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THE IDEAS PAGE

The war within America

Battle over Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's legacy, her Supreme Court seat, may overtake all other issues — pandemic, economic collapse, fires and floods — in US presidential polls



With that start, I could take the next thousand words in many directions. I could write of the unmarked contempt that incumbent Donald Trump and challenger Joe Biden had for each other through the most presidential of presidential debates. I could write about the marches for racial justice taking place for months across the country, aptly described as the largest protest movement in the nation's history. I could speak of the unspeakable — America's botched handling of everything from coronavirus to climate change.

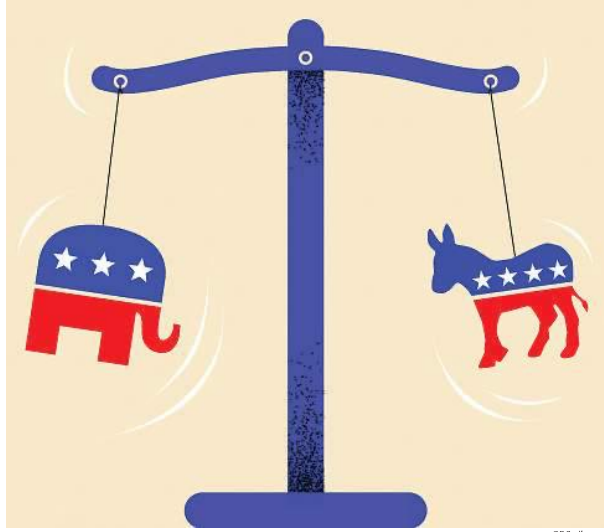
Let me put those subjects aside and take the space here to focus on a war about to erupt in Washington DC over a seat vacated by an 87-year-old woman. At 5 feet and an inch, she was a towering presence on the nation's Supreme Court, champion of gender, civil and voting rights — and a pop icon memorialised in t-shirts and tattoos. I speak, of course, of the Notorious RBG, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who finally succumbed to cancer. In the coming days, the war over her legacy, her Supreme Court seat, may overtake all other issues — a pandemic still raging, an economy in collapse and fires and floods of biblical proportions.

The US Senate has a Republican majority and with the party's leader, Donald Trump, in the White House, it can replace the left-leaning liberal, RBG with a conservative judge before the election. The effects would be long-lasting, as the vote would firmly tilt the highest court in the land to the right for decades to come and overturn fundamental laws that could affect a woman's right to an abortion or the sweeping affordable healthcare act, known as Obamacare, among others. Trump has, in fact, selected an ultra-conservative, Judge Amy Coney Barrett, as his nominee and is aiming for a Senate confirmation before the end of November 3. The Democrats have the cards stacked against them, since the bodies that can make this happen, the Senate and the White House, are currently in Republican control. With enough Republican senators lining up to support naming a new justice before the elections, the prospects for blocking such a move look bleak.

Oddly, this may help the Democrats on the Election Day. Sometimes, the most powerful strategies emerge when you have your back against a wall.

To my mind, the Democrats and their presidential candidate, Joe Biden, have a clear option that dominates all others: Go nuclear. By this I mean they must commit to a credible threat, promise that if they were to win the White House and Senate, they will abolish the filibuster — a tactic that blocks or delays Senate action on a Bill, usually by talking endlessly — and expand the size of the Supreme Court by adding more seats. The laws allow such a possibility. This way, if Judge Barrett is installed, they can rebalance the political makeup of the Court by adding seats and "packing" it with their hand-picked liberal justices.

The idea comes with some retaliatory



C.R. Sankar

of tit-for-tat Supreme Court expansions when the shoe is on the other foot and the other side is in power. However, such a retaliation would happen further out into the future and endless court expansions could be unpopular among voters. So it is a risk worth taking for now. This nuclear option is beginning to get some adherents already. Kamala Harris, Joe Biden's running mate, has hinted she is warm to the idea. Biden has in the past been concerned about the tit-for-tat precedent this might set, but is now keeping his mouth shut on the topic. When asked in the debate about whether he would push to pack the court in the event of a Democratic win, he deflected and didn't answer.

I feel he shouldn't hold back and come out and say, heck yes, that option is on the table. For Democrats, this is a no-lose strategy, as it will maximise voter energy around a galvanising cause. The issue would bring more voters to the polls and bring more support to the party. The signs of such momentum are already apparent. In the first hour after RBG's passing, a key organisation that tracks fundraising for the Democrats raised more money in an hour than in any other one-hour timeframe since it had launched 16 years ago. It broke its all-time record in money raised in a single day.

Nationwide polls suggest that fast-forwarding Judge Barrett's appointment to the Supreme Court pick is unpopular with a majority of voters, so this should help with the momentum favouring Democrats.

Why did Trump and the Republicans execute a pre-emptive strike? They had two options. One was to forge ahead and install a conservative judge. In the coming weeks, the headlines will be dominated by the bitter confirmation process. This might

To my mind, the Democrats and their presidential candidate, Joe Biden, have a clear option that dominates all others: Go nuclear. By this I mean they must commit to a credible threat, promise that if they were to win the White House and Senate, they will abolish the filibuster — a tactic that blocks or delays Senate action on a Bill, usually by talking endlessly — and expand the size of the Supreme Court by adding more seats. The laws allow such a possibility. This way, if Judge Barrett is installed, they can rebalance the political makeup of the Court by adding seats and "packing" it with their hand-picked liberal justices.

sues: Trump's disastrous handling of COVID-19 or his monstrous debate performance or that he has masterfully avoided paying income taxes by running failed businesses and taking \$70,000 deductions for hair-styling. And then, of course, Trump would boast of having appointed three conservative Supreme Court judges as his campaign pitch. That said, any benefits would be neutralised if the Democrats were to successfully use voter fury of having Judge Barrett pushed through in an election year — an act that Republicans themselves had argued against back when Obama had a similar chance to fill a Supreme Court seat in 2016. Alternatively, Trump could have campaigned on a promise to appoint a conservative judge after he gets re-elected. Such a move would have disappointed the "bird in the hand" voters eager to confirm a right-leaning judge while Trump is still in office, but it could have fired up the campaign to re-elect him and giving it a renewed rationale. By jumping the gun now, Trump may, ironically, pull off a Supreme Court win, but has added fuel to the Biden campaign and set a potential retaliatory strike in motion.

Thus my advice to Biden: Go nuclear. You have nothing to lose at this point. My advice to Trump: Accept the election outcome if you lose and then quietly disappear. Unless, of course, there is a subpoena that requires your appearance in front of a judge in a court to answer some questions about years of tax dodging and \$70,000 haircuts. Court, your self-luck, that the judge is not RBG.

The writer is Dean of Global Business at the Fletcher School of Tufts University, and founding executive director of Fletcher's

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

One unmistakable winner emerged from Tuesday's presidential debate: Xi Jinping. The loser was the American public — and anyone else unfortunate enough to have sat through the grim 90-minute spectacle.

