

Davos Summit 2017

Burning issues will rage amid freezing cold



WARREN FERNANDEZ

As you read this, thousands of business and government leaders will be making their way to Switzerland - by plane, road, rail, or even helicopter - for an annual meeting to discuss the world's most pressing concerns.

They will brave snow and frigid cold - forecasts are for temperatures to dip to minus 17 deg C tomorrow - and a three-hour car ride from Zurich up to the small Alpine ski resort of Davos, for the conference organised by the World Economic Forum (WEF).

Hundreds of aides, academics and journalists, myself included, will be there to join in and follow their discussions.

When these leaders met last January, there was much talk about what the future might hold in the face of rapid and relentless technological change. Minds were focused on developments in robotics, artificial intelligence, virtual reality and 3D printing, and many questions were raised about what these entail for businesses and their workers, indeed for the very nature of work, and leisure.

Few, however, saw or spoke about the prospects of Brexit or the rise of Mr. Donald Trump. Sure, there were a few tentative questions raised about these, which were more often than not laughed aside as long shots not to be taken too seriously.

So Davos man - as this elite group is sometimes derisively called - will have much pondering to do. For while it was right that they focused their sights on the trends that will shape the future, how did they not see the icebergs lying more immediately ahead, which now impede the once-seemingly inexorable path forward to further economic integration and progress?

While past discussions had focused on the economic and social disruptions to come, Davos delegates will now have to recognise that the future economy they had envisioned

is unfolding in a range of sectors, much sooner than most imagined, and worse, a wider Disruption 2.0 is under way, amid major shocks to the underlying global operating system that the WEF has long championed.

The consensus based on the virtues of globalisation, the benefits of immigration and gains from free trade is now under grave threat. Politicians have tapped into latent anxieties, alienation and anger felt by electorates in countries, from the United Kingdom to the United States and elsewhere. Their cries will reverberate around the Swiss Alps this week.

Little wonder then that the WEF has made "responsive and responsible leadership" the theme for this year's discussions.

Its founder and executive chairman, Professor Klaus Schwab, who has a knack for crystallising the zeitgeist of the times, summed this up in an essay published last Wednesday.

He wrote: "Leaders have to be responsive and responsible; they must understand that we are living in a world marked by uncertainty, volatility and deep transformational changes. Many people are living in precarious situations and searching for identity and meaning in a fast-changing world..."

"It is the daunting task of today's leaders to take the right decisions in a complex world that suffers from many legacy issues and emotional turmoil. There cannot just be a return to basics! There has to be a recognition that we are in unmapped territory, which places the status quo, and by extension leaders themselves, into question."

The German-born, Geneva-based professor who presides over the WEF is a thoughtful man not given to hyperbole. His clarion call will ring louder in the face of recent developments, as well as several events playing out this week, as the Davos deliberations unfold.

These include the keynote speech to be delivered on Tuesday at the Congress Centre by Chinese President Xi Jinping, making his Davos debut. Going by what his aides have

been telling the media, he will make a pitch for "inclusive globalisation" and warn that populist pressures could lead to "war and poverty". He will assert China's readiness to play a bigger role on the world stage.

His statements will be welcomed by those who have been calling on Beijing to step up and pitch in to support the rules-based system of international governance, not least when it is being challenged on so many fronts. But there will also be concerns at how China is doing so at a time when others, like the US and Britain, seem to be ceding leadership and influence, wittingly or otherwise.

In a similar vein, anxieties also loom about Russia's increasingly assured and assertive



President Vladimir Putin holding heightened sway in Europe, the Middle East and even Asia.

And then there is the incoming President Trump, who will be sworn in on Friday.

Globalisation's chief advocates will watch with much irony, and not without trepidation, as one of their harshest critics takes the reins in the very country that has done the most to promote the present economic and political order from which they - and yes, we - have all gained.

The Trump administration faces as many challenges as it poses. Questions remain over its alleged links to Russia and whether it will operate at its "kompromat" behest, as well as

doubts about the sobriety of the Trump clan's business dealings. Key Trump picks for the top jobs in economic, trade and foreign affairs have also spoken darkly about being at odds with China and Russia over trade and strategic issues.

