

# Happy Birthday, www!

Mr Berners-Lee's creation can be changed for the better

On March 12, 1989, a 33-year-old scientist at the Physics Research Lab of Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire (CERN, which is a European Council for Nuclear Research) put forward a project proposal for "information management", which his boss thought "vague but exciting". Timothy Berners-Lee thought there was a new way to "share information about accelerators and experiments". He named it "Mesh". By the time he had written the code, he was calling it the "World Wide Web". Mr Berners-Lee was one among a bunch of nerdy academics who used a communication system called the Internet. People using it sent each other emails, shared files, and fought flame wars on

message-boards. His big insight was that the Internet could be made a searchable, indexable store of information by "meshing" it with hypertext (text with links referencing other digital resources), and uniform resource locators (URLs). Mr Berners-Lee created a "hypertext markup language" (HTML), and wrote the first browser and web server. CERN released the code into the public domain and changed the world. The Internet was funded by America's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) in the 1970s, as a tool for communications in the aftermath of nuclear war. When it became the www, with URLs and hyperlinks, it was transformed into a ubiquitous resource.

Thirty years after Sir Timothy (he was knighted in 2004 for "services to the global development of the Internet") had his flash of inspiration, it is hard to imagine a world without the Web. It ranks up there with the printing press and internal combustion engines as an agent of disruption and change. It is hard to overestimate the difference it has made. It has destroyed multiple business models and enabled entirely new ones. Think Amazon, Google, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Netflix, Uber, Airbnb, Pornhub, BuzzFeed, Wikipedia, and all their clones. In our age of mobile communications, social media resources, and locational services, the Web is all-pervasive. It is used to track the migrations of whales, and to get the best prices for farm produce. It is used to access balance sheets and to shift assets across banking systems and financial markets. It is a powerful force-multiplier for distance-learning and an indispensable tool for the delivery of public services, and used by businesses to track activity along value-

chains and to advertise and market products and services. It is used to monitor patients in the health care industry and by ordinary folks to keep in touch in real-time with friends and to disseminate pictures, video, and text that tells us about their lives.

Like all technology, the Web is value-neutral. It can be a force for good and can also be used for evil. It has been a huge aid to coping with disasters like tsunamis, earthquakes, train accidents and terror attacks. It has helped activists organise effective campaigns to topple oppressive regimes and to expose criminal corporations and corrupt politicians. At the same time, terrorists have used it to plan and coordinate sophisticated attacks, and livestream them. Oppressive regimes have used it to spy on their own citizens. It is vulnerable to innumerable, ingenious new forms of fraud, and other crimes. Alongside providing access to vital information, it is also a conduit for vast amounts of disinformation

that has vitiated electoral processes in many nations. It is the ultimate platform for vicious trolling and abuse and for the dissemination of multiple forms of hate speech and racism. There are real fears that it could become an oligopoly, a dystopia run by a few transnational corporations, hand-in-glove with political establishments, no matter how repressive.

Mr Berners-Lee now runs the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), a non-profit spearheading a global attempt to keep the Web open, with freedom of speech and equal access. His new "Contract for the Web" outlines principles to make this happen. As the creator himself has said, given how much the web has changed in the past 30 years, it would be defeatist and unimaginative to assume that the web can't be changed for the better in the next 30. If the world gives up on building a better web now, then the web will not have failed the world. The world will have failed the web.

# Inclusiveness key to ending poverty

It's time to rewrite the rules of good governance, markets and systems to better serve the poor and ensure that they are able to escape poverty permanently

RODGER VOORHIES

In May 2018, India lost its unfortunate title of being the nation with the largest number of poor people. In fact, India currently boasts one of the fastest rates of poverty reduction in the world, with 44 Indians rising out of poverty every minute. According to a June 2018 Brookings Institute study, less than three per cent of Indians, or 20 million people, will remain in extreme poverty by 2022, and it could be eliminated completely by 2030.

