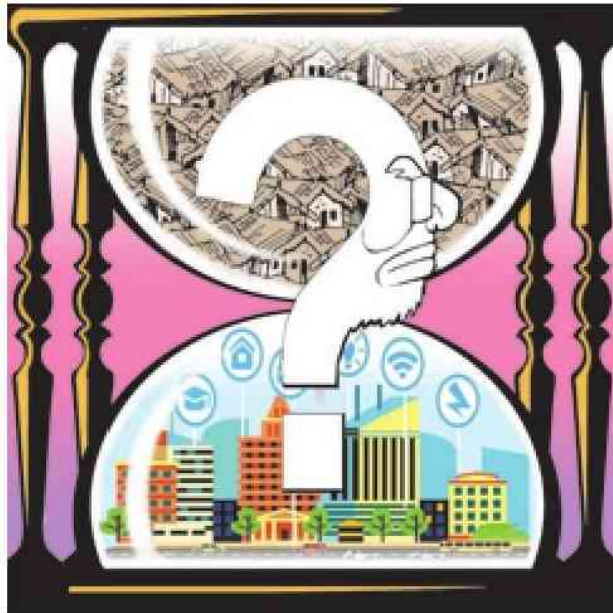


# Call For Change

*PM's I-Day speech certainly had a sense of the occasion but was short on specifics*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi can meld a sense of history with a sense of language to deliver evocative and inspiring speeches, and those qualities were on full display when he spoke from Red Fort's ramparts yesterday. Thus, according to him, the 1942 slogan of "Bharat Chhodo" (Quit India) should now be amended to "Bharat Jodo" (Join India). If currently we have a "chalta hai" (everything goes) attitude that should be replaced by "badal sakta hai" (everything can change). Kashmir's problems cannot be solved by "gaali" (abuse) or "goli" (bullets) but by "gale lagaana" (embracing).

The latter is a significant overture as it suggests that while bullets or stones will not change anything, should there be a mindset shift or the emergence of new leadership in Kashmir, the Centre is listening and willing to reciprocate. Only after good will has been established can specific initiatives come to fruition, a point missed by those who



fault the government for not coming up with specific initiatives in this regard. Whatever the dispute is – whether in Kashmir or anywhere else – it can be settled in a spirit of non-violence and within the framework of India's democratic institutions, and Modi's speech did well to emphasise this. Couched in sobriety and a sense of the occasion as it was, however, it fell short of specificity on other issues.

Most prominent among these is the critical issue of jobs for India's burgeoning youth population where the best the PM could suggest is that youth should be trained to become their own employers. But India ranks poorly in terms of ease of doing business, which means big businesses can still survive but small entrepreneurs find it tough to cope. Modi emphasised project implementation, but this in itself won't suffice if the business environment doesn't improve.

Modi also promised to double farm income by 2022, but didn't offer much by way of a roadmap to get there. He mentioned the Gorakhpur tragedy in connection with natural disasters. But Gorakhpur is one area where his dictum of "badal sakta hai" can be applied – child deaths in India are shockingly high and most other countries, including neighbouring Bangladesh, do much better. Speaking of project implementation, while physical infrastructure such as roads and ports are certainly needed if "new India" is to dawn, perhaps even more necessary are public health projects which save the lives of children.