

PILOTING A PROTOCOL OF ACCOMMODATION

The Congress must revisit its past, to a time when its leadership wrote the blue book on the art of political reconciliation

Very many decent voices and noble souls are disappointed over the Ashok Gehlot-Sachin Pilot dust-up in Rajasthan, which has so far produced only losers and no winner. The dismay is all the more pronounced because over the decades, this oldest political formation in the country had indeed perfected the art of reconciling diverse, often conflicting, ideas, egos, personalities and ambitions. Much before Independence, the Congress leadership had written the blue book on political accommodation and resolving conflicts within.

The Mahatma's choice

A bit of history. In 1929, after much internal debate, the Congress had decided to demand "purna Swaraj" (complete independence) at its Lahore Session at the end of the year. Once the party had spelled out its agenda it would have to galvanise the organisation and the masses behind the demand for total independence. It also needed a new president. Over the objections and doubts of the "old guard," Mahatma Gandhi settled on the young Jawaharlal Nehru. And, the shrewd judge of men and matters that he was, the Mahatma argued: "a lover of discipline, he [Jawaharlal] has shown himself to be capable of rigidly submitting to it even where it has seemed irksome. He is undoubtedly an extremist, thinking far ahead of his surroundings. But he is humble and practical enough not to force the pace to the breaking point."

Gandhi had proposed a classic formula for accommodating the younger generation's ambitions without letting it rock the boat. He understood the need to enlist Jawaharlal Nehru's energies and rapport with the young and the intelligentsia in the campaign for complete independence. And, Nehru kept his end of the bargain, remaining a disciplined organisational man, restraining his impulse as never to "force the pace to the breaking point".

Protocol and adjudication

After Independence and after the Mahatma was gone, the Congress necessarily had to revisit the protocol of accommodation; idealism of a national struggle against the British had inevitably to give way to the demands of ideology of building a new nation. Despite their differences in temperament and preferences, Nehru and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel were unambiguously on one point: the post-Partition situation demanded consolidation, stability and coherence in the Congress. Hence, the Congress Socialist Party, so far tolerated and used as a ginger group, was given a choice of either dissolving itself or heading for the door. Substantive leaders such as Acharya Narendra Dev and Jayaprakash Narayan chose to part company with old comrades. And, in the next few years, Acharya Kripalani, N.G. Ranga and others walked out over differences on policies and direction for the new nation-state. And, then, some like Rafi Ahmad Kidwai, Ajit Prasad Jain and others left [only to come back later] because they wanted to "force the pace".

The Nehruvian years saw creative harmonisation of regional bosses' need for autonomy and the national leadership's imperatives. A protocol of adjustment and accommodation forged itself out as an operative proposition. The party also needed to tap the ambitions and the enthusiasm of emerging leaders of newly empowered social groups. New energies and new voices deepened the democratic legitimacy, but they also necessarily meant a renewed contestation over resources, respect and patronage. The high command arbitrated and adjudicated disputes judiciously and fairly among Congressmen, without getting mired in factional quarrels. And these quarrels were unending but could be contained and managed because the national leadership was able to mobilise the nation's imagination and attention. In addition, it was widely recognised and acknowledged that

Nehru was the maximum vote-getter in the nation. And that fact added that extra punch to the high command's command and control.

The years of change

The Nehru years finessed a culture of consensus that insisted that the Congress's leaders should never allow factional rivalries and personal ambitions "to force the pace to the breaking point". It was this mantra that enabled the Congress to manage three leadership transitions — 1964, 1966 and, 1967. Rivals, Indira Gandhi and Morarji Desai became cabinet colleagues. But the Congress did not work in a vacuum. Its policies and politics were unleashing and provoking new forces which were striving to break the Congress's stranglehold on national power. And, the Indira Gandhi years saw a substantive shift away from the protocol of accommodation; a prime ministerial overlordship and a personality cult combined to not only to drain away the Congress organisation's openness and internal élan but also sanctified the family principle.

In 1977, there was the Janata Party, a party that had dislodged the Congress for the first time from national power but collapsed within three years, all because there was no culture, no experience, no mechanism to sort out the prime ministerial ambitions of Morarji Desai, Charan Singh and Jagjivan Ram. And, then, again in 1989, the Janata Dal government tottered because there was no one to counsel V.P. Singh, Devi Lal and Chandra Shekhar to be "humble and practical enough not to force the pace to the breaking point". And, yet again, in 1996, the United Front government was bound to collapse because small men could not rise to the responsibility and restraint of national office. The post-Emergency Janata Parivar could not imitate the Congress culture of accommodation; it consequently splintered in a dozen groups, almost all family outfits. It meant political fragmentation, a drain on stability at the national level.

