



**A thought for today**  
*The very important thing you should have is patience*

JACK MA

## Eyeball To Eyeball

*Both India and China need to withdraw their troops to resolve Doklam standoff*

With the military standoff between India and China continuing in the Doklam area of the India-China-Bhutan border trijunction, Beijing has resorted to harsh rhetoric to put psychological pressure on New Delhi. It has used state-run Chinese media to issue not-so-subtle threats to India, asking the latter to learn from the lessons of the 1962 conflict between the two countries. This is totally uncalled for and shows China – which seeks to be the pre-eminent Asian power – in poor light. It once again highlights Beijing's lack of respect for a rules based global order.

The facts on the ground are that the area under contention is disputed between Bhutan and China with India too having security sensitivities in the region. The problem arose when China unilaterally sought to change the status quo of the trijunction through its road building activities. India was forced to defend its own interests as well as those of its ally Bhutan when the Chinese side refused to seriously consider Thimphu's protestations. Plus, China's moves are in clear violation of a 2012 agreement that the boundaries in the trijunction point are to be decided by the three parties together.

The only way out of the current standoff is through dialogue. But China insists that Indian troops pull back first before negotiations. This is again unhelpful and underlines Beijing's propensity to arm-twist its neighbours. This is precisely what it has been doing in the South China Sea through its island building activities. Beijing is very good at changing facts on the ground and slowing altering the status quo in its favour. Hence, its neighbours are now holding their ground more resolutely. As pointed out by external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj, a negotiated resolution to the Doklam standoff can be facilitated if both sides withdraw their troops from the area first. This will build the requisite mutual trust between the parties for talks.

It should also be recognised that such border disputes will continue to crop up until the boundary between India and China is fully demarcated. The Chinese attitude that the boundary only needs to be managed for the time being and a final resolution should be left to future generations no longer suffices. Both India and China should let go of past baggage and demarcate the boundary more or less along the present LAC alignment.

## Dumber Than Darwin

*Research shows human intelligence is falling since the 19th century*

Given developments in artificial intelligence many fear robots will soon surpass human intelligence, rendering human beings superfluous. One comfort for humans has been that at least we are smarter than our ancestors. Turns out even this could be false comfort. Research led by Michael Woodley from the Free University in Brussels has shown that our mental abilities have undergone significant decline since the Victorian era. No wonder Victorian sleuth Sherlock Holmes is still considered the acme of detective skill, and TV serials trying to transplant him into contemporary London or Manhattan are all the rage.

Darwin's theory of natural selection has been proffered as an explanation: post-Victorian advances in medicine and nutrition meant that people with lower IQs could also have more children who survived into adulthood. This is usually celebrated as emphatic proof of civilisation, as is our current drive towards automation which will allegedly make greater convenience and leisure available to humanity. But Woodley et al force us to think about what it means if genes driving intelligence are becoming less common.

Isn't worrying signs all around us? It's not just that computers already tell healthcare providers what drugs to prescribe and absolutely nail Super Mario. It's also the 'ludic loop' of the modern work day – check email and SMSS, then WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, then repeat and repeat. Rather than getting their news from trusted news brands, people are greatly excited by fake news these days. This business of becoming stupid intuitively feels connected to ducking real challenges, not doing work that's actually difficult. Maybe that's why modern day Da Vincis spend their weekends climbing mountains or running marathons. For them, there's no take it easy policy. Growing up in premodern times required many different skills. A lazier life may be making us dumb and dumber.

## Bland on the run

*Sean Spicer's resignation shows spicing it up may not be a good formula*

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Given the lack of political seasoning that was attributed to the Trump presidency when it assumed office in January this year, the appointment of a man named Sean Spicer as its spokesperson was greeted with relish by language mavens. Not that the voluble President needed any dispenser of condiments to soup up his language or persona. Recorded conversations suggested both were saucy enough. If anything, Spicy, as he came to be called by the ever-briny media, was required, among other things, to temper Trump's licentious lingo that included racy references to the female anatomy – dismissed by the President as "locker room" talk.

As it turned out, what the White House needed was bland, not spicy. Spicer was frequently put in a piquant situation by a President possessing an unremitting penchant for pungent language and hyperbole. From Day One, when he was reportedly given a dressing down by Trump for wearing an ill-fitting suit for the White House briefing, to the President rubbing salt over brutal take down by comedy sketches for his shaky performance at the podium, it was evident the spokesman was not going to trump the exacting job. And there was only so much dressing up of Russia connections that he could do.

