

## MISHAP AVERTED

Kudos to all the officials of the disaster management bodies, security forces and above all the Indian Army for saving 300 lives of tourists who were stuck midair due to a sudden snag in the Gulmarg gondola cable car. It was a herculean operation jointly launched by the above forces in which not only individuals displayed exemplary courage in saving lives but also managed to keep those trapped in the cable car stay calm and follow the instructions for rescue. It's a second time in recently years that the cable car developed a snag. 300 tourists hanging midair looked like a disaster about to happen but for the 7-hour operation by the rescuers. While the authorities are already praising the rescuers, in future the authorities managing it need to have a meticulous and a fool-proof plan for Gandola's smooth run. Besides, a rescue plan also has to be in place. Surely today's operation could be a template for the future rescue plan. The government must institute an enquiry into the reason for the Gandola's sudden failure, first to fix the responsibility and secondly to learn lessons to avert such lapses which could have cost lives.

## HEAT WAVE

It not even peak summer and already most parts of India are reeling under a severe heat wave. According to experts, the temperatures in many parts are not tolerable for the human body. The government must take this health hazard seriously and restructure the office and school timings. Human health will eventually suffer and it's cost will be quite high and not always quantifiable. The health and civic authorities must run campaigns to educate people on how to stay hydrated and how important it is to stay indoors and keep the body fit in these extraordinary temperatures. The authorities can campaign through social media and radio and television. In many parts of India it calls for a health emergency.

## Speaker in the storm: The failed motion

Kalyani Shankar

The role of the Lok Sabha Speaker in promoting parliamentary stability and independence is incredibly important and deserves recognition. On March 11, 2026, the Opposition's impeachment motion against Speaker Om Birla was defeated by a voice vote, nearly four decades after the last attempt. With 119 MPs signing the notice, the Opposition highlighted the perceived bias in the Speaker's conduct. Removing a Speaker requires at least 272 votes in the 543-member House, and historically, no Speaker has ever been removed. The Speaker is back in his chair.

The repeated challenges to the Speaker underscore political tensions in the legislature, raising questions about the balance of power and mutual respect among legislators. Thus, the Speaker's role is essential to both legislative procedures and the fostering of trust in parliamentary democracy.

Following the unsuccessful impeachment motion, Speaker Birla reiterated his impartiality, asserting that the rules apply equally to all members, including the Prime Minister. He addressed the House to refute allegations of bias. He clarified that there is no mechanism to mute the Speaker's microphone. He emphasised, "This House is not a fair or a festival. We must follow the rules, and no one has the right to speak outside them, regardless of their position."

Union Home Minister Amit Shah criticised the Opposition for its unruly conduct in Parliament, highlighting Rahul Gandhi's low attendance—51 per cent in the 17th Lok Sabha and 52 per cent in the 16th Lok Sabha, compared to averages of 66 per cent and 80 per cent, respectively. The Opposition protested by chanting "Maafi maango," demanding an apology from the Home Minister.

The impeachment motion underscored the ruling party's substantial majority and reinforced the importance of parliamen-



tary procedures. It highlighted the respect that the House warrants for its legislative processes.

Jagadambika Pal, a member of the BJP panel who presided over the session, called upon the Opposition to resume their seats to facilitate voting. Nevertheless, amid ongoing protests, he chose to conduct a voice vote in the House, which led to the resolution's rejection. The House was subsequently adjourned for the day.

Impeachment motions are infrequent occurrences in the history of India's parliamentary system. The attempt to remove Speaker Birla marks the fourth such effort, underscoring the inherent challenges of this vital office. The Speaker's position is safeguarded by the House itself rather than the President, and removal can occur only by a majority vote. This underlines the office's independence and its critical role in maintaining parliamentary stability. The previous efforts included a 1954 motion against the first Speaker, GV Mavalankar, and the recent motion against Birla. These incidents highlight ongoing concerns regarding bias and parliamentary conduct.

Since independence, there have been three unsuccessful attempts to remove a Speaker of the Lok Sabha. The first was in 1954 against GV Mavalankar, the first Speaker. The motion was debated on December 18, with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Leader of the Opposition AK Gopalan participating. MPs accused Mavalankar of disallowing relevant questions and mishandling adjournment notices.

In 1966, MPs accused Sardar Hukum Singh of obstructing inquiries that could embarrass the government and failing to submit privilege notices. The motion did not advance, as fewer than 50 MPs supported it.

CPI(M) MP Somnath Chatterjee proposed a resolution against Speaker Balram Jakhur. Key participants included Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and P Chidambaram. The House voted against the motion. In the Rajya Sabha, attempts to remove Vice President and Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar in 2024 have failed. Similarly, the 2020 notices to remove Deputy Chairman Harivansh Narayan Singh did not spark a debate.

The 'effective majority' requirement—defined as a majority of all sitting House members—establishes the threshold for removing a Speaker, ensuring that a significant consensus is necessary.