The only party that has strived to imitate reasonably the Congress protocol of accommodation is the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP); L.K. Advani was practical enough to come to terms that Atal Bihari Vajpayee was the man of the masses; and, A.B. Vajpayee in turn was gracious enough to see to it that Mr. Advani had a sense of power and prestige commensurate with his standing. Yet the BJP, too, has found it problematic to manage clashing ambitions and egos in the States. It seems competent in containing and accommodating factional ambitions because it has control of power at the Centre and all the patronage that comes with it. The BJP test will come when it is out of power.

As long as a national party has a strong, popular, engaged and competent "high command" the conflicts in the State units remain within manageable limits. The high command loses its efficacious edge when it fails to perform the leadership's basic task — mobilising imagination, introducing ideas, shoring up idealism, hammering out an *esprit de corps*, promoting solidarities among the cadres.

The party today

The conflicts within the Congress appear so intractable because it has a high command that wields only legal authority, but without any moral suasion or political clout. Worse, it has become partisan, waging a pointless, directionless war.

For example, the high command needlessly tried to prop up a Navjot Singh Sidhu against Capt. Amarinder Singh; it itself is violating the dictum against forcing the pace. It encouraged Jyotiraditya Scindia in Madhya Pradesh to breaking point, and now we have the impatience and arrogance of a Sachin Pilot blotting the Rajasthan copybook.

The central contradiction is that while the invocation of talent, ambition, youth is valid reaffirmation of modern democratic aspirations, the party remained trapped in the quagmire of feudal loyalties, anchored in dynastic ties. And, if that was not enough, like the Gandhis, the "young Pilots" lack even the brio and the verve to crowbar their way to the centre-stage. They rely on the indulgence of another family, with fading authority and failed leadership.

Meanings of Difficult Words:

- ❖ **pilot** (verb) – test, trial, examine.
- ❖ **very many** (phrase) – a large number of.
- ❖ **protocol** (noun) – procedure, convention, rules of conduct.
- ❖ **accommodation** (noun) – arrangement, settlement, compromise, adjustment, adaptation.
- ❖ **blue book** (noun) – an official government report/registry/directory, often having a blue cover.
- ❖ **reconciliation** (noun) – restoration of harmony, resolution, compromise.
- ❖ **noble** (adjective) – righteous, good, honest, upright.
- ❖ **dust-up** (noun) – quarrel, argument, fight, dispute, disagreement.
- ❖ **so far** (phrase) – until now, up to the present, up to this point.
- ❖ **dismay** (noun) – concern, shock, surprise, distress, upset.
- ❖ **all the more** (phrase) – even more, notably.
- ❖ **decade** (noun) – a period of ten years.
- ❖ **indeed** (adverb) – in fact, actually.
- ❖ **reconcile** (verb) – settle, resolve, patch up.
- ❖ **spell out** (phrasal verb) – explain, make clear, elucidate/clarify.
- ❖ **galvanise** (verb) – inspire, spur, encourage.
- ❖ **objection** (noun) – opposition, disapproval, disagreement.
- ❖ **old guard** (noun) – older or senior members of an organization/group who don't like any change in it.
- ❖ **shrewd** (adjective) – clever, astute, wise.
- ❖ **show oneself** (verb) – appear, turn up, arrive, reveal (oneself in public).
- ❖ **rigidly** (adverb) – strictly.
- ❖ **submit** (verb) – agree, consent, accept.
- ❖ **irksome** (adjective) – irritating, annoying, vexing, displeasing, disagreeable.
- ❖ **undoubtedly** (adverb) – admittedly, doubtless, beyond question.
- ❖ **extremist** (adjective) – radical, reformist, revolutionary.
- ❖ **force the pace** (phrase) – to make things occur very quickly (than normally).
- ❖ **breaking point** (noun) – end point, extremity.
- ❖ **accommodate** (verb) – adjust, adapt, attune, get used, get accustomed.
- ❖ **rock the boat** (phrase) – to say/do something to irritate or annoy people.
- ❖ **enlist** (verb) – obtain/get (a person's support).
- ❖ **rapprochement** (noun) – affinity, link/bond, close/special relationship, mutual understanding.
- ❖ **intelligentsia** (noun) – intellectuals, intelligent people, academics/learned people.
- ❖ **bargain** (noun) – agreement, arrangement, understanding, deal.
- ❖ **keep one's end of the bargain** (phrase) – to do what someone has promised/agreed to do in an agreement.
- ❖ **restrain** (verb) – control, limit, contain, regulate.
- ❖ **impulse** (noun) – (strong & sudden) urge/instinct, compulsion, need.
- ❖ **adjudication** (noun) – arbitration, settlement, resolution, verdict.
- ❖ **necessarily** (adverb) – inevitably, certainly, surely, undoubtedly.
- ❖ **idealism** (noun) – utopianism, wishful thinking, daydreaming, unrealistic belief.
- ❖ **inevitably** (adverb) – unavoidably, certainly, definitely.
- ❖ **give way to** (phrasal verb) – yield, give in, submit.
- ❖ **ideology** (noun) – beliefs, ideas/opinions, principles.
- ❖ **temperament** (noun) – disposition, nature, character.
- ❖ **unsentimentally** (adverb) – rationally, impersonally, calmly.
- ❖ **unambiguous** (adjective) – unarguable, undebatable, unquestionable.
- ❖ **consolidation** (noun) – unification, reinforcement, strengthening.
- ❖ **coherence** (noun) – clarity, consistency, orderliness, unity.
- ❖ **tolerate** (verb) – accept, agree, allow/permit, approve (opposite/conflicting opinions/ideas).
- ❖ **ginger party** (noun) – a formal or informal group within an organisation seeking to influence its direction and activity.
- ❖ **dissolve** (verb) – disband, disestablish, dismiss.

