

When the world turned upside down!

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

IT looks like a case of the remedy being worse than the disease! If multiplied and extrapolated on future reckonings, we may be looking at a phenomenal disaster of the century in the making!

For a single person to have potentially shaken US democracy to the core and probably turn the world upside down with his blueprint of isolationism and new monetary guild friendships, you take to one extreme view: "He is a suicide bomber landed in the USA!" In a moth-eaten system that lives off its toxic juices, change-agents are handmaidens of the Devil's workshop. In that sense, they are the malware product, as it were, of the system. Although Donald Trump has been up against the system, he is not just a product but the beneficiary of it, both as tycoon and a clincher of the highest office in his land.

Though called an outsider to the Capitol Hill, Donald quipped that as an insider to the system he used it to be a billionaire (by cashing in on its loopholes!). On a wider plane, as self-charmed circles danced around their tiny parcels of comfort zones alienated from the rest, content with one status quo after another in a deceptive pattern of degeneracy, the system has hollowed out. More to the point, the majority seethed in anger and someone like Bernie Sanders tapped in on it earlier in the day, only to leave the field to Donald Trump to capitalise on it.

The results have dealt a severe blow to American democracy. There is no formidable opposition to the Republican incumbent in either House of the Congress and with freedom to appoint the judge to the Supreme



Donald Trump with family and vice presidential candidate Mike Pence.

PHOTO: AFP

Court, it is winner-takes-it-all—ruthlessly! By stark contrast, it was a completely debilitating architecture for Obama in his two terms of presidency which made him fail to perform to his full potential. Neither was there any effective bipartisanship nor any check and balance playing out to any reasonable degree for him.

It is important to note that the Clinton campaign, for all its charm offensive, courtesy of Hillary, Tim Kaine, Bill Clinton and cultural icons, missed out on one fundamental agenda: Convince voters that a Hillary incumbency would not be an Obama

part-2 administration. See what is happening now; the American people are alienated by gender, religion, colour, origin and ethnicity, and what have you! Steven W. Thrasher wrote in *The Guardian* poignantly: "This is a terrifying moment for America. Hold your loved ones close. People of colour, women, Muslims, the sick, immigrants - all are threatened by Donald Trump. They need your love, your warmth, your support."

Such clarion calls have not gone unheeded. Which is why we see a surge of protests across many American states among

Muslims, Hispanics, people of colour, immigrants in general or just people who voted for Mrs. Clinton. Apart from the emotions grounded in existential threats, they are making a sharp political point. They are arguing for a change in the electoral system, highlighting the point that Hillary got 135,000 more popular votes than Donald Trump. As is the practice, however, with the latter securing 289 electoral college votes to Mrs. Clinton's 218, her fate was sealed.

It is now becoming increasingly clear as to what turned the table for Trump. It is being

typically termed 'whitelash' in an acrid way. It means that middle-aged whites, including blue collar working people who had been staying put in their homes not venturing out to vote, came out and cast their ballots for Trump. On the other hand, African-Americans, who thought that their fortunes would have improved during the Obama administration, were disenchanted with Democrats, making for a low turnout. But the protests are being led by the young demographic.

Treating the polls like weather forecasts, regular media's misreading of inherently unpredictable voter behaviour and redrawing of the electoral map in a break with conventional party line states and so-called swing or battle ground states stood in contrast to Trump's campaign gelling on social media.

What is the use of learning the lessons, for doesn't wisdom mean being wise in time? Meanwhile, it is a troubling world we tend to gaze into with trepidation we have not known before.

The EU may be breaking down under the double pressure of Brexit, other far-right peeling off, let alone American isolationism. Jonathan Powell, a reputed journalist says, "Britain's biggest fear realised - an isolationist US president."

The big question is, separated by the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, is the USA courting the isolationism of the thirties?

He is up to unpicking from the Paris Climate Change Accord, WTO, NATO alliance, NAFTA, TPP, just any free trade accord. He prides himself on being a negotiator, apt in cutting deals where America comes first.

Have a listen to famous journo Poly Toynbee's words: "The dark side of human nature always lurks in politics, the mean, hating isolationist, me-and-mine first selfishness."

The writer is a contributor of *The Daily Star*.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

The End of US Soft Power?

AWAKENING INDIA



SHASHI THAROOR

ONE major casualty of Donald

Trump's victory in the bruising US presidential election is, without a doubt, America's soft power around the world. It is a development that will be difficult -

perhaps even impossible - to reverse, especially for Trump. Traditionally, countries' global political power was assessed according to military might: the one with the largest army had the most power. But that logic was not always reflected in reality. The US lost the Vietnam War; the Soviet Union was defeated in Afghanistan. In its first few years in Iraq, the US discovered the wisdom of Talleyrand's adage that the one thing you cannot do with a bayonet is sit on it.

Enter soft power. The term was coined by Harvard's Joseph S. Nye in 1990 to account for the influence a country - and, in particular, the US - wields, beyond its military (or "hard") power. As Nye put it, a country's power rests on its "ability to alter the behaviour of others" to get what it wants, whether through coercion (sticks), payments (carrots), or attraction (soft power). "If you are able to attract others," he pointed out, "you can economise on the sticks and carrots."

Nye argues that a country's soft power arises from "its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority.)" But I believe that it also emerges from the world's perceptions of what a

country is about: the associations and attitudes conjured by the mention of a country's name. Hard power is exercised; soft power is evoked.

