradition and practice in line with reformed laws. In a place like Nagaland, customary law precludes women from political leadership, putting it at odds with the basic spirit of the Constitution. Unlike in countries with a relatively more even spread of social development, in India, the relative liberation of working women, especially those in the organised sector, from the drudgery of unpaid, unrecognised domestic work comes at the expense of less fortunate women, who are still redeemed from abject poverty by the menial jobs they perform at other people's homes. But all women live under the shadow of sexual violence in India, whether actresses, call centre executives working late in the office or returning home at dusk, rural women stepping out to relieve themselves or just about any woman deemed, as per the norms of patriarchal tradition, to be transgressing codes of propriety in terms of dress, place, time or the gender of her companion.

Yes, there are horrid acid attacks by spurned men, but there are also women who increasingly break the glass ceiling or fight back against sexual harassment at the workplace. Stronger democracy is what all women need, along with men.

# Don't Link School Meals to Aadhaar

Requiring schoolchildren turning up for their midday meal to flash their Aadhaar cards is absurd. Aadhaar makes sense in many subsidy schemes, because by transferring cash to the intended beneficiary's bank account, much fraud and waste can be eliminated. But this would not work with the midday meal scheme implemented nationwide in 2008. If the aim is simply to make sure that more and more people enrol in Aadhaar, this would be the wrong way to go about it. Without coercion, more than a billion Indians have already obtained their Aadhaar numbers. Forcing young children to enrol themselves for Aadhaar to get their free meal at school would make any kind of sense only if the idea was to transfer money to the beneficiaries, instead of serving them a wholesome meal. But cash will not do in this case.

The midday meal scheme has multiple goals. It incentivises attendance, whatever the standard of teaching. Some teachers do teach and the improvement in attendance after the midday meal scheme came into place, has done more good than bad. Transferring cash, in the hope that the money would be spent on a nutritional meal for the child, does not guarantee either the meal or school attendance.

If Aadhaar and cash transfers, in place of midday meals, are inflicted on poor and very young Indians, it would mean backtracking from two other goals. Midday meals make children mix with others from different backgrounds. It is also a way to break down barriers of caste and religion differences that infest society today. A meal shared among kids, irrespective of what neighbourhood or mohalla they have come from, and irrespective of the caste or community of the cook, can break down artificial walls set up by the Manusmriti or new, divisive politics. Aadhaar-linked transfers are not everything.

Off-putting packs could trim bottomlines of supermarkets and consumers

# Make Unhealthy Foods' Consequences Plain

An award-winning Cambridge scientist will undoubtedly earn the ire of chefs and home-cooks the world over as he has sounded off this week on the attractiveness of food as temptation to ingest more calories. Of course he was targeting brightly packaged fast-food and processed snacks, but the point will not be lost on those who feel obesity is reaching epidemic proportions. The scientist advocates plain-paper wrapping — à la the deliberately off-putting packs for cigarettes — to discourage impulse buying and consumption of fatty and sugary foods. His somewhat draconian logic is that since dopamine — the hormone that makes us feel good when we eat — cannot be controlled, the appeal and allure of food should be regulated instead. If his radical suggestion is ever taken up seriously and implemented, supermarket shelves will become deathly dull. But the stores' — and their customers' — bottomlines will doubtless become distinctly trimmer.

In this context, could it be posited that the no-frills style of traditional home-cooking promoted healthy apportioning and sensible ingesting of food? With no bewitching garnishes and foams, the plain presentation of daily meals may have been calculated to not induce gluttony in anyone but the most determined gourmands. This professor will not find favour with the hosts, participants and fans of MasterChef.

# Learn from Modi, Comrades

**CURSOR** Narendra Modi has successfully tapped class anger, even as the Left has failed to



**T K Arun**

Traditional class warriors, the Left, can still mine the rich vein of class anger Demonetisation has tapped so effectively and creatively.

