

A tweet that will live in infamy

Weeks later, racist rant continues to roil



ASHFAQUE SWAPAN

A few days may have passed, and the news media may have moved on, but US President Donald Trump's racist rant on Twitter on July 14 has ripped open a raw wound for US immigrants of colour (this writer included), that will take a long,

long time to heal. Trump's July 14 tweet lambasting four Democratic members of Congress, all US citizens and, not coincidentally, all women of colour, could well turn out to be a historic exception.

Trump asked them to go back to the countries they came from, a totally unacceptable insult to an American citizen and a choice epithet for racists with which immigrants of colour in the west are painfully familiar.

What happened after the tweet is remarkable. Republican lawmakers, caught between a rock and a hard place, twisted themselves into pretzels. Most scurried away from reporters. A valiant few fended off Trump's critics with dubious logic. "Clearly it's not a racist comment," Andy Harris, a Maryland Republican Congressman said. "He could have meant, 'Go back to the district they came from, to the neighbourhood they came from.'" Harris would be hard-pressed to find anybody to second his opinion.

Pity the poor Republicans, little though they deserve it. As they scrambled to figure out how to defend the indefensible, Trump riled up his adoring supporters at a rally in North Carolina. The situation reminds me of an age-old observation about US politics. On hearing about an awful legislator, a wag retorted: "If you think the lawmaker is bad, you should see the constituents."

"Send them back," Trump supporters chanted as Trump waited a full 13 seconds. This simply stunned the nation. Republican power brokers begged Trump to



Rep. Ayanna Pressley (D-Mass) speaks as Reps. Ilhan Omar (D-Minn), Rashida Tlaib (D-Mich), and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) hold a press conference addressing remarks made by President Donald Trump.

PHOTO: BRENDAN SMIALOWSKI/AFP

tamp it down. A little chastened, Trump walked back the reaction. He wasn't happy, he said, and he quickly resumed speaking. For someone with so much practice, Trump is an awful liar. I think this is due to his unique combination of mendacity and laziness. For Trump, it's simply too much work to keep his lies straight. The news media had a field day, juxtaposing his remarks with the video clip that flatly contradicted it.

Another day, another Trump. On that day, Trump did another 180 degree turn and

lambasted the lawmakers again, praising the crowd who made those racist chants as patriotic. In other words, he was walking back the walking back, if you get my drift.

Having said that, Trump deserves credit for making the Republicans honest again. He has blown away their proverbial fig leaf.

In more civilised times, Republicans were quite happy to indulge in race-baiting, but had the decency, such as it was, to be coy about it.

Lee Atwater, a pugilistic Republican strategist who advised US presidents Ronald

Reagan and George W Bush, memorably described Republican President Richard Nixon's "Southern Strategy" and its historical context: "You start out in 1954 by saying, 'Nigger, nigger, nigger'. By 1968 you can't say 'nigger'—that hurts you. Backfires. So, you say stuff like forced busing, states' rights and all that stuff. You're getting so abstract now [that] you're talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you're talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is [that] blacks get hurt worse than whites."

There is a searing, poignant human aspect to race-baiting politics. Trump's racist tweets were especially painful for immigrants of colour. When the *New York Times* requested readers to relate their own experience of similar "Go back" form of racial harassment, it unleashed a sort of immigrant "me-too" response: An eye-popping 16,000 responses flooded in. The selected excerpts make for heart-breaking reading.

What a long way the Republican Party has come from the days of its patron saint, President Ronald Reagan. I have profound respect for this man whose policies I loathe. Reagan had made the observation that even if you live in France or England for many decades, you will never become French or English. But you can become American if you want to become one.

Like many millions of immigrants of colour, I personally felt a chill down my spine after I heard about Trump's tweets. Later, I was almost moved to tears when I was reassured by someone who has far greater authority than Trump will ever have.

"If anyone can say 'go back,' it's Native Americans." New Mexico Congresswoman Deb Haaland, a native American, wrote in the *New York Times*. "My Pueblo ancestors, despite being targeted at every juncture—despite facing famine and drought—still inhabit this country today. But indigenous people aren't asking anyone to go back to where they came from."

"I question the standing of anyone who would call to send my sisters and colleagues—Congresswomen Ilhan Omar, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ayanna Pressley, Rashida Tlaib—or any other American 'back'. As a 35th-generation New Mexican and a descendant of the original inhabitants of this continent, I say that the promise of our country is for everyone to find success, pursue happiness and live lives of equality. This is the Pueblo way. It's the American way."

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PROJECT SYNDICATE

How can developing countries pay for the SDGs?

TANIA MASI, ROBERTO RICCIUTI, ANTONIO SAVOIA, and KUNAL SEN

WITH objectives as far-reaching as ending poverty in all its forms and delivering quality education to all by 2030, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are highly ambitious—much more ambitious than their predecessor, the Millennium Development Goals. Whether or not the world achieves them will depend crucially on money—particularly public finance.

Traditionally, official development assistance (ODA) would play a pivotal role in financing an agenda like the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, which encompasses the 17 SDGs. But at a time when nationalist rhetoric and isolationist policies are gaining traction in some of the world's biggest traditional donor countries—beginning with the United States—ODA will not be sufficient.

