

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Taliban and new realpolitik

For Delhi, Panchatantra offers a sensible strategy — divide potential adversaries and strengthen internal unity



C RAJA MOHAN

‘BREAK THEIR HEADS’

SDM’s brutish diktat highlights how the official machinery has switched off farmers’ protests, sees them as enemy

NOBODY MUST BE allowed to breach the security cordon without a “broken head”. That was the brutish, illegal instruction sub-divisional magistrate Ayush Sinha — caught on camera — gave to the police on Saturday in Karnal, where farmers had gathered to protest against a BJP meeting led by Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar. In the aftermath of a lathi charge that left several farmers injured, the officer has claimed the video recording was selective and that no crackdown on protesters happened in his vicinity. The chief minister says the officer’s “choice of words” was not correct, but that “strictness” was required to maintain law and order, even as his deputy from another party has promised appropriate action against the SDM. The question for the Haryana Chief Minister is this: How can any notion of “strictness” in a democracy get away with being so flagrantly anti-people? And what does it say about the Haryana government if the law and order machinery treats the farmers as the enemy, not citizens with a grievance and a constitutional right to protest? The larger question is this: Where is politics, and the politician? The scenes from Karnal on Saturday have once again underlined that politicians have all but abdicated their responsibility to play the mediating and moderating role vis a vis the farmers’ movement against the Centre’s three farm laws. Political interventions are actually reactions, after the event. For the most part, protesting farmers have been left to confront a stone-walling and quelling police force — even as what is most needed are not check-posts and barricades but outreach by the people’s representatives, and a listening state.

It is true that the Centre has conducted 11 rounds of talks with the farm union leaders and that in round 10, the NDA government bent enough to place on the table an offer to suspend the farm laws. And that the dialogue broke down in January because the farmers refused to relent from their maximalist demand of a complete repeal of the laws, and a legal guarantee for MSP, and then, due to the movement’s brief lapse into violence on January 26. But what is also true is that the Centre’s dialogue had come too late, and after too much name-calling. By then the movement had already surged and strengthened on the back of fears and insecurities of farmers, mainly in Punjab and Haryana, over the new legislation shortchanging them while benefiting big corporates. That the Centre was seen to push through the changes last year, first as ordinance amid pandemic, without consultation, and then as law through Parliament without adequate debate, laid the ground for the distrust that has only thickened since.

Now, nine long months after the mobilisation moved to Delhi’s borders, and with assembly elections to Punjab only months away, it is essential that politics finds its way back in. The farmers’ problem cannot be kicked down the road, it is not going to go away by a strategy of wearing them out. There is no alternative to the government engaging the farmers through their representatives and leaders, and persuading them about the benefits and efficacy of the new laws.

AAP’s JOURNEY

Tiranga yatra is an attempt to take the fight to the BJP. But AAP will also have to navigate strategy’s pitfalls

THE BJP’S SUCCESS in framing nationalism and aligning it to its politics of Hindutva has been remarkable. On the other side of the political fence, is the Opposition’s failure in separating Hinduism from Hindutva, or demarcating a more encompassing notion of patriotism that also appeals to the people. The Aam Aadmi Party’s decision to take out a “Tiranga Yatra” in Ayodhya on September 14, with likely stop-overs at the Ram temple and Hanumangarhi, is clearly an attempt to take the battle to the BJP on both fronts. To do so successfully, however, the AAP will need ideological clarity and political finesse — else, its experiment risks succumbing to the failures of the me-too “soft Hindutva” strategies that have been tried by non-BJP parties in the past.

The Tiranga Yatra is evidently a culmination of a series of symbolic and policy actions by the AAP. In November 2020, as the pandemic raged, Arvind Kejriwal conducted a “Diwali Pujan”. His government introduced a “Deshbhakti” curriculum in the city’s schools, “embedded in constitutional values”, and is putting up 500 national flags across the capital at a cost of Rs 85 crore. Announcing former Colonel Ajay Kothiyal as the AAP’s chief ministerial candidate for the upcoming Uttarakhand assembly elections, Kejriwal underlined his credentials as a “deshbhakti fauji (patriotic soldier)” and the party has publicised his work in rebuilding the Kedarnath temple, devastated by the 2013 floods. The AAP has made it clear that it will contest elections in UP, Uttarakhand and Gujarat and that part of its strategy to challenge the BJP is to draw associations between patriotism with governance, and highlight its own record in education and health in Delhi as evidence of its success in the latter.