Much of this success can be attributed to strong and rapid economic growth; and that growth will need to be sustained over the coming decades. However, in order to reach the Sustainable Development Goal of total poverty eradication, India will need to address something much bigger than its GDP. It must transform the array of markets and systems throughout society that consistently exclude the poor and conspire to keep them either in poverty or perpetually on the verge of falling back into it.

To understand the true plight of the poor in developing countries, we must look at this telling statistic: Anywhere from 10 per cent to 40 per cent of the low-income population emerges from poverty every few years, while 10 per cent to 30 per cent fall back into it over the same period. What this means is that much of the world's poor are hardworking and industrious enough to lift themselves up, but outside forces are continually knocking them back down.

What are these forces? They include health-related emergencies, a death in the family, livestock scourges, and crop failures. Poor families simply don't have the means to overcome these calamities, which can have an outsized impact on their finances and well-being. But beyond these devastating tragedies are the daily obstacles that poverty presents, from poor sanitation to lack of electricity to unreliable law enforcement to no access to formal financial services.

Governments build systems to support their citizens — keep them healthy, help them succeed financially, provide transportation and education, and make their lives easier. But while these systems are intended to work for everyone, they often don't work for the poor. Low-income people don't necessarily have the resources to apply for a loan, access medical treatment, use public transportation, pay school fees, or weather bouts of unemployment. The situation is even worse for women and girls, who have fewer employment and educational opportunities than men. Essentially, society's systems are not built to serve all people equally.

That's why it's time to rewrite the rules of good governance, markets, and systems to better serve the poor and ensure they are able to escape poverty permanently. In India, that's exactly what's being done in many aspects of society, including agriculture, education, financial services, sanitation, technology, infrastructure, and regulations.

Most poor people in India rely on agriculture for their livelihood, so programmes that work to improve crop yields, agricultural practices, and access to markets go a long way toward helping low-income families achieve financial stability and independence. For example, in the Muzaffarpur district in Bihar, a farmer group helps individual producers collectivise and reap the benefits of aggregation by offering training in quality control; information about best practices; and access to packaging, transportation, technology, credit, and high-quality inputs such as seeds and fertilisers. When these farmers were on their own, they often suffered from fixed contract pricing and price volatility. As a group, they have greater power to negotiate prices and reach new markets throughout the country.

There are about 4.5 billion people living without safe sanitation throughout the world. In India, nearly 40 per



Some 70 million Indians live in extreme poverty, and tens of millions more are at risk of sinking back into destitution

cent of people practice open defecation. This leaves a large percentage of Indians to deal with serious health threats that can have a devastating impact on their livelihoods. Because traditional sewage systems are too expensive and unwieldy for semi-urban and rural communities in India, it's critical to design non-sewered systems that offer a cost-effective, decentralised, and safe solution.

**Between 10 and 40 per cent of the low-income population emerges from poverty every few years, while 10-30 per cent fall back into it over the same period**

In Devanahalli, Bengaluru, where 60 per cent of households use onsite sanitation containment systems such as septic tanks and pit latrines, project designers at the Consortium for DEWATS Dissemination (CDD) created a plant that separates liquid from solid waste, treats waste, and produces compost and water that are safe for agricultural use — all without using any electricity. In less than a year, the amount of waste being treated in Devanahalli has increased from zero per cent to 40 per cent. And the plant, which is relatively inexpensive to build and run, has been used as a model by local municipalities and state governments that are looking to make similar investments.

Lack of access to basic financial services such as savings accounts and business loans is another major problem that keeps people stuck in poverty and unable to

overcome financial emergencies. Because of the ubiquity of mobile phones, including among the poor, more and more of the 1.7 billion people who live outside the formal financial system are getting connected to formal financial services like bank accounts, credit, and insurance.

India has been at the forefront of investing in the technologies and programmes that expand digital financial inclusion. For example, new government regulatory rules are allowing the private sector to create payment banks that offer a wider variety of financial services to the poor. And the government launched a programme called PMJDY in 2014 to help poor people open bank accounts and receive benefits through them. Particular attention is being paid to increasing women's access to and use of financial services, which has been shown to lead to greater empowerment and independence.

