

## A THOUGHT FOR TODAY

Relations with Bangladesh are of the highest priority.  
India stands ready to be a full, equal partner...

PRIME MINISTER MANMOHAN SINGH

## Eastern Promises

India-Bangladesh ties have been given a welcome fillip

Better relations between India and Pakistan undoubtedly hold the key to transforming the South Asia region. Even as the governments of the two countries engage each other in fits and starts, people-to-people initiatives – such as Aman Ki Asha, this newspaper's project – continue to place their hope in the prospect of peace. Imperative as better Indo-Pak relations are, it is work in progress. The next best thing, however, would be close and friendly ties with Bangladesh. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to the country presents just such an opportunity. Fortunately, New Delhi seems to be grasping it with both hands.

As the slew of agreements announced during the Bangladesh PM's visit reveal, it's not just platitudes and rhetoric doing the rounds this time. Substance has been injected into the relationship. New Delhi has pledged a \$1 billion credit line to Bangladesh to help develop rail tracks, fund dredging of its rivers, and lend monetary muscle to its infrastructure development. From India's point of view, Bangladesh's cooperation in cracking down on extremists operating against India from its territory is crucial. Hasina's categorical assertion that terrorists would not be allowed to use her country as a base for anti-India operations is thus reassuring. There also appears to be some progress on the long-standing issue of India being allowed to set up a transit route via Bangladesh territory. Clearly, both sides are looking to operate within a give-and-take framework.

For several years now, India and Bangladesh have shared a strained relationship. Among other reasons, Bangladesh has resented what it perceives as India's 'big brother' approach while New Delhi has felt that Dhaka is too prickly. However, these two countries share many interests. There are synergies in the field of trade and commerce, security cooperation and cultural exchange that have not been pursued seriously. It is, therefore, welcome that there appears to be a new sense of purpose in the approach being taken by both New Delhi and Dhaka to shore up bilateral ties.

The two sides have signed five important agreements which cover prisoner exchange, cooperation in fighting terror and drug trafficking and enhancing cultural exchange programmes. New Delhi has also chosen to be sensitive to Dhaka's water concerns by halting work on the Tipaimukh dam project. Enhanced trade and investment ties between the two countries could transform the nature of the relationship. It could unleash Bangladesh's economic potential and benefit Indian industry and investors. Bangladesh is among the more stable of our neighbours and is pursuing economic growth. India has much to gain by being a supportive, engaged neighbour.

## Make Them Pay

New air safety guidelines must emphasise zero-tolerance policy

That financial considerations should come in the way of ensuring aircraft and passenger safety is dangerous in the extreme. And yet, that is precisely what the situation seems to be in the Indian airline industry today. Five incidents of passengers behaving in a manner that contravened basic safety norms in the past 10 days have highlighted an old problem, that of the ugly Indian traveller. And given the bare-knuckle rivalries in the Indian aviation industry, exacerbated by the global downturn, airlines seem reluctant to voluntarily enforce mechanisms to deal with the issue, fearing that they will lose passengers in the process. That puts the ball in the Directorate General of Civil Aviation's (DGCA) court. The DGCA is in the process of framing guidelines for dealing with unruly passengers. It needs to make these guidelines mandatory for airlines to follow.

Improper behaviour towards female cabin crew – shading off into molestation and sexual harassment – has been a long-standing issue. Troubling enough as this was, the security concerns that have come to the forefront in the past decade have deepened the implications of such behaviour. Consider the failed Christmas bombing aboard an American airliner by Nigerian Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab. There are no convenient lines to be drawn between the all-too-common recalcitrant traveller and a genuine security threat such as Abdulmutallab. The incident last year when an intoxicated passenger aboard a domestic flight here claimed to be a terrorist is a prime example of this. A zero-tolerance policy is the only option.

It is the DGCA's responsibility that both the response guidelines it is framing and punitive measures emphasise this. Immediate diversion of a flight to offload unruly passengers, as practised in the US and UK, is one option. Another is the establishment of a preventive mechanism by publicising the zero-tolerance policy during the check-in procedure and in-flight. And barring drunk individuals from boarding – as well as a database tracking serial offenders, accessible by all airlines, enabling them to blacklist individuals – would go a long way towards preventing dangerous situations from developing mid-flight.

Laws tailored to deal with air safety are needed as well. For instance, no specific law currently exists to deal with hoax hijack attempts of the kind perpetrated last year. Neither has filing charges against passengers for molestation under the relevant section of the IPC proved particularly successful. Amendments to the Civil Aviation Act putting in place harsh penalties for such infractions could go some way towards ensuring that they do not occur. Individuals drunk on alcohol and a sense of entitlement must no longer be allowed to imperil the safety of their fellow passengers and crew.