The end came on Friday exactly six months into his job, when an incensed Spicer quit after being told to report to a new communications director by the arresting name of Anthony Scaramucci. Spicy has now been replaced by his deputy Sarah Huckabee Sanders, who is now tasked with defending a President who believes he is a victim of relentless slander over alleged Russia ties. With a baying media sniffing out new evidence of such ties all the time, there are doubts if Sanders will have a smooth sailing either.

The US capital, suffering under the myth that it is located in a swamp, has long been a political quagmire bogging down Presidents. "If you want a friend in Washington, get a dog," Harry Truman warned about the city's – or its establishment's – innate hostility to outsiders, while resigned Lyndon Johnson observed, "Being President is like being a jackass in a hailstorm. There's nothing to do but to stand there and take it." Six months into his presidency, Trump is yet to discover that neither Spicer, nor Sanders, nor Scaramucci can do much about scent of scandals that surround the White House. The essence of stability is good governance, and of that there is no evidence yet.

# Six Point Agenda To Fix Hate

*Riot hit Bengal must cure this disease, Mamata must move beyond wait and watch*

Arunoday Majumder



After communism, a spectre is haunting West Bengal once again – the spectre of communalism. Bhadreswar, Bhagabanpur, Chanchol, Chandannagar, Dhulagarh, Hajinagar, Jalangi, Jamuria, Kaliachowk, Kanchrapara, Kansa, Katwa, Kharagpur, Sankrail and now Baduria and Basirhat. The list can no longer be read in one breath. Those who have the intent to revise the writing on the wall will know that the stage is set for more blood.

Chief minister Mamata Banerjee must realise that the communal malaise has hit the body politic of West Bengal. It can no longer be expected to die out and therefore be prevented via wait-and-watch manoeuvres. The state needs an earnest roadmap to cure the disease and establish functional relations between Hindus and Muslims. Here are six measures to achieve the purpose – two long-term and four immediate.

First, Bengal must allow the emergence of a civil society among Muslims. It is telling that most 'leaders' of the community in secular India continue to be related to the mosque in some way. Worse, many of these cleric-leaders have only brought shame upon the community in Bengal. The likes of Syed Quaderi and Noor Barkati who put up public rewards to humiliate Sonu Nigam and Narendra Modi cannot lead a community, especially when it has produced the likes of Nawab Siraj-ud-Daulah and poet Nazrul Islam.

Muslim traders have played a significant role in the recent ouster of Noor Barkati as imam. Media personality Mir Ali and rock musician Rupam Islam are hugely popular across West Bengal. Yet when the former was criticised by radical Muslims for celebrating Christmas, the Bengali secularists decided to remain mum. From the Left Front's acceptance of extremist demands against Taslima Nasreen to the TMC's sabotage of Salman Rushdie, the Bengali secularists have ensured that Muslim commons remain political clients of its grandstanding.

Second, Muslim civil society cannot rise if the community fails to embrace



secular education. Hindu 'pathshalas' have almost disappeared. Without secular education there is little scope to participate in a globalised economy – a social mobility route which scheduled castes have used very successfully.

Muslim masses must realise that the political combination of secular brigade and mosque men have done them zero favour by keeping minority institutions out of the purview of state inspection in Bengal. The plight of madrasa headmaster Masum Akhtar, who was beaten up by the clergy for teaching students the national anthem, is a dangerous indicator of what transpires in those opaque premises. Bengali Muslims must pressurise Mamata Banerjee for schools and not for the presence of TMC leaders in public assemblies that demand the continuation of medieval practices like triple taalaq.

Third, Muslim appeasement must stop. The Calcutta high court made this dire observation in October 2016: "There has been a clear endeavour on the part of the state government to pamper and appease the minority section of the public at the cost of the majority section without

**History is witness to the intensity of communal riots in the east. The unparalleled devastation had compelled Gandhi to shun any celebration and fast in erstwhile Calcutta on the very day of Independence**

there being any plausible justification." Mamata must admit that her pampers tactics to consolidate Muslim votes have come at a terrible cost for the state. Thanks to TMC, Bengal's proud record in communal harmony is at great risk. Fourth, the Hindu population under threat should recognise that the BJP upsurge in the state will not stop at protection from a minority bully. It will translate into the politics of vendetta, if not methodically then sporadically. This is sure to result in human tragedies that spin out of control very quickly. History is witness to the intensity of communal riots in the east. The unparalleled devastation had

compelled Gandhi to shun any celebration and fast in erstwhile Calcutta on the very day of Independence.

Overzealous assertion by Hindus, which BJP can well organise, will further reduce chances of investment in the industry-denied state. So, support to BJP should be based on the pact that defence of the majority will not entail attack on the minority.