This experiment of wedding patriotism with development and moving the conversation around nationalism beyond demonising the “Other” could be a welcome addition to the political repertoire and conversation. However, the strategy also has potential risks and pitfalls. The AAP’s temple visits and flag marches could have the unintended effect of entrenching and solidifying the terms of political debate set by the BJP. Unless it is specifically guarded against, this politics could normalise the invisibilisation of minorities and harden categories like “anti-national”. The AAP has shown an innovative streak with a politics of civic governance earlier. How it navigates these pitfalls going ahead will be closely watched. It will, for better or worse, have a bearing on the robustness of Opposition politics.

JHAJHARIA’S FEAT

His gold in 2004 had marked a turning point for Indian para sport. His silver now shines even brighter

TOKYO CONTINUES to bring happy tidings for India as the Paralympics take off from where the Olympics left. At halfway mark, India have gone past their best-ever medal count, securing two historic gold medals with a world record to boot. Shining in that glittering star cast is javelin para-thrower Devendra Jhajharia whose silver is as bright as any gold. Jhajharia, 40, won his first gold medal at the Paralympics in 2004 at Athens, and 17 years and one pandemic postponement later, returned to Tokyo to win his third Para Games medal to become one of India’s greatest sportspersons. In what is a testament to the Rajasthan legend’s longevity, resilience and continued commitment to excellence, his latest silver came on the back of his personal best throw of 64.35 metres — a progression from his historic hurls that fetched him gold medals in Athens and at Rio.

Jhajharia’s gold in 2004 had marked the turning point for Indian para sport, and it had owed almost entirely to the efforts of his mother to bolster his confidence when he was young. Undeterred by the accident that led to amputation of his left arm as a child, she told her son that there was no reason to fear the outdoors and reinforced in him the self-assurance that he belonged on the sports field. No impairment could pull him back from self-belief as one of India’s most inspiring figures aiming for and achieving the very best in global sport.

On Monday, Jhajharia would achieve success again on the javelin field, the scene of Neeraj Chopra’s gold a fortnight ago. Having spent years taking the help of scientific advances in training techniques and seeking expertise from some of the best coaches in Europe, Jhajharia would also raise the bar of excellence. The country will do well to learn from Jhajharia that smart solutions exist to help the differently abled to not just survive, but excel — on the field, and off it.

AS THE LAST American soldiers fly out of Kabul airport and the world adapts to the return of the Taliban, three uncomfortable but enduring features of international politics have come into sharp focus. The human tragedy unfolding in Afghanistan, India’s enormous emotional investment in the Kabul government that collapsed this month, and Delhi’s strong concerns that the Taliban’s connections with Pakistan should not muddy our thinking about the ways of the world.

That victories on the battlefield have political consequences is one of the fundamental features of international politics. Governments have no option but to come to terms, now or later, with the victor. There is no reason, then, for the Indian discourse to be surprised at the rapid normalisation of the Taliban by the international community.

On August 2, the UNSC warned the Taliban against pursuing a military solution to the conflict and establishing an Islamic Emirate; on August 16, both the references were dropped as the Taliban took charge of Kabul. And last week, the UNSC stopped referring to the Taliban by name and moved to a general appeal against letting Afghan territory be used by terror groups.

The UNSC’s sensitivity to the rapidly-changing ground situation reminds us of the legendary headlines of a French newspaper as Napoleon escaped from confinement in Elba and marched on Paris in March 1815. Here is a rough sense and sequence of the headlines: “The Cannibal has left his den”; “The Monster has landed”; “The Tyrant has passed through Lyon”; “The Usurper is 60 leagues from Paris”; “Bonaparte is advancing, but will never enter Paris”; “Napoleon will be below our ramparts tomorrow”; “The Emperor has arrived at Fontainebleau”; “His Imperial Majesty is in the Royal Palace”.

All students of politics know that total wars of the kind that we have seen in Afghanistan change the domestic and international politics of a nation. Whether it likes the new and victorious sovereign or not, a government has the obligation to secure its national interests — ranging from the protection of its citizens and property to maintaining the regional balance of power. India is not immune to this essential principle of international relations and will find ways to protect its stakes in Afghanistan under Taliban rule.

