

Acting locally may be killing India's lions



ARMIN ROSENCRANZ AND GOVIND SINGH

There are not one but four lions in the national emblem of India. The surname 'Singh' (lion) is a popular one in many parts of India, ranging from Rajasthan in the West to Manipur in the North-east. This surname goes back over two thousand years, and its glory was reinstated in 1699 with the setting up of the Khalsa brotherhood in the north Indian state of Punjab.

The lion has been portrayed as the protector of faith and defender of dharma almost throughout Indian culture. Lord Vishnu is said to have taken the form of the half-man half-lion Narasimha, to destroy evil and protect religious freedom. The lion is also the vehicle of goddess Durga,

perhaps to further illustrate her strength and valour.

Yet, sometime around the 1970s, the Government of India snatched the national animal status from the lion and conferred it upon the Royal Bengal tiger. The arguments then were that the tiger had a more cosmopolitan appeal while the lion was simply limited to a small part of India, and some parts of Africa. It was this global appeal of the tiger that gave it the necessary edge over its predecessor to become a national symbol of India.

The newly declared national animal had to be protected, and a Project Tiger was launched shortly after this declaration. In its initial phase, Project Tiger was immensely helpful and doubled the number of tigers in India in just the first two decades of its implementation. But what it also did

was to push lion conservation, and the lion itself, to the back seat. Even as new tiger reserves kept getting declared, the last of the Asiatic lions had to be contained in the Gir forest of Gujarat. And their number, during the first two decades of Project Tiger, increased by only around 100.

What is perhaps more alarming is the comparison of the total number of tigers and lions in India at the start of Project Tiger. At the time when Project Tiger was being conceptualised, the total number of tigers in India was 1,827 and the total number of lions was only around 180. These were the last of the Asiatic lions, one of the two subspecies of the lion species, the other being the African lion.

So, what made the Government of India focus more on tiger conservation and not on the conservation of

the lion? The cosmopolitan appeal of the tiger has already been mentioned. Another factor that may have come into play is the comparison of the global figures of tiger and lion populations. Even today, the total number of tigers in the wild is estimated to be around 3,900 while the figure for lions is estimated to be around 20,000.

What gets overlooked in this data is that India accounts for over 70 per cent of the global tiger population but only around 3 per cent of the global lion population. Autecological investigation of the lion species reveals considerable differences between its two living subspecies. The Asiatic lion is relatively smaller, with a more compressed mane, thicker coat and a characteristic abdominal skin fold not found in its African counterpart. There are differences in the genetic

makeup as well as behaviour of these two subspecies, which emphasises the need to conserve the Asiatic lions despite the presence of a relatively large number of African lions.

The Asiatic lion, however, lies low in conservation priority and there does not seem to be any nation-wide concern to protect an animal that we all grew up to know as the king of the jungle. And perhaps what continues to be the biggest threat to the Asiatic lions is a problem, the solution for which has existed since at least the last 25 years. We have put all our lions in the same basket.

While the Gir forest may currently take pride in being synonymous with the Asiatic lions, it may also become their tombstone. This is because keeping a few hundred Asiatic lions in one habitat increases the probability of inbreeding in the population. The number of adult lions in Gir forest in 1968 was as low as 124. This number today is close to 515 with no new addition of lions from outside this gene pool. Inbreeding results in inbreeding depression which manifests into decreased biological fitness of a population.

It is for this reason that while any news of increase in number of lions in Gujarat is joyous, it must be taken with the proverbial pinch of salt. This is because the lions of Gir are always under a grave threat of a disease or epidemic that could wipe out their entire population in a matter of days. Sustaining the Asiatic lion subspecies therefore requires that an alternate habitat be created, and a number of lions be translocated to this new habitat.

Indeed, such a habitat has been prepared in the neighbouring state of Madhya Pradesh for many years. After the recent Independence Day announcement by the Prime Minister of India, on starting the much needed 'Project Lion', another neighbouring state of Rajasthan has also begun exploring the possibility of reintroducing Asiatic lions in its forests. 'Project Lion' has arrived late, but in the best interests of the Asiatic lions, let us hope it does prove to be better late than never. The first signs of the latter will be the actual witnessing of translocation of lions into new habitats that are as lion-friendly as the Gir forest continues to be.