— THE GUARDIAN

Gandhi's freedom

He is appropriated by all. But his true legacy could help address the democracy deficit in today's world



RAM MADHAV

ON JANUARY 30, 1948, the flag of the United Nations Organisation was lowered to half-mast. For the first time, the UN had set aside a day's session to honour the man just murdered in Delhi. "Not the head of a state, a general or a king, but a lone man who without an army, riches, or political alliances, has been called the most powerful man of the 20th century. Who was this man that all the world should mourn over?" — *Encyclopedia Britannica's* documentary on Gandhi begins with this description. Gandhi's greatness is universal. For Gandhians, he is an eternal inspiration. Gandhi never hated anybody, but some Gandhians do. Incidentally, for those whom Gandhians hate too, Gandhi is iconic. For Gandhi fits into all shapes and sizes. His legacy can be appropriated by anyone. As is famously said by leaders, Gandhi too can be "loved or hated but not ignored".

Gandhi had optimistically predicted that he could be killed but not his Gandhism. Seventy-two years after his death, Gandhism remains, but it is largely about externals. Cleanliness, khadi, cow protection and swadeshi became chic in Gandhi's name. Gandhi emerged as a "trendy fashion icon". These are not unimportant. But Gandhism is much more than these externals.

Gandhi's core message was about freedom, which Tagore described in his poem as "who's mind is without fear". Enlightenment thinkers emphasised on human freedom from the material standpoint. Gandhi gave this a spiritual dimension. From South Africa to India, Gandhi relentlessly fought for freedom and equality. He aligned freedom with responsibility and equality with dignity and love. "I am not interested in freeing India from merely English yoke. I am bent on freeing India from any yoke whatsoever", Gandhi declared. Biographer Louis Fischer quipped that the Englishman who pushed Gandhi's message in South Africa was a slave-preacher too was born on October 2 in 1800. Turner was the first to rebel against slavery in America. His rebellion was crushed and he was hanged. Like Gandhi, Turner too tried the spiritual path like a mystic. He too was austere in his lifestyle and fasted and prayed regularly. Like Gandhi, he also believed that his mission was divine and self-purification.

Gandhi carried forward Turner's mantle in South Africa, fighting against apartheid. Later, in India, he led the struggle against the British rule on the one hand, and against social evils on the other. He described the movement for swaraj as one of "self-purification".

Gandhism lies in the commitment to freedom and self-purification. Dictators thrive on yokes like brute state power, a

ant media and incessant propaganda. Gandhi respected his critics. But dictators can't stand dissent. They live in their cocoons, surrounded by henchmen and yes-men. That has been the story, from Hitler to Stalin. Once the Third Reich was formed in 1933, Hitler declared that the party had no more role in the government. He surrounded himself with "experts". Leaders who came before him were erased from the historic memory. Stalin undertook the "Great Purge", eliminating his competitors and rivals in the party starting with the killing of Sergei Kirov in 1934 and ending with the killing of Leon Trotsky in 1940. In all these campaigns, both Hitler and Stalin depended on state power and a submissive media.

Gandhi was the antithesis of such dictatorial tendencies. Gandhi lived an open life, never surrounded by a coterie. He was fearless in truth. He rushed to Noakhali when riots broke out in early 1947 in which a large number of Hindus were killed. For four months, he went from village to village persuading Muslims to embrace their Hindu neighbours. He admonished Huseyn Suhrawardy, the Bengal Premier, for his inaction. But then, he refused to accept the chief minister's version about the communal situation in Bihar and rushed to Patna to offer succour to Muslims who were victimised by Hindus. He admonished the Congress government in equally harsh words for its failure.

That's what Gandhi called Ram Rajya or Dharma Rajya — a state of righteous freedom. Deen Dayal Upadhyay later explained Dharma Rajya in the terms of democracy. Democracy is understood as the government "by the people, of the people and for the people". While "by the people" and "of the people" represented elections and government, "for the people" meant Dharma Rajya. Deen Dayal averred, Rama Rajya, for Gandhi, meant people being free from every type of yoke.

A saga inspired many. Authoritarian regimes fell in many countries after India. The last to fall in the last century was the Soviet Union. The Soviet regime's anthem used to describe the country as the "indestructible union of free republics". Those republics were barely free under the Soviet regime. The myth of indestructibility remained only until Mikhail Gorbachev became the President in 1986. All that was needed for the indestructibility to go was his policy of Glasnost — openness. The Kazakhs were the first to take to the streets in 1986. Gorbachev used brute military power, but the movement for freedom spread like a wildfire, destroying one of the last surviving dictatorships of the 20th century. Horrific details of the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant were carried by the recently "freed" Russian media far and wide, further precipitating the downfall.

There is a need to tread the spiritual path in the world today. People's freedoms are at stake. The Gandhian agenda was always about more openness, freedom and a life of dignity and respect. A benevolent state and a free media are mandatory for people's freedom. "I will be gone saying what I am saying, but one-day people will remember that what this poor man said, that alone was true", Gandhi pleaded once. Realising that Gandhi was right is real Gandhism.

The writer is Member, Board of Governors, India Foundation



RAMIN JAHANBEGLOO

FOR GANDHI, violence was a sign of the failure of a legitimate political order. At the core of Gandhi's political theory is the view of politics as shaped by internal moral power, rather than from the standpoint of rational violence. Consequently, for Gandhi, the modern state contained forces that threatened, rather than enhanced, liberty. Therefore, he did not consider democracy as a political regime but as a value, which needed to be created and cherished. He identified institutions of the liberal constitutional state did not mean that he justified them in terms of his political philosophy. To the contrary, politics for Gandhi was an act of consciousness, not a mode of living taken for granted.

Gandhi did not see the goal of political action as the immediate capture of office. According to him, the basic condition of political action was the elimination of violence. His principal aim was to civilise modern politics from within, by shortening the circuit of resentment, hatred and coercion. His politics of non-violence was a method to mobilise collective power in a manner that attends to its own moral education in an exemplary and innovative way. Excellence is the end that we have to set before ourselves as political beings. Gandhi showed that a life of excellence is an agency and a transformative force, an experi-

Moral is political

Gandhi's morality was not denial of politics. His idealism was completed by realism

ence of conscience underpinning the harmony between ethics and politics.

An "ethic of responsibility" underlined Gandhi's non-violent politics. He argued for a dedicated and committed political ethos, which did not accept the necessity of "dirty hands" in politics. As he affirmed on July 3, 1940, "I have always derived my politics from ethics or religion and my strength is also derived by my deriving my politics from ethics. It is also because I swear by ethics and religion that I find myself in politics. A person who is a lover of his country is bound to take a lively interest in politics".