During the impeachment debate, Opposition leaders raised concerns about a vacant Deputy Speaker position, faulty microphones, limited speaking rights for Opposition members, and mass suspensions. These issues focus on the challenges facing parliamentary institutions and the Speaker's office.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah criticised the Leader of the Opposition, Rahul Gandhi, stating that he travels for party purposes and publicity rather than attending parliamentary sessions. "He skipped the President's speech, the Budget, and discussions on Article 370. During key parliamentary sessions, he travels abroad and claims he is not allowed to speak," Shah stated.

"According to the established history of this House, its proceedings are conducted based on mutual trust. The Speaker serves as a neutral custodian, representing both the ruling party and the Opposition. It was unfortunate for parliamentary politics that a resolution for the removal of the Speaker has been introduced," he added.

The Speaker's authority underscores the importance of impartiality and the challenges posed during contentious moments, such as impeachment debates, helping the audience grasp the office's significance to parliamentary stability. Modi, at the end of the impeachment debate, commended Om Birla for conducting Lok Sabha proceedings with "dedication, patience and impartiality". Now that the House has defeated the impeachment motion,

Even if the Lok Sabha is dissolved, Speaker Om Birla remains in office until the new House meets and elects a new Speaker.

The writer is a popular columnist; views are personal

## Svabhava: The nature that shapes who we are

Ajit Kumar Bishnoi

What do we normally remember about someone? It is mostly how he behaved towards us — kindly, warmly, angrily, etc. Looks, etc, become a faint memory. How he made us feel is what one remembers most. Traits of nature stand out, and we decide to deal with such a person accordingly.

For example, if someone was friendly, we are likely to continue our relationship. Conversely, if he was an egoist, one will think twice before wanting to meet him again. We all have peculiarities, and others are quick to notice them. We may not be so aware of them ourselves.

What is 'svabhava' (nature) made of? Just as material nature consists of the three 'gunas' (modes), personal nature similarly has three modes. Every one of us has a combination of goodness, passion and darkness in our nature. Whichever mode is in ascendancy at any time, we are likely to act accordingly. For example, if a person is in a good mode, he will act mostly nicely with others.

How do we get this personal nature? It is determined by the Divine Authority on the basis of our past 'karmas' (acts). As whatever is destined must manifest, nature also makes its presence felt. Since it will have



some proportion of darkness as well, we will have many flaws in our nature. People carry deep desires for lust, greed, anger, hate, etc.

The predominance of these defines a person. Surely, we are classified accordingly. A 'kshatriya' (warrior) is suited to defend a country, and a 'brahmin' is best suited for teaching and preaching. The soul in itself is pure, but nature is what defines him. This

nature will always remain with the soul wherever he goes or whatever species he is born into.

Now the main question is about its improvement. To begin with, let me clarify that nature is very difficult to change, and all changes can only be slow. Until then, a person will behave according to his nature; a lustful person will act in a lustful manner. Attempts to act differently will most likely

fail (The Bhagavad Gita 3.33). Are we, then, doomed? No, because God has not made us in that fashion. But only a very determined person can effect changes in one's nature, especially because it requires taking help from God (7.14), this being part of fate.

Faith and nature are interlinked. Lord Krishna has made it quite clear: "Faith of all is according to one's nature only. Whatever faith he has, he is that only." (17.3) So the solution is clear.

One has to develop faith in God. And for that, one must begin practising spiritual disciplines such as chanting, meditation, etc., to establish a connection with God.

Then God comes into action and begins to guide and help. Our habits will begin to change for the better. Simultaneously, one must begin to associate with things rooted in goodness, such as consuming food in goodness. This, together with God's help, will change one's nature. Ultimately, our nature shapes our actions, relationships and destiny. While svabhava is difficult to change, it is not immutable. Through faith in God, sincere spiritual practice, and association with goodness, gradual transformation becomes possible. With divine guidance, even deeply ingrained tendencies can evolve towards purity, compassion and higher consciousness.

## BJP's Punjab Gambit: Redrawing the State's political map

Monika Malik

Punjab has rarely been comfortable political territory for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Yet, as the state moves towards the 2027 Assembly elections, the party's central leadership appears determined to rewrite that political equation. The strategy emerging from Amit Shah's political messaging in Moga suggests a calculated attempt to reposition the BJP in a state where it has historically remained peripheral.

The significance lies not in the speech itself but in the political architecture behind it. The signals were unmistakable—the BJP's Punjab campaign will be centrally directed, its messaging carefully crafted around Sikh sensitivities, and its social outreach widened far beyond the party's traditional urban Hindu base.

This is less a conventional election campaign and more a long-term experiment to construct a new political constituency in Punjab. One of the clearest messages from Shah's intervention is that the BJP will not leave the Punjab battle solely to its state leadership. The campaign is likely to be driven by the national leadership, reflecting the party's belief that Punjab requires a carefully controlled strategy rather than a routine state-level contest.