Whether PM Narendra Modi would blow away all opposition in Uttar Pradesh and win the state for the BJP remains a matter of conjecture as of now. What is fairly certain is that Demonetisation (DeMo) has been far from the electoral disaster it deserved to be, for having wrecked jobs, small businesses and domestic peace in all homes where the women had squandered away small sums without their menfolk's knowledge.

## Modi Alchemy

The reason DeMo could inflict pain without eliciting anger against the government is class antagonism. This column had argued, in 'Narendra Indira Modi?' (November 16, 2016), that Modi was using DeMo to rally the poor against the rich, with his high-pitched rhetoric against ill-gotten wealth and call to the people to join the battle by bearing the short-term pain of missing cash.

Modi rolled out traders and businessmen, who directly bore the brunt of business loss and the conversion cost of turning black money into white, from his support base. At the same time, he rolled in the poor, who took the pain in their stoic stride, but delighted in the evident panic among

the rich, and at Modi's messianic promises: the queue in front of the bank is the last line in which the poor would stand, for the end of black money would make them rich.

DeMo does not, of course, even scratch the surface of the black money problem. To begin with, only a part of black money stays as wealth, the rest flows through the economy. When a politician's corrupt income is lent to a builder or a variety of small and medium enterprises that do not have access to bank finance, the flow starts as black money, becomes white when the recipient uses it to buy material for construction or pays his workers. The supplier of some of the materials he has purchased could cook his books to evade taxes, and create fresh black money. This could again become white and change colour as it courses through the economy's veins.

Of the black money that is stored as wealth, the bulk is in real estate, the rest mostly in gold and dollar holdings. Except in the case of the really rich, the kind who overinvoice project costs, raise more debt than they need and siphon money out of their projects during implementation. They can also overinvoice imports and underinvoice exports and take money abroad. They can start companies abroad — for which they can take money out with the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) permission.

The companies can invest in countless subsidiaries in places like Panama, the Isle of Man, etc, and lose their original identity, after which their funds can flow back to India as sub-accounts of FIs. None of this would be affected by DeMo.

Prof Arun Kumar, formerly at JNU, has studied black money extensively. He estimates that only about 3% of black money is stored as a cash stash. This is the only bit affected by



Jai Inqilab zindabad!

DeMo. But even the owners of cash found ways and means to convert their stored cash into legitimate bank deposits. So much so that the RBI has not released the data on how much of the demonetised currency came back to the banks. Hopefully, it would finish counting the notes at least when the Election Commission finishes counting votes in the ongoing assembly elections.

## Political Messaging

At the same time, DeMo depressed economic growth by something like 1%, according to the Economic Survey. When GDP data for the September-December quarter came out, it seemed to belie such forecasts, prompting a commentator to suggest that the government demonetise four-fifths of the currency in circulation every other month or so, just to keep economic momentum strong.

It is not the case that the CSO fudged figures. Indian ingenuity did. Traders and businesses showed huge sales and profits, so as to bring their cash hoards into legal channels. They paid tax on these, leading to robust tax collections as well. The CSO estimates industrial growth looking

at financial reporting by companies and tax collections. Since these were robust, so was its growth estimate. Revisions would clear this illusion.

The ordinary voter does not go by GDP numbers. He goes by the political messaging he receives. In the midst of growing inequality, driven presumably by cronyism and corruption, and in the background of generalised venality among politicians and babus, he sees one political leader take decisive action to stamp out ill-gotten riches. His class anger against the illicit rich transmutes into support for this decisive leader.

Class anger is widespread and offers scope for class politics. But Modi targeted the anger not against the rich in general, but against the illicit rich. This is important.

The Left has marched its way to the margins of India's polity ranting against capitalists and capitalism. It must change its line. Accept that capitalism creates the prosperity the poor need. Focus not on foiling capitalists but on forging policy that would make capitalist success yield shared prosperity.