Gandhi was thinking in terms of long-term social stability among nations. So, he wanted to put his hands on the wheel of history through non-violent politics. Ultimately, what was important for him was to move from violence to politics. This transition could not take place without the intervention of the ethical in the political. In a speech at All-India National Education Conference on January 13, 1930, he observed: "There are some who think that morality has nothing to do with politics. We do not concern ourselves with the character of our leaders... If swaraj was not meant to civilise us, and to purify and stabilise our civilisation, it would be worth nothing. The very essence of our civilisation is that we give a

paramount place to morality in all our affairs, public or private".

The Gandhian appeal to the ethical in politics was not only a way to seek Truth, but also of coming to know oneself in ever-greater depth. The Gandhian effort for non-violent politics was a cultivation of one's capacity for ethical citizenship. That is to say, Gandhi considered politics as a work of the heart and not merely of reason. This recalls French philosopher Blaise Pascal, who said: "The heart has its reasons which reason itself does not know". In the same manner, Gandhi believed that the heart, and not reason, is the seat of morality. He wrote in *Harjan* (June 8, 1940): "Morality which depends upon the helplessness of a man or woman has not much to recommend it. Morality is rooted in the purity of our hearts". Gandhi believed that next to constructive work, a society needs also to be inwardly empowered, since human beings are capable of love, friendship, solidarity and empathy.

On January 5, 1907, Gandhi wrote in *Indian Opinion*: "It is the moral nature of man by which he rises to good and noble thoughts. The different sciences show us the world as it is. Ethics tells us what it ought to be. It enables man to know how he should act. Man has two windows to his mind: Through one he can

see his own self as it is; through the other, he can see what it ought to be". Consequently, Gandhi insisted on the autonomous nature of the moral act. His view of morality was not a denial of politics. On the contrary, Gandhi's moral idealism was completed by a political realism, which sought the construction of a democratic society. He wrote: "I feel that political work must be looked upon in terms of social and moral progress".

From Gandhi's perspective, non-violence was an ontological truth that followed from the unity and interdependence of humanity and life. Therefore, he advocated an awareness of the essential unity of humanity. That awareness called for critical self-examination and a move from egocentricity towards a "shared humanity". This "shared humanity" cannot exist if it is not aware of its shortcomings. It needs to strive to remove its ethical imperfections in order to be able to live with global challenges. In an age of increasing "globalisation of selfishness", there is an urgent need to understand and practise the moral leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and re-evaluate the concept of politics.

The writer is director, Mahatma Gandhi Centre for NonViolence and Peace Studies, O.P.J.S. Global University

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

INJUSTICE IN UP

THIS REFERS TO the report UP Police out in full force to cremate Hathras woman, away from family and the editorial 'Impunity in Hathras' (IE, October 1). The incident is an addition to chronicle foretold by B.R. Ambedkar, who while describing the vice and viciousness of caste hatred in Hindu Society, has said: "To the 'Untouchables', Hindutva is a veritable chamber of horrors". Recently, the Calcutta High Court (HC) while disposing a PIL on the dignified disposal of dead bodies of COVID victims observed that "the right to dignity and fair treatment under Article 21 of the Constitution is not only available to a living person but also to his mortal remains after his demise. Disposal of a human body, whether or not the person dies of Covid-19, whether by cremation or burial, should be done with due respect and solemnity". The intriguing police ham-handedness over the gang-raped, brutalisation and cremation of the Dalit woman victim, sends a chilling message — but only do Dalits have no control over their lives, but not even after death.

L.R. Murmu, Delhi

NO DUE PROCESS

THIS REFERS TO editorial "The Devil's Deal" (IE, October 1). It lays bare the stark reality of what the justice system has become. The demolition was a public spectacle that hardly required any

IDEAS ONLINE

A MOMENT FOR REGENERATION AND ADVANTA KALA

● A GANDHIAN OUR MIST: KELSANG DUKTSANG

www.indianexpress.com

The reaction of Justice Liberman, confirmed by the newspaper, underlines the mockery of judicial process. The charge that the judiciary is increasingly beholden to the ruling dispensation is strengthened further with the verdict.

Harish Joshi, Pune

POLITICS NEEDED

THIS REFERS TO the article 'Good students, bad students' (IE, September 30). Pupils must not be dissuaded from partaking in political discourse. The higher education institutions across the nation should seek to lead students into proactive citizens, who are always willing to take up the baton.

Varun Das, Zirokar



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● KEROSENE AND LPG SUBSIDIES

What is the best way to support BPL families?

End the subsidy *raj*, and give special assistance to BPL families when oil prices go above \$75 per barrel

IN SOME ARTICLES I had written a few years ago (there is one published by the International Institute of Social Development bit.ly/34jRlDg), I had revealed how the diversion of PDS kerosene and residential LPG resulted in a ₹50,000 crore loss per year. By any standard, it was the mother of all corruption. But, this analysis did not get any headlines.

Similarly, today, news of the subsidy cost of the government on these two products falling to zero should have got the headlines. Corruption fighters, along with thinktanks, should have argued, at the end of the subsidy *raj*. But there is deafening silence. Why?

Indeed, BPL families can and should be helped when prices go up, but without having multiple prices. The current mechanism is misused to generate black money, even in developed countries.

Since World War II, kerosene has been a controlled commodity. In the case of LPG, subsidies were introduced in the late 1960s to encourage its use for cooking, as it was a clean fuel. Once any subsidy is implemented, ending it in a democracy is next to impossible.

In recent years, however, kerosene consumption has slowly decreased, from 9.3 million tonnes (mt) in 2009-10 to just 2.4 mt last year. This is indeed an encouraging development, driven by the NDA's 100% electrification drive and the Ujjwala scheme, which promotes the use of LPG by BPL families by giving free connections. On the other hand, LPG consumption has increased from 13.1 mt in 2009-10 to 26.4 mt in 2019-20.

The diversion of fuel subsidies results in the generation of a large amount of black money. Also, we should recall the sacrifice made by upright officers like IOC's Manjunath (murdered in 2005 by kerosene mafia) and a district collector Y Sonavane (murdered in 2011), which made news headlines and attracted

national attention. My house was attacked, and even I had received murder threats after my expose on diversion of PDS kerosene in Mysuru.

LPG and kerosene subsidies, after having reached a high of ₹809,450 million in 2013-14, had come down to ₹240,000 million last year. Currently, they are at the zero level—an event that needs to be celebrated. There are many reasons for such a dramatic drop. One of the factors in recent months is the drop in oil price driven by Covid-19 lockdowns.

In addition, the NDA government needs to be credited for initiating the process of decreasing the subsidy by increasing the price of subsidised kerosene and LPG in small increments.

With a drop in international LPG prices, there has been a significant over-recovery of subsidies—this issue has not received media attention. In May, over-recovery was ₹120 per cylinder.

Initially, the UPA tried to take some baby steps to reduce the subsidy burden of LPG. It tried to limit the number of cylinders per family per year to six. However, because of pressure, first, by Sonia Gandhi and then by Rahul Gandhi, it was increased to 12. On average, each family consumes only about 6.3 cylinders per year. Thus, putting a cap of 12 became meaningless since less than 3% use more than 12 cylinders.

