

PROJECT SYNDICATE Pariah India



SHASHI THAROOR

AFTER India launched far-reaching economic reforms in 1991, its stature in the world rose steadily. The country was already recognised as a

thriving democracy and an example to the world of how to manage diversity in a free and open society. Its enhanced economic clout and the size of its increasingly prosperous market added to its appeal. Its self-branding as the world's fastest-growing free-market democracy worked; world leaders queuing up to visit New Delhi became a burden for a generation of diplomatic protocol officers.

But in recent months, it has all begun to fall apart.

The reason is not hard to find. India's domestic political environment has turned toxic under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government, owing to a train of divisive, socially discriminatory policies, accompanied by incendiary political rhetoric bordering on Islamophobia. Moreover, a series of disastrous economic decisions— notably demonetisation and the botched implementation of a nationwide Goods and Services Tax— put many small entrepreneurs out of business and threw millions of people out of work, further convulsing Indian society. And economic failure has only driven Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to double down on its political agenda, animated by the prejudices of its Hindutva ideology.

In particular, a series of decisions suggests the depth of the alienation, stoked by BJP policies and attitudes, of India's 180-million strong Muslim population. In recent years, the BJP has criminalised an Islamic form of divorce,



Members of various student groups took part in a torch rally in Kolkata to protest against India's new citizenship law.

PHOTO: DIBYANGSHU SARKAR/AFP

talaq-e-biddat; abolished the autonomy enjoyed by India's only Muslim-majority state, Jammu and Kashmir; campaigned for and celebrated a Supreme Court judgment awarding the site of a destroyed mosque to Hindus; and amended India's citizenship laws to give fast-track citizenship only to non-Muslim refugees and migrants from three neighbouring countries.

These actions sparked weeks of protest across the country and have subverted India's pluralist secularism. And if that wasn't bad enough, the heavy-handed and brutal response to protests in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh, where 27 Muslim protesters were shot dead, campuses invaded, and students assaulted, has shaken India's reputation as a democracy to be admired.

The "Rising India" narrative rested on the economy's performance and potential, and on India's success at managing its internal differences democratically and largely peacefully. Rapid economic growth opened up

new opportunities for cooperation with foreign countries: neighbours wanted to take advantage of their proximity, while major powers saw a useful partner worth courting. The contrast with China's rise as an authoritarian state was implicit. The Indian system, many felt, was not only more attractive, but also worked just as well.

No longer. Thanks to BJP's divisive sectarianism, driven by narrow party-political goals, India's stature in the world has never been lower. The recent developments have embarrassed India's friends in the neighbouring Muslim countries of Bangladesh and Afghanistan, shaken the confidence of foreign investors, antagonised influential members of the US Congress, and earned the government a chorus of disapproval. Major foreign newspapers, whether on the right (like *The Wall Street Journal* or the *Financial Times*) or the left (like *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post*) have published critical editorials about India in recent months. The drumbeat

of daily reporting and commentaries is relentlessly negative.

At home, even neutral figures known for their habitual reticence on political matters have expressed alarm. Former Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon recently described the government's amendment to the Citizenship Act as a "self-inflicted goal" that has isolated India and resulted in the country being routinely mentioned alongside Pakistan as an intolerant state. The divisive policies of the government, he added, has given our adversaries "platforms to attack us" and left India with "no international support apart from a section of the Indian diaspora and some extreme right Members of the European Parliament."

Several world leaders, including French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the visiting Norwegian king, Harald V, and chiefs of United Nations agencies on human rights and refugees, have

25 years, irrespective of the government in Delhi or Washington, has been broken.

What the world thinks matters more than ever before, not least because India is far more dependent on external trade and investment. Foreign investment requires trust and faith in the future, which is fast eroding. The world increasingly sees India as an intolerant, narrow-minded country. Its credit ratings have been downgraded. Seven countries have issued travel warnings.

The Indian economy's stumbling performance and its domestic political divides have created new foreign-policy challenges in an increasingly difficult external environment, with a transactional President Donald Trump taking a cost-benefit view of the US-India relationship and Chinese President Xi Jinping strengthening his support for India's hostile neighbour, Pakistan. Amid a period of domestic and global unpredictability, India's place in the twenty-first-century world, which once seemed so promising, is again being called into question.

The Indian government shows little sign of waking up to the consequences of its domestic policies. It seems to assume that a country of 1.3 billion people with the world's fifth-largest economy, a member of the G20 and the Brics, cannot be ignored. It consoles itself that its actions still garner popular support in India. But an India that is perceived as bigoted, with a government that, intoxicated by intolerant majoritarianism, is wilfully driving sectarian wedges between its people, can forget about the global embrace on which its future depends.

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criticised the government's recent moves. For the first time in over 40 years, Kashmir was discussed in the UN Security Council. The bipartisan consensus on strong bilateral relations that has existed in the United States for

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Can Bangladesh become a knowledgeable economy?



POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

SALEEMUL HUQ

OVER the next decade, there are going to be four mega global trends that all countries in the world will have to deal with. The first is the global impacts

of human induced climate change which will be felt in all countries both rich and poor. While efforts to keep global mean temperature below 1.5 degrees (which may already be out of reach) or at most 2 degrees centigrade must continue, these efforts will not affect the climate change impacts for the coming decade which are already locked in due to the greenhouse gas emissions from previous decades. Hence, every country, whether rich or poor, must prepare to adapt, as well as deal with the inevitable loss and damage that will happen due to human induced climate change over the next 10 years.

