“What are the two most important days of your life?”
First answer is obvious: the day you were born.
The answer: it is the day you realise why you were born.
Not everyone experiences that day; many of us don’t even know to ask that question.
But for those who do, that day becomes a major fulcrum in their lives.
It changes the entire- your daily life and work.
You are able to draw on reservoirs of energy and inspiration that you did not even know existed within you.
Work becomes truly fulfilling, a source of satisfaction and joy
A sudden lightness of being

Post-election mobilisation prompted by parties such as the AAP and the Janata Dal (United) is changing the election rhetoric by showcasing an alternative way of doing things.

The revenge of the underdog

Growing insecurity in Afghanistan

LETTTERS TO THE EDITOR

PERSPECTIVE

Temptation of spoils

Enterprise as an instrument of change

Getting back home, safely

Despite extensive experience in conducting evacuation operations of its citizens abroad, India's affairs office in Afghanistan could not come to the rescue.
Growing insecurity in Afghanistan

- Blast near the Supreme Court premises in Kabul that left at least 20 people dead, underscores the growing insecurity.
- The suicide attack once again reveals the capability of terrorist outfits in Afghanistan to target even the most secure places in the national capital.
- In the past the Taliban have targeted the court and even the Parliament building.
- Kabul’s anti-terror strategy has hardly been effective, considering the inroads insurgents have made in the recent years.
- After most foreign troops withdrew in 2014, the Taliban have steadily stepped up attacks, expanding the civil war into residential areas. According to a UN report, 2016 was the bloodiest year for Afghan civilians since the U.S.-led invasion began in 2001.
- The Taliban’s territorial control has grown in strength. Last year it had briefly overrun the northern city of Kunduz and threatened to attack several other population centres.
- A report by Sigar [Q-?], a U.S. Congressional watchdog, says around 28% of Afghans now live in territories over which government troops and the Taliban have been fighting.
- The government had initially sought an agreement with the Taliban and reached out to Pakistan, which has some influence over the group. But this yielded nothing- Kabul failed to cash in on an internal power struggle within the Taliban after the 2015 disclosure about the death of its leader, Mullah Omar.
- The Taliban survived the death of Omar’s successor, Mullah Mansoor, in a U.S. drone strike.
- The Taliban have over time built resources and a strong insurgent army to fight a long war with the elected government.
- The question is whether the government, facing factionalism and corruption allegations, is ready for it- For Kabul, the threat is multiplying.
- The Islamic State has established some presence in the country and declared a “province” of the ‘Caliphate’ in eastern Afghanistan.
- To turn its fortunes around in the 15-year-old civil war, Afghanistan needs to strengthen the administration.
- Mr. Ghani should initiate the administrative reforms he had promised and put up a stronger, united fight against terrorist groups.
- Kabul should seek more help and a higher level of commitment from other countries, including the U.S., in combating terror.
- A weakening of the civilian government and its capacity to ensure security is not in the interest of any global power.
Getting back home, safely

- On January 26, 1986, as New Delhi celebrated its Republic Day, South Yemen was being engulfed in a civil war that threatened the lives of thousands of foreigners living there.

- While Britain, France and the Soviet Union coordinated to jointly evacuate their nationals, the 850 Indians in the country were forced to wait for several more days until New Delhi finally managed to convince a merchant ship to pick them up.

- Fast forward almost 30 years, to April 2015, when Yemen was on fire once again. This time, however, the Indian government successfully conducted Operation Raahat to evacuate almost 5,000 Indians and nearly 1,000 citizens from 41 other countries.

- Besides Air India aircraft, the Indian Navy deployed vessels, and the Indian Air Force C-17 Globemasters for strategic airlift.

- Reflect New Delhi’s new drive to protect the lives and assets of its citizens abroad in times of crisis.

- The increasing size and complexity of the diaspora requires the government to expand capacity and improve procedures- More than 11 million Indians now reside abroad and 20 million travel internationally every year.

