

When everything seems to be going against you, remember that the airplane takes off against the wind, not with it.

—Henry Ford

Edit

Protecting China Depoliticized for Western Readers

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The Ladakh administration's decision to impose a strict ban on identified single-use plastic items and littering across the Union Territory deserves all applause and appreciation. More importantly, it deserves close attention from the rest of the country. At a time when environmental concerns are growing louder across the Himalayas, Ladakh has chosen to move beyond rhetoric and embrace firm action. The Union Territory's fragile ecosystem has long been vulnerable to the harmful effects of plastic waste. Every part of Ladakh's natural landscape faces increasing pressure from rising tourist footfall and changing consumption patterns. Plastic waste, once introduced into such a sensitive environment, can remain for decades, damaging soil, contaminating water sources and threatening wildlife. The new regulations send a strong message. Individuals, commercial establishments and institutions, including hotels and eateries, found using, selling or storing banned single-use plastic items will face an environmental penalty of Rs 10000. Littering in public places will invite a fine of Rs 5000. Movind beyond symbolic penalties, these are substantial enough to act as a deterrent and encourage behavioural change. What makes this initiative particularly significant is that Ladakh has gone beyond issuing another notification that risks remaining confined to official files. Across India, several states and Union Territories already have restrictions on single-use plastics. Yet weak enforcement often undermines their effectiveness. Ladakh has addressed this challenge directly by creating a comprehensive enforcement mechanism. A broad network of district and field-level officers has been empowered to inspect premises, detect violations, issue challans and recover penalties. The administration has also authorised surprise inspections and the use of videography, photography, CCTV footage and other legally admissible electronic evidence to identify offenders. Such measures demonstrate a clear commitment to implementation rather than mere intent. This approach is especially important because tourism remains one of Ladakh's primary economic drivers. The region's breathtaking landscapes attract visitors from across India and the world. However, tourism can only remain sustainable if it is accompanied by environmental responsibility. Clean mountains, pollution-free water bodies and litter-free public spaces are not just ecological necessities but also economic assets. By promoting responsible tourism, the new regulations will help ensure that Ladakh's natural beauty remains unspoiled for future generations. The decision also offers valuable lessons for neighbouring Jammu and Kashmir. The Union Territory faces many of the same environmental challenges. Plastic waste has become a growing concern in urban centres, tourist destinations and ecologically sensitive areas. Significantly, the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly's Committee on Environment recently urged the government to take stringent measures against plastic pollution, warning that indiscriminate plastic use is harming public health, polluting water bodies and degrading ecological balance. Ladakh has now shown what decisive action looks like. Strong laws matter, but strong enforcement matters even more. The administration's latest move reflects an understanding that environmental protection cannot be achieved through awareness campaigns alone. It requires accountability, deterrence and consistent implementation. The hope now is that others will follow its example before the cost of inaction becomes irreversible.

Relations between Beijing and Tokyo continue to be in a phase of acute diplomatic conflict. It all started last year with remarks by Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi—suggesting a potential Chinese attack on Taiwan could be treated as a "situation threatening Japan's survival," thereby paving the way for military action.

Then the state media, and military and Party social media accounts in China, reacted immediately: graphics depicting Takaichi as an embodiment of a threat appeared, public television ramped up the rhetoric, and hashtags sanctioned by censors—calling for Japan to be "held accountable" and to "pay the price"—began circulating on Weibo. Concurrently, Beijing implemented retaliatory measures: travel warnings, flight restrictions, and trade curbs. All the familiar political tools were deployed.

Yet one tool, previously a standard one, was left unused: there was no "street" response. No demonstrations outside Japanese diplomatic missions, no officially "spontaneous" marches, and none of the scenes the world remembers from 2012. In a country that has repeatedly demonstrated its ability to mobilize thousands of people outside a foreign embassy within an hour, such an absence constitutes a political message. It's not "nothing"; it's absence of movement where movement can be summoned at will and we must analyse it.

It is precisely this gap—the fact that the anger did not spill onto the streets—that the South China Morning Post sought to address. The article in question was titled: "Why do Chinese consumers feel Japanese products are no longer worth boycotting?" This is not merely a market commentary, but an attempt to impose a specific interpretation on Western audiences: the absence of protests implies a shift in societal attitudes.