The second major trend, which is related to the first, is the loss of biodiversity with perhaps a million species of plants and animals being lost including important ecosystems and habitats over the next decade. The recent unprecedented wildfires in Australia which killed over a billion animals is a harbinger of this trend, which will only get worse over time.

The third mega trend is the rapid urbanisation of the global population

which is already deemed to be more urban than rural. And this trend will continue for the coming decade. This mega trend is also linked to the climate change issue, as many millions of people currently living in vulnerable rural areas such as low-lying coastal areas and drought prone areas of the world will be forced to migrate due to climate change impacts and will almost certainly end up moving to cities.

The fourth and final mega trend is related to technological development, sometimes linked to artificial intelligence (AI), or more generally, to knowledge generation and use which is likely to change manufacturing to be less and less dependent on human labour over time.

All four of these global megatrends are very relevant for Bangladesh and can either hold back our development, or if we play our cards right, may prove to be good opportunities for us to enhance our resilience and ensure a better development pathway that enables us to not only overcome the negative aspects but indeed take advantage of them.

Here are some ideas on how this might be achieved.

The first issue of climate change is already high on our national agenda and with the soon to be published revised Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP) that will take us to 2030, we will have a blueprint for what needs to be done in order to transform Bangladesh from being one of the world's most climate



A fish vendor approaches the Brahmaputra river to rinse his containers as rain clouds loom over Guwahati on June 17, 2016.

PHOTO: AFP

vulnerable country to becoming one of the world's most resilient one. This will require us to mainstream or integrate climate change actions into everything we do, both within government ministries and agencies, as well as in civil society and private sector. The good news is that this is already beginning to happen, so it needs to only be accelerated going forward.

On the issue of protecting biodiversity, the Bangladesh parliament has taken a pioneering role of declaring a "planetary emergency" which addresses both climate change as well as biodiversity and this

now needs to be put into planning and practice. There are two major potential problems we need to keep in mind, and avoid if we can. First, once the Khulna region is opened up to economic development due to the inaugural of the Padma Bridge, we must ensure that this development is nature-based and does not destroy our Sundarbans. Second, the development of the eastern side of Dhaka, over what are some of our last remaining wetlands in this region. If we merely repeat the mistakes we made with the current area of Dhaka, then we will get ourselves into trouble for the new

areas in future. We must prove that we are able to learn from our mistakes and not repeat them when it comes to protecting the wetlands east of Dhaka, and not build over them.

Finally, on the issue of the knowledge economy, we are extremely well placed with the raw material for exploiting this opportunity, namely young girls and boys, but only if we can rapidly change and improve the education that we are providing to them. The young people of Bangladesh are amongst the brightest anywhere in the world, and have the potential to become problem-solvers not just for Bangladesh, but for all the global megatrends mentioned above and hence a resource for all countries.

However, this will require a very rapid transition from our traditional education system, from its emphasis on exam-oriented job-seeking outcomes, to a problem-solving modality where we produce job creators and not just job seekers. The good news is that this transition will not cost any more money than we are spending already, but will require a new kind of thinking and practice from both the government as well as the universities and academic sector of the country. If we are able to make this transition in thinking and implement it, then Bangladesh can emerge as a global champion in tackling all the global megatrends mentioned above.

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ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY

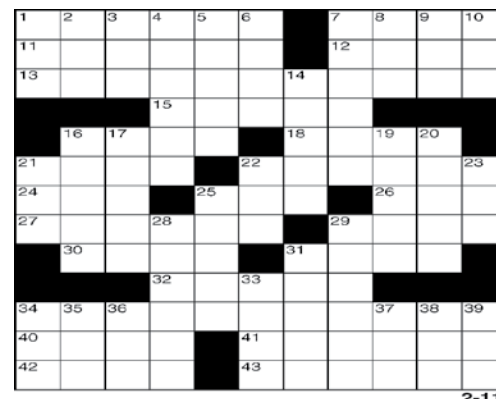


February 19, 1945
Iwo Jima invaded by US Marines

In 1945, during the final phases of World War II, US Marines invaded Iwo Jima so as to wrest control of the strategically important island from the Japanese, who put up fierce resistance in the ensuing battle.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 In the vicinity
 - 7 M's top agent
 - 11 Sight from Yemen
 - 12 Sailor's call
 - 13 Basketball Hall of Famer
 - 15 T-bone, e.g.
 - 16 Added to
 - 18 "Shucks!"
 - 21 Harvest
 - 22 Flip out
 - 24 Drama division
 - 25 Friend of Harry and Hermione
 - 26 Buck's mate
 - 27 "Impressive!"
 - 29 Old codger
 - 30 Walrus's cousin
 - 31 Croquet setting
- DOWN**
- 1 Sleeve filler
 - 2 Old auto
 - 3 "-- bodkins!"
 - 4 Depletes
 - 5 High homes
 - 6 Titled woman
 - 7 Croatian, for example
 - 8 Cry of surprise
 - 9 Opposite of oui
 - 10 Fabric color
 - 14 Singer Neville
 - 16 River to the Rio Grande
 - 17 Barista's creation
 - 19 Henry VIII's house
 - 20 Got to one's feet
 - 21 Sprinted
 - 22 Zeus or Apollo
 - 23 Ready to go
 - 25 Fashion's Lauren
 - 28 Volcanic rock
 - 29 Moves in bounces
 - 31 Rowdy fellow
 - 33 Engrave
 - 34 Belief, in brief
 - 35 Spot
 - 36 Suffering
 - 37 Got together
 - 38 Devoured
 - 39 Lawn material



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



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BABY BLUES



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