

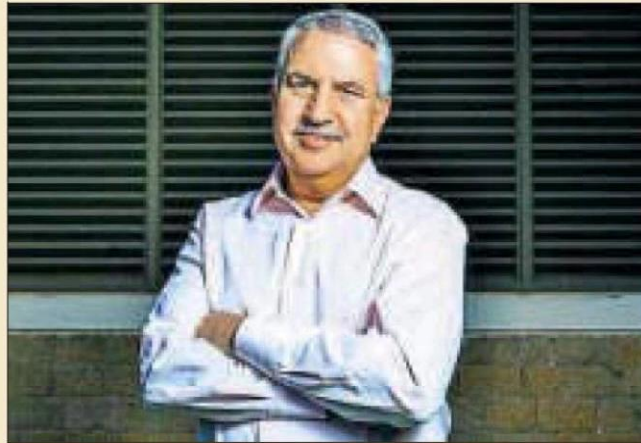
THOMAS FRIEDMAN, American journalist and author

'If India were a stock, I would still purchase it'

MUMBAI: Thomas Friedman, Pulitzer prize-winning American journalist and author, is still bullish on India and believes there are more gains to be enjoyed from globalisation. In an interview to *Arushi Kotecha* on the sidelines of the Tata Literature Fest 2017 in Mumbai, Friedman says that in his new book called *Thank You For Being Late*, he praises everything old and slow. By old and slow, Friedman says he means the things you can't download—good teaching, good parenting, good religious leadership, good governance. All those values matter more because when the world moves fast, the small errors have huge consequences, he adds. Excerpts:

The West is pulling away from globalisation because of populist politics. How do you think that affects developing nations like India?

It's both a challenge and an opportunity. If we (the West) don't globalise, you'll globalise without us. Look what's happening with the TPP (Trans Pacific Partnership). (US President Donald) Trump came in and pulled out of the deal and now the other 11 nations are trying to pull it off alone.



And, you see how the Chinese President Xi Jinping has now become the biggest defender of globalisation and even though they're not such globalisers, they control their market very tightly.

America built the institutions that are the backbone of globalisation—the World Bank, the IMF (International Monetary Fund), the global trading system. We were the greatest advocates of those. And now, if (we) don't support free trade in a sensible way, it'll affect everybody.

So what's the way around it because you said it's an opportunity as well?

It's an opportunity for the developing world. I think

what India's doing right now is very interesting; it's got a lot of advantage because you can leapfrog, you don't have a lot of legacy systems. When you put together over a billion people on the unique ID platform (Aadhaar), where you can have a trusted identity and then that platform becomes an operating system that all kinds of apps can be built out of. That's a big deal.

If you were to say to me, what's the biggest thing in the world? Is it the Brits deciding to pull out of the European Union or is it the fact that actually 3 million more Americans voted for Hillary Clinton than Donald Trump, but because of our electoral system, he's Presi-

dent? Or is the fact that over a billion people in India are on this uniquely built ID platform on which you can build apps for banking, educating, communicating? I think this is a much bigger trend in the world than what we're doing.

If you ask me as a Westerner, I'll tell you the biggest thing in the world is Trump and Brexit. But if I were a Martian who's come down to Earth and is just looking at it, I would say that 2.5 billion people who are doing all of the globalising and digitising now are the bigger trend; there's no question.

Are you still bullish on India as you were 12 years ago when you wrote *The World Is Flat*?

If India were a stock, I'd still buy it. Though the change is not linear, it's curvilinear; so there will always be ups and downs. But I still believe India has enormous assets, considering the world we're going into. It's learning to manage diversity in a world that's only getting more diverse; that's a big deal. And the fact that 1.3 billion Indians speaking a 100 languages, with different religions and ethnicities, in addition to conducting free and fair elections; that's not a small thing.
arushi.k@livemint.com