The NDA did not alter this irrational policy. They must have expected backlash from consumers. Instead, they took recourse to increasing the price of LPG in small doses, which went unnoticed by consumers. Even more significantly, the opposition parties also did not protest.

When Modi urged Indians to give up subsidy voluntarily, only an insignificant number opted out. Later, LPG subsidy was cut-off for those earning more ₹10 lakh per year. Currently, out of 280 million LPG consumers, only 20 million do not receive any subsidy. Eighty million consumers are BPL families who have been given free LPG connection under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY).

Adoption of direct benefit transfer for LPG has helped reduce the subsidy burden. The UPA started this, and the NDA later modified it. This has helped minimise diversion and strike off duplicate or bogus LPG connections.

The total budgeted amount for PDS kerosene and residential LPG for FY21 is ₹409,150 million—₹372,560 million for LPG and ₹36,590 million for kerosene. If there is no increase in prices, India stands to save this amount.

So, now is the ideal time for the government to end both these subsidies. Since consumers are not getting any subsidy currently, other than the one-time Covid-19-related three free cylinders per family, there is unlikely to be any protest either by the consumers or the opposition. At least, the government should seriously consider dropping universal LPG policy and announce a new policy of giving subsidised LPG only to BPL families.

When oil prices increase in the future, the government will come under pressure to support the poor to continue to buy LPG or kerosene. Instead of supplying LPG cylinders or kerosene below the market price, the government should adopt a modified policy of helping only the BPL families. They can be given a special fuel assistance grant when oil prices are above, say, \$75 per barrel.

Such a progressive policy will also get public support for the government to continue with the liberalised marketing policy. When there is multiple pricing for any product as we have had before (domestic price, commercial price and auto price), it gives rise to corruption and black money generation. This is the case not just in India, but even in the most developed countries.

It is unlikely that India will find a more ideal time than now to end the subsidy *raj* for kerosene and LPG. The NDA had taken the right step of moving towards reducing subsidy by slowly increasing price for these sensitive products. By ending the subsidy *raj* now, PM Narendra Modi can make history, like former PM PV Narasimha Rao did by liberalising the Indian economy in 1991.

Rising on innovation

DEEKSHA S BISHT & SURBHI JAIN

IES officers, department of economic affairs. Views are personal

India has made it to top-50 in the GII

INNOVATION, IN BOTH products and processes, has the potential to be India's big ticket to development. This is in line with the vision of the prime minister who has said "...I dream of a Digital India where the world looks to India for the next innovation." India's continuous improvement to reach the 48th position (among 131 economies) in the recently released Global Innovation Index (GII) is indeed good news. GI uses a broad definition of innovation which includes both product and processes. It has two sub-indices with equal weightage, i.e. inputs (pillars of institutions, human capital and research, infrastructure, market sophistication, business sophistication) and outputs (knowledge and technological outputs and creative outputs).

India has made it to the top-50 in the GI—one of only 10 middle-income economies to have done so. Also, India, being the top-ranked in Central and South Asia region, is a neventrant to top-3 rankings among lower middle-income economies. Besides, it has bagged the title of an "innovation achiever" for 10 years in a row. India ranks second among all middle-income countries and 27th among all countries in innovation quality.

India has some intrinsic strengths which make it a naturally strong contender, such as domestic market scale (ranked 3rd), ICT service exports as proportion of total trade (ranked 1st), government's online service (ranked 9th), ease of protecting minority investors (ranked 13th), and graduates in science and engineering (ranked 12th). The rise in India's rank is attributed both to methodological factors and its recent innovation performance. The rise in political stability, government effectiveness and ease of resolving insolvency have contributed to the improved institutions' pillar. In the business sophistication pillar, firms' conductiveness to innovation, gross R&D expenditure by businesses and intellectual property payments as a proportion of total trade and research talent have improved significantly. In creative outputs, we have improved in cultural and creative service exports.

India's innovation output is much more as compared to its innovation inputs. INSPIRE scholarships, infrastructure support through FIST Scheme, incubation support, soft loans and tailored grants, goal-specific challenges such as Smart India Hackathons, goal-specific challenges such as Smart India Hackathons

Covid pandemic has opened up areas in innovation in health, pharma, ICT and processes such as remote working

Ignition Grants have been beneficial in shaping the innovation landscape. The said Ignition Grants have many grounds to work upon. Catching student innovators when young, through ATIL Innovation Mission, Smart India Hackathons, Grand Challenges and making entrepreneurship a part of school curriculum, will foster an innovative and entrepreneurial culture.

According to R&D Statistics and Indicators FY20, women participation in extramural R&D projects has increased significantly to 24% in 2016-17 from 13% in FY01. Policy support through schemes like KIRAN of DST has been complemented with behavioural changes to promote female labour force participation and equitable sharing of household care services. Unleashing this "gender dividend" can help nurture innovations for women-centric issues. As per DST, gross domestic expenditure on R&D (GERD) as a percentage of GDP was 0.7% in FY19—low even if one accounts for India's income levels. To boost it to the targeted 2% by 2022 (recommended by PMIEAC), both public and especially private sector expenditure on R&D need to rise. India's brands dwell in terms of international brand value, but industry R&D is limited to 40% of GERD (compared to 50% in other BRIC economies), that too for few firms and too few sectors. An *atmanirbhar Bharat* needs local firms to innovate for domestic as well as global challenges. Successes in vibrant areas such as fintech—with commendable innovations such as Indiatrack are examples of private-sector research leading public sector support. Covid has opened up areas in innovation in health, pharma, ICT and processes such as remote working, staggered work shifts, court proceedings and passenger management. India is one of the six middle-income countries, where three knowledge clusters (Bengaluru, Delhi and Mumbai) feature in global top-100. Our rising entrepreneurship can both be a source and outcome of innovation, flowering through programmes such as Start-up India, Skill India, and Mudra.

India has outperformed its comparable income peers in innovation, but there remains enormous scope given the young talent, a culture of ingenuity and the sheer diversity of development challenges. Private participation in R&D, academia-industry collaboration, and enhanced public education systems are building blocks of innovations. Let us innovate to build a new dynamic and vibrant India.

COVID-19 HAS BEEN a great equaliser in terms of human survival, economy and business in developed, developing and poor economies alike. It underscores the vulnerability of humans everywhere, hitting the poor and the middle-class, even as clouds of increase in poverty levels gather. Against this backdrop, with protectionist approaches on trade and business finding wide favour, each country has to discover its own mechanism to battle on the health front and restart the economy.

The concern now is that the haste on recovery should not cause countries to lose sight of the global commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals.

