

When self-interest takes precedence

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The ASIO raid authorised by Attorney-General George Brandis on the office of the lawyer representing East Timor raises some interesting points about national interest and security. In whose interest is this protecting? It appears to dilute the efforts of Australia in 1999 in engaging in the stabilisation and creation of the new nation.

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Apparently Australia's self-interest took precedence over benefits that the new nation needed to create an effective economy. This reeks of "big brother, small neighbour", similar to that of Russia and Georgia and Moldava, and the United States and Cuba.

The commercial involvement by former foreign minister Alexander Downer should be examined without the masking of the national security banner being raised.

Rob Park, Surrey Hills

Our volunteers impugned

As someone who worked as a volunteer and election monitor in East Timor from 2006 onwards, I wondered why I was occasionally treated with deep suspicion.

While living locally I was treated with warmth and hospitality, yet when working with the Timorese government and while based in its Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Co-operation, I questioned why an Australian would not be trusted to work for the common good of both countries. Why, just before I arrived, Australia funded important works on the Parliament and government buildings!

Seven years on, I have the answer. I am almost incandescent with the way the conservative government abused ASIO and ASIS for private profit and, in using Australian aid projects as cover, impugned the work of all the decent, hard-working volunteers who gave of their time to help people rebuild their country.

Gavin Ryan, Glen Iris

Act on a matter of principle

We have decided to sell our very small holding of Woodside shares. I would encourage shareholders who do not believe "might is right" to do the same.

It is paradoxical that our governments and this company have behaved so shamefully towards this poor country while, at the same time, many individual Australians are working hard to help the people of East Timor.

Jennifer Raper, Brighton East

Timor's terrible 'crime'

Please do not worry, Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao (above). We spy on everybody. If you have done nothing wrong, you have nothing to fear - although being a very small country with a very large amount of gas is obviously a serious crime.

Ben Laycock, Barkers Creek

A paramedic's lot

Health Minister David Davis' open letter (*The Age*, 5/12) is another attempt to discredit honest and hard-working paramedics. He neglects to mention his attempt at delaying the outcome of wage negotiations for another 18 months, and that he wants to remove the right to have a meal break in a timely fashion on shifts of up to 14 hours.

Mr Davis is incorrect - paramedics do not get 10 weeks annual leave. A large component of leave is time-in-lieu and ADOs (accrued days off). He also refers to our "four days on/four days off rotating roster". In fact, we work five days on and three days off, comprising 48 hours and including night shifts. It is time the minister valued his paramedics.

Ben David, St Leonards

Davis' double standard

David Davis, your "generous and fair" offer to Australia's highest trained paramedics will transform them from the country's lowest paid to its equal lowest paid. Just remind me, how much has your pay increased in recent years, in "these tough economic times"?

Mike Gualano, Ringwood North

Who'll take it on?

A quick calculation would show that Melbourne's Bike Share (*The Age*, 5/12) is taking less than \$1500 per day, which I doubt covers depreciation and maintenance.

Blind Freddy knew the scheme would not work in one of the few countries in the world that requires helmets for all cyclists. Does the government really think a commercial operator will take on a scheme that cannot work with all the resources and our taxes thrown at it?

Sandy Richards, Port Melbourne

An un-core promise

During the election campaign, Tony Abbott said: "There's a commitment that I want to give you. There will not be deals done with independents and minor parties under any political movement that I lead." How does the debt ceiling agreement reached with the Greens (*The Age*, 5/12) accord with this statement?

Stephen Williams, Wandin North

Rudd a role model?

What delightful irony that the Prime Minister's office again has a control freak instilling "a culture of obsessive centralised control" (*The Age*, 5/12). Perhaps we should refer to Tony Abbott's senior aide as Peta "KRuddlin".

Bronwen Bryant, St Kilda West

Turn it down, please

Michael Carr-Gregg (*Letters*, 5/12), a Taylor Swift concert may be good for the psychological health of our children, but I hate to think what it does for their hearing. I live several kilometres from Sydney Football Stadium, the venue of Ms Swift's concert on Wednesday night, but noise levels were so high to make conversation difficult and sleep impossible.

John Byrne, Randwick, NSW

An unhealthy system

SBS showed a news item about South Korean students this week. Even primary school children spend hours after the normal school day with tutors or in "cram" schools.

One high school student featured in the report averaged 4½ hours' sleep each night. It also revealed that South Korea has an exceptionally high teenage suicide rate. Students in the other high-ranking Asian countries also go to cram schools as a matter of course.

Our students need to improve. However, if this is the kind of regime we would have to subject them to in order to top the PISA rankings, perhaps we should not be aiming quite so high.

Gaye Boswell, Wantirna South

Scapegoating teachers

Every time a study shows Australia lagging in educational standings (*The Age*, 4/12), teaching standards become the target. Teachers need to be highly skilled and rigorous, but many factors must be considered.

