

1 London Bridge Street
London SE1 9GF
Email: letters@thetimes.co.uk

Letters to the Editor



A human Gandhi

Sir, Further to your report "Gandhi statue 'would be an affront to women'" (Aug 9), Dr Vadgama is entitled to her opinions, but several inaccuracies should be addressed.

Firstly, it would be incorrect to suggest that the matter of sexual exploitation has been hushed up; Yogesh Chadha's 1997 book *Rediscovering Gandhi* refers to the incidents involving Gandhi sleeping with his nieces, and it was the Mahatma's own openness about the subject that led Nehru to criticise him.

While it would be correct to describe Gandhi's actions as perverse, and arguably exploitative, Gandhi would have regarded his action of involving women in his experiments as an act of treating them with the highest esteem.

Gandhi's career as a whole shows that he believed that women had a full and active role in his campaigns. This could in fact be seen as illustrating how the Mahatma was ahead of his time.

Dr Vadgama is also incorrect to suggest that Gandhi has been above criticism — when the history of the independence movement and subsequent history of India is littered with critiques of his life and methods, and not just from supporters of the British Raj like Churchill.

Similarly, the criticism of Gandhi as being portrayed as "absolutely pure" was something neither Gandhi himself, nor the Gandhi Foundation, would have sanctioned. However, we at the foundation do believe that Gandhi's life and ideas concerning nonviolence, environmental sustainability and religious pluralism were prophetic then and are equally appropriate in today's troubled world.
WILLIAM RHIND
Gandhi Foundation

Bear in mind

Sir, It is ironic that many ideas and practices dismissed by sceptics as "new age nonsense" (Mindless mindfulness, Aug 15) are, in fact, age-old philosophies and practices that have stood the test of time. It is hard to argue with Sathnam Sanghera's view that many companies embrace this trend ineffectively, but encouraging employees to invest in personal development of almost any kind does far less harm than encouraging pervasive scepticism.

Almost the entire canon of personal development literature has a single purpose: to help individuals take personal responsibility for their own success, happiness and fulfilment. It may be more comfortable to maintain a belief that circumstance or other people dictate these things, but that is hardly the most inspirational or effective way to live.

ADRIAN GILPIN
Tunbridge Wells

Corrections and clarifications

Requests for corrections or clarifications should be sent by email to feedback@thetimes.co.uk or by post to Feedback, The Times, 1 London Bridge Street, London SE1 9GF

The chaos in Iraq could spread far and wide

Sir, There are several imperatives for intervening once again in the Middle East. The barbarity and genocide in Northern Iraq and Syria, if not checked, will spread and affect us directly in various ways.

The appalling situation is a part of a bigger crisis that is fast becoming a global game changer. This is not just about the Middle East, as events in Indonesia and Nigeria show, and the longer-term threat to the UK is significant. The wrongs of the recent past and understandable dread of re-engagement must not blind us to this. Too little too late now and we court more horrors and greater dangers in the years ahead.

Getting things right this time requires our political leaders and opinion formers to persuade public opinion that firm, proportionate action is required to prevent genocide and chaos from spreading. Action must be genuinely international, even if a disproportionate amount of any initial military and logistic action is US/British because few others have the requisite capabilities — eg Chinook helicopters — and experience.

Short-term emergency action must however be backed up by international efforts to nurture political frameworks and multi-ethnic and multi-religious state infrastructures. We must encourage the international community to stop reacting to events and begin to drive them. A sustained effort is required to safeguard viable states and to quarantine areas where order has collapsed. This may well involve both "soft" and "hard" power, but diplomacy must lead and involve the key regional powers and actors.

For us the centre of gravity now is British public opinion. Perhaps we need to examine our own consciences and priorities more and be less hasty to blame our politicians and recent mistakes. Hard work beckons.