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100 YEARS AGO

OCCASIONAL NOTE

The Belgian delegation to the Inter-Allied Seamen's Conference at Brussels proposed a general strike of seamen as a means of enforcing an eight-hour day and forty-eight-hour week. The conference adopted the proposal but coupled it with a French amendment in favour of submitting the question in the first place to a joint commission of seamen and ship-owners, which may render a contest unnecessary. The Belgian seamen, in proposing a strike, threaten to spoil an excellent example which their countrymen are setting to the rest of Europe. Mr. Ernest Benn has given an account of his own observations in Belgium, according to which the Belgian working-man is really working. "The doctrine of work as the solvent of all trouble is accepted not only on the land but in the factories and workshops." This is the exact opposite of the doctrine of the Labour extremists who believe that the solvent of all trouble is extortion. The Belgian workman has more time than formerly for recreation, but this does not alter the fact that he is a hard worker. The Belgians, to a man, are doing their best, Mr. Benn declares, and this fact alone is sufficient to place Belgium at the head of the nations at this moment and to assure that she will be the first to enjoy the comforts and blessings of material prosperity. There is "no striving after an unattainable ideal; there is simply a practical determination to patch things up and get a start."

NEWS ITEMS

BOMBAY COTTON BROKERS' ASSOCIATION

Tension between the members of the Bombay Cotton Brokers' Association and the Cotton Contract Board has if anything been growing. The Association, alleging that the Bombay Government have not attended to their grievances formulated in a petition, held a meeting during the week to represent their case to the Government of India. Speakers at the meeting stated inter alia that since the institution of the Government control over the cotton trade, dealers were at the mercy of a small coterie. The Cotton Contract Board was invested with very wide discretionary powers. The meeting resolved that, pending the satisfactory redress of their grievances the members of the Association should not till further notice have any dealings in respect of the new season's contracts.

SUGGESTED CHURCH REUNION

Commenting on the appeal made in the report of the Lambeth Conference, The Times expresses the opinion that the missionary dioceses of the Anglican Church should make the first move in the direction of reunion with the non-episcopal churches, as the problems there are most acute. They have been considered on the spot, and all parties concerned have already declared their desire for reunion in various conferences. The Times says that the ground has already been largely prepared in southern India, and it is anticipated that Christian churches there will seek to respond to the appeal without delay. Similar, though slower, progress may be looked for in Canada, Australia, China and elsewhere.

THE LATE MR. PERROTT

The Lieutenant-Governor in Council has learnt with deep regret of the sudden death of Mr. Henry Ronald Taylor Simpson Perrott at Gaya. Mr. Perrott joined the Indian Civil Service in the year 1900 and was posted to the district of Shahabad. He held charge of various Subdivisions, and in the end of 1913 was appointed Deputy Commissioner of the Santal Parganas. The influence which he obtained in this district was of the utmost service to Government when in 1917 the recruitment of labourers for service in France was first undertaken. Mr. Perrott threw himself with vigour and enthusiasm into the task of persuading the Santals to undertake service overseas. His early death will be mourned by a wide circle of friends, officials and non-officials alike.

MONEY MARKET

The demand for money continues on a fair scale, and some banks are willing to pay six per cent for six to nine months' deposits, and the discount rate is seven per cent. The effect of raising sterling Exchange to a high level by administrative action has been that vast quantities of Indian produce have not been exported, and imports have been temporarily stimulated. The sudden slump in sterling Exchange does not bring up the price of imported goods to the parity of the ruling rates of sterling. The exporters and the importers both, therefore, require funds for the financing of Indian produce, and for the holding of foreign manufactures. The general feeling is to conserve finance, and to seek credit for an extended period at the present favourable rates.

Who's picking up \$11b US poll tab?

RICHARD BRIFFAULT

Total spending in the 2020 US federal elections is projected to set a new record of almost \$11 billion by November.

When adjusted for inflation, that's over 50 per cent higher than 2016 election spending. This year's federal election spending – for the presidency, the Senate and the House of Representatives – is on track to be double what it was in 2008.

The surge in campaign spending is striking. But my research on campaign finance regulation suggests the volume of election spending is not the main problem with the U.S. campaign finance system.

The real challenge for American democracy is where this money comes from. American federal election campaigns are entirely funded by private money; most of it is provided by wealthy individual donors, political action committees and other interested organisations. Wealthy candidates also fund their own campaigns.

The U.S. has a public funding programme for presidential elections, established in 1974. For two decades it played an important role in campaigns. But it provided candidates with limited funds and imposed very low spending limits. As the needs and costs of contemporary campaigns grew, the system collapsed. While still available, no major candidate has taken public funds in the last three presidential elections.