- ❖ **head for the door** (phrase) – move toward something; leave.
- ❖ **substantive** (adjective) – important, large, considerable.
- ❖ **part company** (phrase) – disagree with, fail to agree with be at odds with, be at variance with; cease to be together.
- ❖ **comrade** (noun) – associate, partner, colleague.
- ❖ **walk out** (phrasal verb) – desert, abandon, leave.
- ❖ **harmonisation** (noun) – an act of bringing into harmony/agreement.
- ❖ **autonomy** (noun) – self-determination, independence, freedom.
- ❖ **imperative** (noun) – necessary condition, precondition, essential requirement.
- ❖ **forge** (verb) – form, create, establish, set up.
- ❖ **proposition** (noun) – scheme, plan of action, programme, approach.
- ❖ **tap** (verb) – make use of, put to use, use, utilize.
- ❖ **enthusiasm** (noun) – interest, passion, obsession, craze.
- ❖ **empowered** (adjective) – authorized, allowed, entitled.
- ❖ **deepen** (verb) – increase, intensify, strengthen.
- ❖ **legitimacy** (noun) – reasonableness, justification, validity.
- ❖ **contestation** (noun) – discussion, exchange of views, discourse.
- ❖ **patronage** (noun) – favouritism, nepotism, support/backing.
- ❖ **arbitrate** (verb) – mediate, negotiate, conciliate, intervene, step in.
- ❖ **adjudicate** (verb) – decide, settle, resolve.
- ❖ **judiciously** (adverb) – wisely, sensibly, prudently, thoughtfully, well-advisedly.
- ❖ **mire in** (verb) – entangle, catch up, involve, mix up (a difficult situation).
- ❖ **factional** (adjective) – partisan, sectarian, group.
- ❖ **mobilise** (verb) – stimulate, galvanize, encourage, urge.
- ❖ **in addition** (phrase) – as well as, additionally, moreover.
- ❖ **widely** (adverb) – generally, commonly, by all.
- ❖ **punch** (noun) – power, strength, impact, effectiveness.
- ❖ **finesse** (verb) – have great skill in doing/deal with something.
- ❖ **consensus** (noun) – an idea or opinion that is shared by all the people in a group, agreement, concurrence.
- ❖ **rivalry** (noun) – opposition, antagonism, friction, enmity.
- ❖ **transition** (noun) – change, transformation.
- ❖ **in a vacuum** (phrase) – existing separately (from other people/events and not influenced by them).
- ❖ **unleash** (verb) – let loose, release, set free.
- ❖ **strive** (verb) – try hard, attempt, aim, make an effort.
- ❖ **stranglehold** (noun) – complete control, power, influence/domination.
- ❖ **overlordship** (noun) – the position or quality of being an overlord/ruler (a person with great power).
- ❖ **personality cult** (noun) – excessive public praise/acclamation/admiration of a person, especially a political leader.
- ❖ **drain away** (phrasal verb) – remove, empty, disappear completely.
- ❖ **elan** (noun) – enthusiasm, energy, finesse, smartness.
- ❖ **sanctify** (verb) – approve, sanction, vindicate, endorse, justify.
- ❖ **dislodge** (verb) – remove, displace, get rid of, oust/eject, knock out.
- ❖ **sort out** (phrasal verb) – resolve, find a solution to, rectify.
- ❖ **totter** (verb) – be unstable, be unsteady, be insecure.
- ❖ **bound to** (adjective) – certain/sure, very likely, guaranteed.
- ❖ **consequently** (adverb) – as a result, therefore, for this reason, because of that.
- ❖ **splinter into** (verb) – disintegrate, separate, break into tiny pieces/fragments.
- ❖ **outfit** (noun) – group, organisation, set up.
- ❖ **fragmentation** (noun) – breaking, separation, disintegration.
- ❖ **drain** (noun) – demand, pressure, burden, load.
- ❖ **come to terms with** (phrase) – to accept oneself to something painful/sad/difficult (situation); reconcile oneself to, come to accept.

