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Politics this week

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Indian fighter jets bombed what they said was a terrorist training camp in **Pakistan**, in retaliation for a suicide-bombing in **India** which killed 40 paramilitary police. Pakistan responded by sending warplanes to strike at targets in India. In the aerial battle that followed, both countries claimed to have shot down some of the other's fighters. Pakistan captured an Indian pilot. The fighting is the worst since 1999, and marks the first time since the two countries acquired nuclear weapons that they have conducted bombing raids against one another. See article .

Donald Trump walked away from his summit with Kim Jong Un, **North Korea's** dictator, in Vietnam. The talks broke down when the North Koreans pushed for all sanctions to be lifted in exchange for dismantling Yongbyon, an old nuclear facility. America wants the North to reveal where all its nuclear weapons are stored, as a prelude to dismantling them. See article .

Un-American activities

Michael Cohen, Mr Trump's former lawyer and fixer, testified against his former boss before Congress. He accused the president of being a "racist", and a "cheat", as well as a "con man" for suppressing the publication of his high-school and college grades. Mr Cohen has already pleaded guilty to several charges, some of which are related to his work for Mr Trump. The White House said no one should trust the testimony of a "disgraced felon". See article .

Lori Lightfoot and Toni Preckwinkle came out on top in **Chicago's** mayoral election and will advance to the run-off on April 2nd. The city will now get its first black female mayor, and if Ms Lightfoot wins, also the first gay person to hold the office. William Daley, a scion of Chicago's most famous political dynasty, came third. See article .

On the brink

Venezuela's dictatorship blocked deliveries of aid, which it sees as a foreign attempt to undermine it. Police, national guardsmen and paramilitary groups drove back lorries carrying food and medical supplies, and used tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse people who were trying to escort the aid. Some live bullets were fired, too. Around 300 people were injured and four were killed. Hundreds of Venezuelan soldiers and police deserted. Some of their families were reportedly tortured or raped to discourage further defections. At a meeting attended by Mike Pence, the American vice-president, ten members of the Lima Group of mostly Latin American countries repeated their support for Juan Guaidó, who is recognised as Venezuela's interim president by Venezuela's legislature and by most western democracies. But they ruled out military intervention to topple the regime led by Nicolás Maduro. See article .

In a referendum 87% of participants approved a new constitution for **Cuba**, which will legalise private property, subject to restrictions by the state, and limit the president to two five-year terms.

Brazil's education minister asked all schools to film their pupils singing the national anthem and to send the films to the government. He also asked schools to read out a message that ends "Brazil above all. God above everyone". That was the campaign slogan of the country's new president, Jair Bolsonaro. The minister later admitted that asking schools to read the slogan was a mistake.

Shifting sands

Theresa May, Britain's prime minister, conceded some ground to Parliament over **Brexit**. As well as voting on her revised withdrawal agreement with the European Union, MPs will also have an option to take "no deal" off the table if her plan is rejected. If MPs reject no-deal, they will then vote on whether to ask for an extension past March 29th, which is when Britain is due to leave the EU. Labour also made a significant shift when its leader, Jeremy Corbyn, said it would back a second referendum. See article .

Poland's government announced a package of tax cuts and spending, including a bonus for pensioners and hefty handouts to parents. The package could cost as much as 2% of GDP. The ruling party faces a tough election this year. See article .

EU leaders visited Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt to meet leaders of **Arab League** countries and ask for help in keeping refugees out of Europe. The atrocious human-rights records of some participants were barely mentioned.

Staying power

In the face of huge protests against his dictatorship, President Omar al-Bashir declared a state of emergency in **Sudan**, dissolving the federal government and replacing all state governors with military and security men. He is still far from secure. Despite a ban on unauthorised gatherings, the protests continued. See article .

In a surprise move Muhammad Javad Zarif, **Iran's** foreign minister, publicly offered to resign. The move laid bare the struggle for control of Iran's foreign policy between pragmatists, such as Mr Zarif and President Hassan Rouhani, and hardliners. Mr Rouhani rejected the resignation. See article .

King Salman of **Saudi Arabia** named Princess Reema bint Bandar bin Sultan ambassador to America, the first time a woman has been named to such a post.

Muhammadu Buhari was re-elected president of **Nigeria**. At least 39 people were killed in election-related attacks—fewer than during previous ballots. The opposition claims that the vote was rigged, but observers seem to think it was clean enough. See article .

Tens of thousands of **Algerians** protested against President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's decision to run for a fifth term. The octogenarian leader has made few public appearances since 2013. Most Algerians expect the vote on April 18th to be fixed by the cabal of power brokers who run the country.

Three funeral providers in **South Africa** said they would sue a pastor after they were "tricked" into taking part in a service in which a man was supposedly raised from the dead. A video that went viral shows the man sitting up in his coffin with a startled look on his face. Social-media users were not convinced. Many posted images implying how easy it is to pretend to be dead, and then wake up.

Business this week

Print edition | The world this week Feb 28th 2019

Donald Trump lifted a deadline of March 1st for China to agree to concessions on **trade**, after which he had threatened to increase tariffs on $200bn-worth of Chinese exports from 10% to 25%. The president tweeted that "substantial progress" was being made in negotiations with the Chinese and that he expected to meet his counterpart, Xi Jinping, to sign a deal in the coming weeks. No details were provided, but one of the promises China has reportedly made is not to depreciate its currency. A weak yuan makes Chinese exports cheaper.

The **Shanghai stockmarket** rose by 5.6% in response to the suspension of tariffs, its best day in three years. Investor sentiment was also lifted by comments from Mr Xi about quickening the pace of development in China's financial- services industry.

General Electric agreed to sell its biotechnology business to **Danaher**, a health-services group, for $21bn. It is the biggest step taken to streamline GE under Larry Culp, who became chief executive last October and was Danaher's boss until 2014. The deal was welcomed by the conglomerate's weary investors; the proceeds of the sale will go towards reducing GE's debt.

The share price of **Kraft Heinz** plunged by 27% after the food company booked a $15.4bn write-down, in part because its key Kraft and Oscar Mayer divisions were overvalued. It also revealed that the Securities and Exchange Commission had opened an investigation into its accounting practices. Warren Buffett, who helped engineer the merger of Heinz with Kraft Foods in 2015, admitted that he had overpaid for his investment company's stake in the business. See article .

"A bridge over Brexit"

Regulators in America and Britain announced a long-term agreement to ensure that the transatlantic **derivatives market**, which accounts for the vast majority of global derivatives contracts, is not disrupted by Brexit, whatever form it takes. The pact covers both the trading and clearing of derivatives between the two countries. European regulators have taken steps to allow EU derivative contracts to be cleared in London in the event of a no-deal Brexit, but the arrangement is temporary.

America's Justice Department conceded defeat after a federal appeals-court dismissed its attempt to overturn **at&t's** merger with **Time Warner**, describing the government's arguments as "unpersuasive". The merger was approved by a lower court last year.

In a surprise development, the Dutch government revealed that it had built a stake of 12.7% in **Air France**-KLM**'s** holding company, and would increase it to a size similar to that of the French government's stake in the business, which is 14.3%. Disagreements between the two governments over the future of Air France-KLM have escalated, with the Dutch keen to protect jobs at Amsterdam's Schiphol airport. The French complained that the Dutch had not informed them about the investment.

Barrick Gold launched an $18bn hostile bid for **Newmont Mining**, a smaller rival in the gold industry. Newmont retorted that its pending acquisition of Goldcorp, another mining firm, offered "superior benefits" to shareholders.

Not just any food

In a challenge to Amazon's ambitions in the online-grocery market in Britain, **Ocado**, a leader in online-supermarket technology, struck a deal to deliver **Marks & Spencer's** food products from 2020. Ocado will then cease selling goods from Waitrose, another upmarket food retailer, which has supplied Ocado with posh nosh since it started home deliveries in 2002. Last year Ocado signed an agreement with Kroger, America's biggest supermarket chain, to develop its online-grocery business.

The name **Merrill Lynch** is to disappear. Bank of America bought the investment bank, which started out in 1915 and became one of the biggest firms on Wall Street, during the financial crisis. It had rebranded the business as Bank of America Merrill Lynch, though many investors clung to the old namesake. The wealth-management side will now be known simply as Merrill, and investment banking will fall under the BofA brand.

Exxon Mobil reportedly asked the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to block a shareholder vote at its annual meeting on a measure that would oblige it to set targets for reducing greenhouse-gas emissions in line with the Paris accord on climate change. The oil giant argues that the measure is an attempt to "micro-manage" its operations, and "reflects a misunderstanding" of energy markets.

Elon Musk got into more hot water with the SEC when he tweeted inaccurate production forecasts for Tesla's cars, violating part of last year's settlement with the regulator about not disseminating misleading information about the company. The SEC asked a court to hold Mr Musk in contempt.

KAL’s cartoon

Print edition | The world this week Feb 28th 2019

Modi's dangerous moment

India and Pakistan should stop playing with fire

With an election looming, Narendra Modi is under pressure to act tough

Print edition | Leaders Feb 28th 2019

THE ARMIES of India and Pakistan often exchange fire across the front line in the disputed state of Kashmir. When tensions rise, one side will subject the other to a blistering artillery barrage. On occasion, the two have sent soldiers on forays into one another's territory. But since the feuding neighbours tested nuclear weapons in the late 1990s, neither had dared send fighter jets across the frontier—until this week. After a terrorist group based in Pakistan launched an attack in the Indian-controlled part of Kashmir that killed 40 soldiers, India responded by bombing what it said was a terrorist training camp in the Pakistani state of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Pakistan retaliated by sending jets of its own to bomb Indian targets. In the ensuing air battle, both sides claim to have shot down the other's aircraft, and Pakistan captured an Indian pilot.

A miscalculation now could spell calamity. The fighting is already the fiercest between the two countries since India battled to expel Pakistani intruders from high in the Himalayas in 1999. The initial Indian air raid struck not Pakistan's bit of Kashmir, but well within Pakistan proper and just 100km from the capital, Islamabad. That, in effect, constituted a change in the rules of engagement between the two (see article). India and Pakistan are so often at odds that there is a tendency to shrug off their spats, but not since their most recent, full-blown war in 1971 has the risk of escalation been so high.

The intention of Narendra Modi, India's prime minister, in ordering the original air strike was simple. Pakistan has long backed terrorists who mount grisly attacks in India, most notably in Mumbai in 2008, when jihadists who arrived by boat from Pakistan killed some 165 people. Although Pakistan's army promised then to shut down such extremist groups, it has not. By responding more forcefully than usual to the latest outrage, Mr Modi understandably wanted to signal that he was not willing to allow Pakistan to keep sponsoring terrorism.

In the long run, stability depends on Pakistan ending its indefensible support for terrorism. Its prime minister, Imran Khan, is urging dialogue and, in a promising gesture, was due to release India's pilot—presumably with the approval of the army chief, who calls the shots on matters of security.

But in the short run Mr Modi shares the responsibility to stop a disastrous escalation. Because he faces an election in April, he faces the hardest and most consequential calculations. They could come to define his premiership.

Mr Modi has always presented himself as a bold and resolute military leader, who does not shrink from confronting Pakistan's provocations. He has taken to repeating a catchphrase from the film "Uri", which portrays a commando raid he ordered against Pakistan in 2016 in response to a previous terrorist attack as a moment of chin-jutting grit. The all-too-plausible fear is that his own tendency to swagger, along with domestic political pressures, will spur him further down the spiral towards war.

The ambiguity of Mr Modi's beliefs only deepens the danger. He campaigned at the election in 2014 as a moderniser, who would bring jobs and prosperity to India. But, his critics charge, all his talk of development and reform is simply the figleaf for a lifelong commitment to a divisive Hindu-nationalist agenda.

Over the past five years Mr Modi has lived up neither to the hype nor to the dire warnings. The economy has grown strongly under his leadership, by around 7% a year. He has brought about reforms his predecessors had promised but never delivered, such as a nationwide goods-and-services tax (GST).

But unemployment has actually risen during Mr Modi's tenure, according to leaked data that his government has been accused of trying to suppress (see article). The GST was needlessly complex and costly to administer. Other pressing reforms have fallen by the wayside. India's banks are still largely in state hands, still prone to lend to the well-connected. And as the election has drawn closer, Mr Modi has resorted to politically expedient policies that are likely to harm the economy. His government hounded the boss of the central bank out of office for keeping interest rates high, appointing a replacement who promptly cut them. And it has unveiled draft rules that would protect domestic e-commerce firms from competition from retailers such as Amazon.

By the same token, Mr Modi has not sparked the outright communal conflagration his critics, *The Economist* included, fretted about before he became prime minister. But his government has often displayed hostility to India's Muslim minority and sympathy for those who see Hinduism—the religion of 80% of Indians—as under threat from internal and external foes. He has appointed a bigoted Hindu prelate, Yogi Adityanath, as chief minister of India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh. A member of his cabinet presented garlands of flowers to a group of Hindu men who had been convicted of lynching a Muslim for selling beef (cows are sacred to Hindus). And Mr Modi himself has suspended the elected government of Jammu & Kashmir,

India's only Muslim-majority state, and used force to suppress protests there against the central government, leading to horrific civilian casualties.

As reprehensible as all this is, the Hindu zealots who staff Mr Modi's electoral machine complain that he has not done enough to advance the Hindu cause (see article). And public dissatisfaction with his economic reforms has helped boost Congress, the main opposition party, making the election more competitive than had been expected. The temptation to fire up voters using heated brinkmanship with Pakistan will be huge.

Mr Modi has made a career of playing with fire. He first rose to prominence as chief minister of Gujarat when the state was racked by anti-Muslim pogroms in 2002. Although there is no evidence he orchestrated the violence, he has shown no compunction about capitalising on the popularity it won him in Hindu-nationalist circles. With a difficult election ahead, he may think he can pull off the same trick again by playing the tough guy with Pakistan, but without actually getting into a fight. However, the price of miscalculation does not bear thinking about. Western governments are pushing for a diplomatic settlement at the UN. If Mr Modi really is a patriot, he will now step back.

This article appeared in the Leaders section of the print edition under the headline "Modi's dangerous moment"

Trouble at 3G Capital

3G Capital discovers the limits of cost-cutting and debt

The owner of Kraft Heinz is grappling with several problems

Print edition | Leaders Mar 2nd 2019

NOT MANY consumers have heard of 3G Capital, an investment fund, but it controls some of the planet's best-known brands, including Heinz, Budweiser and Burger King. In the business world 3G has become widely admired for buying venerable firms and using debt and surgical cost-cuts to boost their financial returns. But after Kraft Heinz, a 3G firm, revealed a $12.6bn quarterly loss on February 21st what appeared to be a successful strategy suddenly looks like a fiasco.

