



A thought for today

In all crises, there are those who act and those who fear to act

BEN S BERNANKE

Saying Ta Ta

How to break the bad loan cycle of PSBs

Catalysed by an ordinance promulgated by the government in May, banks and their regulator RBI have kick-started measures to resolve bad loans. This is a positive development as systemic aspects of the banking system had acted as a drag on the resolution process.

An unrelated development gives a sense of the multidimensional nature of the bad loan problem. A few years after beginning operations for a 4000 megawatt power plant in Gujarat, Tata Power is now willing to sell majority stake in it for a token rupee as running it in prevailing circumstances appears unviable.

It is up to government to figure out how to deal with it as India's bad loan problem is primarily a public sector bank problem. At this point, it is important to remember that it seems to be a recurring public sector bank problem.

Among the 50 most populous democracies, only nine have dodged the global growth slowdown, and among this group - with a few exceptions, like Germany - most have relatively small economies.

Worse, the disappointing recovery has been accompanied by anaemic wage growth and rising income inequality.

Uber's chief executive Travis Kalanick has resigned after investor pressure. Under his watch Uber was thought to exemplify 'tech bro culture' - covering up sexual harassment at the workplace, evading regulation and cutting ethical corners, including mishandling medical records of a woman raped in an Uber cab in India.

Silicon Valley has been singled out for promoting tech bro culture because its emphasis on youth, disruption and radical chic talk doesn't translate into gender parity. Until a few years ago the tech force at Twitter was 90% male, Facebook was 85% male and Apple 80%.

Diversity is emphatically not a favour, it makes for more robust decisions and all-round sensitivity. It is this male monoculture that has bruised companies like Uber. In India, we are all too familiar with tech bros - some of our startups and big companies have also seen sexual harassment incidents, which have been met with either obliviousness or impunity.

When Modi Meets Trump

Expectations are deliberately being kept low for US visit

Manoj Joshi



No other foreign tour of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has generated the kind of interest that his upcoming visit to the US is doing. No doubt it has to do with the personality of the current occupant of the White House, the unpredictable President Donald Trump.

GoI is keeping its fingers crossed and working out offerings for the visit: a UAV deal topped, perhaps, by one to make F-16s. Expectations of getting something in return are being kept deliberately low. Tamahas like the Madison Square Garden event of 2014 are out; Trump's allergy to immigrants and immigration is well known.

They have already created a sense of uncertainty in east Asia and Europe though their consequences for India are marginal. But there is one disruption that can be disastrous for us and it appears Trump has been working hard at it. This is roiling the volatile Middle East.

This is the most important external region for India, way beyond the much hyped Indo-Pacific. Qatar provides us 65% of our natural gas, Saudi Arabia 19% of our oil, along with significant amounts from Iran, Kuwait and Iraq. UAE is our third largest trading partner. Chabahar in Iran helps us bypass the Pakistani blockade and the region is a fertile ground for our private and public sector companies.

Trump's outreach to the Muslim world has become an embrace of Saudi Arabia, a country central to the rise of Islamic extremism. Emboldened by Trump's effusive support and leavened by a \$110 billion arms deal, the Saudis have since led a draconian embargo on Qatar, ironically for supporting terrorism.

Trump added salt to the wound by attacking Qatar for funding terrorism "at a very high level". He seemed to be unaware that Qatar hosts the biggest US military base in the region, set up after the Saudis kicked out the US. In the process Turkey, a key Nato ally, has lined up with Qatar, along with Shia Iran.

In the last two weeks we have seen a bizarre situation where the US has signed a \$12 billion deal to supply Qatar air force with F-15 fighters, and the US state department has backtracked on the president's words and demanded that the Saudis and their allies come up with a credible justification of their embargo.

The bigger danger is from the Trump administration's Iran policy which the Americans say is still evolving. Trump accused Tehran of spreading terrorism even as the country re-elected reformist Hassan Rouhani as president. Last week, secretary of state Rex Tillerson openly advocated regime change in Tehran. Iranians, whose nuclear deal has been certified by the state department, are doing much of the ground fighting against IS, an alleged target of the Trump administration.

So we have all the ingredients of a crisis, indeed a possible war, in a region of extreme importance to India. As the record shows, its prime mover appears to be President Trump and his inept administration.

Modi has invested as much in the Middle East as in moving to a higher plane in his relationship with the US. His visits to Riyadh, Dubai, Tehran and soon Tel Aviv, have sought to carefully, but decisively, enhance Indian interests without falling foul of the multiple fault lines of the region. He overcame the "hesitations of history" to sign up on a joint vision for Asia Pacific and the Indian Ocean with the US. But all this and more could go up in smoke if the Gulf goes up in flames, with a match lit by the president of the United States.

Just Throw The Bums Out

An anti-incumbency revolt is sweeping the world

Ruchir Sharma



Only a few weeks ago, much of the global commentariat still saw the rise of right-wing populism as the defining trend of our times, but recent elections upend that notion. This month an old-fashioned socialist, Jeremy Corbyn, scored unexpectedly well in Britain. On Sunday the new-school centrist Emmanuel Macron won a parliamentary majority in France.

