

Shift in the Middle East

Saudi Arabia is adapting to the US' absence

AVIJIT GOEL
GLOBAL EYE

In quoting Ella Leya from *The Orphan Sky*, a piece embodies the Middle East, "... a desert of shifting sand dunes. Unpredictable. Erratic. Harmony changes into dissonance, the immediate outlives the profound, esoteric becomes clichéd. And all, vice versa." Middle Eastern history has been replete with incidents barely predictable until a few days into their existence, the immediate always outliving the profound, with harmony and dissonance as interchangeable as the central characters behind them.

Around two years ago, the Middle East was a house split down many rooms. The coalition of Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain imposed a blockade on Qatar in an effort to bring about a regime change in the small Emirate. The traditional rivalry between Saudi and Iran touched new heights with proxy wars in Yemen and Syria and the re-imposing of US sanctions on Iran. The Saudi-UAE coalition seemed unstoppable in Yemen, while the future looked bleak for Iran and Qatar. "We are a primary target for the Iranian regime," Prince Mohammed of Saudi had said in 2017. "We won't wait for the battle to be in Saudi Arabia. Instead, we'll work so that the battle is for them in Iran." Circa November 2019. There seem to be thawing of tenuous relationships in war-ridden Yemen, easing of the blockade against Qatar and most unbelievably, the semblance of some reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

There's one reason for this inexplicable chain of events — the US' intentions not to dirty its hands in the Middle East anymore. Thought through or not, two indications by the US in the last few months have made the previous blurred writing on the wall clear to Saudi Arabia. The US' withdrawal from Syria and its non-response to the September 14 attacks on Saudi oil

facilities by Houthi rebels (Iran was accused of the attacks by proxy but has denied responsibility) have been a painful awakening for Saudi Arabia. Trump did some tough talking against Iran after the attack, but avoided military response. This would have raised serious questions on the US' commitment to Saudi security, which has underpinned the strategic relationship for years now.

For a coalition used to raw power by mutual support, the hold isn't as mighty anymore. Fitch downgraded Saudi Aramco's rating following the September 14 attack, that temporarily slashed its output by half. This sent a shiver down the Saudi family, as Aramco was preparing for an IPO and the timing could not have been worse.

Qatar, on the other hand, held on almost seamlessly despite the sanctions and the blockade and managed its international media narrative well. That the football teams of Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain will now take part in the Gulf Cup in Qatar is a clear sign of reconciliation.

The Iranian ploy to keep its heels dug in — despite mounting international pressure — seems to have paid off, at least in some quarters. Recently, the UAE held direct maritime security talks with Iran, and pulled back from the war in Yemen, where it had allied with the Saudis against the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels. A larger reconciliation seems around the corner.

In recent weeks, there were reports of an olive branch from the Saudi crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman, asking for de-escalation with Iran. Iran welcomed the gesture, stating publicly that it was open to talks with Saudi Arabia.

In just two years, the US' intentions to have drastically changed in the Middle East. Mohammed bin Salman's decisions may be due to re-think on a variety of issues, as Saudi Arabia has realised that it has to bear the burden of war or dissonance in the region alone.

The writer is a geo-political analyst

BOOK REVIEW

For the love of Earth and its beings

Foregoing meat and animal-based products may just help us soften the blow of climate change

UDAY BALAKRISHNAN

Over the past couple of decades, heat waves, floods, cyclones and droughts have ravaged India. Thousands have lost their lives; many of these farmers, who have seen their fields wither and livestock perish.

India is home to some of the most polluted cities in the world. Our rivers are amongst the most abused, the Ganges being a case in point. The country is also running out of groundwater — so swift and voluminous has been its extraction, and so slow the replenishment of the aquifers. The Himalayan glaciers are in retreat and slated to vanish within the next few decades.

It is surprising then, that India's environmental devastation is hardly a talking point amongst politicians and it has never been a poll issue in India. Paradoxically, the only person who has really gone to town about global warming is Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with his emphatic endorsement of the Paris climate accord and his pledge to double India's non fossil-fuel target. Even the usually critical *Economist* accepts that India "for three years in a row has invested more in renewable energy than in fossil fuels".