The implications reach beyond Kraft Heinz. In total, 3G-run firms owe at least $150bn (3G's founders hold direct stakes in some firms while others are held by 3G's investment funds; for simplicity, it makes sense to lump them together and call them 3G). Notable investors have got not just egg, but ketchup, on their faces—Warren Buffett's investment firm, Berkshire Hathaway, lost $2.7bn on its Kraft Heinz shares in 2018. There is a queasy sense that 3G's approach of dealmaking, squeezing costs and heavy debts, can be found at an alarming number of other firms.

Leveraged takeovers are nothing new. In the 1980s raiders such as James Goldsmith terrorised boardrooms while private-equity tycoons launched buy-outs, most famously of RJR Nabisco in 1988. With its roots in Brazil, 3G has brought twists of its own to such barbarism. One is the scale of its dealmaking. It is history's second-most acquisitive firm, after Blackstone, with $480bn of takeover bids, including the purchases of Anheuser Busch and SAB Miller. Another is its distinct style of buying popular brands with oligopolistic market shares. It believes that competition in such industries is muted and that consumers will reliably drink beer and eat beans for ever: Bud was, after all, founded in 1876 and Heinz in 1869. And since 3G is confident that sales will remain steady, it then loads firms with debt and cuts costs using zero-based budgeting, a technique that requires managers to justify every dollar of spending from scratch each year and reinvest only some of the savings in the best brands.

It sounds plausible and it worked for a time—indeed the restaurant division is still performing reasonably. But recently problems have emerged elsewhere. Consumers are getting more fickle and are switching to independent beer brands and healthier food (see article). Competitors have raised their game; supermarkets are promoting cheaper white-label brands while e-commerce has given a leg up to insurgent brands. And capital markets have adapted. Investors have urged other firms to copy 3G's cost-cutting tactics, even as takeover targets have got pricier because investors expect 3G to pay top dollar for them.

Signs of trouble emerged in October, when AB InBev, 3G's beer arm, cut its dividend. Although it is still growing overall, in North America its volumes and profits shrank in 2018. Meanwhile, Kraft Heinz's recent woes have led it to cut its dividend and warn that profits in 2019 would fall. Alarmingly, this doesn't seem a mere blip: it wrote down $15bn of acquisition costs. For good measure it also said that regulators are investigating its accounting. Neither AB InBev nor Kraft Heinz is likely to go bust, but in the long run they might end up being broken up yet again.

Cost-cutting is essential in mature industries. The process of reallocating labour and capital away from declining products and towards new ones, as well as to new firms, is what boosts productivity. Nonetheless, managers have to get the mix right between slashing expenses and investing for growth, while maintaining an appropriate level of debt. Kraft Heinz has failed on both counts. It now forecasts that gross operating profit in 2019 will be slightly lower than in 2014, before the two firms merged, while its balance-sheet is creaking.

Far from being an exception, Kraft Heinz is a super-sized version of the strategy of much of corporate America over the past decade. Although sales have been sluggish, 66% of firms in the S&P 500 index have raised their margins and 68% have raised their leverage since 2008. A mania for deals in mature industries, premised on debt and austerity, is in full swing. AT&T has bought Time Warner, Disney is buying Fox and Bristol-Myers Squibb, Celgene. These three deals alone involve over $110bn of extra net debt and envision a $6bn cut in total annual costs.

Perhaps the good times will roll on. But there have already been two big blow-ups of acquisitive, indebted firms: Valeant, a drugmaker, in 2015-16; and, in 2017-18, General Electric, which has just sold its biopharma arm in order to cut its borrowings. There have been lucky escapes, too. In 2017 Kraft Heinz and 3G tried to buy Unilever for cash and stock for about $140bn. It was only thanks to a determined fight by Unilever's managers, not its shareholders, that Kraft Heinz withdrew.

Any time a firm has a string of successes, boards and investors tend to drink the Kool-Aid (another Kraft Heinz brand). In fact their unsentimental collective task is to enforce discipline and to block bids by over-extended firms. Since the end of 2016 the value of 3G's portfolio has dropped by about a third, lagging far behind both the S&P 500 and food and beverage firms. Shares of Kraft Heinz have underperformed Unilever by an incredible 84 percentage points since the failed takeover bid. That's enough to make you choke on your beer and burger.

This article appeared in the Leaders section of the print edition under the headline "Bad recipe"

The Hanoi summit

Trump and Kim walk away

Talks break down without a deal. It could be a lot worse

Print edition | Leaders Feb 28th 2019

OH, THAT DIFFICULT second date. When President Donald Trump first met Kim Jong Un in Singapore in June last year, their talks achieved very little except a change of mood. But it was enough for Mr Trump to claim that he had prevented war in Asia and that North Korea was "no longer a nuclear threat".

On February 27th and 28th the two men met again, in Hanoi in Vietnam. This time Mr Trump was under pressure to win concrete concessions from Mr Kim, but he ended up walking away with nothing, saying that he would "rather do it right than do it fast." If you believed Mr Trump's hyperbole after Singapore, that will come as a bitter disappointment. But if the aim is to simply make the world a little bit safer, Mr Trump's unorthodox, sweeping approach to the nitty-gritty business of arms-control is not exactly a failure either.

Walking away was at least better than giving way. Details of the summit were still emerging as we went to press, but in the press conference that followed the talks, Mr Trump said that Mr Kim had demanded the lifting of sanctions in exchange for decommissioning the nuclear facility at Yongbyon. That would have been a terrible deal. The North has other facilities which produce weapons-grade uranium, not to mention a stock of warheads and missiles.

Mr Trump also made clear that the disagreement was amicable. He expects more talks and more progress. He went out of his way to praise Mr Kim and to underline the economic potential of North Korea, if only it was prepared to surrender its arsenal and rejoin the world. It would be very Trumpian for the next overture to the North to come soon after this latest rebuff.

Most important, the Hanoi summit retains the gains from Singapore. In the lead up to that first summit the North was testing ballistic missiles capable of hitting most of America. Those tests have stopped, as have its tests of the warheads themselves, lowering tension and the risk of inadvertent escalation. Mr Kim gave his word that this will not change.

And yet, if denuclearisation really is the aim, the gulf looks unbridgeable. In Singapore, when the two sides agreed to a nuclear-free Korean peninsula, they meant different things. America expects the North to abandon its nuclear weapons in their entirety; the North insists that America withdraw the nuclear umbrella that protects South Korea as well as pull out its troops from the peninsula.

Far from disarming, North Korea continues to build up its arsenal. Much to the irritation of Mr Trump, America's intelligence agencies, backed by his military commander in Asia, have concluded that Mr Kim and his senior aides "ultimately view nuclear weapons as critical to regime survival." As if to rub that in, a recent assessment from Stanford University reckoned that in the past year Mr Kim may have produced enough weapons-grade material for five to seven new bombs, taking his arsenal to 37.

Meanwhile, Mr Kim has failed to take even rudimentary steps towards setting up a negotiating process that might eventually lead to large-scale disarmament. In the lead up to the Hanoi summit, he snubbed Mike Pompeo, the Secretary of State, and sulked about America's offers. The North has refused to produce an inventory of its nuclear weapons, laboratories, test-sites and other facilities. Until it does, denuclearisation cannot get under way in earnest. Without a process to give the talks a momentum of their own, the entire enterprise depends on the whim of two highly unpredictable men.

Obduracy built on a misunderstanding is hardly a promising foundation for lasting and large-scale disarmament. But it has at least resulted in a form of containment. For the time being, North Korea is living under a de facto test ban. That stops it from perfecting its weapons, or from using them to intimidate its neighbours. If you compare that with the achievements of Mr Trump's predecessors, it is not too bad.

This article appeared in the Leaders section of the print edition under the headline "Walk on down"

More haste, less speed

Britain and the EU must extend Article 50

And not just until June, unless they want to end up in the same situation three months from now

Print edition | Leaders Feb 28th 2019

UNDER ENOUGH heat, atoms start to fly apart. Such is the state of Britain's political parties as Brexit day approaches. Theresa May, the Conservative prime minister, has long insisted that Britain will leave the European Union on March 29th, deal or no deal. This week she conceded that Parliament would be allowed to request more time after all. Meanwhile Jeremy Corbyn, who has been resisting calls from Labour members to back a second referendum, said it was now the party's policy to support one.

The about-turns show the extent to which both leaders have lost control of their own Brexit policies, and their parties (see article). Their change of direction is welcome. Labour's reluctant backing of a second vote has many strings attached, but Mr Corbyn has at last conceded the principle that the public should have the right to approve or reject any deal. And Mrs May's volte face makes it highly unlikely that Britain will crash out of the EU without a deal in a month's time.

Yet no one should get too excited. This week's developments do not get rid of the cliff edge towards which Britain is heading—they only push it back, and not very far. Mrs May said that the Article 50 talks could be extended only to the end of June at the latest. That would buy just another three months. The prime minister seems determined to persist with her tactic of pretending to renegotiate her deal with the EU, running down the clock in the hope that MPs will feel forced to approve the deal as time runs out and the cliff edge draws nearer.

This strategy has a poor record. Mrs May originally planned to present her deal to MPs in December, but pulled it when it became clear they would reject it. In January, when time was already tight, they defeated it by a record margin of 230 votes. The deal was supposed to return to the Commons this week for another attempt but the prime minister backed down again, fearing a second rout. She now says MPs will get to vote on her deal by March 12th, just 17 days before exit day. They may yet cave in; some hardline Brexiteers are already hinting that they might rather leave on time with Mrs May's deal than delay Britain's departure, at the risk of ending up with another referendum. But other MPs, far from feeling more cowed as Brexit day looms, seem to be growing in rebellious confidence. The prime minister has kicked the can down the road so many times. How many believe her when she now says that the end of June will be the final deadline? As Mrs May's strategy remains unchanged even as her credibility collapses further, the risk is that Britain's poisonous Brexit impasse simply continues for another three months.

That is why the EU should try to push Britain towards delaying Brexit for longer, perhaps until the end of the year. An extension is useful only if Britain uses it to build a Brexit strategy that can command the support of a stable majority of MPs and the public. And that is more likely the more time it has. Holding yet another election might be another way to break the deadlock in Parliament (though polls suggest it might just prolong it). This newspaper has argued that a referendum on Mrs May's negotiated deal would be a better way to achieve such agreement. Either of these radical courses would take longer than three months to succeed.

A long extension would carry risks. Some Tories are itching to topple Mrs May; if they did, her replacement might turn out to be even harder to deal with. And if Britain remained in the EU beyond the end of June then it might be legally obliged to take part in this spring's European Parliament elections, which it is not currently scheduled to do. Yet even as legalistic an institution as the EU ought to be able to find a way around snags such as this, if the prize is a better Brexit outcome for all parties.

When, as seems likely, Mrs May asks for more time two weeks from now, the EU should press her to accept a long extension. And Mrs May should welcome its offer.

This article appeared in the Leaders section of the print edition under the headline "More haste, less speed"

Old drugs in new bottles

Deploying drugs for new purposes holds great promise

Pharma firms and governments should both make it easier

Print edition | Leaders Feb 28th 2019

BIG PHARMA is under fire. This week the bosses of seven large drug firms were hauled before the United States Congress to answer pointed questions about the cost of their medicines. The hearings come amid rising bipartisan anger about high drug prices. New laws are threatened (see article). Concerns about the affordability of medicines are not peculiar to America; they are global. In Britain the price of a new drug for cystic fibrosis has provoked fury, as has the government's refusal to pay it. Italy is calling for the World Health Organisation to bring greater transparency to the cost of making drugs and the prices charged for them.

Too rarely raised in this discussion is one promising area where pillmakers and governments alike could do more to fight disease while also saving money. Drugs can be "repurposed" (see International section). That is, existing drugs can sometimes be used to treat diseases other than the ones for which they were first designed. This can be a cheaper way to develop new treatments. It could also help answer another criticism often thrown at drug firms: that they do not invest enough in areas where medical need is great but financial returns are unattractive, such as rare cancers, new antibiotics and medicines for children or poor countries. For 7,000 rare genetic conditions, only around 400 drugs have been licensed. Last year saw a record number of new drugs approved. The 59 new arrivals are welcome, but barely scratch the surface of unmet needs.

Drugmakers have a point when they say that the cost of developing new drugs for non-lucrative ailments is prohibitive. (They say it costs more than $2bn to bring a new molecule from laboratory to pharmacy shelf.) Drug repurposing is cheaper because the drugs in question have already been tested for safety, which is itself hugely expensive. Repurposed drugs must be tested principally for effectiveness against the new disease. Some compounds are being tested to find new treatments for brain cancer, the Zika virus, tuberculosis and motor neurone disease. Others have already yielded new treatments for sleeping sickness, leukaemia and blood cancers.

Given the untapped potential in the 9,000 generic drugs (ie, those which no longer have patent protection) found in America alone, this could be just the beginning. One charity says it has found evidence of anti-cancer activity in almost 260 drugs that treat other conditions. An academic reckons that one in five existing cancer drugs might be effective against other cancers. Big data makes it easier to identify promising leads.

For all its promise, however, repurposing is underfunded. Once a drug has lost its patent protection, it is difficult for a drug firm to recoup the investment needed to test and relabel it for a new purpose. The leads already identified need to be tested with randomised trials, and then approved by regulators for their new uses. A doctor can prescribe a pill for "off label" uses without such trials. But patients may not trust a drug that is not approved for their condition; doctors may worry about being sued; and health services and insurers may be reluctant to pay for it.

Governments support drug development through grants, tax incentives or other schemes. However, they focus on molecules that have intellectual property attached. This is misguided. They should support generic molecules, too. Some regulations are also unwise. For example, only firms with permission to market a generic drug can get it relabelled. This means that repurposing charities are not able to work with regulators to speed up the arrival of new cures. They should be. They also deserve more of the public funding used to develop drugs. One interesting proposal is a social-impact bond—where investors would be repaid by a public health system if their financing helped produce a drug that cut the costs of treating a disease. Perhaps firms that relabel drugs could be allowed a temporary price rise to recoup their investment.