The SCMP explains Chinese people have grown "weary of boycotts" and have "greater confidence in domestic brands," seeing little point in symbolic gestures given the world's increased complexity and deepening of economic ties. It cites the views of consumers, marketing experts, and market analysts—all reflecting a tone of moderation, reasonableness, and an ostensibly apolitical perspective on the "maturation" of China's middle class.

The problem lies in the fact that the very structure of this narrative is flawed—and at times, downright dishonest. The SCMP is executing a classic maneuver known in Chinese media studies as "selective depoliticisation" ('xuanzengxingquzhengzhijhua'—literally "selectively stripping politics from the message"), wherein a deeply political phenomenon is re-framed in market terms. An interstate conflict involving national security is transformed into a story about consumer tastes, "shifting preferences," and "boycott fatigue."

The state, as an active agent, vanishes from the narrative. In its place appears the consumer—ostensibly free to react as they please, yet who, by some strange coincidence, never takes to the streets against the wishes of the authorities. The essence of the SCMP's manipulation lies in its choice of an analytical level that can be framed as a "natural social evolution." The article makes no mention of the fact that the massive anti-Japanese

protests in China in 2012 spanned over a hundred cities, were highly orchestrated, and appeared and vanished exactly when the authorities deemed it convenient.

There is no discussion of how street-level nationalism served for years as a controlled safety valve. Nor is there any mention that the absence of protests might stem from a decision made not by the "consumer," but by the Party apparatus—an apparatus that, following the "White Paper" protests of 2022, now fears any gathering of a crowd.

enemy. It may redirect its anger toward domestic issues: the cost of living, inequality, and a lack of prospects.

That is why the absence of protests is a deliberate choice. In a state capable of mobilizing five thousand people outside the Japanese embassy within an hour, lack of such a gathering is not the natural state of affairs. It's a political decision—one driven by the fear that anger could spiral out of control and spill over into areas the authorities wish to keep closed: housing prices, unemployment, stagnation,

perfect shot for CCTV cameras.

There were shouts, fluttering slogans, and a burst of excitement—all lasting exactly as long as the broadcast itself. Then, the crowd would vanish just as suddenly as it had appeared. There was no improvisation, no grassroots energy. There was only a script and performers.

That is precisely why the current absence of protests stands out so starkly. It is not a social shift; it is a political one. The state has not allowed anger to spill onto the streets because,

The reader is offered a convenient explanation: there are no protests because Chinese people have calculated that boycotts are ineffective, because the world has grown more complex, and because prominence of Japanese brands has declined. They are not asked: who decides whether a protest can take place at all? Under what conditions? Why did people take to the streets in 2012, yet fail to do so in 2025? Yet the answer lies precisely in the realm SCMP consciously avoids. The authorities in Beijing operate according to a logic of maintaining stability. In this model, protests are treated as high-risk mass incidents ('quntixingshijian'—literally "collective incidents"). Following the events of 2019, Hong Kong, and the "White Paper" protests, the authorities are aware that a crowd, once inflamed, will not necessarily stop at an external enemy. It may redirect its anger toward domestic issues: the cost of living, inequality, and a lack of prospects. That is why the absence of protests is a deliberate choice. In a state capable of mobilizing five thousand people outside the Japanese embassy within an hour, lack of such a gathering is not the natural state of affairs. It's a political decision—one driven by the fear that anger could spiral out of control and spill over into areas the authorities wish to keep closed: housing prices, unemployment, stagnation, and a pervasive sense of being overwhelmed. This is neither "boycott fatigue" nor "consumer maturity." It is a risk calculation. The SCMP will not write about this. Instead, it opts for a market-oriented, "depoliticising" narrative designed to reassure Western readers. This is precisely what constitutes the "official narrative in soft packaging": it is elegant, reasonable, and seemingly objective. It relies on expert quotes, market references, and sometimes general data. Yet, when weighed against the reality on the ground, it amounts to just one thing: an attempt to make sense of a situation created not by spontaneous social change, but by the authorities' fear of their own society.