Sadly, it is also this government, which is seeking to industrialise India on a massive scale in the old-fashioned way, with resource-intensive industries that go hard on India's natural resources. Then there is the unresolved problem of India's huge underproductive cattle population, which contributes significantly to global warming and must be brought down.

Animal agriculture
It is this casual indifference to climate change, even when the evidence is staring at our face, that Jonathan Foer reflects upon in his elegant book of interlinked essays *We are the Weather: Saving the Planet Begins at Breakfast*. Foer seeks to alert the world to the single greatest contributor to climate change — breeding livestock for meat, milk and eggs. "Animal agriculture," he writes, "is responsible for 91 per cent of Amazonian deforestation."

"When researchers at the Worldwatch Institute accounted for emissions that the FAO overlooked," Foer states, "they estimated that livestock are responsible for 32,564 million tons of CO₂e emissions per year, or 51 per cent of annual global emissions — more than all cars, planes, buildings, power plants, and industry combined."

We will never address climate change, Foer tells us, until we acknowledge that our planet is an animal farm. Every year, animal agriculture funnels more than seven times the amount of grain and corn — enough to feed every hungry person on the planet — to animals for affluent people to eat. We might call that crime "genocide."

It is this inequity of climate change that riles Foer: "The richest 10 per cent of the global population is responsible for half the carbon emissions; the poorest half is responsible for 10 per cent. And those who are the least responsible for global warming are often the ones most punished by it."

"Imagine if you had never touched a cigarette in your life but were forced to absorb the health tolls of a chain-smoker on the other side of the planet."

Foer comes down heavily on our singular focus to fossil fuels as being the chief agents of climate change, and he is not seduced by



Title: We are the Weather: Saving the Planet Begins at Breakfast
Author: Jonathan Safran Foer
Publisher: Hamish Hamilton
Price: ₹493

cosmetic measures. The drive towards electric transportation, he convincingly argues, will be a catastrophe if the electricity to power it comes from polluting fossil-fuel run power stations, as they are in countries like China and India. And, "it takes about twice the amount of energy to produce an electric car as it does a conventional one."

Grim reality
Foer is a despairing realist. He knows matters have gone too far to be reversed. He is well aware of the price humanity must pay for its seemingly insatiable hunger for meat and animal-based products. We can neither save the Amazon nor the coral reefs. He is convinced, on sound evidence, that coastal cities cannot be saved from rising sea levels, exclaiming that "The scale of inevitable loss is almost enough to make any further struggle feel futile."

But maybe, we can mitigate the impact of climate change if enough of us as individuals choose to go off meat and other animal products and create a ripple effect within our networks. "We," as the title says, "are the weather".

Foer asks us to accept the devastating reality of climate change and "get down to the hard work of adapting, with moral humility, to our new reality". Here he finds solace in his

Jewish faith of acceptance and resignation.

Foer is justifiably sad at the fact that numbers numb us all, for "each corresponds to an individual, with a family, and idiosyncrasies, and phobias, and allergies, and favorite foods, and recurring dreams, and a song stuck in her head, and a singular handprint, and a particular laugh."

Foer's book has depth and feeling for the human condition in a period of seemingly irreversible decline and demise. It is also very Gandhian in its approach and conclusions. The fourth part, *Dispute With the Soul*, is written in a style startlingly reminiscent of Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*.

Inevitably, for a Jew whose ancestors had died at the hands of the Nazis, the personal impact of the Holocaust is often brought in to amplify the points. His *Notes and Bibliography* are very beautifully put together to make them wonderful reads in themselves.

This excellent and powerful book could have done with a discussion on a prescient report, *Restoring the Quality of Our Environment*, prepared and presented to US President Lyndon Johnson by his Science Advisory Committee in 1965.

The report warned Johnson of melting icecaps, rising sea levels and predicted that "By the year 2000 the increase in atmospheric CO₂ will be close to 25 per cent. This may be sufficient to produce measurable and perhaps marked changes in climate, and will almost certainly cause significant changes in the temperature and other properties of the stratosphere".