Fifth, the eastern border has to be sealed. Congress and leftists dilly-dallied on border control in the east. The profitable negligence gave them a faithful 'electorate' of illegal migrants in Assam and Bengal. It altered demographics along the 4,000 km border of which almost 1,500 km lies in Bengal. Most riot-hit areas today fall in the border districts of Malda, Murshidabad, North 24 Parganas and adjoining Bardhaman, Hoogly, Howrah.

The continued influx of Muslim migrants from a volatile Bangladesh is a burden not only on prospective harmony but on Bengal's tattered economy as well. Sincerity to secure the porous border with men and machines will indicate BJP's seriousness about peace and prosperity in the state.

Sixth, Mamata has summoned her innovative Didigiri to institute a programme that may prove effective. She has planned the formation of a 'peacekeeping force' in every neighbourhood to tackle the daily spate of communal unrest. It will constitute civilians from different walks of life. They will assist the police in dealing with Hindu-Muslim flare-ups.

The ethnographic film Naata (2003) demonstrates how community initiatives can contribute to the restoration of communal peace. Such enterprise establishes channels of communication between alienated groups. Mistrust and fear – prerequisites for communal violence – thrive in such atmosphere and must be checked.

These measures will not only ensure functional coexistence of Hindus and Muslims but also uplift the latter from the dangerous quagmire of backwardness and discontent. The need of the hour is civic dynamism and political will at the levels of the state and Centre to translate obvious theory into rigorous practice.

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## 'India-Mongolia cooperation signals to Beijing that India can play the geopolitical game in China's backyard'

Along with its land border dispute with India and sea boundary disputes with several other neighbouring countries in the South China Sea, China also has tensions with Mongolia. The recent election of China critic Khaltmaa Battulga as Mongolia's new president has strategic implications and PM Narendra Modi has already reached out inviting him to India. **J Mohan Malik**, professor at the Asia-Pacific Centre for Security Studies in Honolulu spoke to Saibal Dasgupta on the changing nature of China-Mongolia relations, why it matters to India and the region's changing security architecture.



**■ What were the goals and benefits of the recent India-Mongolia military exercises? What economic moves is India making in the region?**

India-Mongolia bilateral ties have been growing against the backdrop of Beijing's growing influence and New Delhi's efforts to find a balance. President Battulga's victory provides an opportunity for strengthening bilateral ties which are now part of the broader spectrum of the Sino-Indian geopolitical rivalry for the support of small and middle powers.

India-Mongolia relations have been on an upswing since PM Modi's May 2015 visit. During this visit, India extended a credit line of \$1 billion to Mongolia.

India and Mongolia have been cooperating in the security arena. A civil nuclear deal was concluded in 2009. The India-Mongolia Joint Working Group for defence cooperation meets annually

and India contributes to training of Mongolian military officers. Both conduct joint military exercise called 'Nomadic Elephant'. India is a regular participant in the multilateral exercise 'Khan Quest' in Mongolia.

Strategic counterbalance against China in Asia is part of PM Modi's "Act East" policy. Faced with growing Chinese pressure, Mongols look to India as a new power to counterbalance Beijing. Stronger ties with India provide Ulan Bator with options that it would otherwise not have in its dealings with Beijing.

Following the 2016 blockade of Mongolia by China, Beijing took note of India's \$1 billion credit line to Mongolia. Significantly, Beijing termed it as a bribe while Mongolia's request for help from India was described as politically hare-

brained by the Chinese official media. Though neither side wants to provoke, India-Mongolia cooperation nonetheless signals to Beijing that as China expands its footprint in South Asia, India can play the geopolitical game in China's backyard.

**■ Has China been encouraged by Nepal's move to get closer to India while distancing itself from India to pressurise other small countries like Bhutan and Mongolia?**

For historical reasons, Mongols fear and loath the Chinese more than the Russians. Therefore, irrespective of what Nepal or Bhutan may or may not do, Mongols will continue to hedge their bets.

Should Battulga follow through on his anti-China campaign rhetoric, Beijing will use all means at its disposal, blandishments and bluster to ensure Mongolia does not go too far.

**■ Does China eye Mongolian territory as it does with another small neighbour, Bhutan?**

Mongolia has always been suspicious of its southern neighbour that Beijing would one day reclaim Mongolian territory. Beijing has not forgotten that the Qing dynasty ruled Mongolia until 1911. Whenever an opportunity has presented itself, the Chinese have tried to reassert their power and influence over Mongolia. Over the last two decades, this has been mainly through economic tools, ie investments in Mongolia's mining sector and infrastructure development.