BRIGADIER NIGEL HALL
GENERAL TIM CROSS
London W1

Sir, David Aaronovitch's article "Only military action will defeat the jihadis" (Aug 14) is spot on, along with his apt comment, "This is Operation Drop Something From a Tornado and Get Out".

Operation Haven in April 1991 which I participated in is a good example of what can be achieved in terms of the humanitarian relief, but also the very deployment on the ground sent a strong message to Saddam Hussein and his Republican Guard. It acted as a deterrent which helped to stabilise the region. I would hope that the UK Armed Forces, along with its Nato and Kurdish allies, could not only mount a similar operation but, most importantly, also deter the so-called Islamic State from further acts of barbarism. I just hope that the prime minister and his Cobra team have not missed this golden opportunity by its limited and hesitant approach to date.

ANDREW HIGGINSON
Barnes, London

Sir, From your news reports we are all only too aware of the terrifying humanitarian crisis in Iraq, the shortages of healthcare services and the looming threat of genocide initiated by the IS.

As doctors all having a connection with Iraq silence is not an option for us, and we believe inaction by the British government is an act of avoidable negligence. The moral and humanitarian case to support the helpless people of Iraq and to take them out of their misery is clear. The UK, the US and others have had major involvement with Iraq and cannot walk away or turn a blind eye from all this now.

PROFESSOR SAAD SHAKIR
Drug Safety Research Unit,
Southampton
DR HUSNI HABBUSH
Consultant Haematologist, Wales
DR ALI KUBBA
Consultant Community
Gynaecologist, London
The names of further 64 signatories are at thetimes.co.uk/letters

Sir, When David Cameron says that there is to be no military intervention to help the Iraqi people, it must be heartening news for the IS. It can continue its barbarism, while the West drops food parcels on the mountains.

Cameron and Obama have made a grave error of judgment, which has cost thousands of lives, in treating the insurgency as a local Sunni uprising, and thinking that by giving

the Sunnis what they want (a change of government) and kowtowing to IS, the latter will melt away. Nothing could be further from the truth. No doubt there has been resentment among the Sunnis at the Shia-led government (just as there was among Shias at a Sunni-led government). However, this resentment has been exploited by a brutal jihadist organisation whose aim is to take over Iraq and form a caliphate. This jihadist army has fewer than 20,000 soldiers so it should be possible to defeat it if the West were to intervene (as the Kurds and others have repeatedly requested). Already it has been shown how a few air strikes can halt their progress. By extending these air strikes to attack all IS bases, and convoys, and providing the Kurds with the military and other support that they desperately need, all IS fighters should be brought to justice for their crimes, resolving this ghastly situation and making the world a safer place for all.

MS J SMITH
Bath

Sir, Headlines like your "Jets ready for combat" (Aug 12) echo our "do something" lethal hatred of what IS seems to represent — a 2014 reinvention of the SS.

Practically, however, one difficulty centres on how far we should ever properly (even if we were minded to "take them out" militarily in Iraq) pursue their extermination to the point where we end up supporting Assad's equally hateful control of Syria. Other difficulties jostle for attention — how do we tell our best friend Saudi Arabia to shape up or ship out, for starters.

The Kurds are right: this is all our fault for misdrawing the boundary lines all those years ago. The price may well be a decades-long investment in practical support (including military, social, political) for the entire region.

MARK SHORTEN
Havant Hants

Sir, Given the situation in Iraq, I trust that we will not now be leaving any military hardware behind in Afghanistan.

MARGARET WHEAL
Starston, Norfolk

1914 THE FIRST WORLD WAR 1918

ON THIS DAY AUGUST 18, 1914

GETTING TO CLOSE QUARTERS

The French and German forces fought their first real engagement in Belgian territory on Saturday, and we are fortunate in that one of our Special Correspondents was an eye-witness of much of the action.

The day of the correspondent in war is clearly not yet over. On Friday evening our representative was in Namur, within 300 yards of the spot where a bomb from a German aeroplane exploded and

injured five men. On Saturday morning he was less than a hundred yards from the point where another bomb exploded in Namur railway station. Acting on the principle of "riding on the cannon thunder" he hurried off to Dinant, 15 miles higher up the Meuse, where the guns had been roaring since early morning.