If there is a common factor driving voters worldwide, it is less a particular ideology than a deep but amorphous desire for change. Seated leaders normally have a huge advantage in name recognition alone, but these aren't normal times. In the world's 50 most populous democracies, the ruling party won just 40% of the national elections in 2016.

This year, in five major national elections, the incumbent party suffered humiliating defeats in France and South Korea, will barely hang on to power in Britain and the Netherlands, and survived with a diminished mandate in Ecuador.

The voters' anger stems from the wide and persistent slowdown that has taken root since the global financial crisis of 2008. The growth rate of the global economy has slumped to around 2.5% this decade, from 4% in the decades before 2008, undermined by weakening growth in both population and productivity.

Worse, the disappointing recovery has been accompanied by anaemic wage growth and rising income inequality.



Dashed economic expectations are undermining popular support for leaders across the ideological spectrum.

Based on polls in the 20 large countries for which long-term poll data is available, the median approval rating for national leaders is now 35%, down from 54% a decade ago, when the global economy was still booming.

Voters are casting their lot with whoever offers something new. In the United States and Britain, where millennials have little experience of socialism or personal memory of the Soviet era, many young voters are inclined to see socialism as something new and positive.

In many Latin American countries, however, leftist governments were in office until recently, and these economies

No major region of the world is growing as fast now as it was before the crisis ... It is hard to recall a time when politics was more ideologically scrambled, or more polarised in big democracies from US to India

stumbled when commodity prices went bust earlier this decade. Voters turned to centre-right reformers like Pedro Pablo Kuczynski of Peru and Mauricio Macri of Argentina. In Chile, conservative billionaire Sebastian Pinera leads the race for president this year.

But the right is not rising uniformly across Latin America. In Mexico, approval ratings for centre-right president, Enrique Pena Nieto, have sunk 20%, and leftist firebrand Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador leads in the polls for

presidential election next year.

In France, the socialist government of Francois Hollande was seen as a dismal failure, and parties of the centre and centre-right rose up to take more than 460 of 577 seats in the National Assembly - perhaps the most resounding victory for pro-market forces since the dawn of the Fifth Republic in 1958.

Right-wing reformers are rising where left-wingers ruled, progressives are rising where conservatives ruled, and unconventional populists are gaining where the traditional parties are especially weak.

While the global economy has picked up momentum recently, the forces driving the post-crisis run deep, making it hard to see what could slow the anti-incumbent wave. If anything, the honeymoon period may be shrinking; several new leaders have already seen a decline in popularity, including Justin Trudeau of Canada, Tsai Ing-wen of Taiwan, Malcolm Turnbull of Australia, Kuczynski in Peru, and even Donald Trump.

Of course, there are exceptions. After more than 15 years in power, such as Vladimir Putin in Russia and Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey both retain high approval ratings.

In genuine democracies, a few leaders remain popular, including Angela Merkel of Germany. Under Merkel, Germany has enjoyed the highest per capita income growth of any major developed country, so her ratings are easy to understand.

Exceptions aside, given how often incumbent leaders are losing re-election campaigns, and how many suffer from record-low approval ratings, the confusing pattern of recent election results seems best explained not by the rise of any one ideology but by a sentiment now common to voters all over the world: When in doubt, just throw the bums out.

The writer is an author and global investor. © 2017 The New York Times (distributed by The New York Times Syndicate)

If BJP wins 2019, will there be a 2024 election? Don't underestimate RSS opposition to the idea of India

Salman Anees Soz



With Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP completing three years in office, there is growing chatter about 2019 Lok Sabha elections. After scoring an impressive victory in UP and forming governments in three other states, Modi and BJP have the wind at their backs.

But, will there be an election in 2024? I believe RSS and BJP view the 2019 election as an important milestone in their desire to realise their long-standing dream of establishing a Hindu rashtra. To circumvent the hurdle that our Constitution poses, a key step is to establish a de facto single-party government, followed by changes to the constitutional scheme.

Should RSS and BJP prevail with the same or enhanced mandate as was the case in 2014, an alternative 'idea of India' will become the new norm. The 2019 election will be the last opportunity for the political opposition as well as the citizen to stop this from happening.

While many have written

about creeping authoritarianism and rise of Hindutva in India, much of it sounds like a complaint, a warning or a cry for help. An underlying theme is that of disbelief about the erosion of "the" idea of India, most often associated with Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Nehru.

Two issues are of particular concern. First, there is very little acknowledgement of the possibility that there was always an alternative Hindutva idea of India and that it had signifi-

As the Sangh Parivar pursues pan-India uniformity, the opposition must relearn the power of unity in diversity. After 2019, all bets are off. India is calling you to duty

cant support. Second, those of us opposed to Hindutva often do not look at the world from the perspective of its proponents. The game, however, has changed. RSS is resolute in its "idea of India" as a quintessentially Hindu country. It has toiled hard for decades in pursuit of



this vision. The Sangh Parivar has always had a core base of support. This leads me to believe that there was a section of Hindu society that felt aggrieved that after the creation of a country for Muslims, Hindus were denied their own country.

