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HSGPC May Lead to Confrontation Path

The Badals need an emotive panthic issue for SGPC polls & they got one.



Gurdwara Nadha Sahib In Haryana. For how long will SGPC continue to manage these photographs?

Sach Kanwal Singh
NEW DELHI/AMRITSAR

In a week of fast-paced developments on the issue of separate SGPC for Haryana, Akali Dal MPs, backed by a few other supporters, rocked both houses of Parliament asking the Congress to desist from what they called "interference in internal affairs of the Sikhs" as two factions leading the demand in Haryana united and reiterated their resolve to get a separate body to manage Sikh shrines in the state.

Now the Akali Dal seems to be ready to raise temperatures even further. The SGPC held a meeting of the executive committee on Monday, and has now called for a general house session on the issue where fireworks are expected on August 14 and possible talk of a

confrontationist path is likely to dominate.

Congress leadership in Haryana has only added fire by talking of a referendum and suggesting that the Sikhs of Haryana will now have a full say on the issue. The Badals have rushed to scotch talk of referendum and are strongly opposing it.

Congress president Sonia Gandhi has already jumped into the fray, asking Haryana Chief Minister Bhupinder Hooda to pull back from the brink and not precipitate the matter. A few Sikh Congress MPs also seem to have told the Congress high command not to get into a confrontation mode since Prakash Singh Badal-Sukhbir Singh Badal would likely prefer to raise the pitch.

Conventional political wisdom in Punjab is that the Badals are open to make the scenario noisier

in view of the upcoming SGPC polls. The Akali Dal in Punjab has moved so far away from panthic concerns and has turned into a secular mainstream political party with all the concomitant ills that it needs a high decibel issue to get votes from the panthic core in order to retain control over the SGPC.

Carving out SGPC in Haryana was one of Hooda's poll promises in 2005 election manifesto but he is under pressure from his own high command that such a move, if forced, could have serious and adverse implications in the neighbouring state.

Hooda lobby has claimed that although Sonia was supportive of Hooda and "saw through"

Is Panth In DANGER?

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Shiromani Akali Dal's "politics" on this issue, she did not want to send any wrong signals in Punjab. "It could open up many old wounds if the Congress is seen or projected as meddling in the religious affairs of the Sikh community in Punjab," said a senior leader from Punjab.

Another section of the Congress is, however, supportive of Hooda's moves. "If the SGPC (in Punjab) remained non-political and acted like a religious body, one could have understood its objections. But, the fact is, they act like an extension of the SAD.

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Power-full Party, Powerless People

Jagmohan Singh

Just the other day, newspaper headlines in Punjab screamed that Sukhbir Singh Badal has again become the Deputy Chief Minister of Punjab. The people of Punjab were second time lucky as they again have the opportunity to convert this dying green belt into California, and no sarcasm intended since these are Sukhbir's words.

The next day's top stories are screaming that Punjab is in the grip of a power and water crisis. Alongside is the first decision of the deputy chief minister - census of non-resident Punjabis - to safeguard their prime properties and interests. In case you have forgotten, he has just returned from an overseas trip. Nobody in Punjab grudges that, because the dream to become non-resident persists, and how can one rue that particularly when a group of non-resident tycoons met the power-full leaders in Chandigarh and expressed their desire to set up a nuclear power plant in the border town of Attari!

That politics is about power is not lost on the people of Punjab and the northern states of India, particularly during the "horror" months of the summer. Prior to the parliamentary elections and the just concluded bypolls which returned the dynastic Naunihal, all water and power flowed to the constituencies where elections were held, particularly unfettered

to Jalalabad -the constituency of the son of the Chief Minister. It is amazing how the flow of water and electricity is also at the command and control of the power-full. As soon as the elections are over, results declared, power is shut off. Power-less people murmur in protest, the heat making that too impossible and the near power-full bureaucrats are ever pliant to dance to the tune.

What about the Power-less? Have a look at the picture above. The power-full are cheerful and the power-less have their eyes fixed either on the ground or sometimes to the skies hoping for heavens to fall or pour, literally.

E M Forster described the Indian summer in A Passage to India as "the herald of horrors". Since then, the horrors have increased manifold. Electricity is available in Punjab for less than 8 hours in a day in cities and much less than that in the villages.

More people are affected due to dehydration following sweltering heat with no electricity, bad drinking water than are dying of swine flu. Should a pandemic of swine flu strike Punjab, it would be made worse with the power situation. The rich, famous and powerful, like the above will rush to generator-run state-of-the-art corporate

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