

Opinion

Editorial Board - DuPage County

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A moment of silence

*Today we mourn lost liberty in Russia where an autocracy fears a free press.
And we honor the journalists who risk their lives in Ukraine. Because the world must know.*

Our View



Pierre Zahrzowski

Oleksandra Kyvshynova

Craig Renaud

Your Views

No compassion for horse racing in Illinois

Is Churchill Downs ever satisfied? I would have started with Arlington Park but we all know that is a non-sequitor. The decision to put one more psychological nail in the coffin of Illinois Racing by suddenly announcing the Arlington Million et al. will now be run in Kentucky shows that CDI (Churchill) literally has no compassion for anything involving Illinois racing. I encourage anyone who has an interest in this to read Jim O'Donnell's column Thursday. He expresses the horror known as Churchill very well. Please leave Illinois as he and move on to your next company.

Bob Gary
Arlington Heights

Climate change is an issue for all humanity

It is sad to see so many insinuations in the news that green issues are part of some radical left ideology. When will the world wake up to the fact that this is a worldwide existential problem of immediate concern? Unless serious measures are urgently undertaken, the lives of everyone on the planet will be severely impacted. Lip service is not an option. Real, significant action is necessary to mitigate the catastrophic impact we are already beginning to experience from climate change. Addressing it will be painful and expensive, but the misery and cost of not acting will be much, much greater. We must adjust our thinking to that harsh reality. This is not a political issue. It is an issue of all humanity.

Bob Dohn
Hoffman Estates

Finding true 'experts'

Here's a frightening scenario. Multiple "experts" in a single discipline are lauded, respected, and paid very well for their knowledge. They've studied long and hard and have reached the pinnacles of success. When asked to solve a problem (let's take the economy, poverty, injustice, legal incomprehensibility), the expectation is that the "experts" would agree, problem solved. Not so. Disagreement prevails and what persists, despite the amazing accomplishments of the human mind over the past 5,000 years are the awards and abundant wealth amassed by these academics - and, of course, the problems. Perhaps someday all the wealth can be used to actually solve problems. Perhaps the brain we are looking for is on a computer chip. There's human accomplishment.

David Hagerman
St. Charles

Join the conversation

We welcome your comments (500-word limit). Letters must include your full name, town and phone number. Letters are subject to editing and may be posted online. We do not guarantee publication of every letter.

Email: feedback@dailyherald.com



The hijab and India's slide away from open democracy

In the United States, wearing a hijab, or head cover, is, with rare exceptions, a non-issue. One can stand in the lobby of my hospital or at a quad of any educational institution and within a short span of time, see folks of different attire or religious symbols walk by.

It adds to the diversity of the society. The U.S. is like a garden where flowers of many different colors blossom. Diversity is the hallmark of a liberal democratic society with emphasis on liberal.

India used to be like us. But in the last few years with the rise to power of the right-wing Hindu administration, its liberalism has gone into serious recession. Examples are many. The latest is banning Muslim girls in schools and colleges their right to wear the hijab. The issue became viral after a video surfaced on social media. A young girl wearing the hijab, rides into the parking lot of her college on her scooter, parks the vehicle and starts walking towards the entrance. She is immediately accosted by a gaggle of young men with saffron-colored shawls (saffron is the preferred color of the right-wing Hindu groups) draped over their shoulders, who start shouting their favorite slogan, Jai Sri Ram (Praise Lord Ram.) She stands her ground, raises her fist in the air in defiance, and shouts back, "God is great."

Muskan, the girl in the video, is a 19-year-old student at the college in the second year of her courses for a bachelor of commerce degree.

"I was returning an assignment," she said.

For the past few weeks in a southern state of India, Karnataka and now other states, girls in multiple colleges and schools are being prevented from entering institutions, attending classes or taking term exams,

unless they take off the hijab.

The main reason offered by the schools for banning hijab is that it vitiates the secular ambience of an institution.

These young Muslim women sought relief from the courts. The Karnataka High Court upheld the hijab ban, citing the need for uniformity of dress in teaching institutions, agreeing with schools that the hijab is a religious symbol. The institutions were not banning any other religious symbol like the Bindi that is worn by Hindu girls on their forehead. Another argument offered by the courts is that the Quran does not prescribe hijab, therefore it is not an essential religious symbol.

For the state to claim it can determine what a faith prescribes for its followers sets a dangerous precedent. The state should not be in the business of interpreting a scripture. It is for the individuals of the faith to decide it for themselves. It is the duty of the state to protect the rights of its citizens to practice their faith as they deem fit, as long it does not cause harm to the society.