That brings us to the second enduring feature of world politics — that there are no permanent friends or enemies, only permanent

interests. Consider reports that the US is providing intelligence inputs to the Taliban on the terror threats from ISIS-K.

Although these reports are disconcerting to many, the conditions on the ground mean the US needed the Taliban’s support for the safe evacuation of its citizens in the last couple of weeks, as well as in the future. When asked whether he trusts the Taliban, US President Joe Biden told the press that “It’s not a matter of trust — it’s a matter of mutual self-interest.” “It’s in their self-interest that we leave when we said (August 31) and that we get as many people out as we can,” Biden added.

The convergence of US and Taliban interests may be more than tactical. The US would want to explore if the Taliban can help secure long-term American interests in preventing a regrouping of international terror outfits like the al Qaeda and ISIS in Afghanistan. The Taliban on the other hand would want American and Western support in rebuilding Afghanistan. It is by no means clear if such a deal can be clinched, given the big risks it presents to both sides. But the two sides seem ready to explore the possibilities.

The same can be said about the prospects for long-term cooperation between India and the Taliban-led government. For Delhi, the main interest is in preventing Afghan soil from being used by anti-India terror groups. At least a section of the Taliban is eager to continue political and commercial engagement with India.

Last week, in a major speech on the Taliban’s approach to domestic and international issues, the head of the Taliban political commission Sher Mohammad Stanikzai underlined the movement’s interest in continuing the partnership with India. This is part of a natural quest for a diversified set of international partnerships. Delhi would be right to keep its fingers crossed on the Taliban’s ability to deliver on these promises and stand up against the Pakistan army’s pressures to keep India out. But it would certainly want to find out if the Taliban means what it says and if there are any cracks in Pakistan’s relationship with Kabul’s new rulers.

Finally, the US engagement with the Taliban to counter the ISIS-K has been met with derision across the world. Critics say all these groups are part of the same school of terror, driven by similar religious zeal and nurtured in Pakistan’s sanctuaries.

India’s extensive experience of dealing with Pakistan-supported terror lends credence to the narrative on Rawalpindi’s masterful cho-

reography of the unending terror ballet in our region. But Delhi should not rule out contradictions between Pakistan and the terror groups it has spawned as well as among various jihadi organisations.

Differences even among the closest of friends are natural and always offer openings to adversaries. History tells us that movements based on ideology — either secular or religious — are especially prone to internecine conflict. Ideological outfits squabble over the interpretation of the scripture and on the appropriate strategies for realising the declared goals.

Recall that in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi exploited the divisions in the Indian Communist movement for promoting her dominance over the Congress and reorienting India’s politics. In the US, President Richard Nixon and his adviser Henry Kissinger actively exploited the differences between Russian and Chinese communists. Across Asia, conservatives actively used splits in the communist parties to establish their political dominance.

Despite its powerful appeal, religious ideology has failed to build durable political coalitions within and across nations. Pan-Islamist movements have quickly splintered amidst sectarian tensions as well as the clash between nationalism and ethnicity on the one hand and the calls for religious solidarity on the other.

Afghan history, too, bears witness to perennial political schisms. The Afghan communists who seized power in Kabul in the 1978 revolution could not overcome their internal differences on how to modernise their nation or the role of the Soviet Union.

The various religious groups that Pakistan supported could not unite after the Soviet army was ousted from Afghanistan. It had to create the Taliban to counter the Mujahideen. The Taliban’s capture of power in 1996 produced a new set of ethnic and religious divisions within Afghanistan.

Given this history, it is unwise for Delhi to paint the external challenges arising from the Afghan tumult as a single coherent force; and to believe in leveraging the external threat for domestic political ends. The Panchatantra has a more sensible strategy to offer — try and divide your potential adversaries and strengthen your internal unity.

The writer is director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore and contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express

A FRIEND OF INDIA

In the mid-1990s, Stanley Weiss was a wise and empathetic ally India could rely on



C UDAY BHASKAR

INDIA AND THE US were “estranged” democracies for many decades and gradually moved towards cautious “engagement” after the end of the Cold War, during the Narasimha Rao-Bill Clinton phase. Among the many individuals and institutions who were part of the vast bilateral ensemble that contributed to this transformation was Stanley A Weiss, former chairman of BENS (Business Executives for National Security) who passed away in London on August 26. Weiss played a critical role as a discreet enabler both in the Beltway and corporate America of the mid-1990s.