A force of German cavalry and artillery, apparently advancing from the heart of the Ardennes, had entered the picturesque little town so well known to English tourists. The affair lasted most of the day, but late in the afternoon the Germans were driven back by the French batteries, and retreated up the winding valley of the Lesse towards Rochefort. When our correspondent left they were being hotly pursued by French chasseurs.

The action suggests first that the Germans must by now have overrun much of the hilly wooded country of the Ardennes, and second, that the French are now in such strength in south-east Belgium that they are not unwilling

to assume the offensive. Very soon these preliminary encounters, which grow hotter and more numerous as the days pass, must be merged in a series of connected battles along the whole front.

Some of the lurid narratives of other combats which have reached this country are obviously exaggerated. We were told, for instance, of the "battle" at Eghezee. It now dwindles into a skirmish, in which Belgian cyclists very pluckily drove back a respectable force of Uhlans. Our correspondent who saw the action at Dinant has visited Eghezee to investigate the matter. We get its measure from his plain statement that the story of the fight "was given me by a farmer in whose field it was fought." These incidents must be viewed in their true perspective. We shall hear of greater things soon enough.

SIGN UP FOR A WEEKLY EMAIL
WITH EXTRACTS FROM
THE TIMES HISTORY OF THE WAR
WW1.THETIMES.CO.UK

Lost for words

Sir, It is noticeable that in your list of the top ten A-level subjects ("Maths is first choice as pupils return to traditional subjects", Aug 15) there was not a single foreign language. This distinguishes us from almost every other advanced country in the world. What has happened to Latin, Greek, French and German?

THE REV CANON ANDREW LENOX-
CONYNGHAM
Birmingham

Adopted son

Sir, On the CBC in Toronto many years ago when they used to feature classical music more frequently than nowadays, the announcer assumed that the conductor was French, so we were able to hear "Néveel Marrinay."
CHRISTOPHER GROUNDS
Burlington, Ontario

Dim signage

Sir, Apropos John Dove's letter (Aug 14) about Scottish road signs, I was driving up the A7 to Edinburgh last week and as I passed into Scotland the first sign was one of those huge electronic matrix boards that tend to display redundant messages like "This sign is not in use". It read "Heavy Rain Forecast". I wondered if it wouldn't have been more financially prudent of Transport Scotland to simply put up a permanent sign and pay someone to cover it up for a couple of days each year.
IAN MOORCROFT
Liverpool

Sir, Last Sunday on a rare trip around the M25 we enjoyed "Long Delays" at a steady 70mph followed by "Fog" as we drove past Heathrow in clear blue skies. Has the Ministry of Transport developed a sense of humour?
SIMON HENSON
Witney, Oxon

Mr Full Stop

Sir, I was having a conversation with a rather bellicose county council road-man this week, who repeatedly ended his sentences with "end of." Is this a new fashion of speaking punctuation, question mark
ROGER PORTER
Whaddon, Bucks

Villages of promise

Sir, How about Huish Episcopi, for a start? And the various Piddles in Dorset? Another two in my collection, in Somerset, are Compton Dando and Nempnett Thrubwell. My current favourite, however, is in Lincolnshire. Last year, when I was driving along Ermine Street with my wife, we saw the sign "Spital-in-the-Street: please drive carefully". I drove very carefully.
F W NUNNELEY
Beckley, E Sussex

Sir, Among the many myriad marvellous British place names, may I offer Wyke Champflower as one of the most charming. It is near Bruton, now suffering from a yuppie invasion, hopefully shortlived.
DARRELL HAMLEY
Amersham, Bucks

Sir, Not being very athletically minded, for years I thought Linford Christie was a village in Somerset.
ELIZABETH FANE
Alderney, Channel Islands