Population is not a problem, but our greatest strength

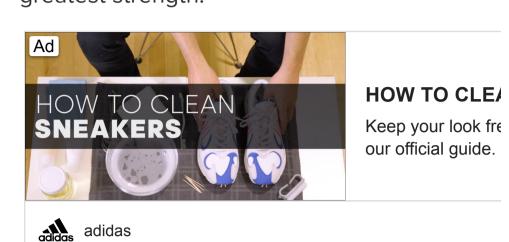
Amit Varma | TNN | Jun 9, 2019, 05:00 IST



When all political parties agree on something, you know you might have a problem. Giriraj Singh, a minister in Narendra Modi's new cabinet, tweeted this week that our population control law should become a "movement". This is something that would find bipartisan support — we are taught from school onwards that India's population is a big problem, and

we need to control it.

This is wrong. Contrary to popular belief, our population is not a problem. It is our greatest strength.



The notion that we should worry about a growing population is an intuitive one. The world has limited resources. People keep increasing. Something's gotta give.

Robert Malthus made just this point in his 1798 book, 'An Essay on the Principle of

Population.' He was worried that our population would grow exponentially while resources would grow arithmetically. As more people entered the workforce, wages would fall and goods would become scarce. Calamity was inevitable. Malthus's rationale was so influential that this mode of thinking was soon called 'Malthusian.' (It is a pejorative today.) A 20th-century follower of his, Harrison Brown,

came up with one of my favourite images on this subject, arguing that a growing

population would lead to the earth being "covered completely and to a considerable depth with a writhing mass of human beings, much as a dead cow is covered with a pulsating mass of maggots." Another Malthusian, Paul Ehrlich, published a book called 'The Population Bomb' in 1968, which began with the stirring lines, "The battle to feed all of humanity is over. In the 1970s hundreds of millions of people will starve to death in spite of any crash programs embarked upon now." Ehrlich was, as you'd guess, a big supporter of

India's coercive family planning programs. "I don't see," he wrote, "how India could

possibly feed two hundred million more people by 1980."

None of these fears have come true. A 2007 study by Nicholas Eberstadt called 'Too Many People?' found no correlation between population density and poverty. The greater the density of people, the more you'd expect them to fight for resources and yet, Monaco, which has 40 times the population density of Bangladesh, is doing well for itself. So is Bahrain, which has three times the population density of India.

Not only does population not cause poverty, it makes us more prosperous. The economist Julian Simon pointed out in a 1981 book that through history, whenever there has been a spurt in population, it has coincided with a spurt in productivity. Such as, for example, between Malthus's time and now. There were around a billion people on earth in 1798, and there are around 7.7 billion today. As you read these words, consider that you are better off than the richest person on the planet then.

Why is this? The answer lies in the title of Simon's book: 'The Ultimate Resource'.

When we speak of resources, we forget that human beings are the finest resource of all. There is no limit to our ingenuity. And we interact with each other in positivesum ways — every voluntary interaction leaves both people better off, and the amount of value in the world goes up. This is why we want to be part of economic networks that are as large, and as dense, as possible. This is why most people migrate to cities rather than away from them — and why cities are so much richer than towns or villages.

If Malthusians were right, essential commodities like wheat, maize and rice would become relatively scarcer over time, and thus more expensive — but they have actually become much cheaper in real terms. This is thanks to the productivity and creativity of humans, who, in Eberstadt's words, are "in practice always renewable and in theory entirely inexhaustible."

The error made by Malthus, Brown and Ehrlich is the same error that our politicians make today, and not just in the context of population: zero-sum thinking. If our population grows and resources stay the same, of course there will be scarcity. But this is never the case. All we need to do to learn this lesson is look at our cities!

TOP COMMENT

100% disagree with the writer. Because of a high population, we have so many people entering labor force and not everyone is able to get employment. Because of high population we have so much co... Read More

Rajiv Kumar SEE ALL COMMENTS

ADD COMMENT

humanitarian consequences in India. Think of the unborn millions over the decades because of our brutal family planning policies. How many Tendulkars, Rahmans and Satyajit Rays have we lost? Think of the immoral coercion still carried out on poor people across the country. And finally, think of the condescension of our politicians, asserting that people are India's problem — but always other people, never themselves.

This mistaken thinking has had savage

This arrogance is India's greatest problem, not our

people.