At that time — when the India-US relationship was estranged — IDSA (Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses) was often referred to as the “lion’s den” by American academics and analysts for its fierce defence of why India remained outside the NPT (Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty). In a lighter vein, India experts alluded to the late K Subrahmanyam, long-time director of the institute, as the “lion king”. But it was also deemed mandatory for members of the American strategic community on their first visit to India to stop by at Sapru House and be “given a stern tutorial by Subbu” — as the late Steve Cohen used to quip.

In early 1997, the IDSA was informed that a business team from the US would be in India

later in the year and that we (I was then the deputy to Air Commodore Jasjit Singh, who was the director) were to coordinate the visit. What seemed like one more foreign delegation acquired a different texture when the then Indian ambassador to the US, Naresch Chandra, met Subbu and Jasjit and indicated that this was more than a routine visit and that the PM would also meet the BENS team.

Events moved swiftly after that and I was nominated as sherpa from the Indian side and tasked to plan the BENS visit with the US embassy, ably led by ambassador Frank Wisner and Raphael Benaroya, the India expert assisting Weiss. Most members of the BENS delegation were CEOs of top US companies. They had never visited India and were exploring business options after economic liberalisation.

The result was a very successful BENS visit to Delhi in 1997. The team met the top brass of the Ministry of Defence and the military, and finally called on Prime Minister I K Gujral. Weiss conveyed to the PM that the real India story was not being heard in the Beltway and Gujral suggested that he (Stanley) could tell the story in his widely read column in the *International Herald Tribune*.

What was the outcome of the quiet role played by BENS apropos the bilateral relationship? In response, Weiss would point to the

lead story of *The Telegraph* (Calcutta), which noted in its September 26, 1997 report: “Why did the US President Bill Clinton, undoubtedly one of the busiest heads of state, seek a meeting with the Indian Prime Minister, I K Gujral, in New York (at the United Nations)? The answer is a four-letter word: BENS. Business Executives for National Security.”

Subsequent events moved in a roller-coaster manner after Prime Minister A B Vajpayee took office in Delhi and India conducted its nuclear tests in May 1998. When the India-US relationship hit rock bottom after the tests and the White House was “mad” with India for crossing the nuclear Rubicon, Weiss was the solitary American voice to provide an empathetic interpretation of the Indian decision.

To their credit, the apex political leadership on both sides and their tireless diplomats were able to reach a rapprochement after the Kargil war of 1999 and Bill Clinton’s visit to India in early 2000 was testimony to the tentative “engagement” between the two prickly democracies. Stanley A Weiss, a World War II veteran and mining tycoon, will be long remembered as a wise and empathetic friend of India.

The writer is director, Society for Policy Studies, New Delhi

AUGUST 31, 1981, FORTY YEARS AGO

TEHRAN BOMBING

A POWERFUL BOMB rocked the prime minister’s office in Central Tehran on August 31 wounding the President Mohammad Ali Rajai and the Prime Minister Mohammad Javed Bahonar, the official Iranian media reported. Pars, the official Iranian news agency, reported that at least five persons were killed with some and 15 wounded with some of the bodies burnt beyond recognition. The Iranian cabinet held an “emergency meeting” and adopted certain decisions to cope with the blast’s aftermath and condemned the episode as a “last ditch attempt by American hirelings”. The blast, which sent a fire raging through the building, appeared to be the most serious in

Iran since a bomb killed more than 70 of the Iran’s religious and political leaders in Tehran.

ADVANTAGE URS

D DEVARAJ URS was unanimously elected president of the state unit of Karnataka Congress (U). Before the meeting, D Chandra Gowda and his followers resolved to join the Congress (I) at a parallel meeting of the KPCC (U). Gowda had to be content with very little support even though he had claimed support of 150 members of the party.

IMPASSE ON DA

REPRESENTATIVES OF CENTRAL government

employees have rejected the government offer of merging a part of the dearness allowance with basic pay if they agree to the impounding of the 50 per cent of instalments of the DA payable. The matter came up at an informal meeting of the representatives of the standing committee of the Joint Consultative Machinery (JCM) called by the Cabinet Secretary.

