

STUDENTS' PROTEST

While political parties have the knack of taking over movements and causes of others, and it is inevitable in a democracy, there is need for every side to play a sober role in the ongoing students' protests over the NEET Paper leak. The government has realized the seriousness of the situation and seems to be trying all things to ask students to go back. This includes the promise to hold the trial of the accused in the paper leak case in a fast track court and overhaul the NEET examination system. While we do hope negotiations end at a pleasant note, genuine students also should be worried about the violent elements that have crept into their agitation in Delhi. Organised mobs using stones and bricks trying to lynch policemen on duty have come into action and this is simply reprehensible. Also such agitation which are built on genuine sentiment and anger but are without a leader, post an inherent danger. Undesirable elements and vested interests join the genuine protesters and dilute the agenda. Today violence against policemen has become a very dangerous aspect of students' protests. Through social media posts, we also saw how some protesters are speaking the language of India's enemies and even threatening to "spread anarchy." The genuine people in it must realize that vested interests are trying to provoke the police into opening fire and possibly causing casualties.

The government would have to expedite the decision making and carrying on the talks on urgent basis with the students and not necessarily with those trying to ride piggy back on students. The opposition must realize that they can corner government on the issue and also contribute to reforming the examination system through a debate on the floor of the Parliament. That is how democracies work; Fighting elections in the streets is fine but playing with the future and sentiments of the students is not.

The Pawar puzzle: Can he make a comeback?

Kalyani Shankar

As the Monsoon Session of Parliament begins, Sharad Pawar, the leader of the NCP, faces internal conflicts within his party. There could be political changes first in Maharashtra, and then the merged NCP could ally with the BJP.

Pawar is known as a political survivor because he has often saved his party from disappearing. He is skilled at forming unexpected alliances, such as the 2019 Maha Vikas Aghadi alliance with Shiv Sena and Congress.

He also has a strong grassroots network in Maharashtra. Even after the tragic loss of his nephew, Ajit Pawar, in a plane crash, and ongoing power struggles within his faction of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), he still has significant influence in both national and regional politics.

In July 2023, the political climate in Maharashtra worsened when Ajit Pawar left the NCP to join the BJP-Shiv Sena government. Soon after, the Election Commission recognised Ajit Pawar's group as the official NCP.

In response, Sharad Pawar started a new party called the Nationalist Congress Party (Sharad-chandra Pawar). Now, Maharashtra has two rival parties, both claiming the same political legacy. This session arrives at a critical point, where upcoming legislation on parliamentary representation could reshape governance, inspiring hope for change despite controversy.

Pawar's involvement in the legislative process is especially important given the upcoming bill to amend provisions related to parliamentary representation in India, which could significantly alter Maharashtra's influence by increasing Lok Sabha seats from 550 to 850 and shifting census-based delimitation powers.



This bill is an important step in the ongoing conversation about how we represent people in Parliament. It is especially relevant for Maharashtra and the southern states, where people are concerned about getting fair representation and sharing resources. The bill proposes increasing the number of parliamentary seats from 543 to 850 and introducing new rules for reporting census data. These changes could greatly impact the political landscape in these regions.

Sharad Pawar has the opportunity to build coalitions and address stakeholders' concerns, which can foster confidence and optimism about his ability to influence Parliament's support. As a pivotal figure in Maharashtra politics, Pawar has demonstrated resilience amid internal divisions within his Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). Following the tragic loss of his nephew, Ajit Pawar, in a plane crash in January 2026, the party has the chance to address succession challenges, with Ajit's widow,

Sunetra Pawar, stepping into the roles of Deputy Chief Minister and state party chief. Despite facing these challenges and ongoing factional issues, Sharad Pawar retains significant influence over the NCP. This situation presents a critical juncture for the party to regroup and develop innovative strategies to succeed in future Assembly elections.

Pawar faces pressure to merge with the NDA-aligned NCP faction. However, his search for a solution raises hope for stability while also highlighting concerns about ongoing factional conflicts.

This situation illustrates that Pawar is resolutely committed to preserving unity within the opposition and has consciously chosen to forgo any merger plans. His actions not only bolster his leadership but also demonstrate his support for political stability in Maharashtra, thereby enhancing confidence in his resolve.

Sharad Pawar's faction has eight MPs in the Lok Sabha and plays an

important role as the NDA seeks to strengthen its majority. This group's support could be key to passing important laws, such as the women's reservation bill, which proposes reserving 33 per cent of seats in Parliament and state Assemblies for women. If Pawar's faction supports these reforms, it could significantly affect their implementation and influence the legislative process now and in the future.