Because of India's dedication to the goal of eradicating poverty, it has achieved tremendous success over the past decade. Still, there are currently 70.6 million Indians living in extreme poverty, and tens of millions more who are just one emergency away from sinking back into destitution. In order to finish the job and break the cycle of poverty, we need to redesign the critical markets and systems that bring safety, stability, and prosperity to the poor.

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# A China trade deal will be a triumph for Donald Trump

SITHARAM GURUMURTHI

Friction between China and the United States dates back even prior to the establishment of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), but President Donald Trump will likely achieve what many of his predecessors could not. The high-level talks between the US and China were resumed on February 21, with the US team composed of the US Trade Representative, the treasury secretary, the commerce secretary and economic advisors from the White House, while the Chinese delegation was headed by President Xi Jinping's special envoy, Vice Premier Liu He.

The most crucial element of the ongoing trade negotiations was the reduction in the bilateral trade surplus between China and the US. In 2018, China exported \$493.49 billion worth goods to the US, while China's imports from the US were a meagre \$111.16 billion, or 7.2 per cent of US exports. Mr Trump had asked China to restrict its exports to the US to the level of its purchases, namely, \$111.16 billion, with March 2 as the deadline. If the matter was not resolved by that date, the US would go ahead and impose taxes on \$200 billion in Chinese goods from 10 to 25 per cent.

When the whole world, particularly South Korea, Taiwan and India were gearing themselves up to exploit the huge opportunity to penetrate the US market, China's willingness to hike its US imports from \$111.16 billion to \$1.2 trillion reported by CNBC TV on February 22 came as a shocker to all these expectant countries. Bloomberg TV announced China's proposal to buy \$30 billion worth of agricultural products from the US, including soya bean, corn and wheat. This will undoubtedly provide great relief to American farmers who have been hit badly by the retaliatory taxes imposed by China on soya bean in the recent past.

Needless to say, such an unexpectedly steep rise in US imports from \$111.16 billion to \$1.2 trillion will be a great moral booster to the US economy. When China increases its US imports to \$1.2 trillion, it will be well within its rights to increase its exports to the US from \$493.49 billion to \$1.2 trillion, which will be purely a reciprocal arrangement between the two nations. This will shut the doors

for all other exporting countries, such as South Korea, Taiwan, India, Vietnam and Malaysia.

Such a steep rise in US exports to China, if it comes through, will be a shot in the arm for Mr Trump. Past presidents of the US, from George HW Bush (who had earlier served as the US Ambassador to China) to Bill Clinton, George W Bush and Barack Obama, could hardly make any headway to resolve the trade war between the world's two largest economies. Mr Trump's achievement will be particularly significant. During his election campaign, he had promised to fix "China's long-time abuse of the broken international system and unfair practices."

In this connection, one should note that China is the world's largest buyer of US treasury bonds and hence the largest holder of the sovereign debt of the United States. In fact, China has been accumulating US treasury bonds over a period of time, owing to the large trade deficit between the two countries.

According to US Treasury sources, China cut its treasury holdings from \$1.184 trillion in December 2017 to \$1.123 trillion in December 2018.

Incidentally, Japan, the second-largest holder of US treasury bonds, also cut its US treasury holdings from \$1.0641 trillion to \$1.0426 trillion during the same period.

CNBC TV reported that Larry Fink, CEO of the world's largest asset management fund, Black Rock, is worried about the long-term impact of the US-China trade war on US treasury bonds. The US federal budget deficit has been rising over the last six years and stood at \$799 billion in 2018, and is expected to touch \$1 trillion in 2019. As China starts dumping its US treasury holdings, it would be selling them at a loss that would mean loss of capital; in the process it will weaken the dollar. As a result, US exports are bound to become attractive.

All trade-related issues, including intellectual property, are likely to reach a final settlement at a summit to be held between Mr Trump and Mr Xi at Mar-a-Lago, Florida, later this month (however, no date has been set for the proposed meeting).