NIHAR RAY DEAD

INTELLECTUALS AND EDUCATIONISTS bade a tearful farewell to Nihar Ranjan Ray, historian and art critic. Ray, ICHR chairman, was a staunch critic of the Left Front government’s education policy.



9 THE IDEAS PAGE

The great unknown in Kabul

No single actor has the power to control events in Afghanistan. That's why the Taliban takeover bodes ill for the world



ANJU GUPTA

EVER SINCE THE fall of Kabul a little more than two weeks ago, the long-anticipated collapse of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF), a "half-determined" President Ashraf Ghani fleeing the country, the "mightier" Taliban walking into Kabul and the "much weaker" Panjshir holding out have dominated the narrative on Afghanistan. Amidst tragic events, several puzzles remain. They hold the key to a proper appreciation of the threats that Afghanistan, the region and the world could face in the next decade.

All stakeholders have often repeated that the ANDSF was expected to take on the Taliban but failed to do so. Under an elected government, with funding up to 2024 and assurance of off-shore training and maintenance, over-the-horizon support from the US Central Command for common counter-terrorism targets, diplomatic and humanitarian assistance and security of Kabul airport by Turkish forces, the ANDSF did conduct itself professionally till early August. It is widely known now that the unspoken Western assessment was that despite all support, the ANDSF could hold out for one or two years.

The earnest recruiting and training of the ANDSF by the US-NATO started around 2009, when the US initiated a troop surge to reverse the Taliban's momentum and give time and space to the ANDSF to grow. On January 1, 2015, total security responsibilities were handed over to the young security outfit, which had 3,00,000 troops, according to the US auditor SIGAR. Since then, the ANDSF has been at the forefront of the conflict, suffering heavy casualties.

Till the signing of the Doha agreement, the ANDSF prevented the fall of provincial capitals and border crossings, stopped the Taliban from taking permanent control of highways, maintaining control over more than 250 district centres — though some districts did change hands — and did not allow ISIS or Pakistan proxies like ISKP or AQIS to increase their footprint across Afghanistan. The outfit faced complex challenges in managing police functions, safeguarding borders, protecting people and fighting Pakistan-backed insurgency. The terrain in Afghanistan did not permit permanent posts and patrols across many parts. Such areas became the Taliban's bastions. Since the ANDSF was dependent on foreign funds, financial compulsions may have prevented mobilising troops to defeat the Taliban at several places. The stakeholders, therefore, resolved that a negotiated political settlement was the only way to end the insurgency.

The Doha agreement disregarded the fact that the foreign forces and the ANDSF had teamed up successfully, forcing the Taliban to the peace talks — this implicitly allowed Pakistan to take all the credit. The agreement negotiated a deal for "no attacks" on foreign forces, leaving the Taliban with more resources to take on the ANDSF. The ANDSF's demoralisation started from this point. Post-Doha, the ANDSF and civilians faced very high levels of violence. The reduction of foreign forces from January this year further demoralised the ANDSF, giving the Taliban an incentive to not negotiate with the Afghan government at all.

The change of regime in the US had raised hopes that the drawdown could slow down



CR Sasikumar

or reverse to help the ANDSF push the Taliban to negotiate on reasonable terms. However, the April 16 announcement of complete withdrawal by September gave a fillip to the Taliban. According to SIGAR, by June-end, less than 1,000 foreign personnel remained. Thousands of contractors were gone, severely disabling the Afghan Air Force and jeopardising the transport of frontline special forces — which held the key to defeating the Taliban — across Afghanistan.

Still, between April 16 and July 2, the ANDSF ensured that provincial centres were not overrun and border crossings were safe. The withdrawal from Bagram on July 2 sent the final signal that the ANDSF was on its own. The Pakistan-Taliban combine began a forcible occupation of border crossings, highways and provincial capitals. Notably, even in July, the ANDSF proved its mettle by pushing back the Taliban in key capitals of Lashkargah and Kandahar.

