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NEWS / BLOGS / INDIA / Precarious politicking in Punjab

INDIA

## Precarious politicking in Punjab

February 16, 2022, 2:21 PM IST / Jagdish Batra in Cultural Inputs, India, politics, TOI

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**Jagdish Batra**

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The election campaign in various states this time have been the shrillest and the nastiest of the ones held so far. Punjab, where elections are due in a few days from now presents a unique case in that it is a border state with a history of terrorism fomented by Pakistan. Apart from being the granary of India, it has many industrial hubs even though financially it has accumulated large debt liability. The politicians, however, go on

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with vicious electoral propaganda unmindful of the great harm they are doing to Punjab and the country through their loose talk and actions.

Talking about the financial position first, it is evident, as in other states, that the parties are vying with one another in offering freebies, subsidies and monetary doles without the least consideration of the actual finances available at the moment or in near future. There is no talk of the projected income and expenditure and, besides the public is not knowledgeable about such matters. The mathematical equation that governs the offerings is quite simple: the lower the chance of a party coming to power, the higher would be the freebies offered by it! And when the time to deliver comes, the ruling party will gloss over it and the public has proverbially a short memory, but even if it had, it would have no means to take the rulers to task. The position of Punjab is quite precarious as it tops the list of states in terms of debt burden which is expected to rise to a whopping 2.82 lakh crore by the time the term of the present government ends!

The other far more serious concern is about the security of the state and the country at large. It may be recalled that even though the Congress government was responsible for Operation Bluestar

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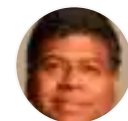
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and the Sikh carnage of 1984, its wrongdoings were forgotten and it was given a chance to rule Punjab. This reconciliatory gesture was a welcome one in the interest of societal harmony, but the party deduced a wrong lesson by interpreting it as a signal to undertake a 180-degree turnabout and sing to the tune of the pro-Khalistan and pro-Pakistan elements. The plea by Mani Shankar Aiyer to Pakistan to support the removal of PM Modi is to be seen in this light. And Navjot Sidhu's open embrace of the Pakistani army chief while doubting the veracity of the Balakot air strike carried out by Indian army got a tacit approval of the Congress high command when he was made the Punjab Congress chief. The comparison with the visit of P.M. Modi to Pakistan is specious since, as the Prime Minister of the country, he had taken the initiative to open a friendly chapter with Pakistan but it did not yield the desired result. That all is not well with the Congress party's nationalist protestations is exemplified by the alarming security breach at the time of Modi's visit to Punjab.

Many of the farmers' unions have come together to fight election. It is good that they have thought of legitimate channel to fight for their concerns. There are other unions which claim to be apolitical but are vehemently supporting political

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parties of their choice, which again is fine. The worrisome aspect is that the separatist lobby which made full use of the opportunity provided by the agitation and exhibited its clout through the patently anti-national attack on Red Fort cannot be believed to have parted ways with the farmers who would feel beholden to them for having financed the agitation and got them international attention. A Red Fort storm trooper having been given a ticket to fight the coming election is an indication.

These are a few examples of the portentous security scenario in which the secessionist forces are gathering strength. Our political parties seem oblivious of the sacrifices of brave Punjabi jawans fighting terrorists being sent into the country by Pakistan besides replying to its aggression at the border. The large supplies of narcotics from across the border have hugely harmed the Punjabi youth. These narcotics are now being smuggled out to Haryana and other parts of the country also. Pakistan is ganging up with China and Turkey, and is taking up every opportunity at the international fora to malign India as a part of its proxy war. Let our Punjab politicians reconsider their strategies and behave in a responsible manner.



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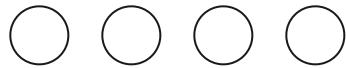
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