- As political instability rattles the West Asian region, which hosts more than 7 million Indians, the government can no longer rely on heroic efforts by individual officials or quick-fix solutions.
Solutions

1) The government will need to build on its rich experience in conducting more than 30 evacuation operations since the 1950s-Studying India’s history, best practices and lessons learned will help institutionalise them- By supporting policy-oriented research at universities and think tanks to document the memory of senior officials, the government would also facilitate the transmission of their expertise to younger officials.

2) The government must avoid the jugaad approach- Every evacuation case is unique, given the specific nature and location of the crisis, but this should not preclude an analytical attempt to formulate a blueprint that lists core tasks for all operations - identify regional support, develop country-specific.

3) India’s diplomatic cadre must be given specific training to operate in hostile environments - conduct emergency drills + create rapid reaction teams of Indian security personnel to be deployed to protect diplomatic staff.

4) The success of future operations will also rely on New Delhi’s willingness to work together with friendly governments. India will have to invest in cooperative frameworks that facilitate coordination among countries that have large expatriate populations in West Asia.

5) The government will have to assign a greater role to its armed forces, in particular by strengthening the Navy and Air Force’s capacity to operate in tandem with civilian authorities.
Using Technology

6) To minimise redundancies (फालतूपन), the government must institutionalise a permanent inter-ministerial coordinating mechanism for emergency evacuations- encourage State governments to create regional contingency plans.

7) To avoid cost inflation and delays, the government must establish a permanent civil reserve air fleet that pools aircraft from all Indian airlines based on pre-established requisition (मांग).

8) The government will have to invest in new technologies to better monitor the diaspora’s profile and mobility- This can be achieved by encouraging more diplomatic missions to provide online consular registration forms, developing an online registration system for overseas travellers, utilising social media, and by making the Aadhaar card compulsory to facilitate biometric identity verification and reduce identity fraud during evacuation.

9) The government must expand efforts to manage public opinion and be able to conduct a quiet diplomacy that is crucial to safely extricate Overseas Indians from conflict zones.

India has extensive experience in conducting evacuation operations, but to secure the lives and assets of Indians abroad, the government must avoid an ad hoc approach and seek to institutionalise best practices, bolster diplomatic and military capabilities, and improve coordination.
Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) is the U.S. government’s leading oversight authority on Afghanistan reconstruction.

Congress created the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction to provide independent and objective oversight of the Afghanistan Reconstruction funds.

Under the authority of Section 1229 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 (PL 110-181), SIGAR conducts audit, inspections, and investigations to promote efficiency and effectiveness of reconstruction programs, and to detect and prevent waste, fraud, and abuse of taxpayer dollars.

SIGAR also has a hotline that allows individuals to report suspected fraud.

SIGAR's mission is to "promote economy and efficiency of U.S.-funded reconstruction programs in Afghanistan and to detect and deter fraud, waste, and abuse by conducting independent, objective, and strategic audits, inspections, and investigations”

The Boeing C-17 Globemaster III is a large military transport aircraft. It was developed for the United States Air Force from the 1980s to the early 1990s by McDonnell Douglas.

Ranjit Katiyal, an Indian businessman, leads a happy and successful life in Kuwait with his family- However, when Iraq invades Kuwait, he decides to risk his life to save his stranded countrymen.

The Taliban alternatively spelled Taleban, recently changed their name and identity to Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) is an Sunni Islamic fundamentalist political movement in Afghanistan currently waging war (an insurgency, or jihad) within that country.

From 1996 to 2001, it held power in Afghanistan and enforced a strict interpretation of Sharia, or Islamic law, of which the international community and leading Muslims have been highly critical.

Until his death in 2013, Mullah Mohammed Omar was the supreme commander and spiritual leader of the Taliban. Mullah Akhtar Mansour was elected as his replacement in 2015, and following Mansour's killing in a May 2016 U.S. drone strike, Mawlawi Haibatullah Akhundzada became the group's leader.
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