

Article

There are many disagreeable things about getting older, from discovering you are entirely responsible for yourself to detecting creaks in joints you had no idea existed. But the worst thing about it is the awful realisation that everyone else, including the people you love, is ageing too.

What is true of individuals is true of countries, too. So it is with India. On the surface, this is a remarkably young country, with half its population of 1.4bn under the age of 29. That is roughly two Americas worth of workers and future workers, who can help make India rich. But it is also a country that is ageing very quickly. Today it is home to 150m people aged 60 or above. By 2050 there will be 350m. They will make India old. The question then, which I wrote about this week, is: can India get rich before it gets old?

This is an age-old (if you will pardon the pun) question, asked with urgency in developing countries everywhere, economically ill-equipped as they are to offer their oldies anything approaching a decent quality of life. But the sheer numbers make it essential for India to get the outcome right. Not necessarily for power or prestige, but because at a purely human level, a third of a billion people living lonely lives afflicted by ailments and badly served by health care would be an unforgivable catastrophe.

It is important, before I continue, to acknowledge that this is a good problem to have. At the foundation of the Indian republic the average life expectancy at birth was 41. Now it is 72. That is a public-health achievement to celebrate. But success brings its own problems. Having extended people's lives, India must make sure they are lived well.

Source: The Economist, Feb 2025