However, between August 6 and 15, all provincial capitals fell without much fight. Did the ANDSF sense that political manoeuvres were overtaking professional assessments and that its own government was powerless to influence external actors? The pictures of Mullah Baradar as a state guest at Doha and elsewhere in the region signal the lack of real involvement of Afghanistan in deciding its own future. The ANDSF must have been acutely aware that retribution was a reality, should the Taliban join an interim government or form one. Did the agency feel that political, moral and functional support for it had become only notional? There was no Northern Alliance, nor was any significant country offering help.

On August 14, many embassies started emergency evacuations and the next day, the Taliban was at the gates of Kabul. They looked equally unprepared, clueless about managing even traffic or crowds. It appears that, though powerless, the Afghan top brass directly supervising the ANDSF — and the ANDSF itself — could see the

Recent events have thrown up many puzzles. Won't Afghanistan become opaque to the world the day the evacuations are over? With the internet, airport and borders shut, the only access to Afghanistan will be through the Taliban. Will Russia-China or the West contemplate supporting resistance movements to keep the Taliban in check? Will ANDSF become part of this resistance? Will the big powers rely on the Taliban — an entity lacking professional skills and one that needs to prove its intentions — for counter-terrorism operations? Can big powers afford to give legitimacy and aid to the Taliban and ensure funds are not used by extremists?

writing on the wall and moved out of harm's way well in time.

The pro-withdrawal narrative that the region was a "free beneficiary" of the security provided by the US and NATO had gained currency. Was the narrative so strong that it disregarded the potential reversal of gains made over 20 years? Or has the Great Power competition with China and Russia tipped the balance with the expectation that these powers will have to get sucked into Afghanistan?

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Will the big powers rely on the Taliban — an entity lacking professional skills and one that needs to prove its intentions — for counter-terrorism operations? Can big powers afford to give legitimacy and aid to the Taliban and ensure funds are not used by extremists? Will the Taliban be able to show "absence of corruption" in its dealings with citizens, a key yardstick for Western aid?

Will Pakistan be comfortable with a Pashtun Amir-ul-Momineen in Afghanistan gaining traction in its tribal belt? Will Pakistan allow all key Taliban leaders, such as Qayyum Zakir and Maulvi Kabir, to move their families and assets to Afghanistan and lose full control?

Much more is likely to emerge from this conundrum in the coming weeks and months. There is no single actor — including the Taliban — who knows it all or can guide events to come. This means that the fall of Afghanistan is a bad omen for countries far beyond the region.

The writer is an IPS officer. Views are personal

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Ironically, Nepal has been re-elected to the United Nations Human Rights Council despite the country's failure to address the outstanding issues of insurgency-era crimes. Nepal is now preaching on the global stage what it is unable to put into practice at home."
— KATHMANDU POST

Why Dara Shikoh matters

He lost the battle for Mughal empire, but won the war of ideas for India



TARIQ MANSOOR

AT A TIME when incidents of intolerance in the name of faith are being reported from Afghanistan, Dara Shikoh, one of India's most enlightened thinkers, needs to be remembered. He was a champion of interfaith understanding, philosopher, artist, architect, translator, poet and administrator. Although in 1655 his father and Mughal emperor Shah Jahan declared him the Crown Prince, he was assassinated by his younger brother, Aurangzeb, in a bitter struggle for the throne on August 30, 1659. Dara Shikoh was 44 at the time of his death. Even though he lost the battle against Aurangzeb, he won the war for India. It is that victory we are celebrating as a proud nation, representing the best example in the world for unity in diversity.

Though Dara Shikoh had very little military experience as Shah Jahan had kept him in the court, his father chose him as successor over his other sons who were sent as governors of various states. Shah Jahan was aware that due to India's deep spiritual roots, it could not be governed by force alone, but only by upholding the ideals of peaceful coexistence, tolerance and winning the hearts of people. It is these values that bind the people of a nation together. What might have been the history of the Indian subcontinent had Dara Shikoh prevailed over Aurangzeb in the battle for succession has been debated for centuries. Though he could not become an emperor, his imprint on Indian civilisation is no less than that of any emperor in the Subcontinent's history.