## Floss Of Civilisation

Kamakshi Chakravarti

According to a recent study by Kyoto University, there are certain types of monkeys that floss their teeth with human hair. Who would have guessed that flossing was part of the collective unconscious? That's right, a primal instinct that has primates lying awake at night afraid of the dark and poor oral hygiene. Where did they get the idea to use our luscious locks to this end, to begin with? I know necessity is the mother of invention but one can hardly imagine that human hair is plentiful in the wild. It would have to be a strange confluence of factors that led to this discovery. First, there would need to be monkeys in captivity then add in long-haired humans with very poor hair care regimens and finally throw in stringy foods that really get in there and drive you crazy. If you think they are just monkeying around, this should change your mind – these monkeys spend twice as much time flossing when their babies are watching. This would indicate, decisively, that they are conditioning their little ones to clean their deciduous teeth with the unconditioned

## MONKEY BUSINESS

strands. In the immortal words of James Joyce, when they are "Jung and easily Freudened", they learn to ape their parents. Not that, one imagines, much teaching is required. I mean, it's so simple even a monkey can do it. Well, better for the little beasties to follow these fowl practices than be foul-mouthed.

I know this farcical folic folly strains belief and usually one ought to discuss only the most refined matters. I have decided, however, just this one time to make an exception at the risk of biting off more than one can chew. It's all in the interests of sanitary sanity. I just want to put the idea into your head that, instead of fighting each other tooth and nail, our teeth and nails could be so much better employed getting to the root of our problems. Part of me thinks, and it's a hair-raising thought, that we are being taut, er, taught by example. It's up to you to decide whether this monkey business should be taken seriously.

## China seems poised to review its Asia strategy

Jayadeva Ranade

Reading tea leaves is risky business. Reading Chinese tea leaves – there are over a thousand varieties – is fraught with even greater risk. Nevertheless, it is necessary to occasionally lift the veil and discern what polite smiles and commercially enticing conversations conceal. More so, since China appears to have replaced its policy of 'taoguang yanghui', or 'lie low, bide your time', with a more assertive one.

Changing strategic equations in Asia seem to have prompted Beijing to begin reviewing its Asia strategy. The US's 'undisguised interest' in Asia and recent initiatives in Myanmar and North Korea have attracted particular concern. Beijing assesses that Japan is preparing to play a larger role in Asia and Japanese premier Yukio Hatoyama's India visit would have been interpreted as part of the effort. China's concerns were reflected in an article in an influential Beijing-owned Hong Kong daily. Observing that Asia is "undergoing big changes" and "a major restructuring", it noted Hatoyama's proposal for an East Asian community, Seoul's suggestion for new diplomatic thinking on Asia and Singapore's recommendation that America get closely involved in East Asian affairs.

Visits recently to Japan, South Korea, Myanmar and Cambodia by Chinese vice-president Xi Jinping, widely tipped to succeed Chinese president Hu Jintao, indicate Beijing's interest in the region. Chinese authorities took care to ensure that each visit was punctuated with a significant gesture. In Tokyo, he was granted audience by the emperor despite short notice. In Yangon, he was received by the normally reclusive senior general Than Shwe. Cambodia sent some Uighurs back to China and certain incarceration a day prior to Xi's arrival. While these hint at Xi's rising stature in the Chinese Communist Party hierarchy, they particularly display China's clout.

Military strength has been key to China's foreign and strategic policy. Last year, the People's

Liberation Army (PLA) conducted over 23 exercises. Unlike in previous years, almost none contained an amphibian element. The exercises suggest Beijing envisages a possible conflagration along China's periphery. China's assertiveness has been in evidence elsewhere too. At least five confrontations occurred between Chinese and US navy vessels in the South China and East China Seas in the course of the year and Chinese vessels clashed with Vietnamese craft.

China's territorial disputes in the region centre on the resource-rich Spratly and Paracels archipelagos which sit atop an estimated 130 million barrels of oil and gas. The National



China's Xi Jinping in Yangon, Myanmar: VEEP as VIP

People's Congress, China's version of a parliament, is currently deliberating a 'Draft Law on the Environment Protection of Sea Islands', which stipulates that ownership of the uninhabited islands will revert to the state and that the state council of the People's Republic of China will exercise control over them. The draft appears to include the Senkaku (Diaoyutai) Islands disputed between China and Japan in the East China Sea and Nansha (Spratly) Islands disputed between China and a number of countries including Malaysia, the Philippines and Vietnam. Tension has escalated. Last March, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, then Malaysian prime minister, inspected the Spratlys and claimed sovereignty. That month the Philippines promulgated the 'Philippines Baselines Law' asserting sovereignty

over some of the Spratlys. Once it enacts the draft law, Beijing is likely to get more assertive.