Sharad Pawar reflects on his extensive political journey; he notes the significance of fleeting moments in politics, having 'witnessed many sunrises and sunsets', and remains cautious about his future alliances amid Maharashtra's shifting landscape. Observers and political analysts are closely watching whether Pawar's faction will align with the NDA or continue to navigate a complex, evolving political terrain that could reshape governance in Maharashtra and beyond.

At present, there is no official confirmation regarding a merger or the establishment of an NDA alliance. However, the series of events - such as reports of ongoing merger discussions, meetings between senior leaders from various political parties, and a separate discussion with Fadnavis on Tuesday night - indicates that talks are still underway behind the scenes. It is said that the two NCPs will merge first, and only then could they join the NDA.

Pawar has the option of going with the Congress too, but this will pose problems regarding his role and his daughter's role in Congress.

The coming days will be crucial as the session unfolds, and the implications of these political manoeuvres will resonate beyond Parliament, shaping broader public perception of governance and representation in the region.

SOUL SEARCHING IS REQUIRED NOW NOT LATER

Ajit Kumar Bishnoi

Please believe me, we are all defined by our dominant emotion. The main ones are lust, greed, anger and hate. Out of these, lust is the most common and harmful. Lord Krishna has spoken about lust, anger and greed as three doors to hell (the Bhagavad Gita, verse 16.21). And the Lord has termed the jealous and mischievous as the lowest among men (14.19). Specifically, the Lord has singled out lust as the worst enemy of humanity.

The reasons are obvious. "It is lust only that devours, and is a great sinner. Know this to be the enemy of the world." (3.37) "By this insatiable fire in the form of lust, which is the eternal enemy of a knowledgeable person, knowledge is covered." (3.39)

I have quoted these verses because no one other than God could have explained the gravity of the situation better. I am an avid reader of the Gita. A few decades ago, I decided to take shelter in God to fight against my dominant emotion of lust. By the way, lust is of many kinds, like lust for wealth, power, fame and sensuous attractions. We all have weaknesses for all these, but one of them dominates and defines us.



Taking shelter in God and remaining in His shelter are not the same. Many take shelter in God for different reasons. Lord Krishna has explained, "Four kinds of virtuous people worship Me. These are a distressed person, an inquisitive person, a seeker of wealth and a wise person." (7.16) I realised over a period of time that I fitted all these descriptions of taking God's shelter.

Therefore, I had to do better; I graduated from taking shelter in God to remaining in the shelter of God. I began to sincerely pray for Him to take charge of me.

This is when my transformation began. My Lord, convinced of my sincerity, took me under His care. He began working on my nature. The deep-rooted aspects don't change like habits of eating, etc., can be

changed. Only God can help in changing the deep-rooted ones because He alone knows our real weaknesses and our deep desires. He knows what will really move us, which will make us agree to take the pain for their change.

And plenty of pain of reformation is required to get the nature changed. My Lord has a wonderful system of reformation. He punishes me with my bad karmaphalas (fruits of deeds) coming to fruition, and He rewards me with good karmaphalas on alternate days. This way, I have kept on going. The result is unbelievable; I am very satisfied with my progress.

No one should wait any longer. Soul-searching is required to be done urgently regarding what is one's most pronounced personal weakness. Nobody else needs to know except God, and He already knows. Begin praying for help till God accepts these prayers for reformation. The beneficiary will know because a mirror will be shown to remind one of the weakness. Shame for oneself and anger towards God will both surface; tolerate them. Reformation has begun, with God in control.

The writer is a spiritual teacher; Views presented are personal.

Punjab and J&K crisis exposes Congress's leadership paralysis

Anil Anand

As a Punjab watcher described the assembly poll-bound state as a "low hanging" fruit for the Congress which the party should strategize to grab the opportunity with both the hands, the mismanagement and mismatch between the thinking of the central and state leaderships and the resultant crisis has put a spanner in the Grand Old Party's (GOP's) chance to stage a comeback in the strategically located state. How to manufacture a crisis afresh and how to mishandle the situation? This seems to have, since sometime back, become the USP of the Congress. And the current turmoil in Punjab, closely followed by Jammu and Kashmir, unit is a glaring example of this.