Politicians tend to blame drug firms for the cost of drugs, sometimes fairly. But governments themselves have failed to take advantage of the cornucopia of generic medicines. This may include treatments that patients with rare diseases have been waiting for, that could extend the lives of cancer patients and that might transform the lives of ill people in poor countries. The next wonder-drug may already have been discovered and bottled; it just needs repurposing.

This article appeared in the Leaders section of the print edition under the headline "Resurrection"

Letters to the editor
On oil companies, Shropshire, Marcel Proust, Brexit

Letters to the editor

On oil companies, Shropshire, Marcel Proust, Brexit

A selection of correspondence

Print edition | Letters Mar 2nd 2019

Letters are welcome and should be addressed to the Editor at letters@economist.com

Reforming energy markets

Climate change is far too complex to lend itself to an easy solution. Your case study of Exxon Mobil does indeed show that "the market cannot solve climate change by itself" and "muscular government action is needed" (" Crude awakening ", February 9th). But the hard fact is that both markets and governments fail to reflect climate-change risks, which explain the failure in slowing global warming. Without a global agreement for an effective, market-based framework for the taxing of carbon at an appropriately high level, no serious and sustainable dent can be made in greenhouse-gas emissions. This alone has doomed the Paris agreement to be a toothless deal. No wonder that coal's share in the global energy mix keeps growing.

Only forceful policies can alter the behaviour of the energy markets, which do not reflect that fossil-fuel firms are overvalued and may become stranded assets. These firms do not even sense the long-term risk of sitting on vast volumes of unburnable carbon reserves, which is a carbon bubble. These companies continue to develop reserves that would never be used with effective climate policies in place. They are rewarded by the markets for finding and developing new reserves. There is no noticeable exit from heavy emission-producing activities in anticipation of the possible introduction of a biting carbon tax. Unless this energy-market behaviour is dealt with, the vision of a carbon-free future will remain just that, a vision.

ISTVAN DOBOZI
Former lead energy economist at the World Bank
Gaithersburg, Maryland

Shale (or fracking) explains much of the boom in the oil market, as well as the volatile market performance of energy companies. Production increases are occurring at the same time that profitability is declining. In 1980, 29% of the Standard & Poor's 500 index was occupied by oil and gas; today it is 5%. Fracking has flooded the market with cheap gas, pushing prices down further. Investors seduced by the promise of increased profits are being left at the altar of derivatives standing in for real economic growth.

You claim that energy companies that rely on fossil fuels are merely "responding to incentives set by society". But oil and gas companies with their deep pockets continue to enjoy the privileges of a bygone era with the false promises of jobs and business expansion that have yet to materialise.

The fact is that last year, oil and gas stocks placed last on the S&P 500. Money managers who continue to invest looking nostalgically backwards ignore this at their own (and their beneficiaries') peril.

TOM SANZILLO
Director of finance
Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis
Cleveland

I take exception to the suggestion that oil companies are merely responding to incentives and are thus not "evil". When you know how serious the consequences are; when you knew decades ago of the severity of climate change and covered it up; when, knowing all that, you just follow "incentives"—that's pretty evil. And when you maintain a political propaganda operation to lie about the problem and protect those incentives, that's pretty evil, too.

SHELDON WHITEHOUSE
Senator for Rhode Island
Newport, Rhode Island

There are a few things you left out of your article on Exxon Mobil. First, it produces about only 3% of the world's oil. If you want to target a much greater contributor to climate change, go after OPEC and Russia, which together account for more than half the world's output. You also left out China, which alone is responsible for nearly half the rise of the world's carbon emissions. Last, you mentioned that Exxon Mobil was against the Kyoto protocol, without pointing out that nearly all the countries that signed it failed miserably to keep to its provisions.

STEPHEN MILLER
San Francisco

Unfortunately, a tax on carbon is regressive given that poorer families pay a higher proportion of their income on energy, especially those in rural areas who must drive long distances. The remedy you propose, to offset carbon revenues with tax cuts, is also regressive. It will reward those with high incomes who pay higher taxes. A simpler approach is to rebate all revenues as a carbon dividend with the same amount to every person. That should appeal to France's *gilets jaunes* and similar protest groups in other countries whose support is needed if we are to adopt a saner climate-change policy.

MAX HENRION
Los Gatos, California

The shires have seen it plain

Regarding Bagehot 's hymn to Shropshire and the damage that a no-deal Brexit would do to the county's sheep industry (February 16th), did he visit Britpart, a fast-growing parts specialist for Land Rover that employs over 300 people at its Craven Arms site? There are always sales support and warehouse jobs available there and the firm exports all over the world. Just down the road is the headquarters of igloovision.com, a virtual-reality firm established in 2007. It now has offices in London, New Jersey and Toronto.

Both of these firms offer better pay and employment conditions than Shropshire's lamb abattoirs. These abattoirs are indirect beneficiaries of subsidies paid to Shropshire hill farmers, currently by the EU, but no doubt soon to be paid by British taxpayers if the guarantees offered by the government are to be believed. Moreover, in the Craven Arms area farmers are already diversifying rapidly into chickens, tourism and equine activities.

I have lived for 20 years at the base of one of those famous blue hills in Shropshire. The forested areas are largely owned by the Forestry Commission with an increasing concern for diversity and wildlife. It is a significant part of the economy. The idea that landowners and farmers will let the land "degenerate into scrubland" is fanciful when land prices have skyrocketed.

CHRISTINE PENDLETON
Craven Arms, Shropshire

Shropshire's hills would not degenerate into scrubland without their "woolly lawnmowers". Instead, they could once again support the varied ecosystems that flourished before the arrival of intensive ovine monoculture. A.E. Housman's blessing is a mixed one. He has given Shropshire a rich poetic heritage, but he also helped fix our folk aesthetic on unnaturally bare hillsides.

EDWARD GENOCHIO
Birmingham

Novel headlines

I was delighted by your Proustian punning in " Remembrance of posts past " and "In search of lost time (and money)" (February 2nd). Both were takes on the alternative English-language translations of Marcel Proust's seven-volume novel, "À la Recherche du Temps Perdu". But given Robert Swan's appointment as Intel's new chief executive ("Swanning in", February 9th), surely you missed a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for another Proust pun with "Swan's way"?

WILLIAM TARVAINEN
London

Terminating May's days

Surely we should be asking for an extension to Article 50 until the end of May (" Crisis deferred, again ", February 16th)?

ALAN MALCOLM
London

On perilous ground

Skirmishing between India and Pakistan could escalate

Two nuclear-armed states shoot down each other's planes

Print edition | Briefing Feb 28th 2019

THE LAST time that Indian and Pakistani jets bombed one another's territory was in 1971, during an all-out war. In that conflict more than 10,000 soldiers died, over 100 planes were shot out of the sky and Pakistan was torn asunder, as the new state of Bangladesh took shape. But then neither side had built the nuclear arsenals that they wield today. So when the roar of Indian warplanes returned to Pakistan's skies on February 26th, it marked the most dangerous moment in South Asia since a months-long mass mobilisation of troops in 2002. How did the two countries get into this situation, and can they step away from the brink?

The immediate origins of India's taboo-busting air raid and the resulting aerial skirmishes lie in a suicide-bombing on February 14th in the Pulwama district of the state of Jammu & Kashmir that killed 40 Indian policemen. It was the deadliest attack in the state, and the worst jihadist atrocity anywhere in India for over a decade. But Narendra Modi, India's prime minister, also faces an election. Hindu hardliners do not feel he has sufficiently advanced their cause while others feel his promise of modernising India to bring jobs has failed (see article). Appearing a resolute commander will do him no harm.

Though the bomber was a Kashmiri, one of many locals who seethe at heavy-handed Indian rule in the state, the attack was claimed by Jaish-e-Muhammad (JEM), a Pakistan-based Islamist group with close ties to Pakistan's spy agency, the ISI. That, for India, was the last straw. JEM and Lashkar-e-Taiba, a similar group, conducted spectacular strikes in Delhi in 2001, Kashmir in 2002 and Mumbai in 2008. An attack by JEM in September 2016 killed 19 Indian soldiers, prompting Mr Modi to send special forces across the line of control, the de facto border in Kashmir, in what he triumphantly called "surgical strikes". Such incursions were commonplace in the 1990s and 2000s, but Mr Modi's willingness to flaunt such brazen raiding publicly was new. Though of questionable military utility, it reaped political rewards.

After the Pulwama attack bellicose news anchors bayed for revenge. Even liberal-minded Indian commentators, who would usually favour talks with Pakistan, demanded that something be done. Mr Modi did do something. A dozen or so fighter jets, equipped with 1,000lb bombs, took off from Gwalior air base on February 26th, crossing both the line of control and a political and military threshold. Indian civilian leaders had forbidden the air force to fly or fire over that line even during a war over Kargil, part of Kashmir, in 1999.

Crossing the line

The planes struck an alleged JEM facility in Balakot in the state of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, undisputed Pakistani territory. India claimed that hundreds of jihadists had been killed. Pakistan snorted at this "self serving, reckless and fictitious claim". India, it said, had crossed only a few miles into Pakistan and pounded uninhabited jungle for theatrical effect.

Even so, Pakistan's powerful armed forces, which have ruled the country for much of its history, were left reeling. Indian jets had appeared to come within 100km of Islamabad, the capital, without being intercepted. Imran Khan, Pakistan's prime minister, promised to respond at a time and place of his choosing. That did not take long. On February 27th Pakistan said that its own aircraft had struck back. As Indian jets chased the attackers, seemingly into Pakistan, an Indian aircraft was shot down, with the unlucky pilot landing on the Pakistani side of the border.

Neither side is spoiling for a no-holds-barred fight. Mr Modi's government made it clear that it had sought to attack terrorists, not Pakistani soldiers, far from densely populated areas. Pakistan said it had fired from within its own airspace (though India disputes this) and deliberately struck open ground "to demonstrate that we could have easily taken the original target", a group of six military facilities.

The torture and mutilation of Indian soldiers sparked national outrage during the Kargil war. The captured Indian pilot has been well-treated so far. Though India protested at his "vulgar" display to the press, he was filmed clutching a cup of chai and praising his captors as "thorough gentlemen". "The tea is fantastic," he added. On February 28th Mr Khan unexpectedly announced that he would be released the next day. All this may offer a path to de-escalation. Mr Khan gave a sober and emollient speech after the dust-up, acknowledging "the hurt that has been caused due to the Pulwama attack". "Better sense should prevail," he urged. "We should sit and settle this with talks." But it may not prove as easy as that.

Can calm come?

Mr Modi is a captive of his own propaganda. His policy of loud jingoism has left India with less room for manoeuvre. Srinath

Raghavan, a former Indian soldier and respected historian, quotes Abba Eban: "A statesman who keeps his ear permanently glued to the ground will have neither elegance of posture nor flexibility of movement." One possibility is that escalation will involve the usual means, such as artillery duels across the line of control, which increased on February 27th and 28th, and raids on border posts. That would be troubling but not cataclysmic. However, Pakistan has closed its airspace and put Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on high alert, suggesting that more incursions are feared. India has increased naval patrols and raised security on Delhi's metro network, reflecting concerns that Pakistan might sponsor retaliatory terrorist attacks.

One Indian expert says that a full mobilisation of the Indian army should not be ruled out. Christopher Clary, who managed South Asia policy at the Pentagon from 2006 to 2009, suggests that America should consider evacuating its citizens from both countries. "Not because we are there yet, but because when the situation warrants it, there will be no time."

A nuclear shadow also hangs over the crisis. During their last big clash, in 1999, India and Pakistan both possessed nuclear weapons but had only limited means to deliver them. Today India has some 140 warheads and Pakistan about ten more than that. Each wields an array of matching missiles. Pakistan has also built tactical nuclear weapons, with a range of 70km or so, intended for use against invading Indian forces, on Pakistani soil if necessary. Their short reach means they would need to be deployed perilously close to the front line.

Mr Khan chaired a meeting of his country's Nuclear Command Authority on February 27th and reminded India of the stakes: "With the weapons you have and the weapons we have, can we really afford a miscalculation?" Pakistan's aim is to underscore that India, which now spends over five times as much as it does on defence (see chart), cannot bring its conventional military superiority to bear without risking nuclear ruin. It hopes, also, that this chilling prospect will force the international community to restrain Mr Modi.

To Indians, such threats fit with a long pattern of cynical nuclear blackmail stretching back to crises in the 1980s. Some officials share the view expressed in January 2018 by General Bipin Rawat, India's army chief, that India ought to "call their nuclear bluff". Hawkish Indians look enviously at Israel's model of counter-terrorism and chafe at how Pakistani nukes have defanged their more numerous forces.

Any whiff of nuclear weapons would, in the past, have sent outsiders rushing to the subcontinent to soothe tensions. In 1990 President George H.W. Bush sent his CIA director to South Asia to calm a brewing crisis. During the Kargil war Bill Clinton gave Nawaz Sharif, then Pakistan's prime minister, a dressing down in Washington, DC. In a stand-off that unfolded in 2001-02 everyone from Tony Blair to Vladimir Putin passed through the region.

Today, however, America's calming influence may be lacking. The Trump administration lacks the experience, expertise and focus to lower the temperature in the same way. It is beset by domestic drama and lacks diplomats in important roles. There is no permanent ambassador in Pakistan and the branch of the State Department which covers South Asia has five acting, rather than permanent, deputy assistant secretaries. "I've never seen anything like that," notes Mr Clary.

Diplomatic language

Donald Trump broke his silence on the skirmishes on February 28th, noting that "hopefully it's going to be coming to an end". There are plenty of useful things he could do. One would be to assure India of further intelligence co-operation and defence assistance should it restrain itself from more muscle-flexing. Another would be to demand that Pakistan takes credible action against terrorist groups such as JEM, rather than the cosmetic and ephemeral steps it has taken in the past. Even so, Pakistan is playing a pivotal role in Afghan peace talks by calling for negotiations by the Taliban, which it has long supported. Mr Trump will fear that should India or America squeeze Pakistan too hard, that process, and the prospect of bringing home 14,000 troops, may collapse.

The influence of China is also important. In recent years, it has grown closer to Pakistan, lubricating the relationship with investment and arms, and more hostile to India, with which it shares a long, disputed and occasionally turbulent border. It hopes to show support for Pakistan without being dragged into an unwanted conflict.