Chinese assertiveness has already triggered quiet alarm in the region. In Taiwan, the popularity of KMT president Ma Ying-jeou, increasingly viewed as pro-Beijing, has ebbed. Strategic analysts in Japan privately voice increasing criticism of Hatoyama's policies towards China and the US. In December, Vietnam convened a conference to discuss the Spratly and Paracels Islands territorial issue.

India has for the past two years been subjected to increasing diplomatic and military pressure. The list of unfriendly actions is long. Most recent instances include designating the entire state of J&K as disputed by the practice of issuing loose-leaf visas to its residents. Official Chinese protests objecting to the separate visits by India's prime minister and the Dalai Lama to Arunachal Pradesh were noticeably tougher than in the past. Chinese academics who visited Delhi last October, echoing Beijing's view, asserted that the Dalai Lama's visit was instigated by the Indian government and hinted at the possibility of punitive action.

The reported incidence of intrusions by Chinese troops along the entire Line of Actual Control remains high. This is accompanied by a major build-up of defences in Tibet. China is building seven modern airfields in the Tibet Autonomous Region. Sixty airfields are planned by 2020. The number of fighter aircraft deployed in Gongga near Lhasa has increased. The network of border defences, roads and intelligence outposts has been expanded. The PLA's annual troop rotation in Tibet was completed quickly; troops no longer have to go via Lhasa but can directly reach many border locations from the Chinese mainland, reducing transportation time.

The window for China's neighbours to formulate policies to engage Beijing while preparing against possible adventurism will not be open for long. Once the Shanghai Expo concludes in October 2010, Beijing could begin to seriously re-examine its Asia strategy, evaluating the advantages of enforcing its territorial or perceived strategic goals.

The writer is former additional secretary, cabinet secretariat.

## 'Society has not accepted ragging as a social evil'

The ragging incident involving 18 students attached to KEM Hospital's prestigious G S Medical College has shocked Mumbai. Mohit Garg, co-founder of Coalition to Uproot Ragging from Education (CURE) and the website norragging.com, tells Jyoti Punvani that ragging can be eliminated.

## What do you think of the action against the accused students?

Filing the FIR against them was swift and appreciable, and in keeping with the Supreme Court guidelines. But the chief minister's statement that their careers should not be affected does not help. A crime is a crime and should be handled as such. Careers are not more important than the dignity of life. Another issue here is that those who were ragged should not be ostracised. Typically in such cases, freshers are blamed for spoiling careers, which is another

## Q&amp;A



Jyoti Punvani

deterrent against complaints. I wouldn't be surprised if there was far severe ragging happening in other professional colleges in Mumbai. As per a CURE study, the number of media-reported cases in Maharashtra is low compared to Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. This does not imply less ragging, since reported cases would be a tiny fraction of the incidents

## Are there any support systems or networks for victims?

Unfortunately, no. I have seen cases of very severe ragging victims trying to contact one another but either people wish to forget and don't connect with other victims or their own fight is so time-consuming that they are unable to give anything beyond sympathy to others. Another perspective against such a network is that instead of victims carrying the scar throughout their lives, the best remedy is to help them get back to normal as quickly as possible.

## Some students feel ragging can never end because its victims want to avenge their humiliation on their juniors.

This is a vicious circle – the victim becoming the perpetrator. We can break it by ensuring that two or three batches are not ragged. This would eliminate the revenge feeling. In fact, most colleges

that have successfully eliminated ragging have done this.

CURE advocates a three-pronged approach. One, monitor ragging and mete out strict punishments. The victim cannot be expected to complain. Offenders should be punished strictly according to law, since whatever is inflicted in the name of ragging is a criminal offence. Two, create social awareness. In every ragging death, it emerges that the victim informed his parents, who took it lightly. Whenever one talks to friends about ragging, they think that only cowards are scared of it. Society has not accepted ragging as a social evil. It's regarded as a necessary initiation ritual, a joke. Ragging is not fashionable, please! Three, alternate means of interaction for breaking the ice.

We should have a college-ranking system that includes ragging as a criterion. Only this will make reputation-conscious colleges improve their efforts to eliminate ragging.