Today's students are bombarded with time-wasting, brain-numbing technologies, immersion in social media, and a culture that emphasises living for the moment over bettering oneself through thought and effort.

Add indulgent, undemanding or egocentric parenting, education systems miserly on resources and confused in direction, and decisions at state and federal level by many who know little about education.

Having taught for 30 years, I fear the Australian culture has moved too far in the direction of entitlement and away from achievement. Many students know they can be disruptive and disengaged without fear of real consequences at school or home. Teaching has never been more demanding, yet it is undervalued, unlike in many countries above us in the rankings.

Paul Brennan, Mount Dandenong

ABC must be unbiased

Paul Mitchell (Letters, 5/12) worries about the Coalition complaining about the ABC bias and hints that News Ltd is biased the other way.

Fairfax and News Ltd are commercial entities that have products we are free to buy, or not, with our own money. They are not required to be unbiased but the ABC, funded with taxpayer monies, is required, by its charter, to be fair and impartial.

When will we see the ABC employ, on air, the conservative equivalent of Phillip Adams? Ironically he has a weekly print column in *The Australian*. More diversity of opinion in a Murdoch publication than on the ABC.

Robbie Gore, Brighton East

Pluralism and choice

With its constant assaults upon the ABC, it is clear the Abbott government wants a "one-dimensional media" that gives up on criticism. It cannot accept the fact that pluralism and, hence, choice is the basis of democracy. Progressive (and even radical) voices must be included on the ABC and in the media more broadly.

Tristan Ewins, Box Hill North

Ads out of control

Advertising signs plastered over bus, tram and light-rail vehicle windows severely impede passenger views. On rainy days it

is impossible to see where you are, particularly when looking for your stop. Let's cease this commercial overkill. There is plenty of scope to apply advertising on public transport vehicles without the need to obliterate views to the outside world.

John Stirling, Middle Park

Proud professionals

As the daughter of a pharmacist, and a former nurse, I respond with irritation to Jenny Callaghan (Letters, 5/12). Pharmacists are not responsible for the cost of medication. This is due to the expense involved in research for the manufacture of health-enhancing medication.

Pharmacists are responsible for ensuring what they dispense is not contraindicated with other medication the customer is taking, and are aware of side effects. Included in their service is the ordering of stock or obtaining it from another pharmacy.

My late father provided this service, as did many pharmacists I encountered as a nurse, and now as someone who takes prescribed medication regularly. They can hardly be begrudged a few dollars for the application of their professional knowledge, most of which goes to the overheads of running a small business.

Christine Harris, Mordialloc

World-class system

Any assertion that pharmacists are "ripping off" consumers is offensive and incorrect. Pharmacists continually rank among the most trusted professionals due to their expert advice, personal care and high accessibility.

Some 275 million prescriptions are dispensed each year, including counselling. Our world-class system ensures the price paid by consumers for PBS items provides timely delivery, accessibility with a national network and choice between different brands of the same medicine.

Anthony Tassone, Victorian president, Pharmacy Guild of Australia

Celebrate difference

I feel profound happiness for the homosexual couples who are to be married this weekend (*The Age*, 4/12). There are too many ways in which people are made to feel other than normal, and the measure of a civilised society is one in which difference is celebrated and fostered.

Best wishes to Peter Darcy and Andrew Buchanan and the other couples.

George Wills, Mount Dandenong

Naughty, naughty

Poor Tony Abbott and Scott Morrison. Have those naughty children in Parliament stomped all over your temporary protection visa policy? So you are going to do what, now? Retaliate? Put the lives of the perpetually condemned in limbo? I would like to say that heartless little boys who show no compassion for their fellow man will never become prime minister, but ...

Kate Molony, Seymour

And another thing

The ABC

Has the government mooted cuts to the ABC because its political analysis is cutting too deep?

Michael Higgins, Erica

The ABC has a bias towards intelligent conversations. That this approach fails to satisfy conservatives is hardly surprising.

Sarah Bone, Wonthaggi

Two words: Alan Jones.

Di Press, Prahran

Politics

The debt truck driven by Hockey is coloured Green.

Patricia Ness, Middle Park

Did the Greens learn nothing from what happened to the Democrats? Goodbye, Greens.

Damien Calcutt, Spotswood

The Greens have sold out over the debt ceiling. Luckily the Liberals are such good economic managers, we won't need to be in debt.

Michael Carver, Kew

Be assured that the electorate Shaw has a long memory.

Stephen Baldwin, Frankston

So is every Victorian hardware store now entitled to the use of a government car? The law is an ass.

Rod Cripps, Parkdale

East Timor

The raids were designed to pervert the course of justice.

Alan Williams, Port Melbourne

ASIO's conduct was disgraceful. It reeks of a cover-up and exploitation of the East Timorese.

Mary Fenelon, Collingwood

When governments justify their dodgy practices in the name of "national security", head for the hills.

Joan Coxsedg, Balwyn North

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