The foreign ministers of India, China and Russia met on February 27th and agreed to "eradicate the breeding grounds of terrorism and extremism". To India, that was welcome language. What Mr Modi really wants, however, is for the leader of JEM to be designated as a terrorist at the UN, something that China has blocked for years to spare its ally's blushes. Also on February 27th America, Britain and France proposed a ban at the UN Security Council for the fourth time. Another Chinese veto would infuriate India. A change of heart, on the other hand, would make de-escalation more likely.

The ball is in Mr Modi's court. His hope was that sending jets into Pakistan would dispel old notions of a pacifist India and collect a few votes in the process. But the pictures on the front pages of newspapers might not now be victorious warplanes but an Indian pilot freed by Pakistan.

The wise choice would be to take up Mr Khan's offer of talks, while trading military restraint for international support. Mr Khan and his generals, who are largely satisfied with their token bombing raid, have made that easier by swiftly promising to hand back the pilot. The temptation, however, will be for Mr Modi to have the last word with another martial flourish. Pakistan would be compelled to respond, risking all-out war. Equanimity, responsibility and sobriety are required, but those are hardly Mr Modi's strong suits.

This article appeared in the Briefing section of the print edition under the headline "On perilous ground"

Orange evolution

Narendra Modi and the struggle for India's soul

How India's prime minister uses Hindu nationalism

Print edition | Briefing Mar 2nd 2019

WHEN THE world's biggest electorate handed Narendra Modi a thumping victory five years ago, India seemed poised for far-reaching change. His party had won an outright majority of seats in the national parliament, a rare feat in India's fractious politics. This was not only punishment for tarnished incumbents or reward for Mr Modi's hard-working, no-nonsense, business-friendly image. Many also saw it as a ringing endorsement of his ideology. Mr Modi's strident brand of Hindu nationalism, which pictures Pakistan less as a strategic opponent than a threat to civilisation, puts him at the fringe even of his own Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

After five years in power, the Hindutva (Hindu-nationalist) movement faces a moment of reckoning. That is not just because first Pakistan's jihadists and then its air force have presented Mr Modi with a political crisis. It is also because India is approaching a general election looking as polarised as at any time since independence.

The rival visions confronting India's 900m voters have rarely been so sharply defined. Hindu nationalists regard India as a nation defined by its majority faith, much like Israel or indeed Pakistan. On the other side stand those who see India's extraordinary diversity as a source of strength. For most of the country's seven decades the multi-coloured, secular vision has prevailed. But the orange-clad Hindutva strain has grown ever bolder.

Under Mr Modi, the project to convert India into a fully fledged Hindu nation has moved ahead smartly. The pace would undoubtedly accelerate if, carried on a surge of patriotism brought by the clash with Pakistan, he sweeps into another term. But given that in 2014, the BJP grabbed its big majority with just 31% of the popular vote, how far would Mr Modi be able to push the Hindutva project, even if he does get a new mandate? And if he loses, can a secular India be rebuilt?

The answers depend less on politics than on the underlying strength of the Hindu nationalist movement itself. To measure this, the place to start is with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). With an all-male membership of around 5m, the flagship of Hindutva modestly describes itself as the world's largest volunteer organisation. It is far more than that.

Founded in 1925, the RSS has over time absorbed or co-opted nearly every rival Hindutva group. "The miracle and also the design of the Sangh is that they have not split—and that is their power," says Vinay Sitapati, a historian. Its most obvious manifestation is the RSS's 60,000-odd self-financing cells, or *shakhas*, which meet daily for communal exercises and discussion, typically on a patriotic theme. The harder core of the RSS consists of some 6,000 full-time apostles known as *pracharaks*. These devotees exercise discreet control across not just the *shakhas*, but a broader "family" of Hindutva groups.

Keep it close

The family includes India's largest trade union as well as unions for farmers, students, teachers, doctors, lawyers, women, small businesses and so on. RSS progeny run India's two largest private school networks, educating some 5m children. One of these, Ekal Vidyalaya, has grown by targeting remote regions where Christian missionaries have made inroads (see chart 1). Some RSS groups exercise quiet influence, lobbying for more "nationalist" economic policy, for instance. Others simply wield muscle. The 2m-member Bajrang Dal, a youth branch of the World Hindu Council, an RSS offshoot, has a reputation for beating up Muslim boys who dare to flirt with Hindu girls. The 3m-strong All India Students Council is aggressive in campus politics. By threat or violent action it frequently blocks events it does not like, such as lectures by secular intellectuals. Just outside the orbit of the RSS lie violent extremist groups, such as one believed responsible for murdering leftist writers.

The BJP is a loose affiliate of the RSS. Under Mr Modi, who served as an RSS *pracharak* before being assigned to the party, ties have been tighter. The RSS has thrown its full organisational weight behind his campaigns. In return, Mr Modi has inserted RSS men—or like-minded ones—into every part of Indian politics (see chart 2). But RSS influence also extends to university deans, heads of research institutes, members of the board of state-owned firms and banks (including the central bank) and, say critics, ostensibly politics-proof promotions in the police, army and courts.

Still, frictions have arisen between Mr Modi and his alma mater. "They don't like prima donnas," says Mr Sitapati. Quiet purges, as well as a massive broadening of the BJP's membership to over 100m, have forged a party hierarchy of personal loyalty to Mr Modi that RSS elders distrust. More broadly, there is grumbling in the Hindutva camp that he has not championed their agenda energetically enough.

This includes education "reform" (to inculcate stronger national sentiment and emphasise Hindu identity); ending "appeasement" (a term Hindutva activists apply to policies aimed at garnering Muslim votes); imposing a uniform civil code (to deny a limited role to sharia, or Islamic law); repealing laws that grant special status to the state of Jammu & Kashmir (to underline Indian sovereignty over a disputed territory that has a large Muslim majority); building a temple to the god Ram at Ayodhya (where in 1992 Hindu mobs destroyed a 16th-century mosque said to be built atop his birthplace); and enforcing rules to protect cows.

Mr Modi's government has met some Hindutva demands. Nationalist staff have been promoted at every level of schooling, subtly changing the tone of education. But many of the RSS's demands boil down to putting Muslims, already mostly poor and badly educated, in their place. Accounting for 14% of the population, they are generally excluded from caste-based "reservations" for government favours. Among the BJP's 1,400 state-level MPs, only four are Muslim. And in Muslim-majority Kashmir, a perennially vexed region, Mr Modi's government has hardened policies to tackle militancy, imposing direct rule from Delhi, threatening to end unilaterally Indian Kashmir's special legal status and endorsing, among other measures, the use of shotguns to blast stone-throwing youths. The approach has alienated Kashmiris and also tempted meddling by Pakistan, ever keen to challenge India's sovereignty. After the longest lull in three decades of violence, it has spiralled again under Mr Modi.

Violence has also accompanied a campaign in BJP-run states to apply stringent laws against the slaughter of cows, sacred beasts to Hindus. Between 2015 and 2018 some 44 people, 36 of them Muslim, have been beaten or hacked to death by cow vigilantes, says Human Rights Watch, an NGO. The ban has not spread nationally, partly because many Hindus outside the "Cow Belt"—the conservative middle and west of the country—eat beef, and partly through anger among farmers who can no longer sell cows beyond milking age.

The demand to erect a Ram temple in Ayodhya has not progressed, either. The issue has been stalled in courts for decades. Mr Modi has tried to push India's Supreme Court to resolve the case, but his influence is limited. In recent weeks the RSS appears to have quietly advised its affiliates to stop agitating over the issue. This suggests a recognition that, although the demand once galvanised mass emotion, most Hindus are now more concerned with matters such as jobs, schools and health care.

This has not helped Mr Modi's standing with the Hindu religious establishment. At this year's Kumbh Mela, a pilgrimage that is the world's biggest public gathering, BJP flags and billboards proliferated along with boasts of a huge boost in public spending to organise the six-yearly event. Yet several senior religious figures seemed unhappy. "They have been talking of nothing but Ram, Ram all these years, and now they ask us to stop?" mutters Swaroopanand Saraswati, the head of two of Hinduism's most prestigious monasteries, as a pair of young acolytes flick yak-tail fly whisks. In a nearby encampment, another high-ranking holy man, his forehead streaked with turmeric, complains that the BJP and RSS are trying to hijack the faith while doing little for issues such as protecting the sacred Ganges river.

Secular foes of Hindutva, however, fear Mr Modi has gone too far. "The battle for a secular India is already lost," says Mujibur Rehman, a political scientist at Jamia Milia University. Mr Rehman does not blame Mr Modi but sees an acceleration under BJP rule of a slow disempowering of India's non-Hindu minorities. "When the BJP bans cow slaughter, no opposition party makes the argument that this destroys Muslim livelihoods." Pratap Bhanu Mehta, a columnist and head of Ashoka University, also sees many signs of Hindutva's "hegemonic arrival". One clue is that the BJP's main opponent, the Congress party, has largely dropped talk of secularism. Since winning the state of Madhya Pradesh in December, Congress has outdone the BJP in cow protection, budgeting millions to build shelters for retired cattle. Its national leader, Rahul Gandhi, now punctiliously visits temples. "He is trying to show that he is no longer 'embarrassed' by his Hinduism, and this is a huge thing since the core RSS belief is that the secular state has left Hindus culturally marginalised," says Mr Mehta.

Hindu the right thing

This may be seen as a healthy shaking off of colonial legacies. Yet what worries Indian liberals is where Hindutva strays into xenophobia and intolerance of dissent. By repeating a mantra of victimhood it constructs a world full of enemies, making it easy to conflate Pakistani jihadists with protesters in Kashmir or simply critics of Mr Modi. A window sticker now common on cars, showing the monkey god Hanuman with an angry orange face, is disturbing as it seems to respond to a threat which, in a country that is overwhelmingly Hindu and proudly so, is hard to perceive. That sense of threat, says Mr Mehta, is what binds the RSS: "Take that away and the whole project disappears."

Mr Gandhi vows that, if elected, he will remove people with RSS links from the bureaucracy. But its devotees have risen organically within the system. "They are judges, they are professors, they went from RSS-run crammers to pass the civil-service exam, or RSS military academies into the army," says Pragya Tiwari, author of a forthcoming book on the RSS. "These people aren't going anywhere."

Obstacles to the RSS agenda may come more from within the group, and from outside politics. The size of the family means it is also cumbersome and quarrelsome. And its increased exposure to politics has opened new internal frictions and exposed it to greater scrutiny. "Before, people were lulled, they wanted to believe these guys were innocuous, they didn't really understand what was at stake," says Ms Tiwari. Now, there is a stronger will to push back.

Yet there seems limited conviction among Indian liberals that the Hindutva tide can be stemmed. Outside big cities, the roots of secular, inclusive India remain shallow. This lack of a strong and attractive liberal alternative matters more in the long term than the coming vote. Mr Mehta's prognosis: "Unless there is a massive repudiation, their staying power will be much stronger after the election."

This article appeared in the Briefing section of the print edition under the headline "Orange evolution"

Defence policy
Bringing out the big guns

Bringing out the big guns

The Pentagon changes its focus to Russia and China

After 18 years of IEDs in the Middle East, America's armed forces are planning for high-tech warfare

Print edition | United States Feb 28th 2019

PATRICK SHANAHAN draws his finger down a list of his priorities for the Pentagon: hypersonics, directed energy, space, cyber, quantum science and autonomy. It could not be further from the dusty battlegrounds of the past 18 years. "When we talk about space, this is not designed for counter-terrorism," he says. Mr Shanahan, a former Boeing executive, was propelled into the job of secretary of defence in January, having served as understudy to James Mattis for less than 18 months. He has taken the helm of an organisation that is in the throes of change, as it prepares for life after the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In January 2018 the Trump administration published its National Defence Strategy (NDS). Officials lamented that nearly two decades of whack-a-mole against insurgents and jihadists had eroded the country's military edge, resulting in exhausted and under-trained units armed for the wrong enemy. So the NDS decreed that America would henceforth focus on "long-term, strategic competition between nations"—namely, China and Russia. Mr Shanahan was charged with implementing the vision while Mr Mattis travelled around the world calming ruffled allies.

"This is the first time since the Reagan era where the United States has been motivated to modernise its war-fighting architecture, its technologies," says Michael Griffin, the Pentagon's technology chief. "The first time we've been forced to think about how we fight war."

One priority is to re-tool the armed forces with the weapons they need. Mr Griffin paints a picture of each service wielding its own ultra-fast and long-range hypersonic missiles, fed information from a vast satellite network girdling the skies, all of it supported by a procurement process that can spit out high-tech weapons in years rather than decades.

David Norquist, Mr Shanahan's acting deputy and the Pentagon's finance chief, points to rising investments in firepower-heavy platforms, like the Virginia-class submarine and new B21 bomber. But he also acknowledges that big planes and ships may not survive for long under a hailstorm of Chinese or Russian missiles. So money is also going to larger numbers of smaller, cheaper and dispersible platforms—like an unmanned boat.

The second priority is ensuring that the armed forces not only have the arms they need, but also the training and readiness to use them in the sort of fighting they would face in eastern Europe and the western Pacific. Disaster relief is nice, says one general, but "this is a warfighting operation." Ryan McCarthy, undersecretary of the army, says that half his brigade combat teams—freed from what was an intense pace of deployments—are now at the highest level of readiness, up from a small fraction of that two years ago. Basic training is being increased from 14 to 22 weeks.

Training and exercise scenarios are adapting, too. They increasingly reflect "large force-on-force conflict against very high-end adversaries," says John Rood, the Pentagon's policy chief. Soldiers who once practised dealing with terrorists' roadside bombs now drill in dodging enemy air strikes or chemical weapons. The army is raising new battalion-sized forces, one apiece for Russia and China, which integrate cyber, electronic warfare and space capabilities—skills that were lost or neglected in the counter-insurgency years.

A third focus is changing what the Pentagon actually does with its troops, planes and ships. "The basic concept", says Mr Rood, "is that we're going to give priority to the Indo-Pacific." He points out that 2018 saw the longest absence of an aircraft carrier from the Persian Gulf since 2001; two carriers were instead sent to the Pacific.

A working group at the joint staff has been poring through 150-odd "global execution orders" (directives to commanders around the world) that have accumulated over the years, weeding out those which do not fit with the NDS's focus on great power competition. Seven out of eight advise-and-assist missions in Africa Command have already been cut. Central Command, which covers everything from Egypt to Pakistan, will have more fat shaved off.

