



## The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

## THE CAPTAIN'S KNOCK

Virat Kohli's defence of Shami breaks a silence. It's enormously significant when too many calculate the cost of standing up

N OBODY SAID IT better than Virat Kohli. The captain Saturday stood up for his teammate Mohammed Shami after the latter was attacked on social media after the loss to Pakistan in the T20 World Cup match. His words need reiteration, so here they are: "To me, attacking someone over their religion is the most pathetic thing that a human being can do. Everyone has the right to voice their opinion over what they feel about a certain situation, but I personally have never even thought of discriminating (against) anyone over their religion. That's a very sacred and personal thing to every human being. People take out their frustrations because they obviously have no understanding of what we do as individuals. They have no understanding of how much effort we put on the field. They have no understanding of the fact that someone like Shami has won India a number of matches in the last few years and he has been our primary bowler with Jaspit Bumrah, when it comes to making an impact in games. If people can overlook that and his passion for his country, honestly, I don't even want to waste one minute of my life to give any attention to those people, and neither does Shami and neither does anyone else in the team. We stand by him fully. We are backing him 200 per cent, and all those who have attacked him can come with more force if they want to. Our brotherhood, our friendship within the team, nothing can be shaken."

The clarity of Kohli's statement, its refusal to duck behind pieties and euphemisms, has enormous significance. While former cricketers had sought to defend Shami far by excusing a rare "off day", they chose to elide the communal nature of the abuse Shami faced. Kohli looks this brand of divisiveness in the eye, and calls it out for what it is. His assertion of solidarity and brotherhood is not just relevant to cricket. It ripples out to the larger world of politics and culture, where every day the right to take offence is being weaponised to polarise, where micro-constitutions over language, advertisements, art and cinema, are used to prise open the bonds that have held communities together and to hand over the freedoms of Indians to moral police and digital mobs. In this environment, Kohli's words draw a line and say: Enough.

They also break a long silence. For a while now, the defence of tolerance and secularism — the inheritance from the freedom struggle, the default settings of a diverse nation — is framed as a political shibboleth, anti-this or pro-that. Too many celebrities and public figures, who both think and know better, from all walks of life, do a cost-benefit analysis and decide to shut up rather than speak up and call out hate and bigotry. But that one of India's biggest celebrities, whose talent, achievement and voice reach out to vast numbers of India's young, chooses to do so marks an important moment. Like Olympian Neeraj Chopra before him, Kohli calls the bluff of those ever ready to stand the dog-whistle and twist spurt into the service of polarisation. It is for the rest to listen and learn from Captain Kohli.

## LOOKING EAST

In the wake of China-US rivalry, India needs to reboot its ASEAN strategy

THIS ENGAGEMENT with the Asian leaders last week, conducted under the banner of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said all the right things. He reaffirmed India's commitment to a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific, and underlined Delhi's support for the centrality of the ASEAN. But Asia is changing rapidly and is very different today from the one that India re-engaged in the early 1990s in the name of a Look East Policy. Much of the churn in the region has taken place since Modi won office in 2014. The PM then promised to impart fresh energy to the regional engagement with his "Act East Policy". Until now Delhi had it easy. It just needed to effectively implement the ASEAN agenda of regional cooperation. But the structural changes in the region and the breakdown of the old certainties demand that India reboot its ASEAN engagement.

If the ASEAN was widely viewed as a thriving regional organisation just a few years ago, it is struggling to retain its internal coherence today. There have been serious differences on how to deal with the military coup in Myanmar. The rise of China and its assertive policies towards its neighbours deeply trouble the ASEAN. But overwhelmed by China's proximity and power, few are willing to raise their voice against Beijing. The region is also shaken to its core by the deepening political confrontation between Beijing and Washington and the prospect for an economic decoupling between China and the US.

Squeezed by the sharpening Sino-US rivalry, ASEAN members are ambivalent about the geopolitical conception of the Indo-Pacific. Many of them have bought into Beijing's narrative that brands the Indo-Pacific as anti-China. They also are wary about India's membership of the Quad, and viewed as a potential challenge to ASEAN centrality. Delhi has its task cut out in explaining its vision of the Indo-Pacific, reassuring the region on Delhi's membership of the Quad, and intensifying its own bilateral cooperation with the ASEAN states. Delhi's withdrawal from the region-wide free trade agreement, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership in 2019, continues to rankle among the ASEAN members. Linked to the RCEP is the widespread regional perception that India has turned inward again with its "Atmanirbhar" policies. There is little regional awareness of India's recent economic reforms promoting greater role for domestic and foreign capital. Delhi can't assume that the logic of its new international posture is self-evident to its ASEAN partners. It needs a comprehensive effort to promote a better Asian understanding of its policies and the new opportunities they present for deeper economic and political cooperation.