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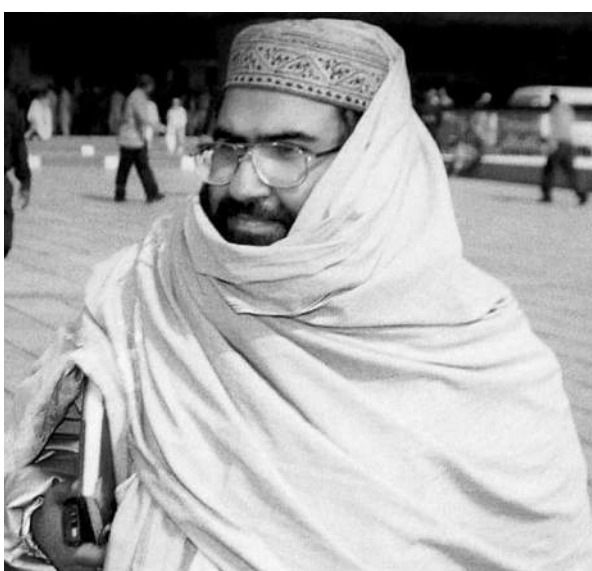
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### After China's action on Azhar, govt must keep up diplomacy

Beijing has economic and strategic leverage over Islamabad

China's decision to block the listing of Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar as a global terrorist at the UN Security Council is both a setback to India's post-Pulwama diplomatic strategy and a reality check on ties with China at present. After the February 14 attack, claimed by the JeM, the government had made the listing of Azhar a focus in its diplomatic efforts. China, as the one country that has refused to allow Azhar's name on the list, is well aware of the evidence against him, but is not ready to withdraw its objections. It is clear that despite India-China relations improving after the Wuhan summit in April 2018, China is unwilling to align itself with India on its concerns on cross-border terrorism emanating from Pakistan.

China's stand is regrettable and condemnable, and it has been consistent on this issue. The government may be more successful if it identifies the incentives it can offer China in the next few months to review its position. While some of those incentives would be bilateral, the Chinese spokesperson's hint that dialogue between New Delhi and Islamabad, and even possible "triangular" talks including Beijing, is indicative of China's thinking. While listing Azhar at the UNSC is an



unfinished task, the larger issue remains: to ensure that Pakistan takes substantive action against Azhar, the JeM and other terror groups that are threatening India. China, with its economic and strategic leverage with Pakistan, may be better-placed to help in this matter.

The Hindu, March 15

### Jobs for women symbolic

Socio-cultural conditions must change

The chief minister of Odisha and leader of the Biju Janata Dal, Naveen Patnaik, is reserving 33 per cent of his party's tickets for the Lok Sabha elections for women. It has certainly posed a challenge for his political rivals. But he has to address a challenge nearer home himself: getting women candidates for seven of 21 Lok Sabha seats may be considerably easier than filling 33 per cent seats with women in the assembly. The Congress president, Rahul Gandhi, is obviously of the same mind. He has promised 33 per cent reservation for women in Central jobs in addition to the revival of the lapsed women's reservation bill if his party is elected.

But is reservation the way

The Telegraph, March 15

### Game over

Rajkot police shouldn't play nanny

The Rajkot police are going where no one in khaki has gone before. They are now battling the ostensible epidemic of virtual violence unleashed by the award-winning video game PUBG, or Player Unknown Battle-ground. They didn't go online to do it, and contented themselves with creeping up on young men playing the game in public places and booking them. Their depth of focus seems to provide yet more evidence of the threat that the game presents to society, and apparently vindicates the notification that the Rajkot police commissioner issued against PUBG a few days ago, banning it from his turf.

But PUBG is not substantially different from other shooter games, a category

that's been popular with online gamers for over three decades. The game has about 400 million active players, who are just waking up to the news that 10 of their peers in India are in trouble with the law, for disobeying a local notification banning the game. Parents are worried about PUBG (one even complained to the prime minister), though it is no more violent than a lot of music and programming that children are exposed to. Besides, the Constitution assures citizens the right to communicate with others, even through a video game. The nanny state has no business trying to attenuate this right through a notification.

The Indian Express, March 15