Ad: State Farm

Download The Times of India News App for Latest Home News.

FROM AROUND THE WEB TOI

When you get stumped, your Remote account opening for State Farm® agent is here to... NRIs anywhere in the world

TOI Bill gates makes an amazing

prediction to the Trump Era. Ad: theheatpeak

TOI

Our hearts go out to Angelina

1001

Stop disappointing in bed - try

this simple trick tonight!

Ad: Healthysoulmags

today.

Ad: theheatpeak.com

Ad: Caesarposts

TOI I can't see my baby suffer anymore. Help me save him! Ad: KETTO

Ad: DBS Treasures India

Jolie. Ad: glamourmagazine

Javed Akhtar ignores question Pancharaaksharam | Song on CAA Controversy Shiva (Lyrical) The Times Of India The Times Of India

Pani puri seller beats all odds, selected for U-19 World Cup The Times Of India

Judge Judy confirms the rumor New Launch in E City Bangalore.1 Bed - 33 lakh+

Husband Divorced His Wife After Looking Closer at This Photo Ad: Godrej Properties Ad: Poplively

Remember Tiger Wood' Ex-Wife?

Try Not To Gasp When You See...

[Gallery] Guests Left when They Saw Her Wedding Dress Ad: Mentertained

Meet The Women Behind The **Biggest NFL Stars** Ad: Popcornews

Latest Haryanvi Song 'Kala Anti-CAA protests: Kangana Ranaut condemns violence Milgya' Sung By Gulshan Rana The Times Of India The Times Of India

Prayagraj gets into a celebratory mood for Christmas The Times Of India

Recommended by Colombia 👶

READ 19 COMMENTS

PAKISTAN NEWS

SOUTH ASIA NEWS

POST A COMMENT

Rajiv Kumar 100% disagree with the writer. Because of a high population, we have so many people entering labor force and not everyone is able to get employment. REPLY 🍅 🐬

This article is completely off the mark....with due respect to the learned writer, it is a complete nonsense.... and if followed, will have disastrous...

CHINA NEWS

NARENDRA MODI

REPLY 🍅 🐬

Shailendra Jha

Prasannan Nambiar The writer appears to be looking at the population problem from a narrow viewpoint. Agreed that a large population is an asset only if they can con...

MORE FROM

NEWS

REPLY 🍅 🐬

LATEST NEWS US PRESIDENTIAL ELEC... US NEWS

DONALD TRUMP

WORLD NEWS

TIMES OF INDIA

The Economic Times Mumbai Mirror IGN India Hindi Economic Times Times Now I am Gujarat Bangalore Mirror Pune Mirror Tamil Samayam Techgig Maharashtra Times Telugu Samayam Ahmedabad Mirror Go Green Miss Kyra ItsMyAscent TC Next FILMIPOP Hindi Navbharat Times **Education Times Brand Capital** Eisamay Indiatimes Colombia Gujarati Economic Times Vijaya Karnataka Malayalam Samayam Times Food Games App MX Player **TimesPoints** LIVING AND ENTERTAINMENT iDiva MensXP.com Femina