In fact, foreign aid has remained flat, at best, in the last few years—and there is no increase in sight. On the contrary, the spectre of global recession—heightened by US President Donald Trump's trade war—makes a reduction in donor governments' revenues, together with increased domestic demand for public spending, a distinct possibility. None of this bodes well for foreign aid flows.

This means that, to implement the SDGs, developing countries will need to rely increasingly on their own resources. And, in fact, the 2030 Agenda anticipates this imperative: SDG17's first target is to "strengthen domestic resource mobilisation...to improve domestic capacity for tax and other revenue collection." The question is how.

Poor fiscal management means that developing countries—particularly in Africa, home to 27 of the world's 28 poorest countries—are often plagued by debt crises and inflation, and many are at the mercy of



A man waters his vegetables at an allotment in Port-Bouet, a district of Abidjan.

PHOTO: SIA KAMBOU/AFP

commodity-price cycles. Tax collection is a major challenge for these economies: the tax revenues low-income countries collect amount to about 10-20 percent of GDP, on average, compared to about 40 percent of GDP in high-income countries.

One major reason for this is that these countries tend to have large informal economies; another is that they invest little in the infrastructure needed to implement personal taxation, relying instead on sales taxes, which are easier to administer but bring in less revenue. Add to that poor management of what is collected, and these countries consistently fail to deliver needed

public goods and services, let alone ensure fiscal sustainability.

The effectiveness of tax collection and the strength of budgetary systems, our research shows, depend crucially on the extent to which political institutions place constraints on executive power. Governments with credible, institutionalised systems of checks and balances tend not only to collect more tax revenues, but also to have more transparent and predictable budgetary processes.

A major reason for this is accountability. Giving a single executive virtually unchecked control over a government's financial

resources raises the risk of sudden changes in budgetary priorities, and nurtures the temptation to spend on projects that enrich a few at the expense of the public good. But when political leaders are unable to use state revenues freely—say, to enrich themselves or their cronies—they may be more likely to invest in strengthening the government's fiscal capacity, including its ability to design, implement, and monitor the budget.

In a well-functioning parliamentary system, for example, the state budget is overseen by a group of elected authorities in a relatively transparent manner. No one person has the power to shape the process in

self-serving ways. Instead, leaders are under pressure to respond to the voters' needs and preferences.

In such a context, taxation becomes an informed, consensual transaction between citizens and the state. This bolsters trust in official institutions, in turn boosting revenues and supporting social and political stability.

According to our research, placing institutional constraint on the executive would, over about nine years, lead to a 2.4-percentage-point increase in the GDP share of both total revenues and income-tax revenues. Such changes would also raise the quality of fiscal planning—the accuracy of revenue forecasts and the effectiveness of budget implementation and debt management—above the global average.

These gains could translate into more textbooks in local schools, more vaccines for local health services, and more resources for poverty-reduction programmes. In other words, a taxation system constrained by institutions that ensure transparency and accountability could support progress toward achieving the SDGs.

Of course, the effects will not be instantaneous. Institutional reform is a gradual process, and legal changes do not immediately translate into behavioural ones. But embedding checks and balances into governance—particularly to limit the executive's discretionary budgetary authority—is integral to accomplish the kind of structural transformation developing countries need if they are to create more stable, prosperous futures well beyond 2030.

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QUOTABLE Quote

PLATO
Athenian Philosopher

We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Start to melt
- 7 Pencil part
- 11 Book goofs
- 12 Storybook monster
- 13 Workout sites
- 15 Argon and xenon
- 16 Acute
- 18 Suit piece
- 21 Locate
- 22 Radio knobs
- 24"—a deal!"
- 25 Buck's mate
- 26 Engine need
- 27 Corned beef sandwich
- 29 One of Donald's nephews
- 30 Barking beast
- 31 Audacious
- 32 Belonging to those folks
- 34 Doctor's office feature
- 40 Egg outline
- 41 Casual drawing
- 42 "Citizen—"
- 43 Manhole setting

DOWN

- 1 Put in stitches
- 2 Bauxite, e.g.
- 3 Work wk.'s end
- 4 Marked for sale
- 5 Hawke of film
- 6 D.C. team, familiarly
- 7 Relax
- 8 Sense of self
- 9 Sleeve filler
- 10 -- Moines
- 14 Skit show
- 16 Toys with tails
- 17 Follow as a result
- 19 Korean city
- 20 Attempted
- 21 Fragrant tree
- 22 Great weight
- 23 Cunning
- 25 Old capital of India
- 28 Fight
- 29 Scary genre
- 31 Intolerant sort
- 33 Finishes
- 34 Stir-fry pan
- 35 Gardner of film
- 36 Writer Fleming
- 37 Dedicated verse
- 38 Bullfight call
- 39 Ran into

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BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

V	A	L	O	R	C	E	D	A	R
A	G	A	P	E	A	R	O	M	A
T	O	W	E	L	R	A	D	I	I
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T	O	W	E	R	P	E	G	G	Y