Dara Shikoh, who had a deep understanding and knowledge of major religions, particularly Islam and Hinduism, is known as a pioneer of the academic movement for interfaith understanding in India. He strove to develop cordial relationships between people by finding commonalities between Hinduism and Islam and bringing their cultures into dialogue. His most important works, *Majma-ul-Bahrain* (Mingling of Two Oceans) and *Sirr-i-Akbar* (Great Mystery), are devoted to the cause of establishing connections between Hinduism and Islam. He not only discovered commonalities but even said that the foundation of the two religions is the same, which is the belief, "One Reality and One God". He had a pluralistic outlook and understood India's syncretic culture.

Dara Shikoh acquired proficiency in Sanskrit and Persian, which enabled him to play a key role in popularising Indian culture and Hindu religious thought. He translated the Upanishads and other important sources of Hindu religion and spirituality from Sanskrit to Persian. Through these translations, he was responsible for taking the Hindu culture and spiritual tra-

ditions to Europe and the West. During those years, the Europeans did not read Sanskrit but were able to read Persian, and so they read the texts in Persian that were later translated into Latin. This is how a new movement of studying India's religious and cultural texts spread in the world. After this, the Europeans also started to study Sanskrit. In this way, it was Dara Shikoh's pioneering work that led to the dissemination of India's culture outside the Subcontinent. This is his outstanding contribution to India's intellectual and religious heritage. Subsequently, it became fashionable among the philosophical circles to admire the Upanishads.

Dara Shikoh had a keen interest in the fine arts and architecture. An album he dedicated to his wife is a treasure of Indian art. A rare miniature painting showing him with his spiritual masters is preserved in the library of the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU). As a talented architect, he designed the beautiful Pari Mahal Garden Palace in Srinagar, and many other monuments.

The importance of interfaith connections cannot be overemphasised in our multi-religious and diverse society. At the centenary celebrations of AMU recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, like a true statesman, delivered a speech that has been much appreciated globally, wherein he portrayed AMU as a unique symbol of India's composite culture by labelling it as "Mini India". Modi also exhorted AMU to undertake study and research in India's rich cultural heritage to give new energy to India's cultural relations with the world.

AMU is committed to the development of interfaith understanding among all the religions of the world. To foster a culture of tolerance and national integration by bringing communities together, AMU, in its centenary year, has started the Dara Shikoh Centre for Interfaith Dialogue and Understanding. While history may not have given Dara Shikoh his due, AMU has initiated course correction by taking up the task of popularising his legacy. The Centre has started undertaking important milestones such as translation of Dara Shikoh's works in other languages, creation of a repository of writings and research undertaken in India and abroad on the life and works of Dara Shikoh, formulation of bibliographies of works done on Hindu religious texts by Muslim authors and vice-versa, among others. This is an initiative undertaken with a liberal mind and vision. AMU's founder Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, himself undertook the work of understanding scriptures of other faiths by writing commentaries on them.

Dara Shikoh, as a true child of India, is an icon for tolerance, harmony and togetherness. It is due to these values that we Indians, despite many diversities, have been living in unity and oneness for centuries. India's neighbours and their regimes can learn from this.

The writer is Vice-Chancellor and Chairman, Board of Management, Dara Shikoh Centre, AMU

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

UNIVERSITY, CENSOR

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'No single story' (IE, August 30). Delhi University's decision to remove texts based on the fear that it will corrupt the minds of students as it goes against ethics and culture takes me back to the era of Victorian morality when several voices like the famous Hardy (for example in Tess) were censored. The trend continued even in the modern era when great writers like James Joyce were forced to change "explicit content" to more euphemistic writings. In the Indian context, this trend seems to continue even today as the literature of the past is seen with the lens of culture and morality to weigh whether it deserves to be taught. In doing so, the decision-makers are forgetting that "offensive" is a subjective word and can be interpreted by anyone according to their own belief systems.

Anamika Priyadarshani, Delhi

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Let's say never again' (IE, August 30). India and Pakistan are the key players, without whose cooperation there can be no peace in the South Asian region. We must look at the other nations, which had once been inflicting sufferings of titanic proportions upon each other, and are now living in peace. An appropriate example is that of France and Germany who had a long blooded history finally concluding into the invasion of the former by the latter during the Second World War, but now stand together as the friendliest of the neighbours. Hatred and vendetta only sink the ties to abysmally horrible depths.

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Vinay Saroha, via email

story 'Sadgati'.

