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Silence from the halls of academe



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CHANGING FORTUNES: In the 80s, books on Japan abound. People were interested to know what made Japan tick.

We espoused the Look East Policy, making Japan our model for growth and development.

Today people's interest in Japan has somewhat waned. They have shifted their interest to China, India and the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India and China) instead.

Nations' economic fortunes can be so volatile. One decade, a nation is at its zenith and the next, it is in the doldrums.

Today, people are still talking about the sole super-power, i.e. the United States, but for different reasons.

There are quarters which believe that the country is in

a gradual and steady decline. There are also those such as Joseph Nye who feel that one should not write off the US just yet.

It still has its innate strengths to pull through. Thomas L. Friedman and Michael Mandelbaum in their latest book, *That Used To Be US*, talk about what has gone wrong with America and how it can come back.

Being old hands in the affairs of the US, their thesis may have some semblance of credibility. Time will tell.

In the midst of the current economic gloom, America should do a thorough SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses/Limitations, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis.

Its strengths admittedly lie in its pools of creative and innovative people, top-notch universities, world-class research and development (R & D) infrastructure.

It should continue to build on its strengths. Judging by the diminishing R & D funding in Science, it seems it is not doing so.

Its weaknesses? It appears to be at a loss without a real enemy. It needs more Sputnik moments. Its opportunities and threats? It can figure out for itself.

Georgi Arbatov, a Soviet expert on the US, hit the nail on the head at the end of the Cold War by telling America: "We are going to do a terrible thing to

you. We are going to deprive you of an enemy." These people seem to know the American psyche better than the Americans themselves.

Once the Americans have reassessed their strengths, whims and fancies and reorientated their global perspective, they should be able to stage a comeback. Winston Churchill said: "You can always trust the Americans. In the end they will do the right thing, after they have eliminated all the other possibilities."

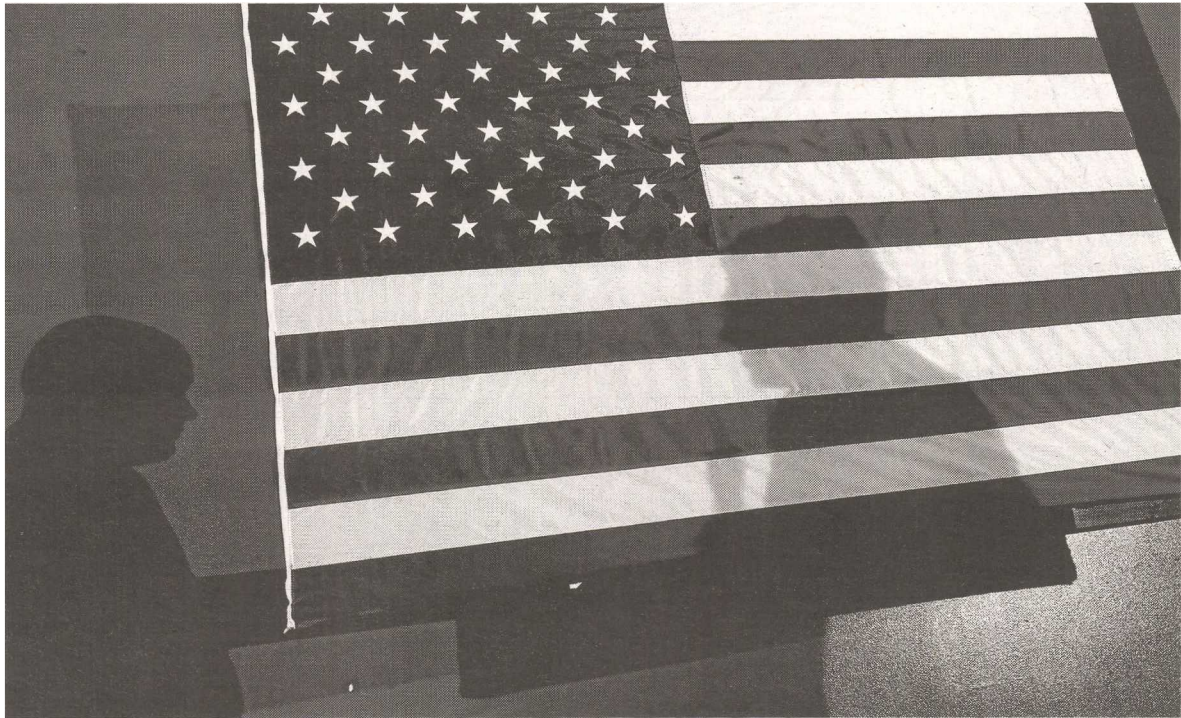
The ongoing Occupy Wall Street movement symbolises the inequality between the 99 per cent economically and socially deprived and the one per cent economically and socially privileged.

Again quoting Churchill: "The inherent vice of capitalism is the unequal sharing of blessings; the inherent virtue of socialism is the equal sharing of miseries."

People such as Arbatov, Nye, Churchill and Friedman can really read the US and the world like a book. We do hope the same can be said of the world's top scholars.

So far, they have been rather reticent. This has prompted Jean Seaton to point out that universities have failed to articulate any sense of national purpose or responsibility, even though they enrich our collective lives immeasurably. In the chilling climate of economic uncertainty and financial turmoil, the intellectual wisdom and guidance of the academic guru is sorely needed.

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