The US has been the world's largest economy and oldest democracy, a haven for immigrants, and the land of the American Dream - the promise that anyone can be anything if they work hard enough. It is also the home of Boeing and Intel, Google and Apple, Microsoft and MTV, Hollywood and Disneyland, McDonald's and Starbucks - in short, some of the most recognisable and influential brands and industries in the world.

The attractiveness of these assets, and of the American lifestyle that they represent, is that they enable the US to persuade, rather than compel, others to adopt its agenda. In this sense, soft power acts as both an alternative and a complement to hard power.

But there are limits to a country's soft power - even America's. In the wake of the US terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, there was an outpouring of goodwill for the US. Then the country launched its War on Terror, in which it relied heavily on hard power. The instruments of that power - the Iraq invasion, indefinite detention of "enemy combatants" and other suspects at Guantánamo Bay prison, the Abu Ghraib scandal, revelations of CIA "black sites," the killing of Iraqi civilians by private US security contractors - were not received well by the global public.

America's soft-power assets were inadequate to compensate for the deficiencies of its hard-power approach. Fans of American culture were not prepared to overlook the excesses of Guantánamo. Using Microsoft Windows does not predispose you to accept torture by the



ILLUSTRATION: BRUNO BUDROVIC

country that produces it. America's soft power declined sharply, demonstrating that how a country exercises its hard power affects how much soft power it can evoke.

America's domestic narrative soon overcame its foreign-policy setbacks, thanks partly to today's unprecedented connectivity. In a world of instant mass communications, countries are judged by a global public fed on a diet of relentless online news, smartphone videos, and Twitter gossip.

In such an information age, Nye wrote, three types of countries are likely to gain soft power: "those whose dominant cultures and ideals are closer to prevailing global norms (which now emphasise liberalism, pluralism, autonomy); those with the most

access to multiple channels of communication and thus more influence over how issues are framed; and those whose credibility is enhanced by their domestic and international performance." The US had done pretty well on all of these fronts.

Indeed, America's culture and ideals set the bar for others, and its international credibility rested on its domestic arrangements. Overcoming the legacy of centuries of slavery and racism to elect a black president in 2008 and again in 2012 seemed to embody the country's capacity to reinvent and renew itself.

Trump's ascent to power has shattered that image. It has exposed and encouraged

tendencies the world never used to associate with the US: xenophobia, misogyny, pessimism, and selfishness. A system that promised a level playing field on which anyone could fulfill their aspirations is being denounced by its own political leaders as stacked against ordinary citizens. A country that confidently counsels others on democratic practice has elected a president who suggested that, if he lost, he might not recognise the result.

Nye has argued that, in an information age, soft power often accrues to the country with the better story. The US has long been the "land of the better story." It has a free press and an open society; it welcomes migrants and refugees; it has a thirst for new ideas and a knack for innovation. All of this has given the US an extraordinary ability to tell stories that are more persuasive and attractive than those of its rivals.

But the story of America told in this election has deeply diminished the soft power the US evokes. Fear trumped hope. The American Dream became the world's nightmare. And the demons released from Pandora's box in 2016 - echoing in widespread reports of racist taunts by Trump supporters of non-whites in America - will continue to roam free in the country's self-perception, and taint everyone else's perception, too. In our eyes, America will never be the same - and Trump's term hasn't even begun.

The writer, a former UN under-secretary-general and former Indian Minister of State for External Affairs and Minister of State for Human Resource Development, is currently Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs and an MP for the Indian National Congress.

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QUOTABLE Quote

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

The best way to predict the future is to create it.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- Half of a chess set
- Snack chip
- Be patient for
- Small body of land
- Doorstop shape
- Set off
- Put up, as posters
- Cow call
- Diner entree
- Rock's Clapton
- Goes off course
- Plows
- Be in accord
- Follows as a result
- Miami team
- Desktop items
- Piece of lumber
- Biz bigwig
- Scientist Newton
- Toil away
- Michigan city
- Pearshaped instruments
- Theater awards
- Aids in crime

DOWN

- Fido's foot
- Wonder
- Hunk of gum
- Cabaret
- Real bargain
- River from lake Erie
- Nile snake
- Chowder bit
- Valiant one
- "Beetle Bailey" dog
- Silent assent
- Parcel (out)
- The Emerald Isle
- Suffers
- 1999 Brad Pitt film
- Gratis
- Eye drop
- Hardens
- Chooses
- Boston team, for short
- Scientist Nikola
- Elevate
- Norwegian city
- Make progress
- One or more
- Had a bite
- Horse doctor
- Curvy letter

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker

HERE COMES THE GENERAL. DID YOU GIVE HIM THAT SKIN CREAM?

YES, I JUST HOPE HE DIDN'T PUT ON TOO MUCH

MORNING!

WELL, DID MY SKIN CLEAR UP?

GREGG! MORT WALKER?

BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott

DID YOU AND DAD MEET ONLINE?

WE MET IN COLLEGE.

NOT ON THE INTERNET?

NOPE.

WE HAD SOME CLASSES TOGETHER, AND JUST STARTED TALKING TO EACH OTHER.

ON FACEBOOK.

NO! IN PERSON!

I HAVE SOME REAL CONCERNS ABOUT THIS RELATIONSHIP.