## SUBVERSE

## Do-it-yourself India

Jug Suraiya

India is increasingly a do-it-yourself country. And the government of India should give a medal to the residents of Tajnagar village, near Gurgaon, for setting a new benchmark in the DIY (do-it-yourself) scheme of things. Having waited a quarter of a century in vain to get their own railway station from a sarkar that seemed deaf to all their pleas, the enterprising Tajnagaris had a whip around among themselves, raised Rs 21 lakh, and set up their own railway station, certainly the first DIY railway station in India, if not in the world.

God is said to help those who help themselves. Our sarkar goes one better than God: it doesn't even help those who help themselves, but implicitly urges them to continue the good work and keep helping themselves some more because – as sure as eggs is eggs – the sarkar certainly ain't going to help anyone. In that way our sarkar is eminently fair, and does not discriminate on the basis of caste, creed or gender. It leaves us all – irrespective of particular persuasion – to help ourselves to whatever it is that we think we require.

You want an uninterrupted supply of bijli? Fine, it's not an unreasonable request. But don't look to the sarkar, or any of its many agencies, to generate it for you; you've got to do it yourself. Get a genset. Or a kerosene lantern and a handheld pankha. What? No kerosene available in the government-run fair price shops? Haven't you ever heard of a do-it-yourself source of supply for kerosene – or for that matter for anything else you might require, like potatoes, and onions, and dal and rice – which is called the black market?

No municipal water to be had? Stop bellyaching and get on with the job of digging a community bore well in your area. Set up a rain harvesting system. Push comes to shove, buy bottled water. To drink? No, dummy. To bathe in. It's either that or don't take off your clothes before sending them to the drycleaners.

Government hospitals and health-care centres either non-existent or full

of rats, disease and infections? Go to a private – read, do-it-yourself – nursing home. What do you mean you can't afford it? Of course you can. What do you think do-it-yourself medical insurance is for, for which you have to pay those humongous annual premiums?

There are no textbooks, blackboards or teachers at your local sarkari school? Send your kid to a school set up by a do-it-yourself entrepreneur who charges swingeing fees for the services provided. Almost everything in India is on a do-it-yourself basis. Electricity, water, health, schooling.

With the virtual collapse of the governmental postal system, the sarkari postman has become an endangered, if not a near-extinct, species, spotted only at Diwali time when he rings your doorbell to collect his yearly bakshesh. The rest of the time you deal with a do-it-yourself delivery system called a courier company.

Rising incidence of crime in your neighbourhood and the cops unable, or unwilling, or both, to do anything about it? Employ do-it-yourself security guards to protect your property and your person. In some parts of the country you have not just do-it-yourself cops but do-it-yourself armies, like the Ranvir Sena, or the Salwa Judum. And to provide competition to these, you have another do-it-yourself army called the Naxalites, who are said to run a parallel do-it-yourself state-within-a-state in over 160 districts across the country.

Each day, in every way, India's do-it-yourself capacity increases, as exemplified by the resourceful villagers of Tajnagar who got themselves their own DIY railway station, thus relieving railway minister Mamata of an onerous chore. The sarkar should recognise and honour such do-it-yourself enterprise. The residents of Tajnagar deserve a medal for the DIY spirit they've shown. Trouble is, the medal will also have to be of the DIY variety, because the sarkar can't supply even that.

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## SACRED SPACE

Harvest Hymn

Lord of the lotus,  
lord of the harvest,  
Bright and munificent  
lord of the morn!  
Thine is the bounty that  
prospered our sowing,  
Thine is the bounty that  
nurtured our corn.  
We bring thee our  
songs and our garlands  
for tribute,  
The gold of our fields and  
the gold of our fruit;  
O giver of mellowing  
radiance, we hail thee,  
We praise thee, O Surya,  
with cymbal and flute.  
Lord of the rainbow,  
lord of the harvest,  
Great and beneficent  
lord of the main!  
Thine is the mercy that  
cherished our furrows,  
Thine is the mercy  
that fostered our grain.  
We bring thee our  
thanks and our  
garlands for tribute,  
The wealth of our  
valleys, new-garnered  
and ripe;  
O sower of rain and the  
dewfall, we hail thee,  
We praise thee, Varuna,  
with cymbal and pipe.  
Sarojini Naidu

Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord. Colossians 3.12-17

For flowers that bloom about our feet; for tender grass, so fresh, so sweet; for song of bird, and hum of bee; for all things fair we hear or see, Father in heaven, we thank Thee! Ralph W Emerson

## The Reason We're Here Is To Experience Love

Dadaji

We have come for some days to play. The body is temporary. We are actors and we are paid according to our performances. Play your part well in the Vraja Leela, God's Play of Love, shaking off desires and obsessions. Our duty is to watch His Leela as passive witnesses. Be always in a state of svabhava, the natural state of Oneness with Him, free of all sense of want.

