



A thought for today

If a country doesn't recognise minority rights and human rights, you won't have the stability and prosperity that is possible

HILLARY CLINTON

Heed The Message

Departing Veep points out uncomfortable reality

Departing Vice-President Hamid Ansari's farewell speech was unexceptionable and balanced, and it's hard to see why BJP is in such a tizzy about it.



Perhaps what has upset BJP is previous references by Ansari to rising insecurity among minorities, sparked by a trend of food bans, vigilantism and 'beef' lynchings which target them.

If such a law comes into force there should no prizes for guessing which community will be targeted most, although anyone can potentially be harassed by authorities.

No Loo, No I Do

The battle Lakshmi Devi waged for a toilet

The toilet is a pretty common cause of marital discord. Some couples quarrel over opposing theories of the proper way to hang the toilet paper - whether the new sheet should come up and over or go behind and down.

Jharkhand's Rajesh Mahato got Swachh Bharat Abhiyan money to build a toilet. But to the dismay of his wife Lakshmi Devi, he used this bounty to buy himself a smartphone instead.

Actually across the country wives and would-be wives are making it clear that they are fed up with open defecation. It's unhygienic and unsafe. But, illustratively, an Odisha study found in 80% of households decisions on constructing sanitation facilities are made exclusively by men - who may treat themselves to a smartphone or a second-hand motorcycle instead.

The Real Military Truth

On Doklam, stop saying the Chicken's Neck area is vulnerable: it isn't

Kanti Bajpai



The Doklam confrontation is not over by any means, and no one can say how it will turn out. As the two sides reinforce their positions, the portents are not good.

Indian commentary has identified the Chicken's Neck as the driving concern behind New Delhi's insistence that it must stand firm in Doklam. The Chicken's Neck area is the area between Bhutan, China, Nepal and Sikkim in the north and Bangladesh to the south.

This is an extremely dubious thesis. It is about as credible as arguing that the Siachen Glacier is vital to the security of Kashmir and northwestern India. For one thing, Indian forces in the Doklam-Sikkim sector are superior to their PLA counterparts, a point that Indian experts never tire of repeating.

If the PLA gets to flatter land, it will be able to fan out. However, by the time it does this, Indian forces from both flanks will have massed. The Chinese may even be vulnerable in their rear, with the Indian army harrowing them from behind.

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Assuming that nevertheless Chinese forces make it to flatter ground and try to consolidate their positions, they will face an enormous logistical problem.

Another possibility is that the Chinese would try to take and hold this area with special forces that are parachuted behind Indian lines. Chinese special forces have grown and improved in capability over the past decade, but they are not much more than a short-operations force against paramilitary or insurgent opposition.

This then is the commonsense military truth. It is not clear why Indian analysts, including unnamed or retired military analysts, continue to propagate the myth that the Chicken's Neck is vulnerable, but it does us no good to repeat this myth endlessly.

Having said that, there is one circumstance in which the Chicken's Neck would be vulnerable: all-out war with China. In that case, India would be fighting desperately in many sectors, and it might not be able to defend the Chicken's Neck sufficiently.

Look Ahead, Not Back

As India completes 70 years of independence, time to trash the blame games

Dipankar Gupta



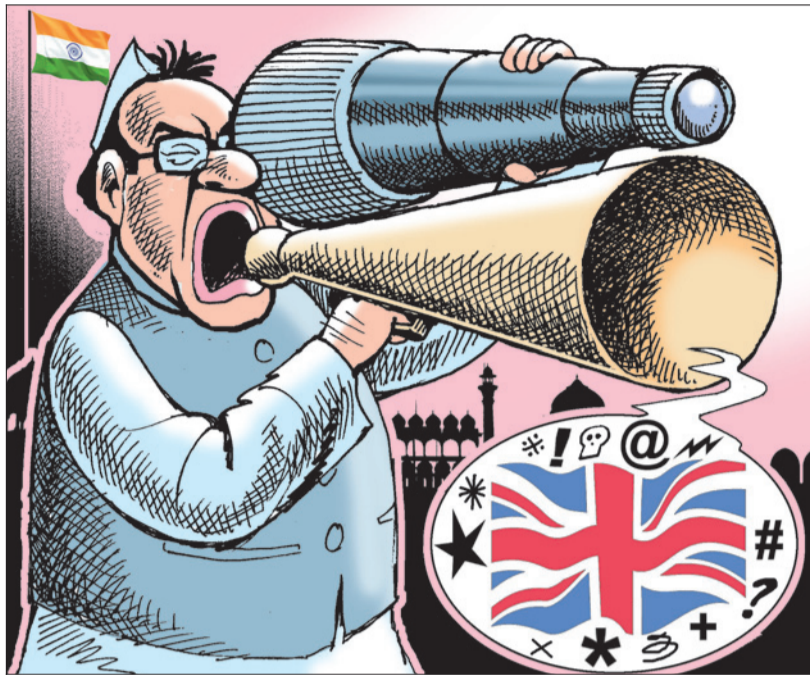
Independence Day is a celebration of the new and a closure of the old. In the euphoria following freedom, it is tempting to play the self-righteous victim, and blame the past; but for how long?