But rebalancing is only part of the story. The most significant element of the NDS, says Mr Shanahan, is "dynamic force employment" (DFE in mil-speak). That refers to moving forces around the world quickly and unpredictably to bamboozle adversaries. Last year, for instance, the *USS Harry S. Truman*, an aircraft-carrier that usually hangs around the Middle East, was abruptly called home midway through her deployment cycle and then suddenly sailed into the Arctic Circle—the first carrier to do so in 27 years—to join massive NATO exercises. For a carrier, whose movements are planned years ahead, that is warp-speed. Similar surprise deployments of bombers, fighter aircraft and surface-to-air missiles are being planned under DFE.

Despite all this, insiders grumble that civilians have not forced services to change spending patterns drastically enough. Rear-Admiral Mark Montgomery, former policy director for the Senate Armed Services Committee, is concerned that the army is still buying too many vehicles initially designed for low-end war, such as light tanks. Chris Brose, the committee's former staff

director, says the Pentagon is not doing anywhere near enough to develop, build and test the huge numbers of autonomous, unmanned systems it needs.

Mr Shanahan urges sceptics to wait for the 2020 budget, which he has called "a masterpiece". "What you'll see in these budgets is a sizeable investment in these critical technologies and programmes, whether it's autonomy, artificial intelligence, hypersonics, cyber. The critics haven't had exposure to those plans yet." He adds, coyly, that "there's a good portion of the budget you won't ever see", implying that more radical efforts may be buried in classified spending. And he is confident that he can remould a 700,000-strong bureaucracy. "People like myself, we spend our whole life implementing. We know how to move large organisations. We know where to place our bets."

This article appeared in the United States section of the print edition under the headline "Bringing out the big guns"

Nothing but the truth

Michael Cohen's turn in the barrel

The testimony from the president's former fixer was at once familiar and shocking

Print edition | United States Feb 28th 2019

FOR TEN years, Michael Cohen was Donald Trump's attack dog. By his own estimate, the president's former fixer threatened more than 500 people or entities at Mr Trump's request. But in sworn testimony before the House Oversight Committee on February 27th, and armed with documents to bolster several striking accusations, Mr Cohen called his former boss "a racist…a con man [and] a cheat" who is "fundamentally disloyal" and a threat to American democracy. The parties' responses to his testimony hinted at how they will respond to Robert Mueller's imminently expected report, providing a preview of the political battles likely to rage for the rest of Mr Trump's term.

None of Mr Cohen's accusations were entirely new. But hearing them made openly before Congress, under penalty of perjury, crystallised how extraordinary they are. Mr Cohen said that Mr Trump knew in advance—courtesy of Roger Stone, a political consultant who had been urging Mr Trump to seek the presidency for decades—that WikiLeaks would release stolen emails damaging to Hillary Clinton's campaign. That may have violated federal campaign-finance law, which bars Americans from accepting any "thing of value" from foreign nationals. More importantly, it would make the campaign complicit in an attack by a foreign intelligence service.

Mr Cohen also entered into evidence a pair of cheques—one signed by Mr Trump from his personal account and the other from his trust account, each for $35,000, both from 2017, after he took office—which he said were reimbursements for hush money paid to a pornographic-film actress. Mr Cohen says that as late as February 2018, Mr Trump told Mr Cohen to say that he did not know about these payments.

He also brought three financial-disclosure statements to illustrate his claim that Mr Trump inflated his net worth when he wanted people to think he was rich, and deflated it to minimise his taxes. In 2012-13, according to the statements, his net worth rose from $4.6bn to $8.7bn—due largely to his "brand value", which Mr Trump did not mention in 2012 but by 2013 was somehow worth $4bn. Questioned by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who showed that she was almost as effective an interrogator as she is a tweeter, Mr Cohen said that Mr Trump also inflated the value of his assets to an insurance firm, which would count as fraud.

Mr Cohen said Mr Trump, "knew of and directed the Trump Moscow negotiations throughout the campaign and lied about it." He said he briefed Mr Trump, as well as Donald junior and Ivanka, about the project around ten times in 2016. Mr Cohen said he knew of no "direct evidence that Mr Trump or his campaign colluded with Russia." But, he said, "I have my suspicions," noting that Mr Trump's desire to win at all costs made it conceivable that he would collude with a foreign power.

Republicans on the committee did not really defend the president from these accusations. Instead, they implied that Mr Cohen's testimony was some sort of plot to land a lucrative book or film contract. And they impugned his character, noting that he was convicted of lying to Congress, among other things, and will soon begin a three-year prison sentence. But literary glory aside, it is unclear what Mr Cohen's motivation to lie to Congress again would be—particularly as Mr Mueller's office was certainly watching, and would doubtless have charged him again had he done so.

Mr Trump can take comfort in the Justice Department policy, which warns against indicting a sitting president. And campaign-finance convictions are hard to win. In 2012 federal prosecutors failed to convict John Edwards, a Democratic politician, for spending donor funds on hush-money payments to a mistress.

Still, Mr Cohen accused the president of conduct more serious than that which led to impeachment for Bill Clinton (lying about an extramarital affair), and which is comparable to Richard Nixon's (covering-up a break-in at Democratic headquarters). For Mr Trump, that ending remains a long way off. While he has solid Republican support, Democrats will shy away from impeachment. But the prospect is closer now than it was before Mr Cohen testified.

This article appeared in the United States section of the print edition under the headline "His turn in the barrel"

Squeezing Lemon

America's porous wall between church and state

A Supreme Court case could make the holes bigger

Print edition | United States Mar 2nd 2019

IN 1947, when the Supreme Court first interpreted the constitution's bar on laws "respecting an establishment of religion", the justices consulted Thomas Jefferson. The First Amendment erects "a wall of separation between church and state," the third president had written in 1802. This means, the court said a century and a half later, that the government may neither "prefer one religion over another", take part in the "affairs of any religious organisations" nor impose taxes to support "religious activities or institutions." Justice Hugo Black explained in a 5-4 decision why this wall did not stand in the way of a New Jersey law covering the bus fares of Catholic-school students. In dissent, Justice Robert Jackson called the majority opinion "utterly discordant". The ruling, for him, brought to mind "Julia who, according to Byron's reports, 'whispering I will ne'er consent,'—consented.'"

The battle over the church-state line is no less divisive—and even more muddled—70 years on. Prayer in school was tossed out in the 1960s. Stand-alone nativity scenes inside government buildings were struck down in the 1980s. But other Biblical verses, crosses and menorahs in the public square have won the court's blessing. On one day in 2005, the Supreme Court upheld a Ten Commandments monument near a capitol building while rejecting another outside a courthouse. When the justices last ruled on the matter in 2014, they found no trouble with a town board launching its meetings with Christian prayers. As long as the government does not relentlessly "denigrate" or "proselytise" dissenters, Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote—again, for a 5-4 majority—it respects America's church-state balance.

On February 27th a new flashpoint came before the court in the guise of an old memorial to first-world-war soldiers. Since 1925 Bladensburg in Maryland has been home to a 40-foot Latin cross honouring 49 men from Prince George's County who died in the fighting. Upon its rededication in 1985, the Peace Cross's reach was extended to veterans of all wars. For Rachel Laser, president of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, it is "remarkable" that the cross, which stands at the intersection of two big motorways on public ground, "is thought to be anything but a clear violation of the establishment clause." The memorial is a sectarian symbol, she says, and denies "equal dignity" to non-Christian soldiers who died.

When the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled against the cross in 2017 it invoked a precedent set in *Lemon v Kurtzman*, a 1971 ruling that states could not pay the salaries of teachers at private Catholic schools in Pennsylvania. Justice Antonin Scalia once likened *Lemon* to a "ghoul in a late night horror movie" that just won't die. At the Supreme Court hearing Justices Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh both professed a desire to drive a stake through its heart. Whether or not *Lemon* gets the squeeze, the oral arguments added credence to the widespread hunch that the Supreme Court will save the Peace Cross. The question is how bold the justices will be.

Late in the hearing, inklings of possible compromise came from Justices Elena Kagan and Stephen Breyer. In 2005, Justice Breyer had found it "determinative" that 40 years passed before anyone raised an objection to a Ten Commandments display in Texas. His vote saved that monument. Likewise, the historical context of the Peace Cross counts, he said. What message would it send, he asked, if people "see crosses all over the country being knocked down?" Justice Kagan said she, too, finds "something quite different" about the "historic moment in time" when the cross was built. Perhaps the justices could let the Maryland memorial stand while saying "no more" to future crosses on public land?

A third way could avoid bulldozed crosses while respecting America's religious diversity—as Justice Ginsburg pointed out, 30% of the country now identifies as something other than Christian. Gregory Lipper, author of a brief criticising the cross, thinks Justice Breyer's proposal could form the basis of a deal between the liberal justices and Chief Justice Roberts; it may, he says, ward off "more grievous harm." But with the court's new conservative majority, the chief may be tempted to make a more dramatic statement when the decision comes this spring. Thomas Jefferson's wall could be up for a redo.

This article appeared in the United States section of the print edition under the headline "Cross roads"

The Cambridge Analytica bill

Congress is trying to create a federal privacy law

The fourth attempt in 45 years turns on how federal law will supersede state laws

Print edition | United States Feb 28th 2019

CONGRESS FIRST tried to pass a privacy law in 1974. Lawmakers succeeded, but lobbying from financial services companies ensured that it applied only to the government, not private firms. Impetus to regulate privacy in the private sector waxed and waned over the next 30 years, building with the first tech bubble, then evaporating in the horror of the 2001 attacks. In 2012, Barack Obama tried again and failed.

Almost half a century after their first effort, politicians are having a fourth go, triggered by the Cambridge Analytica scandal. Some have already offered their own bills, and work is now under way to knit all those into a bipartisan offering. Ranking Republicans and Democrats held two hearings on Capitol Hill this week with the explicit goal of informing the federal privacy bill. The discussion was familiar to privacy wonks—how transparent data collection should be, what limits there should be on it, how to avoid burdensome regulation—but the environment in which it took place suggests it might be fourth time lucky.

Big tech companies are on board, owing to a mixture of self-interest and a sincere feeling that something must be done. Their policy teams regularly meet the congressional staffers who are drawing up the legislation. A bill is expected to be introduced before the August recess, probably in the Republican-controlled Senate. What all sides do not yet agree on is what the bill should say.

The core controversy is over whether a new federal law should override what some states have already done. The disagreement hinges on California, which adopted a new privacy law last year which will go into effect in 2020 and is broadly aligned with European regulations. Republicans and tech companies want the federal law to supersede California's rules, replacing them with a something more permissive. Democrats want any federal law to match California's standard.

California is not the only state threatened by pre-emption. It would also kill a law in Illinois regulating the collection of biometrics. In Vermont, rules that regulate the opaque business of data-brokers would disappear. Rules that are in draft form in at least ten state legislatures would be wiped away. Those who oppose pre-emption see this as a step backwards, away from strong privacy rules. Those in favour think it is good to try to harmonise a complicated patchwork of state rules.

Including pre-emption in the federal bill presents a political problem, regardless of beliefs about the correct level of privacy regulation. Any federal law must pass through a House presided over by Nancy Pelosi, from California's 12th district. It is hard to imagine the House, which contains a powerful bloc of Californian Democrats, undermining the Speaker's state.

The regulations are not just a domestic concern. European courts, both national and supranational, are examining whether American regulation measures up to that in Europe. If it does not, that would mean that the personal data of Europeans cannot flow to America for processing, hurting American internet companies. A set of regulations which keeps Europe happy is therefore in the interests of both politicians and tech companies.

It seems likely that some common ground exists. There is broad agreement that a level regulatory playing field would be good for companies and citizens, while the need to keep the American data-processing market open to Europe is obvious. Even so, disagreements about just how sharp to make America's new privacy rules may yet derail their creation.

This article appeared in the United States section of the print edition under the headline "The Cambridge Analytica bill"

Civics 101

California's teachers' strikes conceal a conflict of generations

Teachers are striking over pay as pensions and health-care costs are eating up budgets

Print edition | United States Feb 28th 2019

"I LIKE CATS, unicorns and peace, but I love my teacher!" declares one sign, with two rainbows, held by a young pupil at Crocker Highlands Elementary School in Oakland on a weekday morning. She should have been at school, but instead she joined her mother and thousands of Oakland's teachers outside City Hall. Oakland's teachers are asking for higher salaries, support staff and more. Teachers in nearby Sacramento may be next to put down chalk and pick up placards.

Such strikes have become a national phenomenon. Teachers in Los Angeles, Denver and West Virginia have gone on strike this year, after action in Arizona, Colorado, Kentucky, North Carolina and Oklahoma in 2018. Last year around 375,000 teachers and staff went on strike. They accounted for about three-quarters of the total number of American workers who downed tools. As a result, 2018 saw the highest number of workers involved in strikes since 1986.

The complaints differ by school district, but one common refrain on picket lines is that teachers are not paid enough for their hard work. The wage gap between teachers and similarly educated workers has certainly widened since the mid-1990s. In many states teachers are paid less than other public-sector employees, such as prison guards and police officers.

The financial crisis a decade ago caused some states to gut spending on education, suppressing teachers' wages. Teachers in West Virginia and Oklahoma, where strikes have occurred, are among the worst-paid in the nation. In parts of California, where the average public-school teacher earns what might appear to be a plum salary of $79,000, around a third higher than the national average, the cost of living is an animating issue. Many teachers struggle to live without room-shares and within an hour's commute of their schools.

A Supreme Court decision has also played a part. Unions are particularly intent on proving their value to members after *Janus v American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees* deemed it illegal to compel union dues from public employees. The strikes have helped unions "re-establish their relevance for younger members" after the *Janus* case, says Andy Rotherham of Bellwether Education Partners, a non-profit.

Finally, the continued rise of charter schools is also fuelling protests. In 2016 around 6% of all American pupils attended a charter school, more than double the share in 2009. Along with private schools, charters are seen as responsible for declining enrolments, which deprive public-school districts of funds because they are paid per student. But the villainisation of charter schools is not the whole story. Behind the teachers' strikes is a broader angst and frustration with the status quo, according to one superintendent of a large school district that has weathered a strike.

The idea that school districts should quickly meet the demands of teachers may sound as uncontroversial as the rainbows and unicorns on the pupil's sign in Oakland. But in many instances settling with teachers will not address the long-term problems facing public schools.