- ❖ **gracious** (adjective) – courteous, diplomatic, well mannered.
- ❖ **see to it that** (phrase) – to make sure that.
- ❖ **prestige** (adjective) – status, reputation, image.
- ❖ **commensurate** (adjective) – equivalent with, proportional, comparable with.
- ❖ **standing** (noun) – status, rank, level, position.
- ❖ **competent** (adjective) – capable, skilful, talented.
- ❖ **efficacious** (adjective) – effective, successful, powerful.
- ❖ **shore up** (phrasal verb) – support, assist, prop up (with some fund/finance to stop declining).
- ❖ **hammer out** (phrasal verb) – produce, bring about, forge, develop (a plan/agreement) after a lot of work.
- ❖ **esprit de corps** (noun) – French literally ‘spirit of the body’; morale”; the capacity of a group’s members to maintain belief in an institution or goal, particularly in the face of opposition or hardship.
- ❖ **solidarity** (noun) – unity, unanimity, harmony, cooperation.
- ❖ **cadre** (noun) – members of a group; a small group (of people).
- ❖ **intractable** (adjective) – unmanageable, uncontrollable, ungovernable.
- ❖ **wield** (verb) – have, hold, be possessed of, maintain.
- ❖ **suasion** (noun) – persuasion, urging, convincing; encouragement,
- ❖ **clout** (noun) – influence, power, control.
- ❖ **partisan** (adjective) – biased, prejudiced, one-sided.
- ❖ **wage** (verb) – engage in, carry on, conduct (a war).
- ❖ **prop up** (phrasal verb) – support, assist, help.
- ❖ **dictum** (noun) – saying, slogan, phrase/quote.
- ❖ **impatience** (noun) – restlessness, hastiness, quickness.
- ❖ **arrogance** (noun) – egotism, self-importance, sense of superiority.
- ❖ **blot one’s copybook** (phrase) – smear, tarnish, blacken, damage (one’s good name or reputation).
- ❖ **invocation** (noun) – citation, mention, calling on.
- ❖ **reaffirmation** (noun) – reestablishment, confirmation, endorsement.
- ❖ **aspiration** (noun) – desire, hope, wish, ambition, goal.
- ❖ **trap in** (verb) – get stuck, get caught.
- ❖ **quagmire** (noun) – unfortunate situation, muddle, mix-up.
- ❖ **feudal** (adjective) – ancient, archaic; outdated, outmoded, old-fashioned.
- ❖ **loyalty** (noun) – allegiance, faithfulness; reliability, trustworthiness; dedication/commitment.
- ❖ **anchor** (verb) – connect, bind, attach.
- ❖ **dynastic** (adjective) – relating to a dynasty (a family or line of rulers).
- ❖ **ties** (noun) – bond, association, relationship.
- ❖ **brio** (noun) – dynamism, spirit, energy.
- ❖ **verve** (noun) – energy, spirit, strength.
- ❖ **crowbar** (noun) – a heavy iron bar which is used as a lever.
- ❖ **rely on** (phrasal verb) – depend on; resort to, have recourse to.
- ❖ **indulgence** (noun) – satisfaction, gratification, fulfilment, pleasure-seeking.
- ❖ **fading** (adjective) – declining, deteriorating, waning, disappearing.