



A thought for today

We are willing to properly handle differences and disagreements in state-to-state relations

HU JINTAO

Take The Plunge

Entry to SCO opens up opportunities for India to look North

With India obtaining membership of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), an important platform has opened up for New Delhi in an increasingly multipolar world. As a Eurasian political, economic and security organisation, SCO serves as a critical geopolitical pole focussed on central Asia and its neighbourhood. For India, SCO membership provides opportunities in three key areas. First, given that Pakistan too has been admitted as an SCO member, New Delhi could use the organisation to hold Islamabad accountable on the issue of terrorism. In fact, combating terrorism, extremism and separatism is a principal priority for SCO. And there's no denying that terrorism emanating from Pakistan poses the biggest threat to regional security today. The abduction and murder of two Chinese teachers in Balochistan demonstrates that the terror weapon cannot be finely honed for use against India alone. Pakistan and its patron China too will suffer; terrorism is not so much a zero-as-a-negative-sum game.



Both India and Pakistan will now be expected to conduct joint military exercises along with other SCO members under the Tashkent-based Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure. Such coordination between Indian and Pakistani militaries is welcome as it can open a direct channel of communication between New Delhi and Rawalpindi GHQ – the real author of Pakistan's India policy. A future India-Pakistan compact is only possible if the Pakistani military is on board.

The second area of interest is India-China relations. Prime Minister Narendra Modi met President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the SCO summit in Astana, and emphasised the need to respect each other's core concerns. This comes at a time when ties between India and China have become tense over Beijing blocking New Delhi's membership to the Nuclear Suppliers Group and stonewalling UN sanctions against Pakistan-based terrorist Masood Azhar. With China using SCO to further its strategic interests in the region, India could leverage this to obtain Beijing's cooperation on Pakistan-sponsored terrorism. Since Pakistan blocks India's connectivity with Afghanistan and central Asia, Beijing could help New Delhi on this score as well. In exchange for this as well as settling border disputes with India, China could obtain India's support for its 'One Belt One Road' project of transnational connectivity. Lastly, SCO provides a good platform to boost India's ties with energy-rich central Asian nations. New Delhi should capitalise on this to shore up its energy security and open up land trading routes to Russia and Europe.

PAN Victory

But steps are needed to protect privacy and against indiscriminate use of Aadhaar number

The verdict of the Supreme Court bench, upholding the validity of the provision in the Income Tax Act which makes Aadhaar number mandatory for securing issue of permanent account number (PAN) and filing income tax returns, is welcome. Linking of Aadhaar with PAN may be necessary to prevent individuals from holding multiple PAN cards. At the same time, the court has provided relief for those experiencing difficulty in such linking through no fault of their own by allowing them to continue filing income tax returns without Aadhaar numbers. The court has also asked the government to take steps to prevent leakages of biometric data of citizens, which has become a serious concern.



The government certainly has a case for linking Aadhaar numbers to PAN cards. The number of PAN cards issued was as much as 250 million whereas the number of income tax returns filed was only about 36.5 million. Clearly there are a lot of income tax payers with more than one PAN card, which help them evade taxes. It is a mistake on the part of the government, however, to introduce Aadhaar – whose original intention was to ensure welfare benefits go to the right people – indiscriminately across the board.

There is a plan, for example, to make Aadhaar numbers mandatory for booking air tickets, which is draconian. Government may want to track finances of citizens for legitimate reasons, but why does it want to track all their movements? India needs, in fact, comprehensive legislation that would protect the right to privacy of every individual and ensure prompt and effective remedial measures in case of transgressions. Such legislation would also help the government to secure a positive ruling from the constitutional bench in the Aadhaar case.

