



A thought for today



I turn on the TV and I see these grown people screaming at each other, if we don't get our civility back we're in trouble

EMMYLOU HARRIS

A Civil Contest

The presidential election can be a good start for parties to work towards a constructive agenda

Irrespective of the outcome of yesterday's presidential election, Ram Nath Kovind and Meira Kumar can take pride in conducting a campaign that never descended into name calling or acrimony. This is praiseworthy at a time when the loud din of divisive rhetoric has polarised society and politics, making it difficult for sane voices to get themselves heard.

But Meira Kumar may rue the manner in which she was selected. For weeks opposition parties dithered on naming a candidate. JD(U) leader Nitish Kumar lost patience and neutral parties like the BJD and YSR Congress saw little sense in playing this waiting game.

Nitish refused to back Meira and correctly identified the malady: Congress was in reactive mode rather than setting an alternative agenda.

With nothing to lose, Congress could have named an eminent apolitical citizen by taking a leaf out of BJP's playbook in 2002 when it chose APJ Abdul Kalam. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's advance greetings to Kovind and Sonia Gandhi's call for a conscience vote - implicitly conceding that the numbers are stacking up against Meira - reveal the contrasting mood in the two camps.

The civility that marked the presidential campaign can become the norm. The government appears to have decided to constructively engage with the opposition. PM Modi told an all-party meeting that communal unrest in the name of gau raksha would not be tolerated and enlisted their cooperation in the ongoing anti-corruption drive.

The country has suffered enough from polarised politics, name calling and loony conspiracy theories. Now is the time to put an end to it.

First Among Equals

Roger Federer's 19th Grand Slam win cements his place as the greatest player of his generation

Perfection has a time limit for most mortals, but not so it seems with Roger Federer. Back with his special brand of tennis - with its unique combination of sublime attack and unnerving accuracy, seamlessly coalescing into an effortless-looking yet lethal kind of perfection - the Swiss wizard spun a web around injured Croat Marin Cilic in the Wimbledon finals to win a record-breaking eighth title.

Federer's journey is even more remarkable as the 35-year-old was coming off a six-month break after winning the Australian Open earlier this year. Having broken virtually every possible record in the game, Federer is now only competing against himself. He has played 29 Grand Slam finals and spent 302 weeks at No 1, the most by any player since the rankings began in 1973.

There is little doubt Federer has moved beyond the stratosphere of tennis to all-time sporting legend-dom, in the league of other stars such as Lionel Messi, Usain Bolt and Michael Phelps. He has tasted immense success, enjoys mass appeal and has consistently reinvented himself over a 14 year period of fiercely competitive tennis.

Smartphone capers

How Digital India can end up wasting tax payers' money

Radhika Vaz

Last week a comedian got in trouble for essentially photo-shopping dog ears and a snout on to an image of our Great Leader and then tweeting it. Now it would be one thing if Great Leader himself had objected to this representation but that isn't the case. What happened was some do-gooder on Twitter by the name of Reetesh Maheshwari (I'm planning to change the spelling of my name to something irritatingly unique - Raadhika maybe?) snatched on the comedian to the Mumbai police.

I am guessing Reetesh had zero friends growing up but more to the point why is this person with no sense of humour sniffing around anything remotely resembling comedy. This is about as stupid as purposefully walking in to a nightclub and being offended by music. The funniest part of this story isn't the comedian's tweet but the Mumbai police's reaction to it.

I doubt Great Leader's reputation has been defamed in any way. And as for 'obscene' - meaning to incite lust or depravity - I request animal rights organisations to keep an eye on both Reetesh and his pals at the Mumbai police. This whole business is shameful. If the law should harass anyone it should be Reetesh and his ilk for willfully wasting our police officers' limited time and resources.

Unlike most government departments the police force work a 12 hour shift on average although it is often much longer, and while the rest of us make merry on festival days they spend it away from their families managing unruly mobs. In the meanwhile the job of the cyber crime division is to look into scary stuff like online fraud, threats of physical violence including rape, terrorism, hacktivism and national security threats. That we the smartphone owning citizenry can call their attention to cartoon dog ears with a tweet should be looked into very seriously. It either means the police are not focussed on what matters most or that they are in turn being policed by politicians.

The writer is a comedian

IndUS Vs ChIndia

India should counter China without necessarily allying with the United States

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Things have steadily gone south between India and China, purportedly over territorial spats and Beijing's malevolent backing of terrorists inimical to New Delhi. Both issues arise from larger differences in perception over each other's role in the region and across the world.

Such fine sentiments aside, what should be New Delhi's response to Beijing's belligerence? Acquiesce and seek accommodation with a neighbour whose economic growth is now the stuff of lore and appears to have given it military heft? Or seek alliances and partnership on its periphery in an effort to counter it? If it adopts the former policy, where does the slippery slope stop or end? And if the latter, how reliable will the partnerships be?

In more propitious times, Indian MP and public intellectual Jairam Ramesh coined the portmanteau term ChIndia amid hopes that constructive cooperation and competition between the Asian giants, who between them account for a third of the world's population, would trump confrontation and conflict. Indeed, the expectations did not appear entirely misplaced. China became India's largest trading partner as the two countries attempted to overcome the Himalayan mistrust between them through commercial engagement, even if people-to-people contacts lagged.