LR Murmu, Delhi

ENEMIES TO FRIENDS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Let's say never again' (IE, August 30). India and Pakistan are the key players, without whose cooperation there can be no peace in the South Asian region. We must look at the other nations, which had once been inflicting sufferings of titanic proportions upon each other, and are now living in peace. An appropriate example is that of France and Germany who had a long blooded history finally concluding into the invasion of the former by the latter during the Second World War, but now stand together as the friendliest of the neighbours. Hatred and vendetta only sink the ties to abysmally horrible depths.

My competitor, my comrade

Neeraj Chopra shows respect for rival is most important lesson of sports



JEEV MILKHA SINGH

SPORTSPERSONS RESPECT each other, regardless of gender and nationality. We respect each other for our achievements, no matter how big or small. That's one of the most important things that sports teaches you. You respect a person for what he or she is and for what he or she has achieved or done. That's what Neeraj Chopra has done by speaking up for what is right and standing up for Arshad Nadeem after people on social media went after the Pakistani javelin thrower for picking up Chopra's javelin in the final at the Tokyo Olympics.

While Neeraj became the Olympic champion, Arshad finished fifth. He kept pushing Neeraj to do his best. Athletes should respect their competitors because they have all proved themselves good enough to be there. Any of the 12 athletes in the final could have won on that day and I give full marks to Neeraj for appreciating each of his competitors, including Arshad. That's the way it should be. Who knows, tomorrow I may miss a putt, while my competitor sinks his and wins the tournament. I can't belittle his efforts or speak against him just because he is of a different nationality. During my time in the US, while on a golf scholarship, I met players and people

from many different cultures. The experience taught me to conduct myself well, to appreciate each competitor, to thank everybody on the golf course as well as in life. That was the best education. At that time, I looked up to Fred Couples, who went on to win the 1992 US Masters. I did not realise this at that time, but I liked how he conducted himself on the golf course, taking the time to talk to the galleries. It made me aspire to be like him some day. Over time, he has become a good friend and we played in Dubai some years ago. I told him that to tee off along with him is a privilege and it is one of the things that has made me the most nervous in my whole career. When I see Neeraj or Arshad or other athletes admiring each other's efforts, I can only think of how good the sporting world is.

During my amateur days, I made many trips to Pakistan and made friends with golfers like Taimur Hassan Amin, a 16-time Pakistan national champion. Over the years, we have played together in Dubai and we often meet and share our memories of our amateur days. It was because of golf that we became friends and we are competitors only on the golf course. Like javelin throwers, golfers too use

their personal equipment in tournaments, with the difference being that others are not allowed to use the equipment. But having played on the PGA Tour, European Tour, Asian Tour and Japan Tour, apart from major championships, I have tried or got to know about the clubs used by different players. I remember taking advice from golfer Daniel Chopra and even asking Fred Couples about his clubs. I have also asked younger players, like Shubhankar Sharma, about their choice of clubs. But each one of us plays on his own and it's our effort which rewards us.

Having travelled and played around the world, I have seen that every country cheers and looks out for its own sporting heroes in a competition. But it depends on you to find a place for yourself. Being a good human being, performing well and conducting yourself well — these things win you the respect of different countries and different cultures.

That's what my father Milkha Singh got from Pakistan, a country he had to flee during Partition, after seeing many deaths and much tragedy. But then, as he would say, "Halat mande hundne ne, bande nahi" (The conditions are bad, not the individuals)". The kind of love my father got from Pakistan cannot be described in words. He will be known

as the Flying Sikh for as long as the world remembers him. The name was given to him by Pakistan. After my father's death, I had a conversation with Mohammad Ejaz, son of Abdul Khaliq, one of my father's biggest competitors on the world stage. Ejaz made sure to thank me because my father had asked about his father's well-being when the latter was a prisoner of war in Meerut after the 1971 war. I told him that someday, if I were to play in Pakistan and get taken as a prisoner of war, somebody there would give me respect as a sportsman. That's the power of sports.

For me, Neeraj is a true champion. He did not think about his parents or coaches; he dedicated his gold medal to my father moments after he became the Olympic champion and spoke about my father's dream. His gesture and the way in which he has supported Arshad make him a true champion.

I don't know if my son Harjai Milkha Singh will make a career in sports. But I am sure his time in sports has taught him to be fair and to respect his competitors — and to applaud their effort.

The writer is a 14-time international winner in golf