Much hypo about typo

Trump's tweets coin new words and contribute to the English language

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President Trump has proved true to his claim that he has an inventive vocabulary ("I know words, I have the best words"). He has contributed the word "covfefe" to the English language, in course of what some illuminati think is an incomplete tweet. While language mavens believe the recent 12.06am tweet that said "Despite the constant negative press covfefe," constituted an unfinished sentence in which Trump meant to complain about press coverage, in a case of thumby interruptus, his spokesman Sean Spicer maintains "the president and a small group of people know exactly what he meant".

Indeed, after his thumb sprang back to life (thumbus resumus), Trump himself tweeted: "Who can figure out the true meaning of 'covfefe' ??? Enjoy!" It is in the spirit of such gratification that we welcome covfefe as an aperfeffe for a whole new class of feffe words that will enrich English language fefedom. After all, linguistic inventiveness and flexibility is the leifmotife – or fefefotif – of English. It is a tongue that needs frequent reliefe to rescue it from grieffe. So easing sundry fefes into the lexicon like a thief – or feffe – in the night would only augment its credentials as a malleable, ductile, fungible language.

Depending on what philologists and lexicographers interpret the word to be, people could soon be propositioning "Covfefe, Tefe, or Mefe?" In further excursions, attorneys could be writing – for a small feffe – legal briefefes, perfectionists would have their pet pefes, criminals could be turning over a new lefeffe, and excessive use of the offshoots could engender feffe counsellors, a development that could be greeted with sheer disbefefe.

Americans who feel there are too many fefes and not enough Indians will be pleased to know we (the real Indians) have our own version of covfefe, aptly and subtly changed to covfeffe – and further, unsightly altered to gaufeffe – for those who have a beef – or befe – against meat (or mete). It is safe to say this has caused much strifeffe in India, but such is lifeffe. Back in Trump's American fefedom, rumors are rifeffe about the president's wifeffe, thanks to tabloids that do not separate wheat from chaffeffe. Trump may or may not take the feffe amendment to overcome his sundry gaffeffe, but one thing is certain: even if his presidency goes down, he would have made his mark as the commander-in-feffe, thanks be to covfeffe.

Children Need Global Help

Child labour numbers are no longer dropping, they may be climbing back up

Kailash Satyarthi



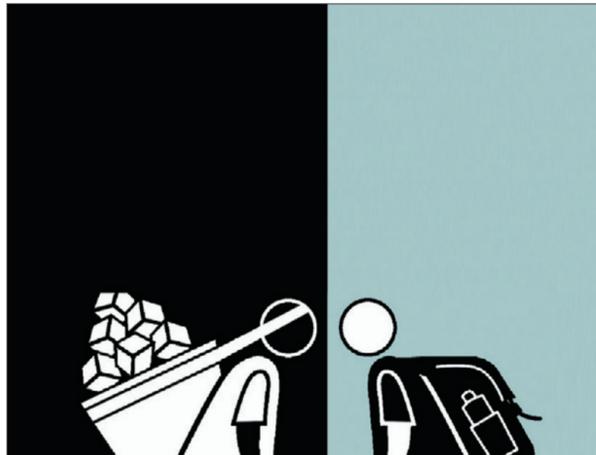
As the global community gears up to commemorate this day as World Day Against Child Labour, my memories go back 19 years to those electrifying few months in 1998. That was when our movement for child rights won not just a tangible victory, but also a moral crusade. That was when likeminded people across the world forged a truly global partnership to organise the Global March Against Child Labour.

When it culminated in Geneva, even we were pleasantly surprised by the reaction of the almost 2,000 delegates, including labour ministers from 150 countries, who had gathered there for the annual meeting of the International Labour Organization. Not only did 600 odd children and activists who had marched across the world get a standing ovation, but ILO actually agreed to pass an international legislation on the worst forms of child labour.

Popularly known as ILO Convention 182 that effectively prohibited child labour, abuse and exploitation, it was unanimously adopted in 1999. At one stroke, the global community made a sincere and honest attempt to stop an abomination that haunted and still troubles the conscience of the world: the pernicious and unacceptable violation of child rights.

