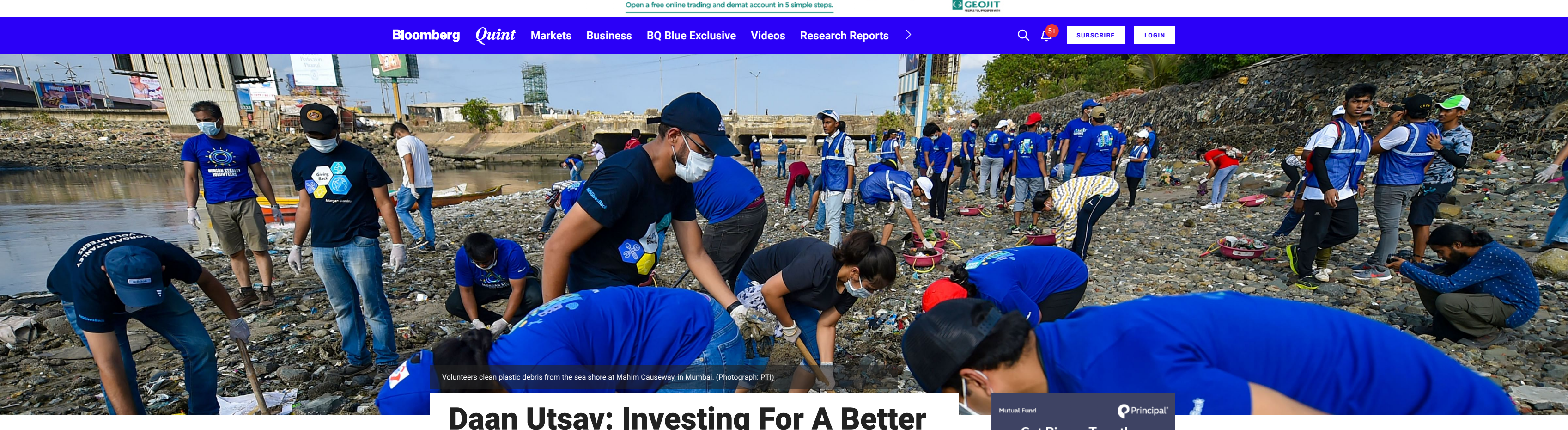
12345 Go
Open a free online trading and demat account in 5 simple steps.
Start now
GEOJIT



Volunteers clean plastic debris from the sea shore at Mahim Causeway, in Mumbai. (Photograph: PTI)

Daan Utsav: Investing For A Better 'Samaaj'

BloombergQuintOpinion
Rohini Nilekani

Bookmark

Published on October 05 2020, 12:46 PM
Last Updated on October 05 2020, 12:46 PM

From the beginning of October and through the end of December, our minds are more attuned to giving and sharing. The giving season starts with Gandhi's birthday and goes on well past Christmas. In between, there are many festivals of sharing, and gratitude, including Dassera and Diwali.

India's Daan Utsav is well-timed to enhance the feeling of fellowship and to encourage people to open up their hearts, minds, and pockets.

This year, the pandemic gives us even more reason to share the burdens of others, and to practice kindness to strangers.

We have learned in these past few months what the state and the markets can and cannot do for us. We have also learned what the *samaaj* or society *can* do. We have seen generosity pouring out across the country; we have seen a rise in the philanthropy of ordinary citizens, both in terms of their time and money. We have seen the civil society sector, and the voluntary sector, rise up to stem the worst of the suffering.

This is a beacon of hope in these bleak times. It is the signal in the midst of all the noise. It tells us that when people engage in concerted action to help others, then we are on a strong foundation to nurture a society that all of us, not just some of us, would like to live in and belong to.