When Joe Biden ran for the Democratic nomination in 1988, and again in 2008, he qualified for and accepted public funds, which accounted for 22 per cent and 14 per cent, respectively, of his campaign



funds.

This year, as of August 31, all of the \$531 million funding Joe Biden's campaign so far came from private funds, according to Open Secrets, a publicly available database that tracks campaign finance data. So did the \$476 million funding President Donald Trump's reelection bid so far.

The private dollars that fuel U.S. elections come mostly from a tiny fraction of society. Critics of American inequality often talk about "the 1%" – but in campaign finance it is the 0.0001 per cent who matter.

Federal law requires political campaigns, parties, PACs and outside groups to report the identities of donors who give at least \$200.

The September campaign finance filings – which cover contributions through the end of August – indicate that just 2.8 million people,

or 0.86 per cent of the U.S. population, had contributed \$200 or more to this year's federal elections. Yet collectively, these relatively high spenders had supplied almost 74 per cent of all campaign funds.

That's almost \$5 billion given by a small fraction of Americans. An even smaller number – 44,000 people, or about one-hundredth of 1 per cent of the United States' 328 million people – have so far given \$10,000 or more each to this election, adding up to nearly \$2.3 billion. And 2,635 people or couples – less than one-thousandth of the U.S. population – together provided \$1.4 billion, roughly one-fifth of total campaign contributions reported as of late summer.

These numbers reflect only publicly reported contributions. The rise of "dark money groups" – which spend to influence election outcomes

but do not have to disclose their donors because they claim to be primarily nonelectoral – suggests even more campaign money is provided by a few elite donors.

America's donor class is not representative of the broader community whose interests are at stake in an election. Donors are older, whiter and wealthier than America as a whole, my analysis shows, and they hail disproportionately from certain places. So far this year, more money has come from Washington, D.C., than from 20 states combined, and Joe Biden raised 10 per cent of his money from just six zip codes – areas in Washington, D.C., New York City, a New York suburb and a suburb of Indianapolis.

Certain industries, like finance, real estate, communications, law, health care, natural resources, oil and gas, are also particularly big election spenders via both personal and PAC donations related to the industries. There is no formal tracking of these donors.

According to media reports and websites like Open Secrets, recent years have seen a striking increase in the number and importance of small donors. This year, small donors account for about 22 per cent of campaign fundraising, up from 14 per cent in 2016. That's a step in a more democratic direction. But big donors are still pivotal to America's campaign finance system.

Whoever wins in 2020 will be tasked with addressing the pandemic's devastating economic and public health harms. A host of other enormously consequential issues – from racial justice and immigration to

trade, the environment and the courts – also hinge on the election outcome.

Having a small number of very wealthy individuals financing political candidates distorts the political process. This is less a classical quid pro quo – the exchange of campaign dollars for votes – than it is politicians' reluctance to take positions that are at odds with the interests of their large donors. What gets on – or stays off – the legislative agenda can be driven by donor concerns.

Donor influence tends to be more significant for issues that get little media attention – who gets a specific tax break, for example, or qualifies for coronavirus relief – than for hot-button concerns like reproductive rights. But campaign money inevitably shapes government action and who benefits from it, who is harmed and who is ignored.

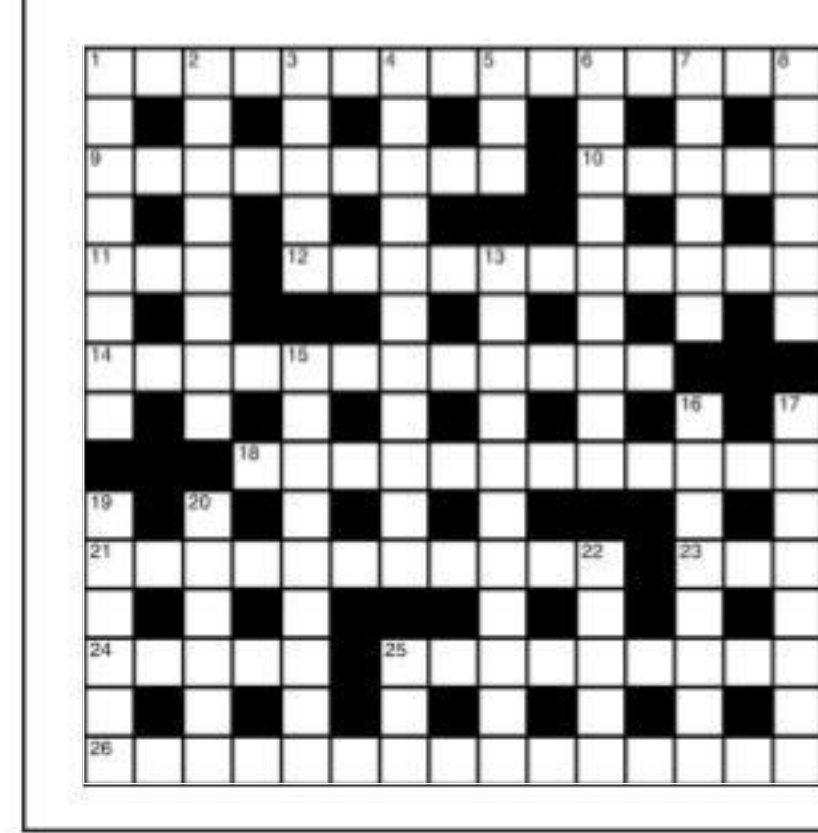
As the Supreme Court explained in sustaining the 2002 McCain-Feingold Act's ban on "soft money" – donations that can affect an election without being expressly focused on the election – "The evidence connects soft money to manipulations of the legislative calendar, leading to Congress's failure to enact, among other things, generic drug legislation, tort reform and tobacco legislation."