About us

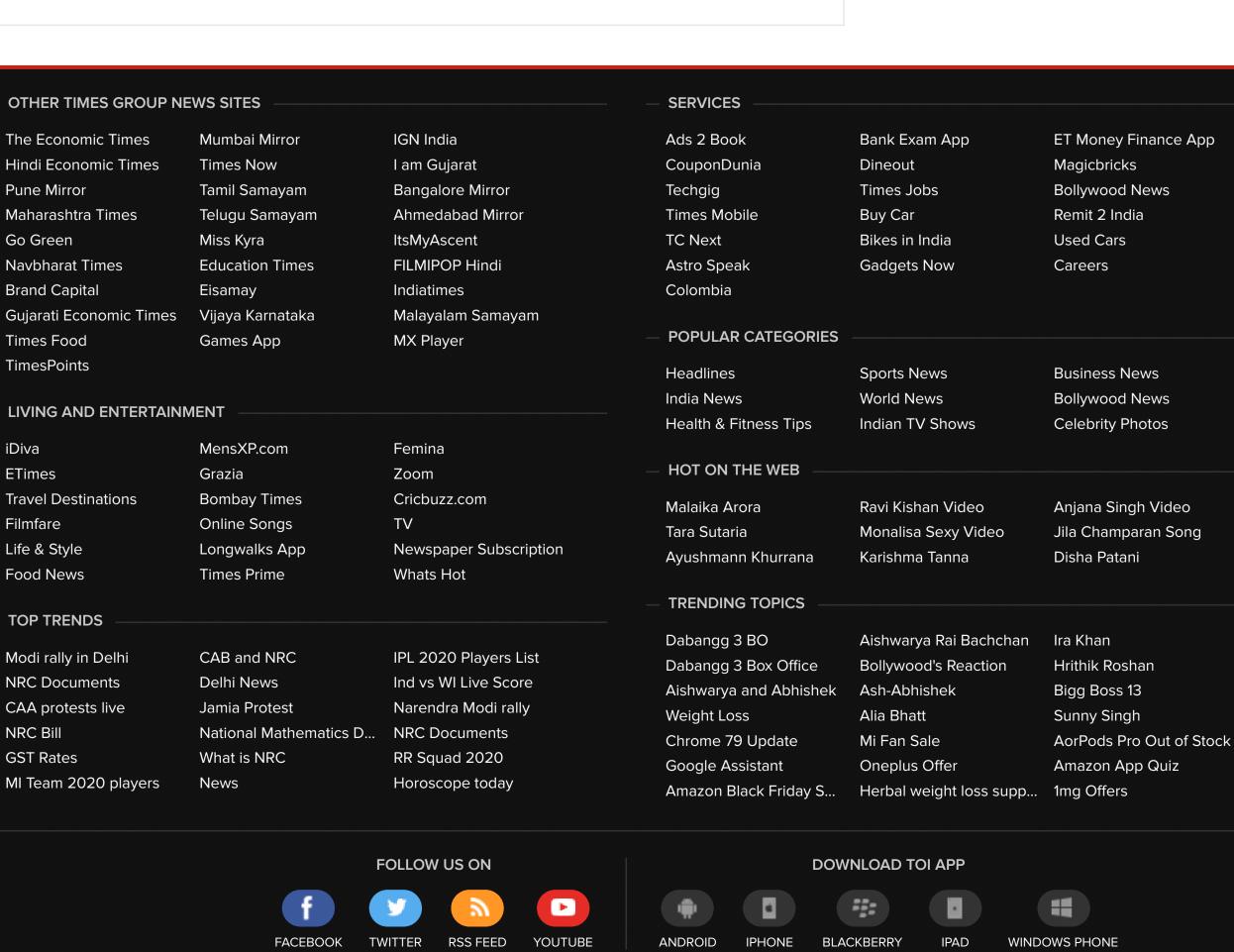
Newsletter

Sitemap

Privacy policy

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Powered by **IIMES INTERNET**



Create Your Own Ad

Advertise with us

Copyright © 2019 Bennett, Coleman & Co. Ltd. All rights reserved. For reprint rights: Times Syndication Service

Feedback

Archives

Terms of Use and Grievance Redressal Policy

RSS

ePaper

LATEST VIDEOS TOP VIDEOS > At 50, Bhagyashree Didi, why are you scared: PM Narendra is setting major Modi mocks Mamata fitness goals TRENDING VIDEOS > LIVA Miss Diva Shefali Sood talks 2020: Lucknow about her Audition preparations for Miss Suman Rao talks Shefali Sood shares message for her fans about her excitement to visit London

PREDICT

CRYPTO

MOVEMENT

TODAY

AND EARN

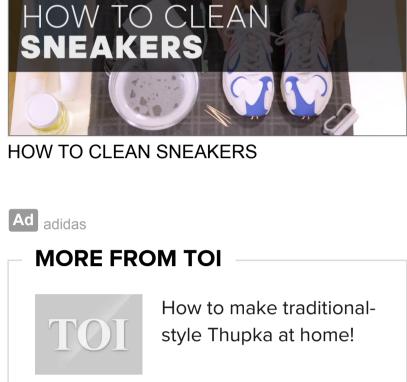
REWARDS

WITHIN 24

HOURS!

Predict Now

Allumcom



Gur Adrak Halwa Recipe Christmas cupcakes: Cute cupcake moulds that you would love to Joyous Christmas decorations to dress up your home

NAVBHARAT TIMES

FEATURED TODAY IN TRAVEL