



The Telegraph

calcutta, india



Tuesday, March 23, 2010

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Sangh young band swings to jazz

RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

THEN



New Delhi, March 22: Anuradha Paudwal, Narendra Chanchal and Anup Jalota are passe. The Sangh's young guns would rather sway to Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington.

The bhajan singers are a generation removed from the jazz greats and could, therefore, qualify as more "contemporary". But someone in the RSS or the BJP decided it was time to stack away the *Jai Siya Ram* and *Prabhu Tero Naam* CDs and play *What A Wonderful World* and *When The Saints Go Marching In*.



But Armstrong's gravelly voice and Ellington's ragtime blues for the RSS-BJP?

The disconnect would seem unbridgeable if you imagined *swayamsevaks* in over-sized khaki shorts swinging to jazz instead of intoning mantras on patriotism.

But when 50-odd youths got together to pledge allegiance to the RSS and the BJP in Delhi, they chose jazz as the background score.

NOW



The new band calls itself the United Volunteer Association, or UVA. Or better still, Yuva.

Yes, it is the BJP's answer to the Congress's effort to foreground Rahul Gandhi and his youth brigade.

Gone with the bhajans are the khaki shorts. The UVAs wear saffron T-shirts and black trousers.

They are not 50-year-olds with paunches but young IT professionals, entrepreneurs and students with less ample waistlines and a general look of fitness.

Nitin Gadkari, the 52-year-old BJP president, whose girth is not exactly an advertisement for health freaks, was the guest of honour at the launch of UVA in New Delhi's Mavlankar Hall today.



He played to the gallery, unmindful of the fact that on the dais with him was M.G. Vaidya, an 80-year old RSS pracharak who often defies the official line on policies and issues. "I belong to a new generation that recognises the difference between the letter and spirit (of Hindutva). Hindutva's spirit will not change. But it cannot be an agenda for any political party," he said.

He invoked lines from a Supreme Court judgment that described Hindutva as a "way of life of people in the sub-continent".

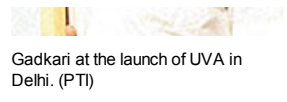
(From top) Anuradha Paudwal, Anup Jalota, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington

"No true Muslim can kill a Hindu, no true Hindu can kill a Muslim. Yet the pseudo-secularists insist on identifying terrorists with religion. The state should be secular, the government should be secular but an individual cannot be secular," Gadkari said. "Why then were Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi cremated according to Hindu rites?"

He emphasised how important it was to drive home the message that the BJP was for "parliamentary democracy and not theocracy".



"Youths should see Hindutva in a larger perspective, as a way of life that is related to tolerance of all people," Gadkari said.



But UVA convener Sanjay Kaul drove home the message of change. At the end of his speech, the BJP activist who was part of the India Shining ad campaign, simply said: "Hey guys, if you are interested, you know who to call."

A generation, it seemed, had been phased out.

A source said youth outreach would become possible only "when we start looking, thinking and speaking like Kaul".

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