Some school districts have been badly mismanaged. Oakland's has been somewhere between $20m and $30m in debt for the past 15 years and has not taken the necessary steps to bring its costs into line with declining enrolment. Three-quarters of pupils qualify for free or cheaper lunches, which they get when schools are open, and rely on free tutoring to prepare them for the upcoming SAT exams, making the strikes there particularly painful. The district operates nearly twice as many schools as pupil numbers justify, but teachers who are striking oppose efforts to close any and reduce costs. A report from a civil grand jury last year chastised the district for a "laundry list of errors and poor decisions contributing to the fiscal crisis." Settling the current strike by agreeing to salary increases and backing away from school closures would exacerbate the district's various problems.

Another issue that gets too little attention is the cost of retired teachers' pensions and health-care costs, which are rising in many states, including California. In 2012 the state approved a 30% increase in income-tax rates, in part to fund schools more efficiently, but all the extra revenue went on pensions and health care for pensioners rather than on pupils or teachers' salaries, according to David Crane of Govern for California, a non-partisan political outfit. The state could enact some reforms. For example, California, which educates 12% of America's public-school pupils, chooses to subsidise health care for retired teachers and their families who could otherwise qualify for the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and Medicare. Eliminating that subsidy could save the state $2.6bn, allowing it to pay teachers more. In the Los Angeles Unified School District alone, this change would translate into around $10,000 more pay for every teacher, says Mr Crane.

Young teachers are probably unaware that they are forgoing higher salaries to support pensions and benefits for their older peers, and it is not a topic that teachers tend to talk about. "The last thing unions want to introduce into the conversation is something their younger members would be pissed off about," explains Mr Rotherham of Bellwether.

Frustration with an underperforming system is not confined to schools. Unrest and dissatisfaction can be found in many corners of American life. But they risk eroding what could be a constructive conversation about how to reinvigorate public schools and do better by pupils. "My concern is that it's become a political war of us versus them, versus doing right by our

kids," says Ted Lempert of Children Now, a non-profit. "We are breaking apart consensus and reframing the debate about education in a way that makes reforms harder."

This article appeared in the United States section of the print edition under the headline "Civics 101"

Flocks away

The politicisation of white evangelical Christianity is hurting it

A group of disenchanted evangelicals, the "exvies", is among the denomination's biggest threats

Print edition | United States Feb 28th 2019

ARMS OUTSTRETCHED, the congregation at Hyde Park Baptist Church welcomed the Holy Spirit into their two-storey, stained-glass sanctuary. Along with the spirit came their pastor, Kie Bowman, accompanied by a full jazz orchestra. He summed up his sermon as: "to impact culture, love the Bible". But interspersed with this joyful invitation to share the Gospel were some spiky remarks, such his assertion that "you have to be convinced by the media that God does not exist." Such has been the transformation of white evangelical Christianity over the past half-century. But conservative politics in church have also caused a backlash.

Mr Bowman's statements reflect the battle that evangelical denominations have been fighting since the 1980s, when evangelical leaders began to move past discussions about morality and embraced conservative rhetoric about individual rights. Andrew Lewis, author of a book about this phenomenon called "The Rights Turn", says that Republicans and conservative Christians now have a shared approach to the law. As examples, he points to the use of free-speech rights to defend anti-abortion legislation and to argue against regulating campaign finance. That fusion seemed complete in 2016, when 81% of white born-again Christians voted for Donald Trump, according to data from the Democracy Fund Voter Study Group.

Yet this coupling seems to be hurting membership of evangelical churches. Several polling firms have detected a decline in the share of Americans who describe themselves as white evangelicals over the past decade. The Pew Research Centre found a two-percentage-point drop from 2007 to 2012. PRRI found a six-percentage-point drop in the share of the population that identify as white evangelicals, from 23% in 2006 to 17% in 2016. ABC and the *Washington Post* found a still larger decline of eight percentage points, larger than the drop among mainline white Protestants. The problem is partly generational: in the PRRI data just 8% of young Americans aged 18-29 say they are white evangelicals, while 26% of those aged 65 or older are white evangelical Protestants. Together with the decline in the share of whites who identify as Catholics, this has caused anxiety among some of the faithful that white Christian America is under threat.

The argument about how to restore lost greatness has been running for 40 years. In the late 1970s the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), an umbrella organisation for evangelical churches, was roiled by a confrontation between modernisers, who were in charge of the organisation, and traditionalists, who blamed them for presiding over a levelling-off in church attendance. The traditionalists won, but on their watch the malaise has worsened. Nor are falling numbers the only problem: an exhaustive investigation by the *Houston Chronicle* and the *San Antonio Express-News* identified more than 250 church leaders who have been accused of sexually abusing people who worshipped at SBC churches.

Many churches remain committed to preaching conservative politics from the pulpit on Sundays. The SBC's leadership, however, has been critical of Mr Trump. Russell Moore, a theologian who heads its work on public policy, is among the president's most eloquent critics.

This may be too little, too late for a group of former evangelicals who are trying to organise "ex-vangelicals"—or "exvies"—into a nascent political movement. Christopher Stroop, a journalist, has emerged as a leader among the exvies. Mr Stroop was raised in a fundamentalist evangelical household, where he went to non-denominational Christian schools and was surrounded mostly by friends who shared his beliefs. In high-school, biology lessons about DNA would be interspersed with preaching from the teacher, and sometimes with documentaries on "flood geology" and the search for Noah's ark. "There was strong pressure to be a young-Earth creationist," Mr Stroop says. He also recalls a class field-trip during school hours to a prototype Tea Party convention. Mr Stroop says his education was "all about isolating children in the subculture so they'll grow up to be the culture warriors the church wants them to be."

He typifies a larger pattern. In a paper published in 2017 Paul Djupe, Jacob Neiheisel and Anand Sokhey, all political scientists, found that people stop attending church when they have intellectual disagreements with their religion and when they lose social attachments to their congregations. Since Americans have become yoked to their political tribe with an intensity that often rivals religious fervour, those with moderate political disagreements frequently find their faith hard to reconcile with their politics and end up leaving their churches.

This article appeared in the United States section of the print edition under the headline "Flocks away"

Lexington

Imagine there's no politics

It's easy if you try. But it's not a good way for Democrats to devise badly needed climate policy

Print edition | United States Feb 28th 2019

NOW INTO its 26th season, the self-parody act that is the Republican Party on global warming is still playing to a loyal audience. With the nomination of Kelly Knight Craft to be ambassador to the UN, Americans can expect to be represented in the world's premier climate-policy forum by the wife of a billionaire coal magnate and Trump donor who claims to admire "both sides of the science" on global warming. Reports meanwhile emerged of a White House scheme to commission a panel of sceptics to attack the government's own National Climate Assessment. The latest iteration of this quadrennial review of America's changing climate, launched in 1990 by George H.W. Bush—the last Republican leader to play it straight on global warming—irked Donald Trump. Released in November, while California was battling its worst wildfire of modern times, it did not support the president's claim that insufficient "raking" of the forest floor was to blame.

No wonder many Democrats want to cut the Republicans out of climate policymaking altogether. Their two past attempts to curb greenhouse-gas emissions—a legislative effort in 2009 and the regulatory steps taken by Barack Obama—both foundered on Republican resistance. The first, the Waxman-Markey cap-and-trade bill, passed the House but was not taken up in the Senate after the Democrats lost their 60-vote majority there. The second is being dismantled by the fossil-fuel lobbyists Mr Trump hired to run the Environmental Protection Agency. The Democrats' nascent third effort, the Green New Deal (GND) championed by Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and endorsed by Kamala Harris and other presidential hopefuls, is therefore designed differently. It is intended to have the durability of legislation, but to be so broadly appealing to Democrats it can be passed without Republican support.

Thus its main innovation: targeting climate change and social inequities together. A blueprint released by Ms Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Ed Markey, one of the architects of the 2009 bill, promises universal health care and affordable housing, as well as extremely steep emissions cuts. This has been viewed as a naive effort to cure all the ills of modern capitalism at a stroke. Yet it is also intended, in theory more pragmatically, to expand Democratic support for emissions cuts by harnessing the two main parts of the party's coalition: college graduates who want climate-change policy and blue-collar workers whose jobs are threatened by it. Resistance from those workers' representatives—for example Joe Manchin of West Virginia, the ranking Democrat on the Senate energy committee—was another reason why Waxman-Markey failed. The social policy in the GND blueprint is designed to win them over.

The enthusiasm the green deal has generated, from the climate activists who invaded Mitch McConnell's Senate office this week as well as the 2020 contenders, is testament to more than Ms Ocasio-Cortez's salesmanship. Its emissions targets, which would include decarbonising electricity generation within a decade, are at once vastly ambitious and merely commensurate with what scientists recommend. That makes it hard for anyone concerned about global warming to gainsay the proposal. It has a powerful moral allure. Yet the gravity of climate change also means the world cannot afford another failed effort by America to curb its tide of carbon pollution. And the green deal appears to have no chance of success.

Only a unified Democratic government—with a filibuster-proof majority or no filibuster to worry about—could entertain passing it. This is not simply because the climate-related proposals in Ms Ocasio-Cortez's draft are left-wing. In fact, by allowing a possible role for carbon pricing, nuclear power and carbon capture-and-storage, they are more moderate than many activists would like. A bigger problem is that by lumping together climate and social policy the proposal appears to confirm one of the main Republican arguments for inaction on global warming: a contention that Democrats are using the issue as a smokescreen for a left-wing economic agenda. This has hitherto been an exaggeration; Democrats have been pushing carbon pricing, a market-based solution, for a decade. Yet the green deal provides compelling evidence for it, which makes the prospects of Republicans returning to sanity on global warming even more remote.

It might therefore seem sensible that the deal's architects are only counting on Democratic votes. Yet moderates such as Mr Manchin—who says the GND is "not a deal, it's a dream"—seem unlikely to support it. The proposal is already being used to attack such Democrats in rural states with lots of extractive industries. Opposing it would offer them a relatively low-cost opportunity to define themselves against their party. It is therefore hard to imagine anything resembling Ms Ocasio-Cortez's blueprint passing into law. And if it did, Republicans would unite to overturn it, just as they did in response to Mr Obama's much less provocative health-care reform. The inconvenient truth for Democrats is that they cannot impose their policies by legislative fiat any more than Mr Obama could do so by executive order.

Greenhorn greens

It is a tough conclusion, because the prospects for bipartisan climate action are modest at best. And it would be hard to maintain enthusiasm on the left for the incremental steps, such as limited carbon pricing, such action might entail. While privately conceding the unreality of the green deal, some Democratic lawmakers therefore view it as a powerful slogan, to be replaced by more achievable policy in due course. That could make tactical sense, if it helps ensure the next Democratic

president prioritises the issue. But it risks underestimating how hard it will be to pass any serious climate policy. Opposition politicians who duck the painstaking work of developing credible policy are liable to come to power with no serious plan—as the Republicans demonstrated in their opposition to Obamacare. It is an example Ms Ocasio-Cortez and her supporters are closer to emulating than they think.

Venezuela (1)
Congratulations, you kept out the food and medical supplies

Fighting off the food trucks

After repelling aid deliveries, Venezuela's despot declares "victory"

The rightful president, who has no guns, ponders his next step

Print edition | The Americas Feb 28th 2019

BY ABOUT 11AM on February 23rd, four lorries, each loaded with 20 tonnes of food, medical supplies and toiletries, had arrived at the Simón Bolívar and Francisco de Paula Santander bridges, which link the Colombian border town of Cúcuta with Venezuela. At the Simón Bolívar crossing, used by thousands of people on a normal day, Colombian police opened a metal barricade they had erected. Venezuelans gathered on the Colombian side poured through, hoping to clear a passage for the vital supplies to enter Venezuela. Chanting "liberty", they headed towards Venezuelan riot police, who had arrayed themselves behind clear plastic shields. Minutes later, the first tear-gas grenade fell. The crowds fled. Many were hurt in the stampede.

This was the first skirmish in a day of pain and frustration for Venezuelans who are trying to relieve their country's humanitarian crisis and topple the dictatorship that caused it. By the end of it nearly 300 people had been injured on the Colombian border by tear gas and rubber bullets fired by Venezuelan security forces and by live ammunition from paramilitary *colectivos*. On the border with Brazil, where more aid awaits entry into Venezuela, four people were killed over two days. Almost no supplies got through.

Nicolás Maduro, Venezuela's president, hailed this success in repelling an incursion of powdered milk, surgical gloves and other necessities as a "victory". He celebrated by dancing salsa with his wife at a rally in Caracas. For Juan Guaidó, whose claim to be the real (interim) president of Venezuela is recognised by the opposition-controlled legislature and by 52 democracies, it was a setback. February 23rd, he had promised, would be a day of deliverance "by air, sea and land".

Watched by the world's media, Mr Guaidó's operation should have shamed Mr Maduro's regime. But the despot and his massively corrupt cronies blame everyone but themselves for Venezuela's plight. And although footage of food and medical supplies turned away cannot have improved Mr Maduro's dismal reputation at home, there is not yet much sign that the armed forces or paramilitaries are abandoning him. Venezuelans yearning for an end to his rule are gloomy. "Maybe I am impatient," mused Alexandra Flores, a lawyer in Caracas, "but I fear this [attempt to overthrow the regime] could fizzle out."

Mr Guaidó and his international backers are striving to ensure that does not happen. Their first response to the setback was a startling one. On the evening of February 23rd Mr Guaidó tweeted that he would "formally propose to the international community that we must keep all options open to liberate the homeland". This echoes President Donald Trump's warnings that the United States could use armed force against Mr Maduro's regime. Marco Rubio, an American senator, tweeted that the Venezuelan regime's brutality towards the aid carriers "opened the door to various potential multilateral actions not on the table just 24 hours ago". He accompanied this with images of 20th- and 21st-century dictators who thought they were invulnerable but were toppled and killed or jailed.

An American military intervention is highly unlikely, unless the Maduro regime does something insane like attacking the US embassy (see article). The Trump administration is not seriously preparing for one. On February 25th Mr Guaidó joined a meeting in Bogotá, Colombia's capital, of the 14-member Lima group, countries that are seeking a solution to Venezuela's crisis. All except a few (including Mexico, which did not attend) recognise him as Venezuela's interim president. They condemned the regime's thuggery and asked the International Criminal Court to investigate whether it constitutes a breach of human rights. But they ruled out military action.