Instead, the SCMP employs a tactic known in Chinese propaganda theory as 'yinxingyúlunyingdao' (literally "covert guidance of public opinion")—a narrative style that appears not to be propaganda but, in practice, steers the audience's interpretation by shifting the focus to obscure the situation's most political elements. The reader is offered a convenient explanation: there are no protests because Chinese people have calculated that boycotts are ineffective, because the world has grown more complex, and because prominence of Japanese brands has declined. They are not asked: who decides whether a protest can take place at all? Under what conditions? Why did people take to the streets in 2012, yet fail to do so in 2025?

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This becomes particularly clear when one recalls what those "spontaneous" protests looked like back when they were being orchestrated. In 2012, I was working as a diplomat at the Polish Embassy on Ritan Lu, directly opposite the Japanese Embassy (now headquarters of SCO). I saw firsthand what a "spontaneous" protest looks like, Chinese-style: buses lined up at six am, the distribution of meals and banners, instructions given to demonstrators, and positioning of crowds to ensure

today, anger poses a threat rather than serving as a tool. The SCMP acts as an intermediary: a translator between Western public opinion and a narrative that can no longer be overtly propagandistic yet must remain loyal to the boundaries set by Beijing.

Why there are no protests is a question about authorities' fear. A leadership that spent years wielding nationalism as a tool of pressure now increasingly understands that mass emotions cannot be "metered out" without risk. Hence the apparent contradiction between heated rhetoric and cool mood on the streets. The state has allowed anger to circulate within the tightly controlled channels of social media—spaces where algorithms and censors can quickly snuff out excessive sparks.

When weighed against facts, it looks less like an analysis and more like preemptive commentary—a proposed interpretation intended to fill an awkward gap. That gap is the question: why didn't the Chinese take to the streets when Japan had just signalled its readiness for war? The most likely answer is simple. Today, the authorities fear the crowd more than at any time in the last...INFA

Sant Kabir Jayanti: The Great Sun of Indian Consciousness & Eternal Bard

LALIT GARGG

In the rich tradition of Indian saints, if there is one saint who profoundly stirred religion, society, spirituality, and human consciousness, it is Sant Kabir. He was not merely a poet, saint, or social reformer; rather, he symbolized that awakened consciousness of the Indian soul which taught humanity to perceive human beings simply as human beings. Kabir is the great sun of Indian spirituality whose message remains as relevant, inspiring, and revolutionary today as it was six centuries ago. At a time when the world is grappling with violence, wars, terrorism, religious fanaticism, social fragmentation, consumerism, mental stress, and moral decline, Kabir's teachings emerge as a beacon of hope for humanity. His entire philosophy seeks to reconnect individuals with their inner selves, foster social harmony, and liberate religion from hollow rituals, leading it back to its essential and authentic form.

Kabir appeared during a period when Indian society was entangled in rigid customs, ritualism, caste divisions, and religious hypocrisy. On one hand, there was the religious intolerance of certain Muslim rulers; on the other, Hindu society was burdened by excessive ritualism and external observances. The true essence of religion had been lost. In such a transitional era, Kabir fearlessly proclaimed: "Pothe padhi padhi jag mua, pandit bhaya na koye; Dhai akhar prem ka, padhe so pandit hoye." (The world perishes reading countless

books, yet none becomes truly wise; only one who learns the two-and-a-half letters of love attains true wisdom.) Kabir emphasized that the essence of religion lies in knowledge, love, compassion, and self-realization, rather than in external rituals. Transcending the boundaries of both temple and mosque, he urged humanity to seek the Divine within.

One of Kabir's most remarkable qualities was that he was a saint of direct experience. He himself declared: "Main kahta aankhan ki dekhi, tu kahta kagad ki lekhi." (I speak of what I have personally witnessed, while you speak of what is written on paper.) His teachings were not subservient to scriptures, traditions, or dogmas. Whatever he said emerged from his own lived experience. This is why his words possess extraordinary authenticity and radiate the brilliance of life's deepest truths. Kabir consistently advocated self-examination. His celebrated couplet: "Bura jo dekhna main chala, bura na miliya koye; Jo dil khoja apna, mujhse bura na koye." (I went in search of the wicked, but found none; when I searched within myself, I found none worse than me.) remains profoundly relevant even today. In an age increasingly marked by criticism, blame, and fault-finding, Kabir guides us toward introspection and self-purification.

