

▶ Campus radicals are less powerful than the president. But he will be gone by 2021 or 2025. By contrast, the 37% of American college students who told Gallup that it was fine to shout down speakers of whom they disapprove will be entering the adult world in their millions. So will the 10% who think it acceptable to use violence to silence speech they deem offensive. Such views are troubling, to put it mildly. It does not take many threats of violence to warn people off sensitive topics. And although the left usually insist that the only speech they wish to suppress is the hateful sort, they define this rather broadly. “Hateful” views may include opposing affirmative action, supporting a Republican or suggesting that America is a land of opportunity. Mansfield University of Pennsylvania bans students from sending any message that might be “annoying”. In some Republican states, meanwhile, public universities face pressure to keep climate change off the curriculum. Small wonder most American students think their classmates are afraid to say what they think.

As societies have grown more politically polarised, many people have come to believe that the other side is not merely misguided but evil. Their real goal is to oppress minorities (if they are on the right) or betray the United States (if they are on the left). To this Manichean view, campus radicals have added a second assertion: that words are in themselves often a form of violence, and that hearing unwelcome ideas is so traumatic, especially for disadvantaged groups, that the first job of a university is to protect its faculty and students from any such encounter. Some add that any campus official who disputes this dogma, or who inadvertently violates the ever-expanding catalogue of ta-

boos, should be hounded out of their job.

These ideas are as harmful as they are wrongheaded. Free speech is the cornerstone not only of democracy but also of progress. Human beings are not free unless they can express themselves. Minds remain narrow unless exposed to different viewpoints. Ideas are more likely to be refined and improved if vigorously questioned and tested. Protecting students from unwelcome ideas is like refusing to vaccinate them against measles. When they go out into the world, they will be unprepared for its glorious but sometimes challenging diversity.

The notion that people have a right not to be offended is also pernicious. Offence is subjective. When states try to police it, they encourage people to take offence, aggravating social divisions. One of the reasons the debate about transgender rights in the West has become so poisonous is that some people are genuinely transphobic. Another is that some transgender activists accuse people who simply disagree with them of hate speech and call the cops on them. Laws criminalising “hate speech” are inevitably vague and open to abuse. This is why authoritarian regimes are adopting them so eagerly. A new Venezuelan law, for example, threatens those who promote hatred with 20 years in prison—and prosecutors use it against those who accuse ruling-party officials of corruption.

Governments should regulate speech minimally. Incitement to violence, narrowly defined, should be illegal. So should persistent harassment. Most other speech should be free. And it is up to individuals to try harder both to avoid causing needless offence, and to avoid taking it. ■

Rising seas

A world without beaches

How to prepare for the deluge

THE OCEAN covers 70.8% of the Earth’s surface. That share is creeping up. Averaged across the globe, sea levels are 20cm higher today than they were before people began suffusing the atmosphere with greenhouse gases in the late 1800s. They are expected to rise by a further half-metre or so in the next 80 years; in some places, they could go up by twice as much—and more when amplified by storm surges like the one that Hurricane Sandy propelled into New York in 2012. Coastal flood plains are expected to grow by 12-20%, or 70,000-100,000 square kilometres, this century. That area, roughly the size of Austria or Maine, is home to masses of people and capital in booming sea-facing metropolises. One in seven of Earth’s 7.5bn people already lives less than ten metres above sea level; by 2050, 1.4bn will. Low-lying atolls like Kiribati may be permanently submerged. Assets worth trillions of dollars—including China’s vast manufacturing cluster in the Pearl river delta and innumerable military bases—have been built in places that could often find themselves underwater.

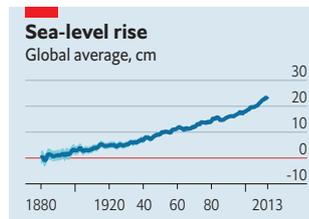
The physics of the sea level is not mysterious. Seawater expands when heated and rises more when topped up by meltwater from sweating glaciers and ice caps. True, scientists debate just how high the seas can rise and how quickly (see Briefing) and politicians and economists are at odds over how best to deal with

the consequences—flooding, erosion, the poisoning of farmland by brine. Yet argument is no excuse for inaction. The need to adapt to higher seas is now a fact of life.

Owing to the inexorable nature of sea-swelling, its effects will be felt even if carbon emissions fall. In 30 years the damage to coastal cities could reach \$1trn a year. By 2100, if the Paris agreement’s preferred target to keep warming below 1.5°C relative to preindustrial levels were met, sea levels would rise by 50cm

from today, causing worldwide damage to property equivalent to 1.8% of global GDP a year. Failure to enact meaningful emissions reductions would push the seas up by another 30-40cm, and cause extra damage worth 2.5% of GDP.

In theory minimising the damage should be simple: construct the hardware (floodwalls), install the software (governance and public awareness) and, when all else fails, retreat out of harm’s way. This does not happen. The menace falls beyond most people’s time horizons. For investors and the firms they finance, whose physical assets seldom last longer than 20 years, that is probably inevitable—though even businesses should acquaint themselves with their holdings’ nearer-term risks (which few in fact do). For local and national governments, inaction is a dereliction of duty to future generations. When they do recognise the problem, they tend to favour multibillion-dollar struc- ▶▶



► tures that take years to plan, longer to erect, and often prove inadequate because the science and warming have moved on.