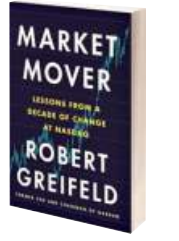
If only Johnson and his successors had considered the report seriously and taken steps to stop climate change in its tracks when it was still possible, we'd be living in a much better world today than one on the brink of extinction. That's a thought!

The reviewer, a former civil servant, teaches at the Indian Institute of Science-Bengaluru

NEW READS



Title: The Game Changers: Transforming India
Author: Vir Sanghvi
Publisher: Westland
Price: ₹199
Journalist and author Vir Sanghvi profiles 10 very different personalities who have changed the winds in their respective industries



Title: Market Mover: Lessons from a Decade of Change at NASDAQ
Author: Robert Greifeld
Publisher: Nicholas Brealey Publishing
Price: ₹599
NASDAQ's former CEO offers a behind-the-scenes look at the events that took place during his tenure and the lessons he learnt



Title: Make Your Own Luck
Authors: Bob Miglani/Rehan Yar Khan
Publisher: Fingerprint Publishing
Price: ₹250
An entrepreneur and a company executive explain how to go about carving your own paths and attaining your goals without waiting for divine intervention

5 THINGS to WATCH OUT for TODAY

■ **Assembly bypolls** to three seats in West Bengal and one in Uttarakhand are set to be held. The counting of votes will happen on November 28. The Pithoragarh seat in Uttarakhand fell vacant following the death of MLA Prakash Pant. The three seats up for elections in West Bengal are: Kaliaganj, Karimpur and Kharagpur Sadar.

■ **The Supreme Court** will again hear the plea filed by the Shiv Sena-NCP-Congress combine against the Maharashtra Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari's decision to swear in Devendra Fadnis as Maharashtra Chief Minister, on November 27.

■ **The Supreme Court** will hear the appeal filed by the CBI seeking cancellation of anticipatory bail granted to former Kolkata police chief Rajeev Kumar by the Calcutta High Court in the Saradha chit fund scam. A Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Sharad Arvind Bobde will hear the appeal.

■ **Huawei will** hold a conference in Shanghai for the launch of Huawei MatePad tablet, Sound X audio and Huawei MateBook D. The main product — the tablet — is likely to come with punch-hole details, magnetic keyboard, and POGO connectors for keyboard attachment.

■ **Honda is** set to launch its fifth-generation City in Thailand. The car is said to have changes in the headlamp, grille and bumper. It is also likely to have touch-screen infotainment system and multi-function steering wheel. This launch will be its world premiere and come with 1.0 lt turbo petrol, 1.5 lt petrol and 1.5 lt diesel engine options.