That leaves open the question of just what Mr Guaidó's backers are prepared to do to end Venezuela's suffering. The plan, said Mike Pence, Mr Trump's vice-president, who was at the meeting in Bogotá, is "to continue to isolate Maduro economically and diplomatically until democracy is restored". The United States Treasury widened sanctions on members of the regime to four more people, all state governors. They include Rafael Lacava, governor of Carabobo. He speaks fluent English and played a role in the release of Joshua Holt, an American, from a Venezuelan prison last year. During that negotiation he spoke to Mr Trump by telephone. The sanctions against Mr Lacava suggest that the United States has no further interest in talking to the regime.

On the sidelines of a UN Security Council meeting to discuss the crisis, Elliott Abrams, the Trump administration's point man for Venezuela, promised more sanctions. These could bar non-American companies from trading with Venezuela. But Mr Trump has already imposed the toughest sanction at his disposal, denying the Maduro regime and PDVSA, the state oil company, access to revenue from sales to the United States of hydrocarbons, Venezuela's most important export by far. Venezuela is trying to sell its oil to other countries, such as India. Tankers holding 10m barrels of it, worth about $500m, are waiting for customers off Venezuela's coast, according to Kpler, an energy-research firm.

Mr Guaidó and his allies hope such pressure will cause enough defections from the armed forces to topple the regime, or to force some of its leaders to break with Mr Maduro and negotiate with the opposition a transition back to democracy.

More than 400 members of the Venezuelan armed forces and police have deserted in recent days and crossed into Colombia, according to Colombia's immigration agency. Many crossed the bridges they had been patrolling and pledged their loyalty to Mr Guaidó's government. One brought his baby daughter, another his drug-sniffer dog. "It's repress, repress, repress, I can't do it anymore," said one exhausted national-guard sergeant who had just sprinted across the dried-up Táchira river.

But most of the men in uniform remain at their posts. The families of deserters have reportedly been tortured or raped—a powerful deterrent. The sergeant said that members of the paramilitary *colectivos* were issuing the orders in towns along the border. They stopped a protest by inhabitants of San Antonio de Táchira by forcing them to stay in their homes. "You have just seen a little taste of what we are ready to do," crowed Venezuela's vice-president, Delcy Rodríguez.

Mr Guaidó's immediate challenge is to return to Venezuela, after leaving the country in defiance of a travel ban. (He sneaked out via back roads, with help from sympathisers in the army, he says.) Presidents in exile "achieve little", Mr Guaidó notes. Mr Maduro has threatened to jail him. If any harm comes to him, "it would be the last decision Mr Maduro would make", a senior American official told journalists.

This article appeared in the The Americas section of the print edition under the headline "Congratulations, you kept out the food and medical supplies"

A Caracas idea

The risks of military intervention in Venezuela

Using force to oust Nicolás Maduro would be horribly risky

Print edition | The Americas Feb 28th 2019

IN PAST DECADES the United States has used force to change governments in the Caribbean basin. Nowadays the country is trying to extricate itself from wars, not get into a new one. Yet President Donald Trump has repeatedly insisted that "all options are on the table" to remove Venezuela's dictator, Nicolás Maduro, from power. What if he means it? Experts think a military intervention would be unwise, for many reasons. Some spoke on condition of anonymity.

A full-scale shock-and-awe invasion would require a formidable logistical and operational effort. The intervention in Panama in 1989, which removed from power Manuel Noriega, a drug-running dictator, involved nearly 26,000 troops, many of whom were already in the country. It was quickly over.

But Panama is a minnow. Venezuela is a mountainous country twice the size of Iraq. It has large cities. In such conditions, the United States' high-tech weaponry confers less of an advantage. Each of the presumed objectives—detaining Mr Maduro, installing a new government, organising elections and allowing in aid—would be a big task, involving large numbers of boots on the ground.

No doubt the superpower would defeat Venezuela's 130,000-strong armed forces. "The Venezuelan military would disintegrate very quickly," says Evan Ellis of the US Army War College. Yet that would merely bring on a second problem. A new government would need that same army to maintain order. Although many ordinary Venezuelans would welcome an invasion, others would resist. Thousands of gangs and militias could create chaos. "Some of them would fight for Maduro, some would fight for Venezuela, but many more would take up arms to repel a Yankee invasion," notes an analyst at a think-tank that is connected to the Pentagon. Francisco Toro, founding editor of Caracas Chronicles, an independent news site, warns of the danger of creating "Libya in the Caribbean".

Trouble could spill over into Colombia, especially if that country participated in a military operation. Even after making peace with the FARC guerrilla group in 2016 Colombia is fighting small insurgencies. Outlaw groups include the ELN, which shelters in Venezuela. Hence a third risk: starting a regional conflict. "I don't think there's a military solution to this that doesn't create the likely situation of a protracted regional war," says Cynthia Arnson of the Wilson Centre in Washington.

A fourth complication is that any intervention has to reckon with the role of countries that back Mr Maduro's regime, both on the ground and at the United Nations. Thousands of Cubans, including military advisers and intelligence officers but also doctors, are in the country. Luis Almagro, the secretary-general of the Organisation of American States, likens them to an "occupation army". Russia and, more cautiously, China support Mr Maduro; both are able to veto UN backing for a military intervention, which would anyway be hugely controversial.

If a major American intervention is so problematic, what about a minor one? Perhaps willing partners could put the boots on the ground, limiting the United States' role to providing logistical and other support. That, however, would not mean a smaller operation or an easier one. A less direct approach would be to arm anti-Maduro groups. But memories of the Contras in Nicaragua should quickly squash that temptation. More plausibly, intervention could be confined to securing delivery of humanitarian aid, through air drops and safe zones along the border. "That would be the only sort of military intervention that would be remotely feasible given history and current circumstances," says Craig Deare, who briefly co-ordinated Venezuela policy at the National Security Council in 2017. Yet even that might require significant muscle, including the destruction of Venezuela's air defences and aircraft.

All this explains why, for all the talk about what may be on the table, it does not yet appear to be an imminent plan. "I can dispel the theory that there is a military option for Venezuela," says a defence official in Washington. She denies that staff are being asked to draw up plans.

That could change if Mr Maduro hangs on for months despite a deepening humanitarian disaster and a mass exodus of refugees. American officials warn that violence against Americans (which was what triggered the intervention in Panama) would change the situation. So might any attempt to harm Mr Guaidó or his family. A military option, for all its difficulties, cannot quite be ruled out.

This article appeared in the The Americas section of the print edition under the headline "A Caracas idea"

Bello

Uncovering Peru's neglected splendours

The country fails to make the most of its recent archaeological finds

Print edition | The Americas Feb 28th 2019

ONE NIGHT in 1987 the police woke Walter Alva, a Peruvian archaeologist, and invited him to come to inspect some stolen gold objects. The tip would lead Mr Alva to discover the intact tomb of a ruler of the Mochica (or Moche) civilisation, whom he dubbed the Lord of Sipán. It held the lord's full regalia of gold breastplates and crowns, exquisite nose- and ear-pieces and a unique necklace of giant gold and silver peanuts.

It was the start of an archaeological revolution in northern Peru. Since then Mochica temples, built from mud reinforced with gravel and shells, have been unearthed at Huaca de la Luna, near the colonial city of Trujillo. They are decorated with embossed and colourfully painted friezes of fanged warlord deities and bound prisoners. In 2005 at a site called El Brujo, Régulo Franco, another archaeologist, found a tomb almost as rich as that of Sipán, but of a woman, now known as the Lady of Cao.

These discoveries underline that ancient Peru was one of the half-dozen cradles of civilisation. It remains a creative place, as its gastronomic boom attests. But modern Peru's dysfunctions are preventing it from reaping the full benefit of the new finds.

The Mochicas thrived from around 100 to 600AD by irrigating the valleys of the coastal desert. Theirs was perhaps the most artistic of Peru's ancient cultures, far more so than the much later Inca empire. Apart from their metallurgical prowess, they were skilled potters, producing sculpted vessels and stirrup-spouted jars on which they recorded their likenesses, lives, animal deities and religious ceremonies. Thanks to the recent tomb discoveries, it is now clear that some of these representations accurately portrayed priests and rulers.

Although the pots and friezes describe warfare and human sacrifice, archaeologists now believe these were rituals to placate the deities of a people acutely vulnerable to drought and flood. "There are no Mochica fortresses, there are temples," says Ricardo Morales of the University of Trujillo, who directs the Huaca de la Luna site. Recent scholarship also suggests that there was no Mochica super-state, but rather a collection of local lordships in each valley, linked by a common religious ideology and iconography. Finding the Lady of Cao "changed our conception of power in ancient Peru", and the role of women within it, notes Mr Franco.

The Sipán treasures are displayed at a superb museum, directed by Mr Alva, in a nearby town. There are museums on site at Huaca de la Luna and El Brujo, both run by non-profit foundations. They represent a kind of miracle. For decades locals lived from tomb-robbing, and Peru's treasures were melted down or sold on an international black market. The country has around 100,000 archaeological sites. It is impossible to police them all.

Although funds are always tight, the archaeologists are trying to win over the locals. Mr Morales says he sees Huaca de la Luna as a "development pole". His project employs 38 staff, while another 98 sell handicrafts to visitors. Peru is developing archaeological skills. Whereas many of the Sipán artefacts were sent to Germany for conservation, this was done on site for the Lady of Cao. The archaeologists say that the biggest impact of their discoveries is on Peruvians' self-esteem. "There wasn't a native hero," says Mr Alva. Now there are several. At the village next to El Brujo, DNA testing is under way to see whether the residents are descended from the Lady of Cao.

Visitor numbers are rising, but remain low. The Sipán museum received 198,000 last year, mostly Peruvians. Despite recent decentralisation, Peru revolves around Lima. The government promotes the Inca sites of Cusco and Machu Picchu, although they are saturated with tourists (1.4m went to Machu Picchu in 2017). Roads in the north are vulnerable to the El Niño flooding that helped to end the Mochica civilisation. Because of a damaged bridge, the fastest bus between Trujillo and Chiclayo, the two main cities, takes almost five hours to cover 200km (125 miles). There are few good hotels. Official incompetence leaves roadsides strewn with rubbish.

Yet from the top of the temple mount at El Brujo the view is breathtaking: the Pacific breakers, the desert and the sugar-cane fields that stretch to the Andean foothills. Turkey vultures glide overhead. The archaeologists have revealed that what once seemed to be desert hillocks were the ramped, decorated and tomb-filled temples of one of the world's most sophisticated early civilisations. They deserve to be far better known.

This article appeared in the The Americas section of the print edition under the headline "Uncovering Mochica splendours"

Bromance on hold

Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un leave Vietnam without a deal

But they promised to keep on trying

Print edition | Asia Feb 28th 2019

THE MESSAGE was hard to miss. "Welcome to Hanoi, city of peace" read the multi-coloured, flashing LED display on the road from the airport into central Hanoi. Placards depicting stylised doves and hands clasped in a deal-sealing shake lined the streets all over town. Even the South Korean pastry chain catering to the press got in on the act and put up posters calling for peace on the Korean peninsula in anticipation of the second meeting between Donald Trump, America's president, and Kim Jong Un, North Korea's dictator, in Vietnam's capital this week.

The decorations turned out to be overly optimistic. On February 28th American officials abruptly cut the summit short, cancelling a "working lunch" and a joint signing ceremony that had been planned for later in the day. Instead they announced that the two leaders would be leaving Hanoi without agreeing on a deal. In a press conference shortly afterwards, Mr Trump said that he and Mr Kim had had a "very productive time" but had ultimately failed to come to an agreement that would work for the United States. "Sometimes you have to walk," the president told reporters.

That was a surprise. Many observers had predicted a narrow deal, in which North Korea might have offered the dismantlement and inspection of its main nuclear site at Yongbyon in return for goodwill gestures by America, such as the establishment of liaison offices in both countries and moves towards a declaration ending the Korean war. The talks' failure will dismay Moon Jae-in, South Korea's president, who had been planning to announce his new vision for economic cooperation on the Korean peninsula at celebrations marking the centenary of the March 1st movement, a rebellion against Japanese colonialism that is celebrated by both Koreas.

However, given the large gap between the two sides' negotiating positions and the lack of agreement in working-level discussions in the run-up to the summit, it had always been optimistic to assume that Mr Trump and Mr Kim would thrash out in a few hours what their negotiators had failed to agree in weeks of talks. At their first meeting in Singapore last June, the two leaders had pledged to establish "new US-DPRK relations" and to build a "lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula". Mr Kim also pledged to work towards "complete denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula".

In the months since, the fuzziness of that statement had led to a deadlock, since the two sides were unable to agree on what any of those commitments actually meant and in what order they should take place. North Korea was adamant that a reset of relations, including security guarantees and, ideally, relief from sanctions, had to precede any moves towards disarmament. America insisted that no concessions would be forthcoming without substantial steps towards disarmament, such as the closure of some of the North's main nuclear sites, verified by international inspectors, or a list of all nuclear facilities and a timeline for their dismantlement. In recent weeks American officials had sounded ever less exacting both in their demands and in the timeframe for achieving them, appearing to accept denuclearisation as a long-term goal that would be reached step by step, if at all. "I'm in no rush," Mr Trump repeatedly said before he travelled to Vietnam, a stance he reiterated even as he entered talks with Mr Kim on the morning of February 28th. Yet even this growing malleability, it seems, was not enough to mollify the North Koreans.

Nonetheless, there was an air of bonhomie. Just as in Singapore, the two leaders exchanged smiles and handshakes in front of an enormous display of American and North Korean flags and congratulated each other on their "successful and great meeting" before most of it had taken place. On Wednesday evening, they could be seen bantering over a dinner of shrimp cocktail, steak, pear-fermented kimchi and hot chocolate cake. In an effort to whet North Korea's appetite for market reforms, a group of officials was taken around a Vietnamese car factory and given a talk on joint ventures while their boss prepared for his meeting. Mr Trump, meanwhile, tweeted about the "AWESOME" opportunity for "my friend Kim Jong Un" to turn North Korea into an economic powerhouse.

In the end, no amount of banter or allusion to future riches could bridge the gap. "It was about the sanctions," Mr Trump confirmed when asked by reporters. "They wanted them lifted entirely but we couldn't do that." North Korea was offering too little—in essence, apparently, some form of access to Yongbyon. Both Mr Trump and Mike Pompeo, America's secretary of state, emphasised that "real progress" had been made at the summit. They said that the relationship with North Korea continued to be productive, that Mr Kim had promised to stick to his moratorium on tests of nuclear devices and missiles and that they were hoping to make headway on an agreement in the weeks and months ahead.

