

Boomtown India creating greater divide between the rich and poor

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Article

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ONE cannot help but feel a tinge of envy on reading an article in the recent Forbes Asia (Nov 27) featuring India's richest.

According to the article, the top 40 wealthiest have surged to more than double that of the previous year's— from US\$170 billion (RM578 billion) to US\$351 billion.

This makes India's 40 by far the wealthiest of all in the Asia-Pacific, it asserted.

Among them, four are said to be worth an "astonishing US\$180 billion", with 10 newcomers making the list this time.

There are, however, 14 others with billion-dollar fortunes who did not make the cut, not counting those who have opted to be citizens of other countries.



At a glance, it appears like the subcontinent is the new land of milk and honey, and why not?

In the same issue of the magazine, another article tells the success story of turning trash into treasure to help India's downtrodden.

Reportedly, the "treasures" are turning up in stores in Europe and the US, and is "getting a toehold in Parisian fashion". Not bad for someone who recycled plastic bags which at some point contained garbage!

Don't be surprised if the creator one day emerges to be among Asia's richest. After all, the miracles of Asia are producing more than its fair share of garbage that is yet to be recycled.

If this sounds like a dream, just read the Dec 3 issue of Newsweek predicting that India is vaulting into the future, given its controversial nuclear pact (thanks to Uncle Sam) and, of course, its booming economy.

Its economic growth has touched the nine per cent mark for the last four years.

And as for the nuclear deal, it will be an end to "a three-decade-old ban on international nuclear-energy co-operation and will usher in a strategic alignment with America", suggests the article and hails it as a sort of "crowning achievement".

Reportedly, the deal seems vital to India's emergence as a world power and sustaining its economic progress.

It will help reduce the electricity lag which has been blamed for frequent power cuts in homes and workplaces. Nearly half of rural India is said to lack reliable power supply.

All these predictions would be unfolding sooner if not for the stance taken by Communist Party of India to frustrate it as argued in the Newsweek article.

Still, it is worth taking the gamble on the subcontinent given what the future is expected to bring. Moreover it is alleged that the communists are in a weaker position than acknowledged, some analysts claim.

It is therefore conceivable that India could be a magnet for those who are looking for a new lease of life, especially among those already conversant with the language and culture.

There is yet another viewpoint to consider as expressed by the editor-in-chief of a New Delhi-based magazine, Tehelka, also in the same issue of Newsweek.

It narrates a somewhat different story as evident in the rather telling opening paragraph: "Making trouble in India is easy, the country mined with multiple identities: caste, community, religion, language, class, ethnicity.

"Mismanaging one can set off an uproar and politicians of every stripe repeatedly tease up trouble by playing with identity as suits the moment.

"The result is continual protests, riots, violence, tragedy and farce."

In other words, there are those who thrive in many such situations, like duck taking to water.

They seem to cherish this mode of expression, of course in the name of democracy.

As for India's booming economy, the viewpoint expressed is also quite different.

Seemingly, it involved "only 200 million people, leaving 900 million more out in the cold. The latest statistics show that the number of Indians living in abject poverty is actually growing in five major states".

Thus, as to be expected, the concluding paragraph is equally revealing: "The fact is India cannot be fixed through economic initiatives alone. It needs great political vision. And there are no signs of that.

"Yes, India is highly re-silient, which allows the management of great contradictions and crises. But in the coming years, this resilience will be tested as never before."

While this may be so, come what may, one thing is for sure. True to the spirit borne out by the Mahatma, one can never imagine that Indian society would stoop so low as to beg from its former colonial masters as a means to solve its internal problems, no matter how complex they are.

No doubt, India as a sovereign and independent nation is sure of itself and this is what makes it such a great Asian nation and community with an equally great destiny.

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