BY THE WAY DIPANKAR BHATTACHARYA looks at people and professions

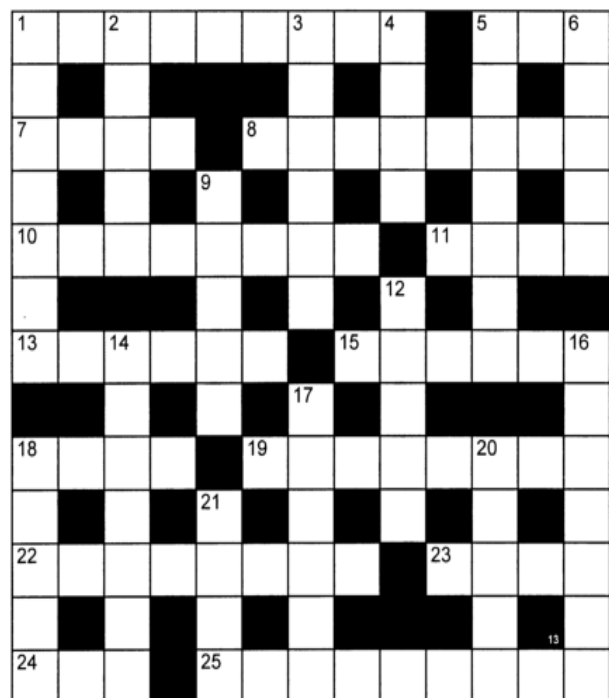


EASY

- ACROSS**
01. Lean old man of Italian comedy (9)
05. To be read as printed (3)
07. Stumble, catch one's foot (4)
08. Blossomed (8)
10. Aircraft body (8)
11. Untamed (4)
13. Dormant, undeveloped (6)
15. Oration (6)
18. Movement of the sea (4)
19. Railway carriage passageway (8)
22. A plan, an offer (8)
23. Leg joint (4)
24. Word signifying agreement (3)
25. Holding fast, stubborn (9)
- DOWN**
01. Compassionate; sad, despicable (7)
02. Pins down (5)
03. Constrain, bind by favour (6)
04. Tidings, intelligence (4)
05. Outlive (7)
06. In secret language (5)
09. Board for walking on (5)
12. Be at play (5)
14. Boring, wearisome (7)
16. Work-straps (7)
17. Sphere of knowledge (6)
18. Partially intoxicated (5)
20. Australian wild dog (5)
21. Mail (4)

SOLUTION: BL Two-way Crossword 1492
ACROSS 01. Plucky 04. Keep up 09. Opinion 10. Blunt 11. Omit 12. Coma 13. Don 15. Gale 16. Move 19. Out 21. Nous 22. Diva 24. Arena 25. Abolish 26. Errant 27. Manner
DOWN 01. Proportionate 02. Uniting 03. Kris 05. Emblazon 06. Pound 07. Patent leather 08. Enjoy 14. Plantain 17. Edition 18. Human 20. Their 23. Coda

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 1493



NOT SO EASY

- ACROSS**
01. Pantomime character with a singular pair of trousers (9)
05. Even if it doesn't sound well, read it as it is (3)
07. Lose one's footing on the journey (4)
08. Feel word was misapplied as it came into bloom (8)
10. See a gulf opening out in body of an aircraft (8)
11. Angry that this card may stand for any other (4)
13. Los Angeles has temporary accommodation hidden (6)
15. What actor has to say about spec he made of it (6)
18. Spring, it may be, bound to sound like it (4)
19. Passage company is right to get shot of, or finish off (8)
22. Marriage offer poor pals make (8)
23. By end of week, need to get joint in (4)
24. A word that agrees with viewers that lose their leader (3)
25. Coat in use maybe with a bulldog quality (9)
- DOWN**
01. Sad it may be, if lit up (7)
02. To be hard as such as get unfortunately slain (5)
03. It will go with bile disorder? Do me a favour! (6)
04. It is made up of bulletins from all quarters (4)
05. Outlive the virus maybe, but have to lose half (7)
06. Fish starts eating delicacy, but not in plain language (5)
09. Wood strip to be walked with a ton of whale-food (5)
12. Recreation of the kind political leader will enter (5)
14. Wearisome diet might be nothing to you and me (7)
16. Straps for working shares broken around top of neck (7)
17. What one is master of no maid can supply (6)
18. Somewhat intoxicated by the gratuities you initially get (5)
20. Wild dog may be dog in trouble (5)
21. An appointment one will put in the pillar-box (4)

BusinessLine TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY

NOVEMBER 25, 1999

Govt won't sell NTPC assets

The Government has decided against pursuing its earlier proposal to sell off National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) assets, according to the Union Power Minister, Mr. P.R. Kumararamangalam. Instead, the Government is mulling a restructuring of NTPC involving clubbing of specified NTPC power stations in a holding company and sale of its equity to the private sector. Speaking to newsmen today after attending a conference on Indo-US relations organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), he said the revised line of thinking was because "the latter option would yield a better market response".

SEBI sets up panel on online trading

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has set up a committee to recommend measures and guidelines for the introduction of trading in the secondary capital markets on the Internet. Headed by Mr. B.P. Pathak, a techno-legal expert, the committee is expected to submit its report by mid-December. The SEBI board, which is likely to meet during the last week of December, is expected to take up the committee's recommendations for consideration.

Lok Pal Bill to be finalised soon: Shourie

The Union Government will soon finalise the Bills on 'Lok Pal' and the 'Right to Information', the Minister of State for Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances, Mr. Arun Shourie, said here today. Talking to newsmen soon after taking charge of his Ministry, Mr. Shourie said the passage of these bills, which are a part of the National Democratic Alliance's (NDA) manifesto, is on the Government's agenda for reforms and "the Prime Minister is personally committed" to their enactment.