You are here to relish His rasa, to experience God's Love, to taste His Vraja Leela. This Leela is symbolised by union, moving to and fro between the opposite poles like a pendulum, the characteristic of duality and mental function. It is a stage where we are to enact our respective roles for a stipulated period of time.

Duty is the first thing. Duty is karma or work. Perform your actions with sincerity and honesty. You must act. There is no knowledge without karma. You are seeing, hearing, eating something... all this is karma, and this karma is knowledge. Whatever you do is karma. Actions and reactions in the mind lead to one's activity. Let the fruit of action be decided and bestowed by Him because the result comes from Him. You cannot undertake any work without a pragmatic end in view. So, you have to do your work, but without any desire for the results. No sooner has the work been finished then the attachment evaporates. That should be the attitude.

Work is worship when the sole frame of reference is the Soul, the vibrant Mahanah, God's Name within your heart. Every bit of work is worship. But the moment any kind of work grips your consciousness

## EDIT PAGE MAILBOX

My Times My Voice

## Australian government tardy in acting

With reference to the editorial 'Trouble Down Under' (Jan 11), the attacks on Indian students in Australia do seem racially motivated. But despite facing a steep 46 per cent drop in student visa applications from India, the Australian authorities seem to be acting tardily in ensuring the safety of Indian nationals. This can only embolden those carrying out the attacks. It is now up to the Indian government to demand action from the Australian government. And while it is at it, perhaps it should also take a look at the many lacunae in our education system that have compelled students to go to other countries even when they are unwelcome there.

Ippili Santhosh Kumar, HYDERABAD

## Hockey authority must put its foot down

With reference to the editorial 'Self Goal' (Jan 12), the governing body of India's national sport, hockey, must take a firm stand in dealing with the recalcitrant players. In this connection, it can look to the action taken by the Australian Cricket Board when it was faced by a similar situation upon the launch of Kerry Packer's World Series Cricket during the latter half of the 1970s. All its frontline cricketers were barred from the national Test side and a brand new team of young players was constituted to represent the country at the international level.

Arun Malankar, MUMBAI

## Colonial and Indian armies cannot be compared

With reference to the Q&A (Jan 8), Omar Khalidi's contention that minorities were better represented in the colonial army does not hold. The colonial army represented undivided India, while the Indian army represents post-independent India. At the time of partition, there was a mass exodus of Muslim officers and soldiers from the colonial army to the Pakistani army as well as a civilian exodus. This resulted in a void in the Indian army, and an economically disadvantaged Muslim community that was unable in part to fill it. Thus, vastly different social conditions make a comparison between the colonial army and the Indian army untenable.

JN Mahanty, PUNE

## Attaining liberation from cycle of life and death

In the Speaking Tree 'True Meaning of Non-violence' (Jan 9), Prem Khamesra does an excellent job of explaining the true meaning of non-violence. The ultimate goal of atman or soul is to attain moksha – total liberation from the cycle of birth and death – so that it can reunite with the paramatma. But the path to attaining moksha is difficult. Attachment to other people and to material possessions is one of the most difficult obstacles to overcome. Therefore, the soul must always remember that it is a fragment of the paramatma. The path of non-violence helps the soul to achieve this.

Narayan Paga, VIA E-MAIL

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## THE SPEAKING TREE

My body is an ashram, the temple of God, a temporary place to enjoy Him in Prakriti or Nature and it is God's Grace. We have come with mind, senses, desires and attachments. We shall have to give something to them. If you stop everything, they will revolt.

The object of our being born on earth is to relish the joy of God's love. It is human tendency to act under compulsion of innumerable temptations and attachments. But even being involved in all this, human birth is a blessing. How ineffably is this world filled with beauty and flavour! We have come to experience it. However, we have become otherwise engaged. Be always with God's Name then the objective with which you have come here will be realised.

An individual can at best put in effort, regardless of the result. Work is one's own dharma. Work itself is sacrifice. Work is penance. God is there, ready to hold your hand and walk with you. So do not worry or be afraid. We are here to enjoy His Play, remember Him with love and remain in the natural state. Today is the birth centenary of Dadaji Amiya Roy Chowdhury.