Add to this mix, uncertainties over upcoming elections in Germany, France, and possibly Italy, not to mention Malaysia closer to home, and the propensity for political volatility mounts.

Underlying these more immediate geopolitical developments, however, remain the deeper and more relentless concerns about rising income inequalities and unemployment in societies around the world. Like it or not, these will have to be dealt with - the WEF has flagged the need for faster and more inclusive economic growth - regardless of how the political events mentioned before play out.

So, as Dr Olga Oliker, the director of the Russia and Eurasia programme at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, summed up in the Financial Times last Thursday: "We're in a very strange space."

How to make sense of these unusual times, when pollsters, pundits and politicians have all seemed to fail us so miserably in recent months?

Delegates might do no worse than to turn to history and heed the wise words of Britain's wartime Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who once famously declared: "The farther backwards you look, the farther forwards you can see."

After all, history reminds us that previous Russian regimes in the 1960s had similarly sought to influence American elections, while Singaporean officials, too, have been caught in compromising positions, such as when cypher officer Alan Wee Kheng Soon was jailed for 10 years in 1980 for passing sensitive information to a Moscow spy lady he had consorted with.

So, in a curious way, we have been here before, and might draw some lessons from the past as we find our way forward.

This is what a panel of eminent historians, including Professor Lawrence Freedman from

King's College London, Professor Margaret MacMillan of Oxford University, and Professor Patrick McCray from the University of California in Santa Barbara, among others, will attempt to do in a session titled "Back To The Future: Lessons From The 20th Century For The 21st", which I will have the pleasure of moderating on Tuesday evening.

In a column published recently, one of those who will also be on the panel, Professor Nouriel Roubini of New York University's Stern School of Business, likened events of today to the troubling times in the 1920s and 1930s.

He wrote: "As in the 1930s, when protectionist and isolationist US policies hampered global economic growth and trade, and created the conditions for rising revisionist powers to start a world war, similar policy impulses could set the stage for new powers to challenge and undermine the American-led international order. An isolationist Trump administration may see the wide oceans to its east and west, and think that increasingly ambitious powers such as Russia, China and Iran pose no direct threat to the homeland."

"But the US is still a global economic and financial power in a deeply interconnected world. If left unchecked, these countries will eventually be able to threaten core US economic and security interests - at home and abroad - especially if they expand their nuclear and cyber warfare capacities. The historical record is clear: Protectionism, isolationism, and 'America first' policies are a recipe for economic and military disaster."

So, amid the freezing cold, the Davos discussions this year will have to be infused with not just the usual heartwarming messages of hope in the face of long-term fears, but also a pressing sense of urgency to ponder and put right the many global fires that are raging or might yet be unleashed, if indeed the delegates who come to the WEF are to deliver on its lofty commitment to "improving the state of the world".

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Of gangs, adolescents, and winners



NADINE SHAANTA MURSHID

As the outrage over a ragging incident at Jahangirnagar University died out, news about gangs of Uttara took its place, complete

with a picture of a young man gone too soon.

These incidents reveal the potentially high but underestimated use of violence among young adults, reminding me of a recent study suggesting that having friends who use violence increase young adults' odds of using violence themselves, pointing to the social acceptance of violence, and the role of peers and friends in shaping individual behaviours, including destructive ones. Or perhaps I should say, particularly destructive ones.

In a recent study I conducted on South Asian adolescents, I found that those who experienced bullying were more likely to report depression symptoms including suicide ideation.

This, of course, is not surprising. What is surprising though is how little we talk about adolescent health, particularly mental health, in Bangladesh and perhaps even the rest of South Asia. That bullying victimisation is connected to mental health is important to know; parents, teachers, and students all need to be aware of the effects of bullying that casts a long shadow right into their

adulthood. Individuals are more likely to experience Post Trauma Stress Disorder (PTSD), complex PTSD, depression, anxiety across the lifespan when they experience bullying as adolescents, research shows, and it is important that policymakers take note of this because what we see in practice - in schools and at home - is the opposite of what we want to see.