Every year Independence Day sends out a clear non-partisan message: this is your country now, look ahead, not back. Blaming colonialism has an attractive political ring about it, but it is a lazy, disingenuous ploy.

When we allow memories to condition our thinking, we lose the capacity for self-examination and introspection - so essential for progress. George Santayana was wrong. The truth is that those who remember too much of their past are condemned to repeat it.

In the 1950s, most of the policies our Constitution enacted were to combat those aspects of our tradition that had made us weak. The founding fathers of independent India did not waste time on the British, but critiqued our society from within, even when it hurt.

Consequently, a slew of measures against caste, gender and religious discrimination came to life. Together, these firmed up India's position as a full-fledged democratic nation.



was now breaking free from its past, almost at one stroke. In a similar fashion, the newborn Indian state turned against landlordism and the many iniquitous practices that went with it.

For example, sharecropping and rack renting had devastated the agrarian poor, but village oligarchs thought nothing of it. We know how the British stayed imperiously unmoved, even though their wartime policies caused the 1943 Bengal famine.

The determination with which our leaders carried out post-independence reforms was, in one word, heroic. They demonstrated both correctness and self-correction in equal proportion.

Those who remember too much of their past are condemned to repeat it. We must break this cycle before it becomes an addiction

blame game would be an indulgent distraction. Yes, democracy was being planted on hostile soil; but that was cause for cheer, not despair.

Most western intellectuals of those years were of no help, either. They were convinced that the past would soon swallow us and we would return to our original state of chaos.

It is true that Lancashire mills ruined our weavers, but they finished off such

craftspeople in Britain as well. Britain, however, went on to become an industrial power, while we fell back. The first Indian-owned cotton factories still needed British engineers to establish them.

Still changing gears, India, since 1950, has set up institutions of higher education, and it is not done yet. As a result, today, in this computer age, we can actually teach the West a trick or two.

In other words, instead of moaning over our historical misfortunes let us resolve never to be in that place again. These sentiments are twins, born at the same time, but must be separated at birth.

Contrast this with the flaccid tendency to blame the past for our present ills. This affliction is widespread, across different political persuasions, with minor variations of severity.

We need never forgive, but there are certain things we should learn to forget. That is the 'good amnesia'.

Keep elephant corridors open and allow India's national heritage animal to survive, it'll help the whole ecosystem

Dia Mirza



India has for thousands of years revered and worshipped all natural resources, flora and fauna. And the elephant has a special place in Indian mythology.

We now live in an India that has 17% of the world's population while occupying 2.61% of the world's landmass, which we also share with 60% of the world's Asian elephants, 65% of the world's tigers, 100% of Asiatic lions and 85% of the world's one horned rhino.

While all this is incredible, it's also the reason why we're fast losing natural habitat, disconnecting once uninterrupted forests, obstructing natural migratory routes of key species and disturbing an ecological balance that is key to our wellbeing.

The elephant is a perpetual nomad. Being a very large and herbivorous animal it needs vast areas to roam: constantly browsing, foraging, moving from place to place in search of food and water with the changing

seasons. Elephants in India are primarily threatened because of habitat loss, shrinkage and degradation. The growing infrastructural and agricultural needs of India's burgeoning human population have led to increasing encroachment within and around elephant habitats, resulting in the fragmentation of wild habitats and a loss of the traditional movement paths of elephants.

This has forced elephants to move through human-use areas,

The Gaj Yatra begins today, it's the biggest event ever around India's wild elephants

contributing to increased human-elephant conflict, which often leads to loss of human and elephant lives. There are an estimated 30,000 wild elephants in India (MoEFCC, 2012). This accounts for around 60% of the global population of Asian elephants, which has declined by about half in just the last 60-odd years.

So how can we help India's elephants? By becoming aware of and spreading awareness about the importance of elephant corridors. These are traditional migratory paths that elephant herds have used for centuries, their location passed down from



generation to generation. Today, as forest lands continue to be lost, they are crucial natural habitat linkages between protected forests that allow elephants to move between these areas freely, uninterrupted, giving them access to food and water... and other elephants!

Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), the government's Project Elephant and other NGOs have mapped 101 elephant corridors across the country. Protecting and securing these is of critical importance. Not too many people know about elephant corridors though, which is why WTI and its partner NGO the International Fund for Animal Welfare are organising the Gaj Yatra, an awareness campaign to celebrate elephants and highlight the necessity of securing

elephant corridors.

The Gaj Yatra begins today, World Elephant Day 2017, in New Delhi but will continue over the next 15 months. It's the biggest event ever around India's wild elephants. There'll be a roadshow rolling through 12 states, with elephant sized artworks created by local artists and craftsmen as the centrepiece. There'll also be Gaj Mahotsavs at different venues, with elephant sized fun to be had: concerts and parades and street plays; sculpture making and wall painting for kids.

Why should we care what happens to elephants? Well, because elephants are a keystone species. Their nomadic behaviour - the daily and seasonal migrations they make through their home ranges - is immensely important to the environment.