The United Nations was formed with the aims of maintaining international peace and security, developing friendly relations among nations and promoting social progress, better living standards and human rights. However, the focus of UN councils has been on peace and security; the need now is to shift this on to social progress, better living standards and protection of human rights. Now, wars will be less physical, more economic. The UN should not become a bridge of Choluteca, the exemplar of pouring resources into a solution that is rendered obsolete by an 'emerging normal'. The UN must develop a mechanism to ensure the protection of human rights across the globe, especially that of the poor and needy. Here, poor

UN needs an urgent metamorphosis

It needs to ensure fairer representation for the developing and low-income economies

ARUNA SHARMA

Development economics practitioner & former Secretary, GoI



denotes not just the economically poor but also those being converted into a voiceless herd. The assertion of rights of equity and better standards of living had been flagged by US president Roosevelt long ago.

Formed after World War II, the UN's aims and activities have expanded to make it the archetypal international body for the early 21st century. The focus is to defend life, liberty, independence and religious freedom, and to preserve human rights and justice in member countries' own lands as well as in other lands. The need to realign the structure of UN to make its chosen tool of SDGs effective has become imperative ever since the pandemic broke out.

The principal organs of the UN, to rejoin

themselves, have to shift focus to the participation of countries that need special attention to set appropriate strategies. The General Assembly's primary focus is to promote social progress, better living standards and human rights. To that end, the UN formulated the MDGs and, subsequently, the SDGs, but the mechanisms adopted need a thorough look. Each fall, the United Nations General Assembly, where each member has one vote, becomes a stage where presidents and prime ministers give speeches, largely clichéd. For the rest of the session, the General Assembly is the arena where largely symbolic diplomatic jousts are won and lost.

The United Nations Security Council



has 15 members, with five (Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States) holding permanent seats. The 15-member Security Council is by far the most powerful arm of the United Nations. It can impose sanctions, etc. The shift required here is to have permanent representation of developed, developing and underdeveloped economies to ensure that the focus of the organisation continues to remain 'no one left behind' and enable the transfer of successful experiments and faith in democratic functioning wherever this is needed. Thus, the need to rejoin the UN is also one that is rooted in the need to change its label from powerful but paralysed to vibrant, dynamic and effective.

The charter of the office of the Secre-

tary-General is vague in defining the duties of the United Nations' top official. Nine people have held the position so far, all men. The Secretary-General is expected to show no favouritism to any particular country, but the office is largely dependent on the funding and good-will of the most powerful nations.

The Security Council, notably its five permanent members (P5), choose the secretary-general by secret ballot, to serve a maximum of two five-year terms. It is difficult for the Secretary-General to remain independent of the P5's influence. Thus, there is a need to change the way the Secretary-General is chosen, by extending it to a secret ballot of not just permanent members but also the ten non-permanent

members, who are elected for two-year terms and represent emerging and low-income economies in the Security Council. This will enable fairer representation.

The ECOSOC (United Nations Economic and Social Council) is responsible for promoting higher standards of living, full employment and economic and social progress. The SDG mandate is the guiding factor here. The Covid impact has aggravated the situation that the ECOSOC needed to deal with, and there is a need for urgent action and relevant, one that is in sync with the challenges of the times. The challenges today are of inequity, the fear of worsening of all kinds of poverty because of Covid-19 and the indispensable requirement of sustainable development.

The UN has to undergo urgent metamorphosis to sink the task of achieving the SDGs with the new challenges emanating from the pandemic's impact on life, livelihood and lifestyle across the globe. It has to enable cooperation among member nations to ensure no one is left behind if the world is to recover and resurrect itself on the path to prosperity.

ARTS

Pinter brings pause to an end

The playwright's masterpiece 'Betrayal' is part of a new season at the reopening Theatre Royal Bath. Sarah Hemming reports

On March 16 this year, director Jonathan Church, like every other theatre maker in the world, hit a brick wall. "I was on my way to take *Singin' in the Rain* from Sadler's Wells to Tokyo," he says, with the rueful laugh of a wise old relative recalling a youthful folly. Since then, life has been rather quieter. "I haven't worn a pair of leather shoes for months..."

Now, finally, Church is back in a rehearsal room (shod, though not in leather) and directing what promises to be a humdinger of a show. Squirrelled away in a space in Bath, he is working on *Betrayal*, Harold Pinter's 1978 masterpiece and the play that will open the doors of the city's elegant Theatre Royal for the first time since the pandemic made them clang shut six months ago.

Church's delight is tempered only slightly by the practical headaches of rehearsing a play, central to which is a love affair and which was written before social distancing was even a phrase in the dictionary. "I was cursing Pinter when we were designing it," he says. "There's a bed in three scenes."

So will there be, you know, contact? "Yes!" replies Church. "The thought of doing some strange hand gesture instead of kissing in the middle of an affair would be a bit... bemusing."

But rehearsals have had to adapt to the current crisis. The team is divided into bubbles, the cast in one, Church and the technical team in another and the stage management alongside wearing masks and visors. More intimate moves are plotted rather than fully rehearsed – the actors might indeed kiss, but only in performance. Restraints are worth it, says Church, to bring a play as meaty as this to the stage and to move on a notch from monologues (such as those being

staged so brilliantly at London's Bridge Theatre) to three- and four-handers. "We very much wanted to go for plays, not monologues," he explains. "Rich drama that allows actors to do what they haven't been allowed to do. So we started focusing on plays that are the matically rich but also theatrically rich."

Betrayal spearheads Bath's "Welcome Back" season of three intimate but weighty dramas. It's followed by Michael Frayn's dazzling *Copenhagen* (1998), about the mysterious meeting between physicists Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg in 1941, and David Mamet's incendiary *Oleanna* (1992), in which a female student accuses a male academic of sexual harassment.

Church, who is usually artistic director of the theatre's summer season, says that he and Danny Moar, director of the venue, wanted to find work that was emphatically theatrical, rather than naturalistic. "All the plays we've chosen have a spectacular theatrical idea at the heart of their form. *Betrayal* runs backwards which is very rewarding for both the actors and the audience; *Copenhagen* has people meeting after they're dead to



Top: the Theatre Royal Bath. Above: Danny Moar, the theatre's director. Left: Jonathan Church is directing 'Betrayal' in Bath. Credit: Richard Herring/Barry Rhoades/Roby Centre



debate the moral issues surrounding nuclear physics; *Oleanna* is a kind of hot-house: those two people in that room, Mamet's heightened language and that huge theme."

Though very different in focus, each of them also turns on truth, loyalty, betrayal and moral responsibility. Such dilemmas might speak aloud to an audience all too familiar with uncertainty, competing narratives and elusive facts, says Church. "They all have a political, personal dilemma at the heart of them."

They are all also written by white men. Is that the best move at a time when many in the theatre industry are concerned that recent progress made in increasing diversity could be damaged by the impact of the pandemic? And what about *Oleanna*, which famously, and provocatively, pitches he-said-she-said? (On its debut, audiences argued ferociously.) Church points to the fact that *Copenhagen* and *Oleanna* will both be directed by women – Polly Findlay and Nicole Charles respectively. He suggests too that the time is right to

revive *Oleanna*, given all that the #MeToo movement has revealed.