By then, we had spent 18 struggling but satisfying years fighting against child labour through our organisation, Bachpan Bachao Andolan, which was launched in 1980. The quick ILO decision to declare exploitative child labour as illegal made our struggle worth it. Subsequently, the decision in 2002 to mark June 12 every year as World Day Against Child Labour ensures that the global community remains engaged and focussed on abolishing child labour.

Indeed the global community needs to retain unwavering focus. By 1990, the United Nations had announced that all children would get an education by the



year 2000. But nothing of that sort was happening at the ground level. By 1996, it was estimated that about 250 million children were being exploited through child labour, millions of them as virtual slaves or bonded labour.

Freedom, education and basic rights were a distant dream for these 250 million children. However, much to our satisfaction, the situation started improving at the ground level. There was a significant drop in the prevalence of child labour for a decade or so. But much to our dismay, that is no longer true.

The last four years have actually seen a stagnation, if not an increase in the prevalence of child labour. This time last year, the UN officially reported that 168 million children across the world were still being ruthlessly exploited despite stringent laws against child labour.

To this dangerous ground level situation has been added the alarming increase in recent years of child refugees and trafficking. Children constitute one third of the total population of the world but account for more than 50% of refugees

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In the last decade, close to 10 million children have been killed in conflict and more than six million have become physically disabled.

It is estimated that 28 million children have become refugees without any hope for a future. Syria and Afghanistan alone accounted for more than 50% of child casualties and refugees in 2015. While accurate and reliable numbers are not available, there is a consensus that the refugee crisis has led to a big jump in child trafficking.

Clearly the global community needs to engage and focus all over again with a sense of urgency on the menace of child labour and trafficking. The menace must be tackled in a multi-dimensional manner.

'Assam's vision is to be gateway to Southeast Asia ... open trade routes connecting Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China'

Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal recently completed his first year as the first BJP chief minister of the state. He spoke to Pratigyan Das about the strategic significance of the newly inaugurated Dholra-Sadiya bridge, his government's eviction drive against encroachers on religious and ecological lands and building greater connectivity with Southeast Asia.

shield controversy in Kashmir. Why?

Major Nitin Leetul Gogoi who hails from Assam's fertiliser town Namrup has been rendering his duties in Kashmir as an Indian army officer. His action of tying a man to a jeep as a shield against stone-pelters led to the timely rescue of several polling officials and others. We hail Major Gogoi's timely action and his astute fight against militancy which is a threat to the lives of the common men of our country.

■ **What is your government's view on the proposed citizenship amendment bill? How is the state addressing the refugee and infiltration issue?**

Implementing the Assam Accord in its letter and spirit is a commitment of our government. We are according top priority to providing constitutional, legislative, social, cultural and economic safeguards as per Clause 6 of Assam Accord to the indigenous people of Assam.

We are also committed to protecting the Xatra (Vaishnavite monasteries) lands and other religious, cultural and ecological lands from infiltrators. After coming to power our government initiated action against illegal encroach-

ment, subsequently huge chunks of land have been freed from the illegal encroachers. On the citizenship issue, we will be guided by our party's Vision Document.

■ **What do you think are the three major achievements of your government in your first year?**

Our government has been working resolutely to wipe out corruption. We have adopted zero-tolerance against corruption and we have already nailed several corruption schemes and corrupt officials, arrested them. Due investigation is going on against them.

We have also achieved remarkable success in recovering a huge chunk of land from encroachers. A series of eviction drives were carried out to free the land. For instance, in Kaziranga National Park illegal settlers were evicted from the forest land. Moreover, our government has been working resolutely to maintain and strengthen the age-old bonhomie among people belonging to different caste, creed, ethnicities and religious background.

■ **What is your government doing to attract investment?**

Our long-term strategy is to develop conducive infrastructure,

including air connectivity to Asean countries, access to sea ports through Brahmaputra and opening of international trade routes connecting Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China and other countries.