The most hypocritical is the disturbance of law-and-order argument. The girls started protesting when they were banned. There were emotional pleas with the school administrators. The students are the victims, not the instigators. To presume that they are being forced to wear the hijab/Niqab is not accurate, either. There is diversity of opinion in wearing hijab among Muslim women. There is no faith where its followers do not have varying opinions about



Javed Akhter
Guest view

how to practice it. There are many instances where one family member, like a mother, may wear the hijab and another, like a daughter, may not or the other way around.

These Muslim girls have been attending schools and colleges in hijab forever, so why the ban now. An obvious explanation is that the state of Karnataka is currently ruled by the right-wing Hindu nationalist party, the BJP, that has the aspiration of making India a Hindu nation. In BJP's India, only a saffron flower may bloom. Banning hijab is the latest in their desire to make Muslims the "other."

With the BJP in power, the anti-Muslim rhetoric has increased, hate crimes against Muslims and Christians and Dalits have skyrocketed. Muslims have been lynched for trading or even for the suspicion of trading in cows, and Muslim men have been pulled out of trains for traveling with a Hindu woman. Christian priests have been assaulted for the canard of conversion when they were offering prayers.

Even on Christmas, right-wing Hindu goons attacked church services and vandalized church properties. Atrocities against Dalits (euphemism for untouchables) have continued, including recently, the physical assault of a Dalit groom riding a horse that was considered an insult to the higher caste communities.

All societies have old traditions and histories to grapple with. India is no exception. India started out on positive note. Sadly, it is rapidly becoming an "illiberal" democracy. Democracy without liberalism turns into an oppressive form of majoritarianism.

• Javed Akhter is a physician and freelance writer from Oak Brook.

The Eurasian 'heartland' axis' threat

"Who rules the heartland rules the World Island. Who rules the World Island commands the world." So wrote the geography professor and occasional member of Parliament Halford Mackinder in his 1919 book "Democratic Ideals and Reality."

Mackinder's heartland was vaguely defined as the vast Eurasian landmass from central Europe eastward across Siberia and the Himalayas to eastern China. And while it hasn't dominated the world since — it glaringly excludes the United States — it still has great weight in what Mackinder called "the lands of outer or insular crescent." And it seemed to have great weight suddenly on Feb. 24 when, just days after a conference between Russia's President Vladimir Putin and China's President Xi Jinping at the Beijing Winter Olympics, Russian troops suddenly invaded Ukraine.

It's true that the Russia-China alliance solemnified then has not proven to be an axis of steel. China has been skittish about supporting Putin's aggression, abstaining rather than opposing United Nations resolutions condemning it. On the other hand, it has also spurned U.S. efforts at mediation. Nonetheless, the apparent alliance of Russia and China, however strained, and their friendly ties with Iran raise dangers for the U.S. and its friends and allies that American leaders have been ignoring until recently.

This heartland Axis of Unfreedom is reminiscent of that Axis of Aggressors that dominated Mackinder's heartland from August 1939 to June 1941 — an alliance of totalitarian dictatorship that was the closest thing to what George Orwell described in "1984." The key allies then were not Russia and China but Germany and Japan. The key event was the signing of the Hitler-Stalin pact on Aug. 23, 1939. This pact, and the almost simultaneous end of Russia-Japan skirmishes on the Manchurian border, gave two 20th-century despotisms control of most of the landmass of Eurasia — Mackinder's heartland. Adolf Hitler and Josef Stalin promptly carved up Poland and the Baltic states. Hitler sent his armies west and north, to conquer Denmark and Norway, the Low Countries and France. By May 1941, he was master of the Balkans all the way to Greece.

By any measure, that was a more serious menace to freedom and decency in the world than what we face today. Hitler, Stalin and the Japanese warlords were bent on further conquests, and on the mass murder of vast populations.

Today's Russia-China alliance is obviously not nearly as formidable as the Hitler-Stalin axis. It may turn out that Putin's invasion of Ukraine will backfire and cut Russia-China ties that are already frayed. The leaders and people of Europe, suddenly alert to the need to strengthen their militaries, will take on responsibilities borne by the U.S. from the 1940s to the 1990s. Perhaps the West will set aside stringent climate policies based on models of the distant future that may prove no more valid than virologists' COVID models of the recent past. And perhaps Xi, having observed the founting of Putin's military strategy, based on optimistic assumptions that proved unwarranted, may decline to risk the uncertainties of an amphibious invasion of Taiwan.

Or so we may hope. But Ukraine, and the ghost of Mackinder, suggest we should ponder unhappy possibilities as well.



Michael Barroo

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