Mr Trump and his aides seem to have concluded that walking away will do less harm to America's security than showering North Korea with concessions without gaining much in return. They are also implicitly admitting that denuclearisation is a

long process rather than something that can be achieved overnight, as Mr Trump had previously implied. The calm mood that has prevailed on the Korean peninsula for the past year is clearly preferable to the nuclear brinkmanship of 2017. However, according to security analysts and intelligence services, even though Mr Kim is no longer conducting tests, he is still expanding his nuclear programme. Mr Trump's insistence that there is "no rush" to disarm North Korea suggests a preference for a deal that is much less ambitious than ridding the world of Mr Kim's nukes: ensuring that they are not used.

This article appeared in the Asia section of the print edition under the headline "Bromance on hold"

Getting out of the house

Why Bangladesh's divorce rate is rising

First women get jobs, then they get ideas

Print edition | Asia Feb 28th 2019

IT WAS WHEN Nasrin Khaleque got a job that she realised her marriage "was not normal". None of her female colleagues seemed to have husbands who checked to see what they were up to ten times a day, or who objected if they went out for coffee after work. She told her husband she wanted a divorce. "I realised I didn't have to put up with it," she says.

According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, the number of applications for divorce has increased by 34% in the past seven years. More and more are filed by women, especially in cities. Not long ago, women could not initiate divorces. During marriage ceremonies, the presiding registrar would ask the husband and his family if they wanted to give the bride the right to seek a divorce, says Fawzia Karim Firoze, president of the Bangladesh National Woman Lawyers' Association. "Of course many, if not most, families said 'no'." A legal change means women now enjoy the right as a matter of course. But they still have to give a reason for wanting a divorce, such as infidelity. Men do not.

For the poorest and the richest, says Mrs Firoze, divorce was never that unusual. Among the poor, marriages are seldom official, allowing men to abandon one wife for another easily. As for the rich, "Wealth buys certain freedoms." But among the middle classes, divorce has been rare: "They face the most stigma. What will my family say? What will other people say?"

That is changing. The rate of divorce is increasing across the board, but particularly among the middle classes, according to Tania Haque of Dhaka University. Internet access and social media mean women are more easily able to communicate with friends and to lead lives outside their marriage. "This makes the prospect of divorce seem less daunting."

With greater access to a world outside the home come changing expectations. Ms Haque believes that popular Indian soap operas have helped to propagate a more liberated world view. For both men and women, she adds, social media have also made it easier to have affairs. Sabrina Saba Mumu, who left her husband after he had an affair, says that her mother's generation would have tolerated their husbands' infidelities. She and her friends are less accepting. "We want marriages that are equal partnerships," she adds, "not a relationship where the man is the boss." That means sharing housework and child care, too.

Most importantly, more and more women have jobs. In 1974 women were just 4% of the labour force. In 2016 they were 36% of it. Much of this is down to the booming garment industry, which employs mostly women. Earning a salary makes leaving a bad marriage financially possible.

Many men are unhappy about these changes. Ms Saba Mumu says her husband wanted her to look after him the way his mother did, but, as a successful research scientist, she "didn't have time to cook all his meals and do everything else he asked". Miss Khaleque's husband thought that because she came from a small town she "wouldn't be so ambitious". He forced her to wear a headscarf to work and forbade her from talking to male colleagues. After she had their daughter, he tried to stop her working altogether, saying that she belonged at home.

Religious groups are also troubled. One of the most prominent, Hefazat-e-Islam ("Protectors of Islam"), formed in 2010 partly in response to plans to change inheritance laws to make them more favourable to women. When Hefazat supporters later marched on the capital calling for stringent segregation of the sexes, that was widely perceived as a call for women to stay at home, especially by the city's many female garment-workers. Hefazat also rails against adultery and "shamelessness".

Hefazat's hectoring has not stopped the divorce rate from rising. But the social stigma for men and, especially, women who seek divorce remains strong. "In hindsight leaving was the easy part," says Miss Khaleque. "My family's judgment since has been harder to take."

This article appeared in the Asia section of the print edition under the headline "Getting out of the house"

Welcome, sort of

Japan's plan to let in more low-skilled migrants is half-baked

The rules are too woolly and too onerous, and support for new arrivals too scant

Print edition | Asia Feb 28th 2019

CHO LAN spreads out papers on the table as she explains that her job, sewing women's clothing at a small factory in Gifu, a prefecture in central Japan, was based on lies. The 51-year-old Chinese worker came to Japan in 2015 on a foreign-trainee visa, hoping to earn a higher salary. But she says the details on her pay-slips bear no relationship to the number of hours worked (which she meticulously documented in notepads and with videos of the factory clock) or the pay she received. "I feel very tricked," she says. Her story is echoed by many like her, says Ken Kai, the (also Chinese) head of a shelter in Gifu where Ms Cho is now staying.

From April Japan will for the first time openly accept low-skilled workers in certain industries facing labour shortages. That will remove one of the lies from stories like Ms Cho's: neither she nor the firm she worked for believed she was a trainee (she had 20 years of experience in her field). Japanese firms have long used that scheme, on paper designed to give workers from poor countries the chance to develop skills to take home, to recruit low-skilled workers. Others enter the country on visas meant for students or people of Japanese descent. Now they will be able to come honestly. Workers will be able to change jobs, which they could not under the trainee scheme. And although Shinzo Abe, Japan's prime minister, often states that they will not be able to bring their families or stay indefinitely, the new visa in fact opens up a path to both.

But the scheme does not resolve all the complaints of low-skilled migrants. "The politicians did not debate the power imbalance that causes the issues," says Ippei Torii of the Solidarity Network with Migrants Japan, an NGO. Yoshihisa Saito of Kobe University reckons that in reality workers will struggle to change jobs. They will, for example, be allowed to move only within the same industry. Foreign workers also depend more heavily on their employer than in other countries, for example for help getting housing. Many landlords will not rent to foreigners, and the ones who do require a guarantor.

Too little is being done to tackle many of the problems facing low-skilled workers in Japan, says Yuichiro Tamaki, the head of the opposition Democratic Party for the People. It is not uncommon for migrants to do too much overtime or to be underpaid. (Ms Cho says she often worked from 6am to midnight). Companies often get away with breaking laws, such as not paying the minimum wage. It does not help that the most desperate demand for foreign workers is in rural areas, where bosses are not always aware of laws, says Misa Matsuzaki, who runs Work Japan, a job site for blue-collar foreign workers.

It is unclear how the government will stamp out other problems, such as physical and verbal abuse, or the use of dodgy brokers. There are only a handful of support centres and hotlines for complaints, many run by NGOs. Much of the new law is unclear, says Mr Saito. The government says, for example, that companies must help workers learn Japanese. Yet it remains to be decided exactly what that means. As a foreigner it can be difficult to do simple things like get a mobile phone or open a bank account, says Ms Matsuzaki.

Getting workers to Japan in the first place could be hard, too. They must pass two exams, to show job-relevant skills and some degree of proficiency in Japanese. Officials admit that many of the necessary foreign test centres have yet to be set up, and that tests may be too difficult to attract the 350,000-odd workers Japan reckons it needs over the next five years. In February Japan said it would lower the Japanese-language requirements for nursing-care workers admitted under the trainee scheme, as fewer had come than expected.

"If my issue gets resolved, I would think about continuing to work here," says Ms Cho—the money is good. "But all my friends and family at home say to come back home; that working here is bad." Even some government officials admit that the law was enacted in haste, because of pressure from business. If Japan wants to end its labour shortage, it needs to ensure that migrants are treated decently.

This article appeared in the Asia section of the print edition under the headline "Welcome, sort of"

Criminal injustice

How an Australian police force used lawyers to snitch on mobsters

A scandal means that convicted drug lords and gangsters may have to be released

Print edition | Asia Feb 28th 2019

POLICE IN THE state of Victoria spent millions of dollars trying to keep their arrangement with Informer 3838 a secret. She was a young criminal barrister who snitched on some of Australia's most notorious drug lords while she was representing them in the 1990s and 2000s. The informant, whose name is protected by the courts, claims her actions helped convict nearly 400 criminals. She also violated their right to confidentiality and possibly, their chances of a fair trial. Dozens of gangsters could walk free now the affair has become public.

The police claimed the lawyer would be murdered if her clients discovered she had double-crossed them. But the High Court lifted suppression orders on the case in December, saying that faith in the courts was more important than her personal safety. Informer 3838 had committed "fundamental and appalling breaches" of her duties as a barrister, it ruled. Police had "corrupted" prosecutions and "debased fundamental principles of the criminal justice system". A royal commission is investigating.

Before that inquiry began in February the police admitted that the lawyer had been dishing dirt for a decade longer than they previously thought: from 1995 to 2009. Neither was she alone. Six other legal clerks, secretaries and solicitors were on police books, some as recently as 2016. Other states are asking whether their forces resorted to similar tactics. More than 20 prisoners were told last year that they might have grounds to appeal against convictions secured using ill-gotten information. Three are already doing so. If other professionals snitched on their clients, it follows that more sentences could be in jeopardy.

Melbourne was shaken by the gang wars that raged between 1998 and 2010. At least 36 mobsters were killed in that period, and police were desperate to punish the perpetrators. But citizens' right to confidentiality when speaking to their lawyers is enshrined in law. "Police shouldn't ask and lawyers shouldn't tell," says Arthur Moses, president of the Law Council of Australia. Officers knew that well. Ron Iddles, a former detective, reckons that up to 15 senior policemen turned a blind eye to the arrangement with Informer 3838. "They saw the risks," he said in a television interview, "but there was directions from above."

This is not the only controversy to cast a shadow over Victoria Police. This year officers in the state have been accused of falsifying a witness statement and of battering innocents. One victim was a meekly compliant pensioner arrested for drunk driving who was knocked out by an angry copper (he kept his job). Another was an aboriginal teenager who was arrested despite not remotely fitting the description of the criminal the police were hunting, and allegedly assaulted. Complaining about brutality seems futile, though. Most misconduct allegations are referred to the police themselves for investigation. In cases of assault, less than 4% are ever proven.

Last year a parliamentary committee recommended sweeping reforms to that system, saying that Victoria's anti-corruption watchdog, IBAC, should be given more power to investigate misconduct. But the state government has not enacted the changes. Other states have conducted far more sweeping inquiries into police abuses and corruption. The last such review in Victoria occurred in the 1970s, according to Colleen Lewis, a retired criminology professor. Darren Palmer, a criminologist at Deakin University, complains of "25 years of serious mismanagement in policing in Victoria". That will take more than a royal commission to fix.

This article appeared in the Asia section of the print edition under the headline "Criminal injustice"

Banyan

Why South Korea and Japan still can't put the past behind them

Ghosts of the second world war still divide America's crucial East Asian allies

Print edition | Asia Feb 28th 2019

ONE HUNDRED years ago this week, 33 Korean intellectuals called for independence from the colonial overlord, Japan. Its gendarmes struggled to contain the revolt this sparked, in which over 800,000 Koreans took part. At least 900 Koreans were killed. In one notorious incident police locked protesters in a church and burned it down.

To mark the anniversary, South Korea's president, Moon Jae-in, is encouraging hundreds of commemorative events in the coming weeks. Japanese diplomats are nervous about the beating Japan is to get. For Mr Moon, the founding of a provisional government by exiles in Shanghai, as the March 1st movement was being suppressed, more neatly marks the birth of modern Korea than the creation of the Republic of Korea in 1948. After all, that took place, somewhat embarrassingly, under American tutelage. The first president, Syngman Rhee, was a dictator. And only two years later the country was plunged into a civil war that has left the peninsula still cruelly divided today.

History is messy and painful. Even today few Koreans acknowledge that millions of their compatriots collaborated with the Japanese. Far better to define the Korean character as emanating, pure and brave, from a far-distant moment when it revealed itself in opposition to a monster. For some politicians, Japan-bashing is part of the point.

But relations between Japan and South Korea are bad enough already. Mr Moon has undermined an agreement between his predecessor, Park Geun-hye, and Shinzo Abe, Japan's prime minister, meant at last to resolve the issue of Korean "comfort women"—tens of thousands forced during the second world war to have sex with soldiers in imperial army brothels. In return for (yet another) Japanese apology and ¥1bn ($9.3m), South Korea was to stop using the issue as a diplomatic wedge, and to remove the statue of a comfort woman outside the Japanese embassy in Seoul. Half of the money has gone unpaid, and the statue remains.

Things got worse last year when South Korea's Supreme Court ordered two Japanese industrial giants to compensate South Koreans forced to work for them during the war. Japan is furious. It says the treaty of 1965 establishing formal relations settled all colonial-era claims in return for $800m, $6.3bn in today's money, in aid and loans. (The issue of the comfort women arose later.) The South's then dictator—Ms Park's father, Park Chung-hee—used the money to kick-start development rather than succour victims.

Then, in December, Japan claimed a South Korean destroyer in the Sea of Japan had locked its fire-control radar onto a Japanese maritime-surveillance plane—highly provocative, if true. Denying it, the South Korean government accused the plane of buzzing an operation to rescue a stricken North Korean fishing vessel. This is a sensitive sea: South Korea is neuralgic over Japan's claim to Dokdo, a remote group of islets.

At least relations among ordinary Koreans and Japanese are good—last year 7.5m South Koreans visited Japan. But as Park Cheol-hee of Seoul National University puts it, leaders are squandering the chances that warmth affords, at a time of growing regional peril. Certainly, Japan is to blame too. Its wartime apologies came thick and fast in the 1990s, when it was keen to be seen to be doing the right thing. These days Mr Abe and his government are more cynical—and fed up. It is popular to decry remorse as "masochism". Mr Abe has even suggested that comfort women weren't coerced.

Worried about its two allies falling out, America urges them to overcome historical differences. That's blithe. The United States never acknowledges its own contributions to the region's difficult history. In 1905 it gave Japan a free hand in Korea. As the occupying power in the late 1940s, it put a stop to Japan's lively examination of its wartime guilt in order to ensure the country was onside during the cold war.

In 1951, by evading the matter of rightful ownership when helping Japan draw a line under the war in the Treaty of San Francisco, America laid the ground for Dokdo's present controversy. And leading up to the 1965 treaty, when America had bills to pay in Vietnam and wanted Japan to pony up in South Korea, it urged both sides to adopt only vague statements about "remorse for the past" in favour of looking to the future. Today's problems are a reminder: a "future-oriented" relationship can't start without a proper reckoning with the past.

This article appeared in the Asia section of the print edition under the headline "You started it"