We plan to connect the state through a trans-Asian highway and trans-Asian railway network. We are also preparing to build an industrial corridor in Assam and create a high-tech industrial city with plug-and-play facilities for setting up new industries. This will be all world class infrastructure. So far as medium- and short-term strategy is concerned, we will improve the existing infrastructure, simplify the procedures, amend rules and laws to build business and create an enabling environment of ease-of-doing-business in the state.

We also plan to hold a Global Investment Summit in November this year to start an industrial revolution in the state.

■ **What are the major challenges in your roadmap for the next four years?**

Assam is continually developing much-needed infrastructure towards its vision of being a gateway to Southeast Asia.

Brahmaputra express highway would be soon built on both sides of the river. The government has also undertaken a project for dredging the entire stretch of the river Brahmaputra from Sadiya to Bay of Bengal. This ambitious project will allow big ships to navigate and will open sea route access for Assam. This initiative to develop waterways up to Chittagong Port, Bangladesh, will boost industries and commerce in Assam.

dilbert



Niyyat In Islam Is About Purity Of Intentions

Masha Hassan

Alim extended his arm and handed me a rainbow-coloured juggling ball and said that it was a present for me. As he uttered these words, he smiled and his eyes glimmered, perhaps reflecting what he was feeling in his heart. I met Alim in one of the teaching centres of an NGO where I worked. Alim is only 14 years old and lives on the pavements of New Delhi. He works in a toy factory where he had made that ball.

There are some moments or situations in life that are unexpected, but they manage to change your perspective rather mysteriously. These moments might seem unimportant and they may last only for a second but they move you in such an astounding way that you start questioning a lot of things. This, surely, was one of those moments.

When Alim gave me that present, I realised that it was given selflessly. The

authenticity of his emotion made that small juggling ball priceless and that glimmer was only because there was no ulterior motive. I had never felt this unquestionable emotion of sincerity while receiving a gift. Alim's inner light shone forth, reflecting Allah. Alim's 'niyyat' was 'saaf', pure.

Niyyat refers to intention behind action, the word which I see myself and many others using often, but mostly with negative connotations. In the Quran, it acquires a meaning which leads to a spiritual bond with the Almighty.

Niyyat comes from the word 'niyyah' which, in Islam, is the criterion of value in every act, including worship, and it is the first obligatory act in prayer. Niyyat, in fact, is the soul of ibadat (devotion and prayer).

Intention is considered the pillar of

worship. Devotional acts without purity of intentions, cannot take one closer to God. The most sacred acts are spoiled because of calculated objectives behind them, while the simplest actions gain value because they hold an essence of honesty and purity.

While walking on the streets of New Delhi, I never fail to notice the contradictions. I see garbage cans, park benches, bricks, floorings, water dispensers – all donated for public use in streets with names inscribed on them just so that people know who contributed what. On the other hand, I see beautiful graffiti on walls made anonymously, bringing colour and life to dull paths.

Doing benevolent, unselfish acts releases one from a state of indifference. In addition to the divine reward implied, these acts are for posterity.

During festivals I see people buying luxury gifts for their business colleague or for their wealthy friends only because they expect something in return. I feel it is not only about givers; it is also about receivers. Often, during marriages and festivals, you can see people cribbing and evaluating the gifts received and making sure they return the same value in the gifts they would have to give in future.

Materialistic society has conditioned us in such a way that we have started to put a price tag on emotions. We tend to not see beyond the cost, brand and consumer value of a gift that we receive. We have forgotten to appreciate compassionate behaviour, howsoever small, but which is given with warmth and love. We might not be able to know everybody's niyyat, but Allah would know. As mentioned in the Quran, "Your actions will be judged by your intentions."

Sacredspace

The Misogynist

A woman knows very well that, though a wit sends her his poems, praises her judgment, solicits her criticism, and drinks her tea, this by no means signifies that he respects her opinions (or) admires her understanding...

Virginia Woolf