Now, the victory of a self-confessed

Russophile and "China-wary" leader Battulga, the incoming president, who expressed concern over Mongolia's trade dependence on China during the election campaign, must worry Beijing. He is likely to impose curbs on Chinese investments and exercise greater state control over the mining sector. In a 2014 interview, Battulga reportedly said that when his country runs out of resources, there will definitely be conflict between the Mongolians and the Chinese.

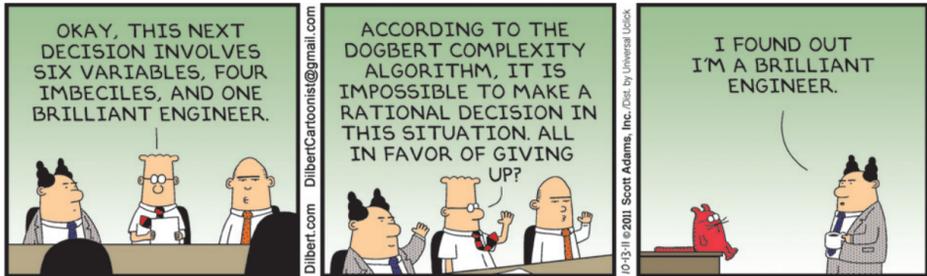
Much to China's chagrin, since the end of the Cold War, Mongolia has also pursued a 'third neighbour policy' – which includes India along with the US, Japan, Germany in order to diversify its trading partners.

**■ Is China putting undue pressure on Mongolia?**

By choice or by necessity, Sino-Mongol trade relations follow a pattern of Chinese domination. Whenever Mongolia is seen as taking actions contrary to Chinese interests, Beijing exercises its economic leverage and geographic proximity to punish Ulan Bator, as was done for inviting the Dalai Lama in 2016 by imposing a blockade on the supply of essential goods. It brought Mongolia to its knees and made the Mongols pay a heavy economic price for putting religious freedom over economic necessity.

Battulga wants Mongolia to diversify and reduce overwhelming dependence on China. Despite its natural resource wealth, mismanagement of the economy in recent years has led to deflation and a \$5.5 billion IMF bailout package.

## dilbert



## Celebrate The Talent That You Have

Janina Gomes

Did someone tell you that you had no talent? Not true! Only the talents we have, are different. To celebrate life we need to celebrate the talent that we have. Some use their talent and some don't, because they are not sufficiently aware that the gifts of life they have, are to be traded for other talents.

The musician looks at life's beauty through sound; the artist through visuals; the writer through words; the thinker through concepts and abstractions; the chef through culinary delights; the economist through statistics; the believer through faith; the unbeliever, perhaps through ideals. There is a whole world out there full of beauty and light that we are not privy to, because, in life, we cannot be super at everything.

A multi-faceted personality may have a large number of skills, some innate and

some developed. Others choose to stagnate and find the easy way out because developing a talent and celebrating it means hard work. The more focussed people are, the more they concentrate on developing the talents they have. If they put these talents to good use, they uplift society and touch and change the hearts of people.

We all remember the musical performances by which we were transported to another world. An orchestra, for example, is the coordination of many talents, with performers playing different instruments in harmony with each other.

There is a parable of a master setting out on a long journey and entrusting his 'talents' to his servants; to one he gave one, to another two, and to another five. When he returned home and asked his

servants what they had done with his talents, the ones who had received two and five talents had traded their talents and won many more. The master commended these servants with the words: "Well done, good and faithful servant".

But the one who had received one talent had buried and hid his talent and the master reproached him calling him a wicked man. Why was the master of the house displeased with the servant who buried his talent? Because the gifts of life have been given to us to develop and grow.

We rarely in life look at our talents in this way. I have a cousin gifted at the organ, who for years has played the organ as a service to others – for weddings, funerals, celebrations, the novena masses, the Sunday services, daily masses... That has

meant that she used the gift of time to practise with others, to serve others, even to the extent of improvising in the church when the occasion demanded it. She has truly celebrated her talent.

In a sense, even the lowliest of jobs require some talent. There are those who enjoy the simple tasks of life. It is not what we do, but the way we do it that counts. I once met an engine driver who even enjoyed shovelling coal and pushing it into the furnace. The long engine trips did not bore him; they fascinated him, even when he was young.

Don't crave for another person's talent or talents. We cannot all be film stars, models or star-cricketers. Don't fix your gaze on the impossible. Closer to yourself, you will discover your own innate talents. Celebrate life by developing the talent or talents you have. The invitation is open to all, however deficient we may seem to be.

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## Sacredspace

My Teachers

*The obvious is that which is never seen until someone expresses it simply... I have learnt silence from the talkative, toleration from the intolerant, and kindness from the unkind; yet, strange, I am ungrateful to those teachers.*

Kahlil Gibran