But much of the bilateral trade centred on goods and raw materials. Bangalore may have supplied granite for the Vietnam Memorial in Washington DC in the 1980s, but a decade ago, almost the entire edifice of Beijing Olympics was built on stone from India's Silicon Plateau. In those intervening decades,



Uday Pooj

the same Plateau's fecund education system and engineering chops supplied the US not with stone but with services and tens of thousands of skilled workers, many of whom would become American citizens. They would eventually counter the ChIndia talk with their own IndUS projections, even though the two are not mutually exclusive and in an ideal world there could be a ChIndUS.

India and the US have no borders but they have plenty in common, perhaps more than India has with China. They include, to a degree, language, democracy (however imperfect), open society (not free of prejudice), and a free press (occasionally supine). All these have led recent leadership, spurred by public opinion and business contacts, to surmise that the two countries are natural partners, if not natural allies - New Delhi being allergic to the term allies.

Indeed, if you combine goods and services, US-India commerce would easily top India-China trade. Besides,

It is not as if the US will be charitable towards India or sympathetic to its issues with Beijing

there is no country in the world - certainly not China - that is home to more than four million expatriates of Indian origin, including citizens and permanent residents. It is this constituency - highly educated, wealthy, and vocal - that propelled New Delhi closer to Washington in the last two decades and continues to do so, much to China's irritation.

Even within India, public sentiment appears to favour Washington over Beijing. This despite talk of civilisational contacts and Asian togetherness with our northeastern neighbour, and notwithstanding signs of US decline and China's rise. A recent Pew poll of 38 nations across

the world showed a median of 42% saying the US remains the world's leading economy, but a striking 32% named China as Numero Uno. That included seven of 10 European nations (UK, Germany and Spain among them) and Australia, but not India. In India, 43% of respondents continue to see US as the top economy compared to 11% who think China is the top dog.

Favourable opinion of China has also fallen in several Asian countries, including in Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Indonesia and India. In India it has declined from 40% to 26% over the past three years as Beijing has persistently thwarted New Delhi's efforts to join the international high table. The slide is even more precipitous in Japan, where it has fallen from 55% in 2002 to 13% in 2017.

These numbers suggest that New Delhi should strengthen its Asian engagement even more, with or without US encouragement given the fickle nature of the current Washington dispensation. Besides, it is not as if the US will be charitable towards India or sympathetic to its issues with China, as it attempts to resolve its own wrangles with Beijing, with whom it has a massive, almost insurmountable, trade deficit. On more than one occasion, Washington has deferred to Beijing on issues critical to India.

The road to countering China should not lead directly to Washington, but could go through Japan, Vietnam, South Korea and other Asian nations increasingly leery of an assertive China. In fact, the doctrinal change that President Donald Trump is enforcing - compelling US allies to spend their own lolly on defence - actually works to India's advantage. A more sinewy Japan and Korea, along with Vietnam, can effectively counter Chinese hegemony.

There being no permanent allies or friends in international relations, China itself can render all these plans inoperative simply by accommodating India's aspirations. But puffed up with its sense of economic accomplishment - undoubtedly impressive - there is no indication that Beijing is in any mood to entertain India. The Doklam spat is a small manifestation of that mindset.

Why reforms undertaken by Modi's India are not an illusion: Improving governance is the biggest structural reform

Rajiv Kumar



There is plentiful evidence that refutes the claim made by the Economist magazine, that Modi's India suffers from 'The Illusion of Reforms'. Most recently, in an article for this column Jayant Sinha, India's junior minister for civil aviation, has cited six structural reforms that are changing the economic landscape of the country ('The Big Bang Has Come', June 30). These are breakthrough measures like GST; bankruptcy code; law against benami properties; India Stack; statutorily guaranteed autonomy for the RBI for inflation targeting; increasing use of the JAM trinity; and demonetisation for rooting out systemic corruption.

Suffice it to say that these measures do not reflect 'tinkering at the margin'. They are disruptive and have transformative potential. The Modi government's steps for qualitatively improving governance range from installing biometric attendance machines at government offices; eliminating foreign junkies by sundry netas and babus; holding bi-monthly meeting of the PRAGATI group with top ranking bureaucrats in major provincial capitals for de-bottlenecking infrastructure projects; coating urea fertiliser with neem, thereby eliminating leakages; direct transfers of government subsidies to actual beneficiaries' bank accounts; linking MGNREGA to infrastructure development, etc.

This large number of seemingly



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marginal measures are beginning to have a significant cumulative impact on making governance more efficient, accountable and transparent. They will ensure that growth is more inclusive and benefits are not confined only to the well-heeled, well-connected and the corrupt.

The other goal is PM Narendra Modi's resolve to minimise the marked differential between public and private sector performance. In essence it implies, perhaps for the first time since Indepen-

dence, establishing a 'development state' in Delhi. There is today a conscious, consistent and clear-headed attempt to improve the delivery of public services; make bureaucracy more accountable; and reduce and steadily eliminate leakages from government expenditure by better targeting of subsidies through the effective use of the JAM trinity.