As with all climate-related risks, governments and businesses have little incentive to work out how susceptible they are. Some highly exposed firms are worried that, if they disclose their vulnerabilities, they will be punished by investors. Governments, notably America's, make things worse by encouraging vulnerable households to stay in harm's way by offering cheap flood insurance. More foolish still, some only reimburse rebuilding to old standards, not new flood-proof ones.

However, there are ways to hold back the deluge. Simple things include building codes that reserve ground levels of flood-prone buildings for car parks and encourage "wet-proofing" of walls and floors with tiles so as to limit the clean-up once floodwaters recede. Mains water, which is desirable in its own right, may stop people without access to it from draining aquifers, which causes land to subside; parts of Jakarta are sinking by 25cm a year, much faster than its sea is swelling. If more ambitious projects are needed to protect dense urban centres, they ought to be built not for the likeliest scenario but for the worst case, and engineered to be capable of being scaled up as needed. The New York region has funnelled \$1bn out of a reconstruction

budget of \$60bn to such experiments in Sandy's wake.

Authorities must also stop pretending that entire coastlines can be defended. Unless you are Monaco or Singapore, they cannot. Elsewhere, people may need to move to higher ground. Bangladesh, for instance, is displacing 250,000 households.

All this requires co-ordination between different levels of government, individuals and companies, not least to prevent one man's levee from diverting water to a defenceless neighbour. Market signals need strengthening. Credit-raters, lenders and insurers are only beginning to take stock of climate risks. Making the disclosure of risks mandatory would hasten the process. And poor, vulnerable places need support. Just \$70bn a year of the \$100bn in pledged climate aid to help them tackle the causes and impact of global warming has materialised. Less than one-tenth of it goes to adaptation. This must change.

Open the floodgates

Actuaries calculate that governments investing \$1 in climate resilience today will save \$5 in losses tomorrow. That is a good return on public investment. Rich countries would be foolhardy to forgo it, but can probably afford to. Many developing countries, by contrast, cannot. All the while, the water is coming. ■

Zimbabwe

Land of hope and worry

Zimbabwe's economy is crashing and its people are hungry

AFTER DECADES of mismanagement and corruption, Zimbabwe is a wreck. Its people are poor and hungry (see Middle East & Africa section). By early next year about half of them will need help to get enough food, says the UN's World Food Programme. In a country that was once among Africa's most industrialised, electricity flickers for only a few hours a day, often at night. Factories and bakeries stand idle while the sun shines. Workers arrive after dark, hoping that if they are patient they will be able to switch on their machines or ovens. In homes people wake up in the middle of the night to cook or iron their shirts. Freshwater taps work for a few hours once a week. Tendai Biti, an opposition MP and former finance minister, complains that life has gone back to colonial times: "I'm washing in a bucket, my friend, as if it is Southern Rhodesia in 1923."

The crisis is Zimbabwe's worst since the bad days of 2008-09, when President Robert Mugabe's money-printing sparked hyperinflation so intense that prices doubled several times a week. That crisis was tamed only when Zimbabwe ditched its own currency and started using American dollars. This time, the government blames drought for the nation's woes. Rains have, indeed, been poor. But the real problem is bad government. The same ruling party, ZANU-PF, has been in charge since 1980. Mr Mugabe's successor, Emmerson Mnangagwa, who seized power from his mentor in 2017, is equally thuggish. His regime has kept grabbing dollars from people's bank accounts and replacing them with electronic funny money, which has now lost most of its value. In June, without enough hard cash to pay the soldiers who defend it, the government decreed that shops must accept

only funny money. Annual inflation has reached 500%.

Zimbabweans have learned to expect only trouble from the people in charge. They hustle creatively to get by. Salaried workers have side gigs. Families subsist on remittances from relatives working abroad. However, they do not see why they should endure oppression and dysfunction indefinitely.

Zimbabwe is poor because its rulers are predatory. But some blame must be shared by neighbouring governments, donors and lenders who, time and again, have looked the other way as the ruling party has rigged elections, tortured dissidents and looted the nation's wealth. In 1987, when Mr Mugabe tried to create a de facto one-party state, Western diplomats crooned that a firm hand was probably what the country needed. In 2000, when Mr Mugabe sent thugs to seize white-owned commercial farms, some African leaders cheered the righting of a colonial wrong, ignoring the fact that much of the land was redistributed to cabinet ministers who barely bothered to farm it. After Mr Mugabe's kleptocracy crashed the economy, the IMF handed over \$510m in 2009, saying it welcomed his promises of reform. They proved empty.

Now Mr Mnangagwa wants another bail-out from the IMF and loans from the World Bank. To secure it, he is making grand pledges to repeal oppressive laws and compensate farmers whose land was stolen. Yet after 21 months in power, he has shown few signs of doing either. Until he proves through actions that he is sincere, his regime should not get a cent. Provide food and medical aid to the hungry; but do not prop up the government that made them so. ■