In 2018, then-federal budget director and former congressman Mick Mulvaney admitted as much with disarming candor: "We had a hierarchy in my office in Congress. If you're a lobbyist who never gave us money, I didn't talk to you. If you're a lobbyist who gave us money, I might talk to you."

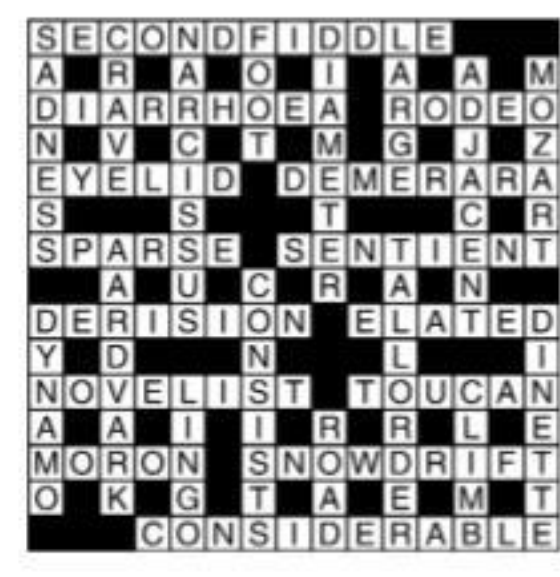
As the saying goes, he who pays the piper calls the tune.

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CROSSWORD



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



ACROSS

- 1 Looked at one way, 2020 was first of two parts (6-9)
- 9 Sold vice, but not very subtle about it? (9)
- 10 Physical river cut (5)
- 11 See 23
- 12 Factory that is invested in by broadcasting tycoon? (11)
- 14 Dance medium with chairs etc. – missing 11 could make for awkwardness (12)
- 18 Courtier is upset with me having beauty not brains (12)
- 21 Showy type of fake

DOWN

- 1 Stop close to road and, if empty, put in children (8)
- 2 Fruit on head – not a good look (8)
- 3 Substitute ballplayers
- 23/11 Nature could be somewhere to find refreshment (3,3)
- 24 Contents of 17? (5)
- 25 Bit of delicate bone jewellery coming in droplets (9)
- 26 Manipulative behaviour could make you listen (6,9)

FOR PACEY BUT OUTNUMBERED CENTRES (5)

- 4 Fight here if held up by British PM or ignored by Lord (11)
- 5/25D Marksman's target finally hit by stranger from the South (3,3)
- 6 Being fixated with what Europe used to be is odd (9)
- 7 Nearly sick after fast food for vegetarians? (6)
- 8 Soothing music for two opened by lush chords at the beginning (6)
- 13 Virgin Queen brought in wives essentially for exchanging information (11)
- 15 Deliveries with wrong,

WRONG, WRONG QUANTITY OF FLORA (9)

- 16 Apologetic but right to stop idiot wearing item stolen by student? (8)
- 17 Starter in Le Mans makes car go through clutches (8)
- 19 A church abandoning God for something they can count on (6)
- 20 Tavern ale could be thus: without a receptacle to put it in (6)
- 22 Ring, ring, ring – being incredibly tolerant to start with (5)
- 25 See 5

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with The Independent, London)