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Demonetisation has to be understood as clever politics that channelled anti-rich anger into support for the leader who dared to take on the powerful

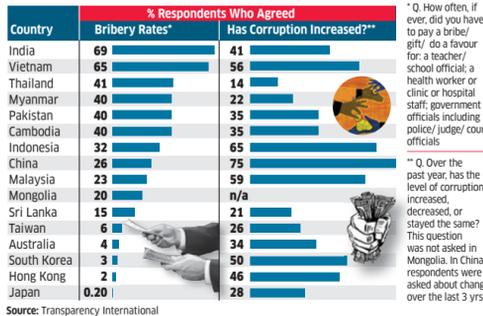
**WIT & WISDOM**

"A champion is someone who gets up when he can't."

**Jack Dempsey**  
Boxer

## India Tops in Bribery Rate: Survey

India has earned the dubious distinction of having the highest bribery rate in the Asia Pacific, with a Transparency International survey showing that more than two-thirds had to pay 'tea money' or fork out other forms of bribe to get access to public services. However, it is China which seems to have seen the highest increase, with 73% saying the bribery has gone up in their country...



## CAMERADERIE



What were you saying about stump vision, Stevie boy?



## In Praise of Women

SUMIT PAUL

Woman has been the primary source of intellectual inspiration for man. When Muhammad was disturbed by the divine voices echoing in his mind and doubted their authenticity, it was Khadija, his wife, who assured him that those voices were indeed from God. She was not only the first woman to embrace Islam but also the first person to accept it from Muhammad.

When Edison was driven out of the school for being 'unintelligent', his mother knew that her son was destined to become great — he went on to become arguably the greatest inventor of all time. Napoleon Bonaparte would have remained an ordinary soldier; his mother's faith in him made a diminutive man to become one of the greatest military geniuses of warfare.

Interestingly the Romans and Greeks preferred female soldiers. Alexander had an army of female soldiers, who fought alongside men and were often better cavaliers. Roman historian Catullus observed that when women brandished swords as cavaliers sitting on horseback, they could control themselves better than men because of the ir anatomical advantage. Cleopatra had female soldiers and female generals in her army. She herself was a good swordswoman. Amazon is a Greek word for expert fighter woman.

Closer home, Lakshmbai, Chandbibi of Ahmednagar, Razia Sultan and Chittoor's Queen Chenamma are examples of valiant female soldiers. Kalhan's Rajatragami describes how the king of Kashmir had an army of women. He also had women philosophers in his court.

## Chat Room

### We Will Freeze Your ₹5,000

With effect from April 1, India's 'biggest bank' SBI plans to rob, by way of a penalty, its nearly 31 crore customers, including students, pensioners and senior citizens, if they fail to keep a minimum balance of up to ₹5,000 in their SB accounts. Banks have already started robbing the public under the guise of an important step towards making India a cashless nation. All such robbing charges are meant to discourage people from cash transactions so that the bank employees have minimum work. Now, is the SBI management not aware that more than 85% Indians belong to either poor class or lower middle class?

HANSRAJ BHAT

Mumbai

## Insolvency Law to the Rescue

Appropos 'PARA'chuting into 'Trouble' by Mythili Bhusnurmath (Mar 6), large projects are sanctioned on the basis of projections of future cash flows for servicing the loan. Infrastructure projects, despite lack of sufficient collaterals, do get sanctioned, while selling large collaterals too is a big problem.

Armed with the strict new insolvency laws, minimal NPAs should be allowed in the future. Corporate bonds market should be encouraged for financing high-value projects.

ASHOK BARUA

Chandigarh

## Three Cheers for Team India

The victory of the Indian cricket team over Australia in the second Test match at Bengaluru is a memorable one since we had performed badly in the first Test match at Pune and the way our first innings folded up and we conceded lead to the visitors. Moreover, what is incredible is that despite captain Virat Kohli failing in both the innings, the team did not, which means there are other batsmen who are ready to raise their hands and be counted. Hopefully, we will turn around the series from here and win it.

BAL GOVIND

Noida

Letters to the editor may be addressed to editet@timesgroup.com

## UP POLLS 2017

# Uttar to a Waiting Pradesh



**Shashank Tripathi**

Creating large-scale employment opportunities is the biggest challenge for India in the coming decade. Between 2004 and 2014, India's working-age population increased by 14 crore. The economy, however, added only four crore new jobs.