> **I have personally always structured my philanthropy around this simple idea. If we can continue to build a good, resilient *samaaj*, which derives its energy from a moral leadership; which is inspired by the interconnectedness of our fates; and which is driven to co-create positive change, then we can face any future with the optimism that is unique to our human species.**

So how do I help this idea along? Luckily, there are hundreds of organisations in India that are trying to do something similar: they want to help people become part of the solution rather than remain part of the problem. They want to unleash innovation, find change-makers, and support them to become leaders and institution builders. They want people to engage as citizens, especially at their local level and figure out how to come together to resolve societal issues. These cover a wide spectrum from water, health, education, livelihoods, public infrastructure, environment, and also issues of access and voice.

With my amazing team's help, I try to find and support ideas, individuals, and institutions that resonate with the vision of building a strong *samaaj*, a good *samaaj*, through personal action. We call this portfolio – Active Citizenship.

Citizenship is typically seen through the lens of voting during elections, making claims of the state, and sometimes of active resistance.

But there is ample space for deepening this idea of citizenship. Here's just one example. We are a young nation coming of age in a digital era. This can upend the traditional imagination of citizenship and citizens' engagement. Emerging digital technologies, now widely adopted around the world, increase the possibility and space for participation. They can allow you to better understand your community's issues but also your own rights and duties. They can help find allies outside one's narrow circles. They can increase the discovery of other people's solutions.

Luckily, India's voluntary sector is just beginning to tap into this potential. There are many initiatives, both urban and rural, rising up from the *samaaj*, to expand citizen participation. There are instances of new, diverse institutions of the people - from neighbourhood societies to digital, issue-based affinity groups.

I have been able to support about a dozen wonderful organisations, most led by young, dynamic leaders. Organisations like India Rising Trust and Reap Benefit work to build more opportunities for civic engagement at scale, to solve hyper-local problems. Jhatkaa works to mobilise citizens around issues and help them take action. Other grantees work to reduce the friction between the citizen and the state. Civis is a platform that helps citizens understand and give feedback on drafts of legislation and government policies. Nyaaya works on the other side, helping citizens understand laws and regulations. Socratus Foundation for Collective Wisdom looks to understand wicked problems and bring all stakeholders together through a deliberative, outcome-oriented process.

I find great inspiration from the work of these leaders and institutions, no matter their size.

I do believe that this space needs to be better seeded with magnanimous philanthropic capital. I hope much of it will come from small givers giving big. I hope some of it will come from big givers giving big.

During and beyond Daan Utsav, we must support organisations that activate people to become better citizens – first for themselves, and then for society. So that we can all thrive in a better *samaaj*.

Rohini Nilekani is the Founder-Chairperson of Arghyam, and Co-founder and Director of EkStep.

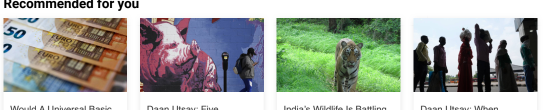
The views expressed here are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of BloombergQuint or its editorial team.

BloombergQuint

Missing BloombergQuint's WhatsApp service? Join our Telegram channel or activate Website Notifications.

View Opinions From Business And Policy Experts On BloombergQuint

Recommended for you



Would A Universal Basic Income Make Us Lazy Or Creative? Oct 5, 2020

Daan Utsav: Five Reasons To End Animal Abuse Oct 4, 2020

India's Wildlife Is Battling Disease Too Oct 3, 2020

Daan Utsav: When Enough Isn't Enough In A Pandemic Oct 2, 2020

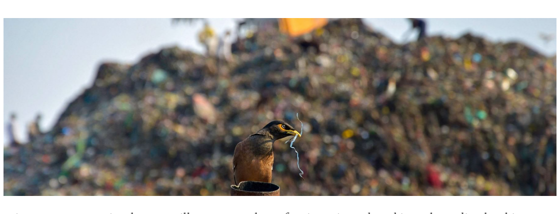
Disclaimer

Most Read

Sensex, Nifty Gain For Third Day Courtesy I.T., Metals
TCS To Consider Share Buyback On Oct. 7
Waiving Compound Interest: Finding The Good In A Bad Idea
Yes Bank Sees Deposits Rise, But CASA Liabilities Remain Low
Governance Firm SES Pegs Vedanta's Fair Delisting Price At Rs 200-250 Apiece