In the Indian context, improving governance is a key structural reform. This effort has evidently disappointed those who perceived Modi as a Thatcher-Reagan clone. To be fair Modi himself lent credence to this perception by talking of 'maximum governance and minimum government'. However, having learnt from his own ground level experience in Gujarat, Modi has realised in quick time that a development state is a necessary critical condition for the success of further liberalisation.

A development state, which is the antithesis of the 'soft and rent-seeking state' that has characterised India through all its post-Independence decades, is essential for ensuring efficient provisioning of basic necessities for the poor who are excluded by the market. It will also reverse the hitherto dominant trend of substituting private solutions to palpably public problems. This outsourcing of basic public services has resulted in an exclusionary pattern of development since 1991. The break down in public schooling; basic health; public transport; power transmission networks; are all testimony to the ruinous outcomes of the soft and rent-maximising state.

Modi's effort is to put in place a

governance system that efficiently delivers public services to the poor and promotes ease of doing business in a non-discriminatory, transparent and accountable manner. This is certainly not easy. Vested interests are entrenched and they fight back at each step. Modi is trying to overcome this resistance with recourse to digital technology and centralised, purposive and persistent monitoring and regular feedback.

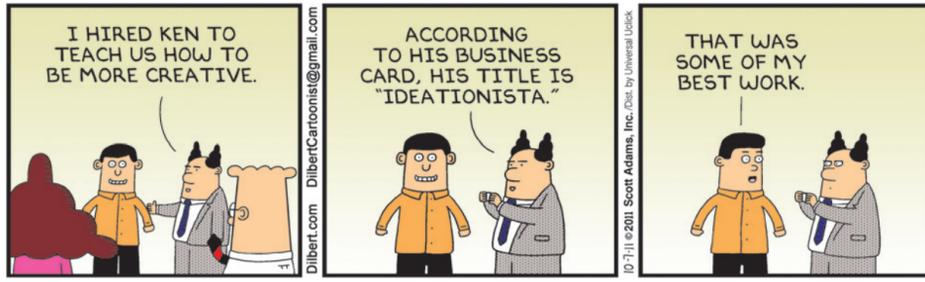
When successful, this difficult but necessary structural reform will generate an inflexion point in India's growth trajectory, both by raising GDP growth rates and making it qualitatively more socially beneficial. It will remove the substantial and unfair advantage that large domestic corporate houses presently enjoy vis-à-vis the small and medium domestic enterprises as well as foreign investors. This will be a game changing move for spurring investment.

Modi has also chosen to not take steps that will result in powerful political coalitions ranged against him. His is a calibrated stance that combines continuous governance improvement with political stability. This rangles with the opposition who rightly sees this as shutting them out from success in the next elections. Modi can hardly be faulted on that.

Modi's India is in the throes of a paradigmatic shift in its development experience. Going by present approval levels in opinion polls and frenzied state of equity markets, one could surmise that common Indians have bought into this story. This is not an illusion of reform.

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dilbert



Emily Holland

The effects of stress range from irritability and anxiety to raised blood pressure and heart disease. No wonder you spend so much time trying to manage or avoid it altogether. But what if, instead of stressing over how to rid your life of stress, you focussed on ways to use it to your advantage?

As health psychologist Kelly McGonigal describes in her book, The Upside of Stress, it is this shift in mindset that allows you to have a healthier, even beneficial relationship with stress. She discovered that perceiving stress through a negative lens can actually be harmful to your health. But when you view stress as a helpful tool and motivator, and learn how to harness it to your advantage, your health is less likely to be negatively affected. In fact, stress may actually be good for you, if you learn to embrace it

and use it properly.

Stress can serve as a great motivator for reaching goals or accomplishing simple tasks. Whether it's landing a new job promotion, meeting a deadline, or tackling a to-do list, a little stress can push you to take action. If you didn't feel any stress at all, you might not feel inclined to break out of your comfort zone, which is essential for personal growth.

When you experience small amounts of stress, you are actually building up your resistance to future stressors. According to the American Psychological Association, over time, humans are wired to adapt to stressful situations by building resilience, which can be developed by: Making connections with others; taking care of yourself and taking decisive actions.

A 2013 study from the University of

California, Berkeley, found that acute stress can generate new nerve cells in the brain, improving cognitive and mental performance. A certain amount of stress can promote optimal levels of focus; improved memory and enhanced learning of new tasks.

How you view stress can determine how it affects you. Retraining the brain to view stress as a helpful tool rather than a roadblock will take time as the latter has likely become deeply ingrained. When stressed, say, "I'm experiencing stress and welcome it fully." Then, think of how you could best use it to solve a problem or reach a goal. How can you make the stress work for you?

When you attach purpose to a difficult situation, it becomes easier to handle or, at the very least, motivates

Sacredspace When You Lie

A lie will easily get you out of a scrape, and yet, strangely and beautifully, rapture possesses you when you have taken the scrape and left out the lie.

Charles E Montague

You Could Use Stress To Your Advantage



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