Bullying is often dismissed as a rite of passage; bullies are often held in "high esteem" possibly out of fear and because they are deemed powerful and popular, and in the name of "ragging", bullies get away with almost anything, including murder. In the fear of being bullied themselves, few stand up for those who are bullied, and for the fear of repercussions associated with being a "snitch", few report it to authorities or anyone else. And thus continues the cycle.

In Social Work, we talk about being trauma informed, about asking "what happened to you?" instead of "what's wrong with you?" In line with that frame of thought, we need to understand that most bullies are not bullies because they choose to be so. Most bullies have trauma history, such as child abuse - including exposure to domestic violence or intimate partner violence, which they learn to re-enact in other settings and situations. In the absence of actual tools of conflict resolution, they learn that violence is the only tool of conflict resolution, only way to gain control, only way to negotiate. This



ILLUSTRATION: PARK GEE YOUNG

tool of violence is likely to remain with them, and they are likely to continue to use violence in their personal lives, as adults, to meet their own needs, to control situations that they want control over.

Unless they get help. Help is admittedly difficult to get in Bangladesh given the dearth of mental

health providers. Clearly, greater investment in infrastructure to address mental health problems is absolutely necessary. But when we talk of infrastructure we often think about brick and mortar infrastructure - we need more than that. We need to think about how we have stigmatised mental health problems, we have to

recent research after all suggests that trauma may be intergenerationally transmitted. That violence has persisted in independent Bangladesh perhaps speaks to how that trauma happens.

At the same time, though, we have to realise that the neoliberal world order has to change for human beings to stop acting like they're in a rat race that must be won at all costs. The practices of unhealthy competition, which many schools are made of, have to change. The creation of "leaders" as if everyone can be a leader has to be re-thought. We need to focus on being human and humane. Not winners (and losers). Not money and material goods.

Maybe if we didn't expect all of our youth to be leaders, these gangs of high school students in Uttara wouldn't take it upon themselves to become leaders of violent groups. If these young adults didn't feel the need to "win" all the time, maybe they would figure out what they really want to do with their lives. Maybe if violence didn't become a form of social currency, the youth wouldn't be enticed by it.

What we need to do is reframe the idea of success, not equate it with money and power, but make it about purpose, about finding meaning in life.

Because if we don't, we will lose ourselves. And possibly our young adults. To money and power and the means to acquire them.

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A WORD A DAY



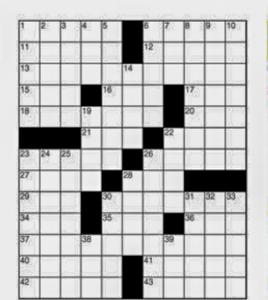
ANTEDILUVIAN

adjective

Of or belonging to the time before the biblical flood

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Half of a '60s group
 - 6 Foot connection
 - 11 Barn-raising group
 - 12 Gives a hoot
 - 13 Personal bearing
 - 15 Verb for you
 - 16 Neckline shape
 - 17 Farrow of film
 - 18 London theater area
 - 20 Rent out
 - 21 Antique
 - 22 Penalty
 - 23 Big trucks
 - 26 Pointers
 - 27 October birthstone
 - 28 Fly catcher
 - 29 Cover
 - 30 Resort site
 - 34 Noshed
 - 35 Corn unit
 - 36 Galloped
 - 37 Private room on a train
 - 40 Online messages
 - 41 Therefore
 - 42 Cars' scars
- DOWN**
- 1 Showy parrot
 - 2 Love, in Lombardy
 - 3 Silent performers
 - 4 African viper
 - 5 Digging tools
 - 6 Took a part
 - 7 Saigon setting
 - 8 Politburo home
 - 9 Not strict
 - 10 Fancy homes
 - 14 Tear
 - 19 Work hard
 - 22 Little lies
 - 23 Comforted
 - 24 Perfect example
 - 25 Mob member
 - 26 Warm areas
 - 28 Dress in
 - 30 Elite Navy group
 - 31 Singer Cara
 - 32 Tango or twist
 - 33 Come in
 - 38 Peach core
 - 39 Got together



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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| N | A | G | I | C | E | I | D | O |
| G | L | O | S | S | E | S | O | V |
| J | A | I | L | S | F | O | N | T |
| A | C | R | E | B | A | N | | |
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BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