"Asking Polly and Nicole to look at them is a genuine attempt at balance," he says. "All the productions of *Oleanna* I've seen have been directed by white men. We felt we had to now see a production by a woman. The world's moved on. My gut instinct is that because of its writing and its form, its brilliance will allow it to be seen differently and still celebrated. It's deliberately provocative and it forces the audience to debate."

Moar adds that to address diversity, organisations need to "take practical steps to empower people who aren't empowered. That is absolutely something we are going to be looking at as we reopen again and get going."

The theatre's plans unfold against a backdrop of uncertainty in the UK



Polly Findlay will direct Michael Frayn's 'Copenhagen' in Bath

theatre world. Several playhouses hope to recommence this autumn (including Manchester HOME, Nottingham Playhouse, Chichester Festival Theatre, the National Theatre in London and several West End venues). But earlier this week, *The Mousetrap* (which has been running continuously in London since 1952 until the pandemic) postponed plans to reopen. Meanwhile pantomime dames, in full regalia, marched on to parliament to highlight the importance of Christmas shows and the plight of freelance workers (many of whom have fallen between various government support packages).

Theatre boards and practitioners are anxiously scanning the news and awaiting announcements about the £1.57bn Culture Recovery Fund. "Everybody's on tenterhooks," says Church. He echoes calls from others across the industry for a government-backed insurance scheme. "It's the next big thing that can help open the industry."

Bath's Theatre Royal, in common with

"We felt we had to now see a production of David Mamet's 'Oleanna' directed by a woman"

all venues that are managing to reopen, is following strict Covid-secure guidelines. Capacity will be significantly reduced (from more than 800 to well under 400); the ventilation has been adjusted so that fresh air is pumped into the auditorium; audiences will be distanced, wear masks, have their temperatures checked and use separate doors (in this respect, the older theatres sometimes win out, observes Moar wryly, as the Victorian obsession with class resulted in multiple entrances).

Reopening is a risk, says Moar – the theatre will, at best, cover its production costs – but he felt that Bath needed to go ahead: "A lot of touring theatres are exclusively reliant on producers bringing shows. We're unusual in that, as a touring house, we produce a lot as well. It's great now to be able to be producing plays again. I think the next step is for more and more theatres to be able to do that because everyone is so interlinked: we have a system that is completely intertwined."

"We could make a loss," he adds. "And the whole thing could be closed down if there's another lockdown. But we're going into it with our eyes open knowing that the first step is always going to be the hardest. If we're one of the first ones back, that's great, but what matters is that theatres are putting on plays, audiences are coming, they're safe and they're enjoying themselves. That's the only thing that matters."

'Betrayal', October 14-31
theatreroyal.org.uk

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Series that shone a harsh light on policing



As the '60s shifted into a higher gear, something had clearly gone wrong with the Metropolitan Police. Friends of mine in slowly gentrifying Islington, north London, fondly remember being taken to small rooms and treated to punishments that went some way beyond the traditional "clap round the ear". A Greek Cypriot kid at our school – grammar, not any old secondary modern – was stitched up on an offensive weapon charge by a senior detective. Though later exposed by a report in the *Sunday People*, he was pensioned off without much further ado (later, playwright Joe Orton, a local resident, featured him as the bent copper in his hit drama *Loaf*). Then there was the constable who ran on to the 1966 FA Cup final pitch to crash-tackle a celebrating fan with such force as to bring protests from players.

Weren't constables meant to walk slowly to the scene of an incident with the blow of a whistle, and deal calmly with circumstances? The blame for this misconception could be laid at the large footprint of PC George Dixon, who for years had begun each Saturday evening's TV with his gentle "Evenin' all!" outside the BBC's imaginary Dock Green police station. I tried this greeting on a copper once while walking through leafy Canonbury, only to be promptly pinned against a wall. His accent was deepest Glaswegian, but I got his drift from the fact he had his truncheon up my nose.

Z-Cars came along to correct the disparity. The backdrop to this new BBC police drama was more grimy than Dixon's, and the characters and issues it dealt with represented the police less obviously as a force of unambiguous

good fighting evil. Loveable PC Bert Larch (James Ellis), for example, might be caught beating up some social misfit and chucking him in the back of his car. The first episode had colleagues explaining to one of their number, nice PC Bob Steele (Jeremy Kemp), that he really shouldn't be giving his wife black eyes.

The overall picture had changed, the police besieged by new circumstances. They risked being murdered while walking the beat, with '60s law ever less inclined to protect them with the death penalty. Instead they went on wheels. You'd see fewer police now, but you might hear their sirens as they zoomed past in their Ford Zephyrs and Zodiacs. "This is Z-Victor 1, come in Z-Victor 2."

Debuting in 1962, Z-Cars spanned about 17 years and 800 episodes. Some were wiped by the BBC or simply lost but many have survived, with a good number of them on YouTube. The black and white years starred Stratford Johns as DI Charlie Barlow, with Frank Windsor as his hard-pressed sidekick, DS John Watt ("appen you'd better, John, appen you'd better.") Come '70s colour television, DS Tom Stone assumed a leading role, played by John Slater.

The setting was the fictional "Newtown" on the edges of Liverpool, symbolic of new communities thrown together in the suburbs that robbed the average copper of his knowledge of the inner city. Thieves, tearaways and villains "were at large but there was always

hope too: "There's nowt wrong with Lancashire but human nature," opined, if I remember correctly, PC "Fancy" Smith, played by Brian Blessed.

Look out for others en route to flourishing careers: Judi Dench as a juvenile delinquent, John Thaw as a rather meek CID man but taking notes from Barlow for his future shouty days in *The Sweeney*; Colin Welland, who would come to swap his seat behind the wheel for fame as the Oscar-winning writer of *Chariots of Fire*. I recall a real-life news item at the time about him being pulled over on the motorway and fined for throwing a sweet wrapper out of the window. No details were given of the possibly graphic exchange of words at the scene.

Shot and broadcast live, each episode's direction and repartee between Barlow and his cohort – informants, snivelling journalists, the dispossessed rifling shillings from the gas meter or nicking nylons from their factory production line – rarely misses a beat.

The series ended in the late '70s, as another era of the thin blue line began. By then, the PC on duty at the foot of the police station steps had disappeared and the shutters had come down to stop members of the public just wandering. Appen you'd do well to take a look, then, and see how policing used to be done.

Peter Chapman

Episodes available on DVD and on YouTube



From left: Frank Windsor, Stratford Johns, James Ellis and Jeremy Kemp in 'Z-Cars', 1962. MTC/Archived Albany

Opinion

Investors grapple with a bizarre US election cycle

FINANCE
Gillian
Tett

Once upon a time – say, a decade ago – equity and debt investors classified countries into two buckets. There were “emerging markets” countries, where investors often had to price in political risk due to fragile institutions, capricious leaders or populist swings. Then there were “developed” countries, where the political institutions were presumed to be so stable that risks could be measured with spreadsheets and uncertainty was driven more by policy than the political process itself.