Well, severe factionalism in GOP's state and Union Territory units and repeated failure of the clueless AICC leadership to stem the rot has a serious reflection in Punjab. It is a classic example of half a dozen chief ministerial

hopefuls pulling in different directions but strategically joining hands to "challenge the authority of the high command." Instead of effectively mediating the central leadership seemed content offering peace-meal solutions and ultimately resorting to status quo. This has further aggravated the situation. In states and UTs where the Congress has been facing such crisis, the factionalism has been allowed to foment with encouragement from the AICC quarters particularly the state/UT in-charges. The two classic examples are Punjab and adjoining J and K. The common denominator between the two is that PCC chief, Mr Amrinder Singh Warring (Punjab) and Mr Tariq Hamid Karra (J & K) being the hand-picked choice of Mr Rahul Gandhi. And there lies the problem and from where stems the argument of the central leadership's authority being under challenge. And, let Mr Gandhi take a decision to remove such PCC chiefs, lest "we" end up antagonizing him. This is quite a fallacious argument furthered by

some strategists sitting in the AICC in the name of protecting their leader. The argument stands no ground when viewed in the light of performance, on ground, of the incumbent PCC chiefs. After all, Mr Gandhi must have appointed Mr Warring and Mr Karra to strengthen the organization on which they seem to have failed. While the former has been the PCC chief for three years and the latter nearly two years.

No doubt there are other reasons behind factionalism. As reflected both in Punjab and J and K, the issue of prime concern to Mr Gandhi should be the tendency of AICC representatives, including general secretary (organization) and the in-charges to ignore multiple opinions in the PCC before taking a realistic decision. Punjab and J and K have to be viewed from the prism of this horrific syndrome of perpetuating the crisis and hiding behind Mr Gandhi's name by avoiding acquainting him with ground realities. This is reflected in the view of some senior Congress

leaders that Delhi no longer sees the Punjab crisis purely through the prism of Mr Warring's performance. Instead, the larger concern is the authority of the high command itself. Maps

Both Mr Warring and Mr Karra have badly fumbled to achieve the very objective, to rebuild party organisations in their respective domains, which Mr Gandhi must have wanted them to do. The poll-bound Punjab has assumed a greater significance since Congress has been battered by repeated electoral defeats and prolonged infighting. And snow is the chance of redemption. What is the harm if Mr Gandhi, properly informed about the ground realities by the in-charges and the committees sent to such states and UTs from time to time to quell the factional wars, reviewed his decision? Where is the ego hassle if an incumbent is removed on grounds of failure to deliver goods, maybe due to wrong approach and style of functioning? No harm! It is in the fitness of things that to protect his nominee PCC chiefs, the

set of AICC leaders do not sully his name.

The entire gamut of approach in dealing with states and UTs, particularly embroiled in crisis, needs to be drastically changed. Not always but most of the time, the AICC-appointed missions to such areas adopt a conveniently tailor-made approach rather than basing their reports on the actual ground realities. As a result, with invocation of Mr Gandhi's becoming a protective gear, the visiting committees are seen sheltering the incumbents. Wherever such committees give their findings based on the ground realities, it hardly favours the central leadership.

In the case of Punjab, a three-member committee led by AICC treasurer and an old warhorse, Mr Ajay Maken, had submitted a report resting on their interaction with a sizable section of Punjab leaders including rebels. Reports suggest that the Maken committee had clearly pointed out that an overwhelming majority opinion was in favour of replacing Mr Warring with former

chief minister, Mr Charanjit Singh Channi. As the situation in Punjab stands, Mr Warring stands totally isolated and seems to be in no position to lead the divided house into 2027 assembly elections. How and why the central leadership, Mr Maken himself being among the top leaders in the party hierarchy, has ignored his panel's recommendation, and at what level, it is still not known. Whether Mr Gandhi, who has just returned from a two-week sabbatical abroad, has seen the report or not? Intriguingly, the strong AICC coterie overlooked the Maken committee's recommendation, reflecting the majority view in the Punjab Congress. No time was lost announcing retention of Mr Warring as the PCC chief, and appointing Mr Channi and other rebel leaders as heads of other sundry committees in preparation for elections in total rejection of the recommendations.

The factional feud has reached a level of no return and the argument that the AICC's (read Mr Gandhi) authority will get eroded

if Mr Warring is removed holds no good. The authority will, in fact, get strengthened if a decision is taken in line with the party's best interests. In cases such as Punjab and an equally strategic J and K, the central authority of the party should make a decisive mediation effort at the highest levels. Any delay will result in Congress losing valuable ground to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Punjab, and giving more strength to BJP in its stronghold of Jammu region, and the National Conference and Peoples Democratic Party in the Kashmir Valley.

Since Punjab and J and K are sailing in the same boat, the developments in the former are bound to impact Congress in the neighbouring Jammu and Kashmir. This is more so because rebel leaders Mr Channi and former deputy chief minister, Mr Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa, represent Lok Sabha constituencies adjoining Jammu region, and had played an important role (though partisan) in the last assembly election in the UT.