For the BJP, Punjab is politically deli-

cate for multiple reasons. The aftershocks of the farm laws agitation continue to influence voter perceptions, especially in rural areas dominated by Sikh farmers. At the same time, the party's traditional alliance architecture has collapsed, forcing it to re-define its role in the state's political ecosystem. Shah's approach appears to be aimed at building the party's legitimacy step by step rather than chasing immediate electoral victory.

Rebuilding bridges with Sikh voters The BJP's biggest structural challenge in Punjab has always been its limited acceptance among Sikh voters. Without making inroads into this electorate, the party cannot realistically compete in the majority of Assembly constituencies.

The emphasis on visible Sikh leadership reflects an attempt to change that perception. The BJP now appears keen to project Sikh leaders prominently within the party structure, signalling that Sikh representation will not be tokenistic but central to its Punjab strategy.

Punjab's electoral arithmetic explains the urgency of this effort. Sikh voters dominate roughly 70 to 75 of the state's 117 Assembly constituencies. In regions such as Malwa and Majha, the Sikh electorate holds decisive influence in a majority of seats. For a party that has historically been viewed as urban-centric,

building credibility in these constituencies is essential. The BJP's ongoing induction of Sikh leaders and its effort to highlight their political visibility suggest a deliberate attempt to create a new leadership layer capable of engaging rural Punjab.

The farmer factor: Healing a political rupture

Even more challenging for the BJP is its strained relationship with farmers. The farm laws agitation, coupled with the unfulfilled promise of a legal guarantee on minimum support price (MSP), created a deep political rupture between the farm party and large sections of Punjab's agrarian community. Repairing this relationship is central to the BJP's electoral ambitions. By emphasising that the Central Government continues to work in the interest of farmers and dismissing fears surrounding international trade agreements, the party appears to be attempting a slow process of trust rebuilding. This effort is as much psychological as political. The BJP's leaders know that rural hostility once prevented them from entering villages in Punjab. Any improvement in that perception, even marginal, could open political space for the party.

A crucial element of the BJP's messaging is the emphasis on its rising vote share in Punjab. The party's vote share rose from

6.6 per cent in the 2022 Assembly elections to more than 19 per cent in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. Shah's narrative frames this increase as the beginning of a political trajectory that could eventually lead to power. The argument is designed less for immediate persuasion and more for long-term psychological impact. Within the party organisation, it seeks to instil confidence among workers who have long struggled in a difficult political environment. Among voters, it attempts to reposition the BJP as a growing political force rather than a marginal contender. In electoral politics, momentum can often become self-reinforcing. Shah's strategy appears to rely on creating precisely that perception.

A new political agenda: Religious conversion

The BJP's messaging in Punjab is also attempting to reshape the political agenda itself. By raising the issue of religious conversions and promising legislation to prevent them, the party has introduced a sensitive religious question into Punjab's political discourse. The issue resonates particularly among Sikh groups concerned about conversion trends among marginalised communities. Simultaneously, the BJP is trying to claim ownership of governance issues that have long troubled the state—particularly the drug

menace. By promising to eliminate drugs within two years, the party is attempting to position itself as a decisive alternative to governments that have repeatedly pledged action but struggled to deliver. These themes—identity, law and order, and governance—form the ideological backbone of the BJP's emerging Punjab narrative.

The BJP's strategy is not limited to Sikh outreach. It is also attempting to broaden its social coalition in Punjab by engaging other influential communities. One important component of this effort is outreach to Other Backward Classes. Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, himself an OBC leader, has been repeatedly deployed in Punjab to connect with these voters. His frequent appearances in the state reflect a deliberate attempt to build a political bridge with communities that have historically remained outside the BJP's core support base. Similarly, the party is making a visible effort to connect with Dalit voters, who constitute a significant share of Punjab's population. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Dera Ballan in Jalandhar on 1 February, immediately after presenting the Union Budget in Parliament, was widely interpreted as a symbolic gesture towards the Ravidasia community. The dera is considered a nerve centre of Dalit politics in

the state. These outreach efforts suggest that the BJP is attempting to build a multi-layered social coalition rather than relying on a single identity bloc.

Learning from the 2022 setback The BJP's current strategy also reflects lessons learned from its experience in the 2022 Assembly elections. After its alliance with the Akali Dal collapsed in 2020, the BJP effectively entered the contest almost alone. The party attempted to compensate by forming a coalition with break-away factions—Capt Amarinder Singh's Congress offshoot and Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa's Akali faction. Yet, the arrangement proved politically ineffective, and the experiment ended in a disappointing electoral outcome.

That setback has forced the BJP to rethink its approach. Instead of relying on fragmented alliances, the party now appears focused on building its own organisational strength in the state.

The emerging signals suggest that the BJP is preparing to fight the next Assembly election largely on its own. This marks a significant shift from decades of politics in which the party functioned as the junior partner in the Akali-BJP alliance. Contesting independently indicates that the BJP now seeks to evolve from a supporting player into a principal political actor in Punjab.