Sant Kabir was a powerful proponent of interfaith harmony. He criticized the narrow-mindedness found within both Hindu and Muslim communities, yet he opposed no religion. His resistance was directed solely against superstition, hypocrisy, and fanaticism. He said: "Kankar-pathar jod ke

masjid layi banay, Ta chadhi mulla bang de, bahra hua Khuday?" (Stones are assembled to build a mosque, and from its top the mullah calls aloud—has God become deaf?) Likewise, he remarked: "Pahan puje Hari mile, to main puja pahar; Taate to chaki bhali, pees khaye sansar." (If God could be attained by worshipping stone, I would worship a mountain; better still is the grinding stone, which serves the world by grinding grain.) The purpose of these verses was not to denounce any particular religion, but to elevate humanity beyond external formalities and direct it toward inner spiritual realization. In a world increasingly afflicted by religious intolerance and communal tensions, Kabir's message—"Avval Allah noor upaya, kudrat ke sab bande." (The Divine first created the Light, and all beings are its manifestations.)—holds immense significance for humanity.

Kabir regarded caste discrimination as one of the greatest weaknesses of Indian society. He strove to establish social equality and human dignity. His famous couplet: "Jaati na poochho sadhu ki, poochh lijiye gyan; Mol karo talwar ka, pada rehne do myan." (Do not ask a saint's caste; ask about his wisdom. Value the sword, not the sheath.) continues to serve as a foundation for social harmony. Kabir asserted that a person's identity should be determined by character, knowledge, and actions rather than birth. He demonstrated that spiritual greatness is not the monopoly of any caste or class. Though a humble weaver by profession, he rose to become one of the

towering figures of India's saintly tradition.

Kabir's life itself proves that spirituality is not confined to forests, monasteries, or hermitages. Living as a householder, he attained the highest spiritual realization. He did not renounce the world; rather, he practiced truth, simplicity, hard work, honesty, and saintliness while remaining fully engaged in worldly life. In today's age of stress, competition, and materialism, Kabir's message is especially meaningful: one can lead a deeply spiritual life while living amidst family and society. The twenty-first-century individual, despite unprecedented technological advancement, often feels inwardly insecure, lonely, and distressed. In this era of artificial intelligence, digital revolution, and consumerism, humanity is steadily losing its inner peace. In such times, Kabir's message offers fresh direction: "Mala pherat jug bhaya, phara na man ka pher; Kar ka manka dar de, man ka manka pher." (Ages have passed turning the rosary beads, yet the mind has not changed; abandon the beads in your hand and transform the beads of your mind.) Kabir teaches us that inner transformation is far more important than external achievements. He reminds us that true revolution occurs within the human heart. In this age of environmental crisis, violence, intolerance, and moral decline, Kabir's philosophy of compassion, coexistence, and simplicity can guide human civilization toward a more enlightened future.

Kabir's voice does not belong to a single era; it is a heritage of all humanity. His Sakhis,

Shabads, Ramainis, Bijak, and Ulatbansis continue to inspire millions across the globe. His language is simple, deeply rooted in folk culture, and extraordinarily powerful. Although Kabir is traditionally considered unlettered, his words embody such profound wisdom that even the greatest scholars stand amazed. It is for this reason that he is often described as the "Sun of Knowledge." His teachings are not merely meant to be read; they are meant to be lived. They shake the human conscience, shatter ego, and inspire individuals to walk the path of truth. At the time of Kabir's passing, a dispute reportedly arose between Hindus and Muslims over his mortal remains. According to legend, when the shroud covering his body was lifted, flowers were found in place of his physical form. This symbolic event suggests that Kabir belonged not to any one religion, sect, or community, but to the entirety of humanity.

Through his life and teachings, Sant Kabir established that the true religion of humankind is love, truth, compassion, and self-realization. He offered society a new vision, religion a new direction, and spirituality a new dimension. On the occasion of Sant Kabir Jayanti, it is imperative that we do not merely recite his couplets, but imbibe his ideals in our daily lives. That alone would constitute a genuine tribute to this great saint. Indeed, Kabir is the great sun of Indian spirituality, whose rays of wisdom will continue to illuminate the path of humanity for generations to come.