They are landscape architects, creating clearings in the forest, preventing overgrowth of certain plant species and allowing space for the regeneration of others, which in turn provide sustenance to other herbivorous animals. Elephants eat plants, fruits and seeds, releasing the seeds when they defecate in other places as they travel, benefiting biodiversity.

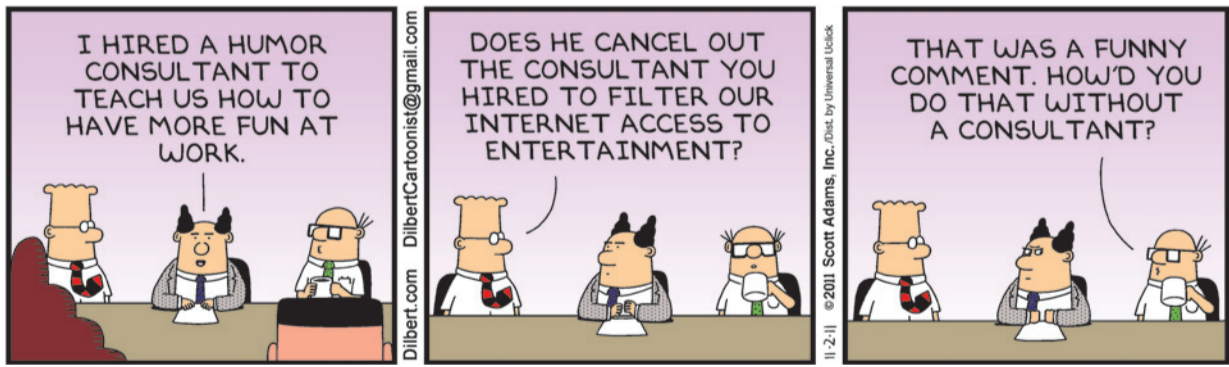
Elephant dung provides nourishment to plants and animals and acts as a breeding ground for insects. In times of drought they access water by digging holes, which benefits other wildlife. Further, their large footprints collect water when it rains, benefiting smaller creatures.

To have elephants in isolated populations, unable to move freely through their home ranges, would therefore have a devastating effect on India's natural heritage. Many animal species would suffer and the ecosystem balance of several wild habitats would be unalterably upset.

It would also, of course, eventually lead to the local extinction of India's national heritage animal, one of the wisest and most beloved species on the planet. So come, #JoinOurHerd and help us secure #101Corridors, give our elephants #RightOfPassage!

The writer is brand ambassador of Wildlife Trust of India

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The Conditional And The Constitutional

B V Vaman Maharaj

Everything is generally associated with two types of activities, the conditional and the constitutional. Conditional means an activity that is subjected to one or more conditions or requirements being met.

For example, water is liquid by nature. Hence, liquidity is its constitutional activity. However due to excess cold it becomes ice and freezes others. If heated, it changes to vapour and makes others warm or burns. Both of these are conditional activities.

Srila Bhakti Vedanta Swami writes that when a living entity is conditioned, he has two kinds of activities: one is conditional and other is constitutional. As for protecting the body or abiding by the rules of society or state, and many other activities in connection to condition-

ed life, these are called conditional. Besides these, the living entity who is fully conscious of his spiritual nature and is engaged in devotional services unto Krishna, has activities which are transcendental, performed in his constitutional position.

In general, we understand body as the person and also use terms as 'my body', 'my mind', 'my intelligence'. Nobody says, 'I am body', 'I am mind'... This means that the speaker 'I' is somebody different from the body. Across the globe, if the body has conscious principle, it is considered as a person. When the same body loses consciousness (or is dead), nobody addresses that dead body as a person.

Without realising the fact, we accept the constitutional position of all living beings, though we tend to accept conditional position of living being. This means

we all accept that a living being is called 'living' when he possesses that conscious principle, known as 'Atman'. Accepting a living being as 'Atman' is accepting the constitutional position of that living being. In other words, until the atomic soul, energy of the eternally existing, blissful, knowledgeable Supreme Lord, remains in the body, it is identified as a person. By the existence of that principle, 'I' remains and by the absence of that principle, 'I' do not remain; that is my nature (means, I am a soul). Soul is eternal, body is not eternal. That is my constitutional position.

Whenever we embrace our conditional state, we move away from our constitutional state, that is, reality. Being soul, we comprise of sat-chid-anand. We have inbuilt desire to become happy. Although striving hard for many years to become happy, we see happiness slipping from

our hands now and then. It is not eternal. Though the desire to be happy, to be in bliss is always there.

What should we then do, to retain this hard-earned happiness forever? According to the Bhagwad Gita, living entities are not part of the Supreme, but a part of His energy. We, the souls, are the servants of Krishna, eternally. In the seventh chapter of the Gita, Krishna explains that soul is part of his potency. This means soul is servitor of Super-soul.

By staying in this material world and forgetting the Super-soul, we suffer from threefold misery. When this soul serves the Lord in his constitutional position, or practises devotion, he remains in transcendental ecstasy, unaffected by any threefold miseries. One who attains this exalted state of devotion is instantly liberated from the cycle of birth and death. (The writer heads the Sree Chaitanya Gaudiya Math, Chandigarh). Post your comments at speakingtree.in