No longer. Even before the full swing of the US presidential election exploded on to television screens this autumn, investors had started to realise that the source of political risk and instability is

shifting between developed and emerging markets.

This week Matthew Chamberlain, head of the London Metal Exchange, told me that, in the commodities markets, it is events in western markets that tend to create price volatility, while China has become a relative source of stability. “It’s a big change” for investor psychology.

Events in the US now offer a more striking example of change. In recent weeks the movement of derivatives prices suggests investors are scrambling to buy contracts to protect themselves from wild volatility in asset prices around next month’s election. Indeed, they are equally doing this more frenetically than market professionals have ever seen for a US election.

“The 2020 presidential election has seen an historically wide margin of event risk priced across asset classes by options markets,” a JPMorgan client note observes, citing equity, rates and credit sectors as the key asset classes affected.

What is doubly striking is that these derivatives swings extend far beyond

contracts for November 3, the putative election date, into 2021. At best, that suggests investors fear an extensive dispute around the results, comparable with what happened in 2000. At worst, they fear violence or an impasse where President Donald Trump refuses to leave the White House if he loses. “We are trying to price in a whole new type of risk,” says one hedge fund boss.

The source of political risk and instability is shifting between developed and emerging markets

The issue is not whether a victory for Democratic candidate Joe Biden, say, would cause a rally in green assets (although it almost certainly would). What really unnerves investors is the prospect of trust in the wider political process breaking down. “Social conflict [fears] are now affecting developed markets too,” Henri Wallard of AXA insurance observed, citing a new survey.

Some asset managers are reacting to this by withdrawing to the sidelines, particularly given the rising cost of protection. “It is getting more and more expensive to hedge the election results,” a note from Weiss Multi-Strategy Advisors, a hedge fund, said recently.

Others are developing new compasses to track political risk. Because national polls were a bad guide to predicting the election results in 2016, there is rising investor interest in using political prediction and betting markets as well, particularly as implied projections can differ from polls. (Earlier this year betting sites gave Trump a better chance of victory than the polls, but this has now narrowed.)

And while the betting sites have relied on fairly crude methodologies so far, some entrepreneurs are trying to improve these amid customer demand. “Political markets have been a poor cousin of sports betting before. But it is rapidly growing up,” says Jose Garay, a Spanish entrepreneur who is building a platform called Causas.

Sell-side firms are reforming their risk models too. JPMorgan is a case in

point. Last year it took the (then novel) step of launching a so-called Volfée index to track how Trump’s tweets shape futures prices. This month it updated the tool in response to rising election uncertainty.

“Non-traditional measures of political uncertainty have become increasingly useful in terms of assessing volatility in interest rate markets,” it explained to clients. In plain English, bankers are grappling with the bizarre.

An optimist might view this as just a sign of Wall Street’s evergreen love for innovation. A cynic might point out that the presence of these tools means most US election event risk is already priced in – and the real “shock” would be a normal election.

Either way, the saga shows the degree to which America’s role on the world stage is shifting, as investors rethink their late-20th-century assumptions. That is unlikely to change any time soon; even if Mr Biden does win the White House, as both the betting markets and polls imply he will.

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Crisis relegates central bankers to the second division

ECONOMICS
Chris
Giles

Who are the most important economic policymakers around the world? The answer in the 2008-09 global financial crisis was simple: the leading central bankers. Ben Bernanke at the US Federal Reserve, Jean-Claude Trichet at the European Central Bank and Mervyn King at the Bank of England were top of the league. Seen as the only game in town, their actions ultimately quelled the financial storm, providing the necessary economic stimulus and co-ordinated response globally.

This time is different. While central bankers did an immensely valuable job in heading off the risk of a financial crisis in the third week of March, their subsequent actions have second division status. Health officials and finance ministers are far more important for the economy.

When it comes to supply – what can be produced in a modern economy – the influence of Anthony Fauci, the director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, Anders Tegnell, the state epidemiologist of Sweden, and Chris Whitty, the UK’s chief medical officer, has a greater bearing on our livelihoods than any central banker. Their success or failure in controlling the virus will ultimately determine the degree of mandatory or voluntary restrictions on daily lives.

To take the UK as an example, fear of the uncontrolled spread of the virus in mid-March and the compulsory lock-

Ministers and health officials are far more important for the economy

down later that month led to the largest drop in output for well over a century. Subsequent loosening of restrictions once the virus subsided will see a record economic bounce reported for the third quarter.

If ever there was a perfect example of the economic importance of regulations, this is it. In the months ahead, if health officials can operate a successful test and trace system to keep control of Covid-19 or distribute a working vaccine, output will continue to recover rapidly. If not, the economic situation will again deteriorate. There is no trade off between health and economics.

Central bankers would reasonably argue that apart from their regulation of the financial system, they do not claim to affect the supply side of an economy. Monetary policy affects demand. But here, a sense of scale is important. Internal simulations from the BoE’s model suggest that its March interest rate cuts might ultimately stimulate demand enough to raise the level of gross domestic product by around 1 per cent.

New research shows central banks systematically exaggerate the effect of monetary policy. But whether or not the BoE’s calculations are right, there is no doubt they are small. The UK government’s direct coronavirus support for workers, companies and households was immediate and now runs to 10 per cent of GDP.

In this crisis, there is only one area in which central bankers could claim to be crucial in supporting demand. It is in creating sufficient quantities of new money to finance wartime levels of government borrowing. But talk of monetary financing, illegal in the eurozone and a taboo elsewhere, generally brings them out in a sweat.

You might say, “So what? Why does it matter that central bankers no longer regulate the economic cycle as they once did?” The problem is that politicians and the public still rely on central bankers to bring demand into line with supply, and keep inflation stable, low and positive. Central bankers pretend they are doing this job. The combination risks costly mistakes.

If governments remove fiscal support too quickly, as has probably happened in the US, or allow the virus to spread too rapidly, as appears to be happening in Europe, politicians will expect central banks to offset the damage. This time central banks cannot come to the rescue. That is likely to hurt us all.

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Germany’s tough choices amid disorder

POLITICS
Philip
Stephens

Germany has prospered through the best of times. Now, it must navigate what are shaping up as the worst. Next month it celebrates the 31st anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Amid a rising sea of international discord, Germany’s peaceful reunification has been a triumph for liberal democracy and an anchor of political stability. Now, the global order that made it possible is disappearing over the horizon.

Cast around for descriptions of today’s Germany and responses usually include “prosperous”, “steady”, “moderate”. Some may add “smug”, and there will always be some UK Brexiters who live the nightmare of a fourth reich. In troubled times, however, Europe’s most powerful nation is defined by its stability – a national resilience rooted in rejection of extremes.