## FREEZE FRAME

## EP UNNY



SHOBHIT MAHAJAN

ANJU AND ANITA had come to me for advice on future career prospects. They were both students in my MSc course. During the conversation, I found out that Anju was the daughter of a vegetable seller, while Anita's father worked as a clerk in a private office. Both of them had been giving tuitions to school children right after their Class XII to fund their education. They would come back from their college at 5 and from 6 to 8 in the evening they would give tuitions to a group of children at another child's house since their place did not have enough room.

The fact that they belonged to very modest families was not surprising. The results of a survey I did last year of our students in MSc Physics at Delhi University had already made me aware of the socio-economic background of our students — more than half of them were from villages or small metropolises; more than 50 per cent came from families where they were the first generation of college-goers; more than a quarter of them belonged to farming families and about 70 per cent of them reported their family income as less than 5 lakh a year.

The enhanced enrolment of students from these socio-economic backgrounds is primarily a result of the extension of reservations to OBCs and EWS. In addition, the massive increase in the number of higher education institutions has led to an enlargement of the number of available seats — there are more than 45,000 universities and colleges in the country. The Gross Enrolment Ratio for higher education, which is the percentage of the population between the ages of 18-23 who are enrolled, is now 27 per cent.

What is remarkable is that despite all these initial disadvantages, these students managed to finish their undergraduate degrees and some of them were now even looking at their prospects post their Master's degree. They, and obviously their parents, have high aspirations for their future. And, this is where there is a huge mismatch be-

Mismatch between aspirations of students and what they are likely to attain is disturbing

tween their aspirations and what they are likely to attain.

A majority of the students are aiming to get some kind of a government job post their degree. Unfortunately, the spectacular increase in enrolment in recent years has not been matched by a concomitant increase in jobs. Employment opportunities in the government have not increased proportionately and may, in fact, have decreased with increased contractualisation. Even in the private sector, though the jobs have increased with economic growth, most of the jobs are contractual. Worse, the highest increase in jobs is at the lowest end, especially in the services sector — delivery boys for e-commerce or fast food for instance. A student who has finished his college against all odds is not very keen to take up a job in a call centre or worse as a delivery agent for e-commerce or fast food.

Thus what we see is a huge pool of unemployed university graduates with unfulfilled aspirations. This group of dissatisfied, disgruntled youth can lead to disastrous consequences for our society, some of which we are already witnessing.

Attitudes towards work do not change overnight — the time scale for change in societal attitudes is possibly in decades. A reduction in the number of universities and colleges might not be politically feasible given the huge demand for higher education. But there are several things that the government can attempt to do. A concurrent increase in the number of high-quality vocational institutions is something that can be done.

There are upwards of 15,000 Indian Training Institutes (ITIs) in the country currently. These institutions provide training in various trades like air conditioning mechanic, electrician, mechanic etc. The quality of these courses is very uneven. They are also, by and large, poorly maintained and lacking in resources, both physical and human. The curriculum remains outdated and

has not been upgraded to include some of the newer skills like maintaining networking and telecom equipment.

And yet, there is a huge competition for admission into these institutions, and polytechnics. In some places, it is harder to get into these than to get admission to the local government college. The reasons are obvious. Manufacturing units prefer hiring them for blue-collar jobs since they at least have a modicum of training. In addition, the pass-outs from ITIs also have the option of being self-employed in the various service-related sectors.

Upgrading the existing ITIs, opening many more new ones with high-quality infrastructure and updated curriculum is something which should be done urgently. There is a scheme to upgrade some ITIs to model ITIs. However, what is required is not a selective approach but a more broad-based one that uplifts the standards of all of them besides adding many more new ones. Industry might be more than willing to pitch in with funding (via the CSR route) as well as equipment, training for the faculty and internships for students. After all, the industry czars never cease to remind us about the shortage of skilled labour in the country. And surely, if the government can spend thousands of crores on exciting and hypothetical Institutes of Eminence, funds should not be an issue for this exercise which, coupled with our demographic dividend can be a boon for the economy and the society.

For Anju and Anita though the future remains uncertain. They would finish their MSc, possibly do a PhD, and keep trying to get a teaching job in a government school. If they are lucky — they would succeed though in all likelihood — they would have to settle for teaching in a private school for a pittance. And, of course, continue giving tuitions to support themselves and their families.

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BADRI NARAYAN

IN THE GAME of electoral democracy in India, one now has to play within a chalk circle. This is the chalk circle of Hindutva, which is defined by right-wing ideologues as "Hinduness". It is drawn by those engaged in inculcating and strengthening the Hindutva consciousness among people. Within this circle, one may be either in the soft or hard Hindutva fold, but everyone needs to demonstrate his or her Hindutva affiliation, either by visiting temples, chanting the Durga Path or promising to support the work going on for the development of Hindu pilgrimage sites. One can see this trend in the run-up to the Uttar Pradesh assembly election, where Hindutva has emerged as one of the dominant political ingredients.