SUBSCRIBE to Bloomberg | Quint
The Daily Newsletter
Subscribe
I agree to the terms of the privacy policy
News & Stock Alerts
Telegram Subscribe
Website Notifications Subscribe
WhatsApp Subscribe

Waiving Compound Interest: Finding The Good In A Bad Idea



It is now near certain, that we will see a new class of waivers introduced into the Indian banking lexicon. The compound interest or 'interest-on-interest' waiver.On Monday morning, the Supreme Cou...

Read More › Bookmark this

Don't Expect Deep Discounts At Electronics Stores This Diwali

BQ BLUE

Don't Expect Deep Discounts At Electronics Stores This Diwali

Consumers should expect lower discounts on appliances and electronics at offline stores this festive season, as inventory constraints persist and cautious buyers shop online during the pandemic.Com...

Read More › Bookmark this

Google Defers Play Store Billing Policy Till April 2022 In India After Pushback

Google Defers Play Store Billing Policy Till April 2022 In India After Pushback

Google has deferred its new policy to charge fee for in-app payments in certain categories in India, days after local startup founders forged a collective to express concerns over the technology gi...

Read More › Bookmark this

In Charts: What Technicals Are Saying About Indian Markets

BQ BLUE

In Charts: What Technicals Are Saying About Indian Markets

Indian equity markets posted its best weekly gain in nearly four months as hopes of a fresh U.S. stimulus, positive domestic macro-economic data and further easing of restrictions on the economy bu...

Read More › Bookmark this

Yes Bank Sees Deposits Rise, But CASA Liabilities Remain Low

Yes Bank Sees Deposits Rise, But CASA Liabilities Remain Low

Yes Bank Ltd. witnessed an increase in its outstanding deposits during the quarter ended September as the private lender continues to regain normalcy under a new management.The bank's outstanding d...

Read More › Bookmark this

Why Pramod Gubbi Says 'Boring' Sectors Are Better Than High-Growth Industries

BQ BLUE

Why Pramod Gubbi Says 'Boring' Sectors Are Better Than High-Growth Industries

The best investment opportunities in India lie in the "boring sectors" and not in the high-growth industries that seem to attract the most attention, according to Marcellus Investment Managers' Pra...

Read More › Bookmark this

Tata Taking on Ambani Could Be India's Alibaba-Tencent

Tata Taking on Ambani Could Be India's Alibaba-Tencent

(Bloomberg Opinion) -- Just as the Chinese duo of Jack Ma and Pony Ma have carved up major chunks of their country's internet businesses, the battle for control of 1.3 billion Indians' data could b...

Read More › Bookmark this

India Needs A New Infrastructure Financing Framework

BQ BLUE

India Needs A New Infrastructure Financing Framework

Infrastructure projects typically include large capital outlay, higher investment risk, and longer gestation periods. Given the upfront capital requirement during the initial construction stage, le...

Read More › Bookmark this

Trump's Doctor Sows Confusion With Reversals on President's Vitals

Trump's Doctor Sows Confusion With Reversals on President's Vitals

(Bloomberg) -- Donald Trump's physician admitted to giving a misleading statement about the president receiving oxygen, the latest in a series of contradictory and confusing accounts about Trump's ...

Read More › Bookmark this

When a $38,000 Chair You Can't Use Is a Bargain

BQ BLUE

When a $38,000 Chair You Can't Use Is a Bargain

(Bloomberg Businessweek) -- For those who believe a chair is simply for sitting, the idea that furniture can be "editioned" might come as a surprise. After all, a couch is just wood, fabric, and st...

Read More › Bookmark this

Bloomberg | the quint
© 2019 Bloomberg L.P | BloombergQuint | TheQuint • All Rights Reserved | Powered By Quintype