Of course, Germany has its dark corners. It has not been immune to the economic and social divisions challenging political elites across Europe. It has its own populists – Alternative for Germany on the far-right, Linke on the far-left. Those who assumed German capitalism always played by the rules have

been startled by the environmental frauds perpetrated in its legendary car industry. Admirers of its unmatched engineering prowess struggle to explain a crumbling national infrastructure.

By the same token, reunification has thrown up disappointments. The vast investment poured into the former German Democratic Republic has not erased the line between east and west. Leipzig and Dresden have been reborn as great cities, but the east has failed to attract self-sustaining private businesses. The best and brightest head west. A generation of “left-behinds” still hanker for communist certainties. Ostalgia, it is called.

All these challenges are relative. Most other European governments would hesitate to swap Berlin’s problems for their own. In an era of popular disenchantment, what stands out is the high level of trust in Germany’s political and civil institutions – trust that underpins a capacity to absorb unexpected shocks.

The opening of the borders in 2015 to 1m migrants from Syria and beyond looked for a time as if it might overwhelm Chancellor Angela Merkel’s administration. The far-right in the Bundestag, a firm foothold in the Bundestag. The subsequent process of integration has not been perfect, but the crisis has long passed – smothered by the high levels of civic engagement that mark out Germany’s federal system.

The response to the Covid-19 pandemic has illuminated the same careful proficiency. Responsibility has been shared between the various tiers



of government. Citizens have been engaged. Germany’s infection and mortality rates are the lowest of Europe’s big countries.

So why fear the worst of times? For over three decades, history was on Germany’s side. Now, the external stability on which it built domestic success has been replaced by the most significant geopolitical uncertainty of the postwar era. The US presence in Europe guaranteed the continent’s security. The wisdom of Bonn’s political leaders in facing up to the horrors of Nazism created a shelter behind which Germany could rebuild its economy while entrenching democracy.

Franco-German reconciliation and the creation of the EU pulled in the same direction towards a rules-based system

Three decades after the Berlin wall fell, history did not end and the Republic must take sides

in which the social market economy flourished. The bargain suited all sides. Four neighbouring German rearmament left responsibility for security – and the burden of defence spending – to the Americans, the French and the British.

For more than a decade after the wall fell, Germans could tell themselves that this conjunction would last for ever. The German model of normative power would serve alongside US military might as a guardian of unification. As former chancellor Helmut Kohl used to remark: “For the first time in our history we are surrounded only by friends.”

This was the walled garden behind which the republic flourished. To be fair, Germans were not alone in thinking the world had reached the end of history. Never mind. Real life has turned out otherwise.

Vladimir Putin’s Russia has re-emerged as a revanchist power, seeking to redraw national borders by force. China has repudiated the western model in favour of state-directed capitalism attached to political repression.

The US has turned inwards as China pushes outward. Nationalism has returned to Europe. This is the world of 19th century power plays rather than the co-operative internationalism of the second half of the 20th.

If ever there was a perfect example of the economic importance of regulations, this is it. In the months ahead, if health officials can operate a successful test and trace system to keep control of Covid-19 or distribute a working vaccine, output will continue to recover rapidly. If not, the economic situation will again deteriorate. There is no trade off between health and economics.

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China’s net-zero target is a giant step in fight against climate change

Adair
Turner

Xi Jinping’s announcement last week that China would achieve carbon neutrality before 2060 was greeted with surprise. Few outside China expected this hugely important commitment so soon. But it reflects three motivations: awareness in China that climate change will cause it huge harm; a desire to be a responsible global leader; and growing confidence that technological progress can make net-zero emissions attainable without interrupting China’s path to prosperity.

That confidence is justified by dramatic global changes over the past 10 years. Solar electricity costs have fallen by 50 per cent, wind by 60 per cent and lithium-ion battery costs by 87 per cent. Initial public subsidies have created such strong economies of scale and steep learning curves that the need for

subsidies is diminishing fast. Over the next decade, the cost of producing green hydrogen via electrolysis will also fall significantly.

As a result, countries can now build zero-carbon electricity systems with total costs no higher than for fossil fuel-based systems. They should electrify as much of the economy as possible. In passenger road transport, that will be straightforward and cheap. In more challenging sectors, such as steel and cement, aviation and shipping, carbon capture and storage, bioenergy and hydrogen will also play a role.

As the Energy Transitions Commission’s “Making Mission Possible” report shows, all sectors in developed economies could achieve zero emissions by 2050 – and all developing countries by 2060. They can do so largely within their own operations rather than relying on “offsets” bought from elsewhere. The estimated cost, around 0.5 per cent of global gross domestic product in 2050, will be immaterial compared with the potentially catastrophic impact of uncontrolled climate change. Because China will by 2050 be a fully developed

rich economy, its “before 2060” target should at some stage be advanced to 2050. Given its technological prowess and commitment to combat climate change, it almost certainly will.

More than 1,100 businesses and 45 of the world’s biggest investors have already set net-zero targets. Those commitments will drive tech developments that reduce the cost of achieving them, encouraging others to commit. The

Countries can now build systems with total costs no higher than fossil fuel-based systems

chances that the global energy and industrial system will get close to net zero by 2050 are now high.

But the chances of avoiding seriously harmful climate change remain worryingly low. Zero carbon by mid-century is essential, but not sufficient. From January to June this year, Siberian temperatures were 5°C above average; massive

wild fires have ravaged Australia and California; exceptional heatwaves scorched northern India; and China has faced huge floods. By 2050, these effects could get far worse even with a zero-carbon economy. A delay in reducing carbon over the next 30 years matters as much as the level in 2050.

The effects so far reflect global warming of just 1.1°C above pre-industrial levels. To limit warming to 1.5°C, we must not only achieve zero emissions by mid-century, but cut emissions 50 per cent by 2050 after an increase of emissions of 10 per cent in the past decade. Achieving that latter cut will be more difficult than zero by 2050. With clear targets and strong policies, we can transform our energy and industrial systems over 30 years. But in the near term, the potential is constrained by capital equipment – from internal combustion engines to coking coal blast furnaces – already in place.

Action over the next decade is therefore just as crucial as mid-century targets. All growth in electricity systems should now come from zero-carbon sources, and all rich countries should

close existing coal plants as fast as possible. Road transport electrification should be accelerated by early bans on the purchase of new internal combustion vehicles. And consumers have an important role to play: reducing car and air travel can cut emissions in the years before zero-carbon options are widely available.

But this will not be enough to deliver the 2050 target. So that means there is a major role for “nature-based solutions” – preventing deforestation and sequestering carbon in soils by changing the way we use land. Countries and companies should therefore commit not only to reaching net zero by 2050, but to making big reductions by 2030, using purchased offsets to achieve faster progress than internal action can achieve.

Last week was a great one in the fight against climate change. Now we need commitments to the challenging objective of big emissions reductions over the next decade.

The writer is chair of the Energy Transitions Commission

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