At a recent rally in Lucknow, on the occasion of Kanishk Ram's 15th death anniversary, BSP chief Mayawati promised not to derail the ongoing work of the BJP government in the three holy cities of Ayodhya, Varanasi and Mathura, should her party come to power. During the recent Kisan Nyaya Yatra, Priyanka Gandhi, Congress general secretary and in-charge of UP, chanted the Durga Path and the jaghosh of "Har Har Mahadev". She also recited from the Gurbani and the Quran, and had been part of Congress's political campaign for leaders to visit temples, mathas and religious peethas. But during his tenure, the pressure of

retaining Muslim votes made the Congress defensive and the performances of Hindu religious symbolism became comparatively weak in its political mobilisations and strategies. Now, due to pressure from the Hindutva chalk circle, the Congress is trying to become louder while narrating its relation with Hindu religious symbols.

Akhilesh Yadav, leader of the Samajwadi Party, also understands the rules of the electoral games set by UP's Hindutva politics. He visited Ayodhya, Chitrakoot and Vimalnath temple in Farnukhabad to assert his Hindu identity. Arvind Kejriwal who is working to expand to UP, recently visited Hanuman Garhi of Ayodhya and prayed to Ram Lalla at the Ram Janmabhoomi temple site. He also announced the inclusion of Ayodhya in Delhi's free pilgrimage scheme for senior citizens.

All political parties are now required to enter the chalk circle of Hindutva because they all want to create socio-political alliances with as many castes as possible in order to win elections. Most of them have realised that their core voter base alone can't provide a majority. They need to extend their caste-based chalk circle and, of course, religious identity provides more opportunities to create such caste-based alliances with different castes, communities and people. Secondly, Hindutva politics, led by political parties such as the BJP, mobilised broader social groups of Hindus in the previous elections and diluted the pressure of minority votes, proving that demonstrating their Hindutva affiliation can be po-

litically beneficial now.

But what the opposition politicians miss is that the chalk circle of Hindutva is drawn by organisations like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which evolved not only by symbolic acts but by its decades-long hard work at the grassroots. The organisation's seva karya (social service) during natural calamities and other crises, their educational and health-based projects, and developmental schemes have successfully helped them forge close ties with various communities.

Yet, with all political parties offering Hindutva as a prominent part of their political package for the coming election, the question arises: How will they forge a close connection with the Hindu mind and engage with the Hindutva bhaav, which has become more expressive in recent decades? The opposition parties who are contesting the UP election may be able to respond in terms of the symbolic aspect of religious identity, but it is difficult to say right now whether they have the capacity to respond to the substantial aspect of the same, which requires organising the popular religious consciousness with grassroots work, through a strong network of cadres and region-based organisations. When the symbolic aspects combine with the substantial aspects, there are effective results, otherwise, it is a mere performance.

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## THE HINDUTVA CHALK CIRCLE

All parties in UP play within it, with symbolic acts that show religious affiliation

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## NOVEMBER 1, 1981, FORTY YEARS AGO

**VIP TRAIN ROBBERY**  
EIGHT ARMED TRAIN robbers looted valuables worth Rs 5 lakhs from passengers from passengers of an air-conditioned two-tier coach of the Delhi-bound Lucknow mail, popularly known as the VIP Train, near Sandila in Hardoi district, about 70 km from Lucknow. Three of the robbers were nabbed after an exchange of fire on the Baghauli crossing on the Lucknow Hardoi road. Most of the looted property was recovered including 16 watches, three cameras, gold necklaces and bangles. Kalpanath Sonkar and Mahavir Singh, two MPs travelling in the train, got back their watches. Later one of the dacoits succumbed to his injuries.

**AUTONOMY FOR STATES**  
URGING GREATER AUTONOMY for states, President N Sanjeeva Reddy said that it had become almost "impossible" for the Centre to deal with the multifarious problems of the states promptly and efficiently. Delivering the Sardar Patel lecture on the integration of India, he said that the states had felt without exception that the responsibility cast on them by the Constitution for social services and industrial development was not matched by the corresponding allocation of finances. Reddy warned against neglecting the demand of autonomy on the plea that it was a threat to the country's integration. He also expressed regrets over communal, caste and linguistic differences and re-

gional and boundary issues which had led to violence and destruction of life and property.

## SINO-INDIAN AMITY

SINO-INDIAN DIFFERENCES on the border question "though serious can and should be resolved through negotiations" a highly-placed Chinese official said. The official said that the efforts should be made to improve relations by promoting exchanges in fields like information, culture and trade. He said that Sino-Indian relations have deteriorated in the past 19 years but one should not forget that the two countries had 2,000 years of close ties.