This grievance has simmered for decades as the Gandhi-Nehru vision prevailed and the first part of the post system kept Hindutva forces from gaining power at the national level until 1998. The defeats of 2004 and 2009 delayed the project but the 2014 election finally provided a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Hindutva proponents. BJP had an aspirational narrative, an astute strategic approach, a compelling leader in Modi,

boots on the ground and a real hunger for power.

Modi has used populism, nationalism and anti-secularism to great effect and fired up the imagination of millions looking for instant progress and national greatness. Hindutva is now undeniably a mainstream alternative to the idea of India that most Indians grew up with. Where do we go from here?

It is here that we must see the world from the RSS's perspective. They are not in politics for the usual business of governance and economic development. Those are means towards the ultimate goal, a higher aspiration, which is to build a Hindu rashtra. Clearly, a Hindu rashtra is incompatible with India's Cons-

titution and its democratic norms.

I believe the likelihood of India's conversion to a Hindu rashtra has never been greater. Most government institutions are brittle. Indian democracy as we know it, stands at the precipice. But there is still one hope. Paradoxically, it is the same Indian voters who are supposedly going to deliver a decisive victory to Modi in 2019 who are also in the best position to rein the Sangh Parivar in.

What does that mean for 2019? The opposition must build its own strategy, complete with an ideological narrative that can resonate with most Indians. Mobilising public opinion and public participation at a mass scale will be imperative. For all of BJP's strengths and successes, the majority of Indians have still not voted for them. India's diversity offers opportunities for opposition forces. As the Sangh Parivar pursues pan-India uniformity, the opposition must relearn the power of unity in diversity. After 2019, all bets are off. Oh, by the way, what if it isn't 2019? What if it is 2018? Be ready for anything and everything. India is calling you to duty.

The writer is a National Media Panelist of Congress. Views are personal

dilbert



Three Sets Of Paradoxical Needs That Drive Us

Mahatria Ra

Three pairs of paradoxical needs drive human life: Certainty and uncertainty; individuality and connectedness; having and giving. Most of us get tossed between these paradoxical needs because when one need is satiated, the other is starved. Then, you focus on satiating the latter, only to end up starving the former.

First paradox: Certainty provides order. Uncertainty provides growth. Both order and growth are needed to complete life. And, that's the first paradox. You want certainty. So, you try to achieve certainty by trying to control everything around you. Now, when your life becomes completely certain, when things become predictable, you become bored. That's why you lose interest in a work that you know you can handle.

So, while you want certainty, you simultaneously also want a certain

amount of variety, which comes only out of uncertainty. You need surprises and challenges for you to feel fully alive. Too much certainty is boredom. But with too much uncertainty you become extremely nervous and concerned. You again seek a degree of certainty. Two sides of the same coin but you keep toggling between the two sides, causing a roller coaster ride in the flow and rhythm of your life.

Second paradox: As a physical being, you are the only one of your kind, absolutely unique and individualistic. At the same time, as a spiritual being, the spirit of life that enlivens you is also the same spirit that enlivens all. So, spiritually you are connected to one and all. Both individuality and connectivity are needed to complete life. And, that's the second paradox.

As a unique individual, you need

identity. You need significance. If you don't find the right ways to feel significant, the sheer desperation to fulfil this need might even propel you to choose wrong ways to feel significant. Some people try to stand out by developing extreme problems that set them apart from others. From dressing in certain ways to carrying a certain style, all stem from this need. But, when your trumpet is too loud, others will begin to withdraw from you. That's why you lose out on relationships; at least, people begin to distance themselves. Now you feel separated. Now you feel lonely and isolated. So, you crave for connectedness.

You want to be cared for and cared about. You want to feel one with the crowd. To meet this need, you join a fraternity or a club. Once you feel connected, you will again feel as if you

have lost your own identity in a crowd. And, the seesaw of being tossed from one need to another only continues.

Third paradox: Life is a flow and this flow is achieved through possessing and sharing. Both having and giving are needed to complete life. And, that's the third paradox. The need to have and the need to give; the need to consume and the need to contribute; the need for accumulation and the need for renunciation. The toss is between selfishness (instinctive) and unselfishness (conscience). And, the oscillation is between being spiritual in giving and being materialistic in having.

While everything you do will be tossed between these paradoxes, if you can find a few activities in your life, which fulfills all six needs and gives you that balance in life, you will discover a new zeal in life. ... That's the secret to a complete life.

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Sacredspace

The Cosmos

Our feeblest contemplations of the Cosmos stir us - there is a tingling in the spine, a catch in the voice, a faint sensation, as if a distant memory, or falling from a height.

Carl Sagan