The working-age population is expected to continue to rise rapidly over the coming decade. Disguised unemployment figures are estimated to be as high as 30 crore. Unless large-scale employment is created, our demographic dividend can transmute into a demographic disaster.

This drama will be first played out in Uttar Pradesh, a state in the process of electing a new government. With 21 crore citizens going to be 25 crore by 2026 in UP, the scale of the unemployment problem was on display when an application for 400 peons in Lucknow led to 2.3 million applications. Over the coming 10 years, this situation will worsen. Around 24 million new jobs are required in UP for a positive demographic dividend. This is equivalent to employing every citizen of a country as large as Australia from scratch.

At the current rate of economic growth, at best, only a third of those numbers are possible. Providing employment to the remaining 14 million is critical not just for increased per-capita GDP but for social sanity. A Haryana-type agitation in UP can put 10 times the number of young protesters on the streets. The new government in UP has to put employment generation at the top of its political agenda.

There are no dearth of schemes in UP for economic development or job

creation. Most of them have been on paper. Successive governments have not been able to bring economics into the citizens' lives, as the state remains animated by 'pure politics'. A large part of the local bureaucracy, state-led banks and other departments are simply not geared up for an economic conversation with its citizens.

Of the 44 lakh micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in UP, less than 5% have benefited from schemes related to technology upgrade, freight rationalisation and market development assistance. There are numerous litigations, the largest litigant being the state itself. Trust has been the casualty.

Brand UP is in severe disrepair, with confidence of global companies low, resulting in very poor investments flowing in. Since 2000, UP has received a paltry \$2.5 billion in FDI, accounting for 0.2% of cumulative national inflow. Take out the inflow into Noida, and this small number shrinks further.

This situation will change only if we take a citizen-centric view to the economic transformation of the state.



Seeking good fortune in Lucknow

UP has to focus on MSMEs and the farming community, the largest segments of the population. The new government should focus on solutions that empower them, removing roadblocks that come in their way.

UP is the largest food grain producer among Indian states. It has over 9% of the country's MSMEs, the largest in any state. Farms are not connected to markets and they continue to produce commodity products. In the absence of credible support, MSMEs try to fly below the radar of government officials.

A key theme for large-scale employment generation is to create market connects through aggregation and digital-physical platforms. The state's traditional MSME clusters can scale up through aggregated development of common infrastructure and collective branding and market reach.

Agriculture needs value addition and market connect through large number of crop-specific processing enterprises. Any solution to these issues has to find basis in the strengths of the state in agriculture, self-enterprise and its social and

cultural heritage.

In a state that is urbanising, urban growth anchors are essential. Mimicking the Philippines, which has an active policy of labour export to geographies with declining populations, can be a key plank for employment. While tourists arrive, they leave equally quickly. Poor infrastructure and worsening law and order are the culprits. In addition, new areas where UP was poised for growth — like sports and biotechnology — have to be promoted.

Political decentralisation of states is unlikely in the near future. But the implementation of these employment-generation schemes will require moving beyond Lucknow to the four regions with specific solutions.

Large-scale initiative for job creation needs active participation of the private sector. Expertise and leadership is as important as capital.

A state-level entity that allows partnership with different private sector companies together with industry bodies is the way forward. Attracting companies to come into the state with wide-scale capital outlays has to be complemented with the focus on citizen-centric employment generation.

The future of India will be determined not just by the growth of states like Gujarat and Karnataka or urban centres like Bengaluru and the National Capital Region (NCR), but by the development of states like UP, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Assam, West Bengal and Orissa that comprise 50% of the country's population.

The new administration of UP that comes in after March 11 has a duty of care to address this issue on a war-footing. It has an opportunity to convert UP's demographic dividend into positive economic growth outcomes. The future of 16% of India's population is at stake. As are the results of the 2019 parliamentary elections.

The writer is leader, PwC Strategy, India