

Editorial

Monday August 13, 2018

Patriots Day: Real homage or just showmanship

On this very day of 13 August, Manipur's two worthy son of the soil, Tikendrajit and Thangal General was hanged to death by the mighty British Empire for waging war against them. People and the songster in their lyrics drew satisfaction by describing as 'Yuvraj Koireng' and 'Athouba Thangal General' as 'Lanjing Pural' meaning gallant spear-header of War. On that day, this two brave patriot achieved their martyrdom. People were very much discontented and dissatisfied about their death taking it as abuse of power by the British colonialist. The day used to be observed clandestinely as the 'Patriots Day' to pay gratitude and homage for the sacrifices they have made to defend the sovereignty of Manipur without any least concern for their personal safety.

People in the state were astonishingly spellbound with happiness when the Manipur People's Party Government declared that 13 August will be observed as state function in 1972. The said function was observed and celebrated at the present site of Bir Tikendrajit memorial Function. When the observation of Patriots Day was about to start, just then came the impediment from the congress government at the centre to bar the function.

The Chief Secretary, Krishnamurti reportedly came to Bungalow of Chief Minister (CM) and informed the CM, Md. Allimuddin and Shri Yumnang Yaima, Minister of Law, Education and Local Self Government who would be participating respectively as the Chief Guest and the President that 'the observing of this function was banned from the Home Ministry of Delhi. This was posted to telegram and also let it known through phone'. The Chief Secretary then handed over the telegram copy to the Chief Minister.

The Chief Minister after reading it passes on to Shri Yaima. Shri Yaima after rubbing crushed it and thrown to Krishnamurti, saying, 'Mr. Krishnamurti! All these are done by you'. Chief Minister then asked Shri Yaima, 'what we should do now?' Yaima then said that function should not be abandoned at any cost. Further, he said, it is better not to be in government if it means remaining like this under the whims and fancies of the centre. All these must have been done by Krishnamurti.

'Let us not pay any heed. People are waiting at the function venue. Let us go. I am heading towards it.' Convinced with Yaima's words, the Patriots Day function was started well in time. Since then it has been observed uninterrupted as state function till date. So, the leadership of the MPP government of those time by standing rock solid placing the interest of the state above self have set quite an ideal worth emulating precedent.

However, such spirit of state before self doesn't seem to have any follow-on in the successive regimes. This incident is being recalled here with the purposive intent to appraise the present day regime at the state to not just observe the patriots day just for the sake of mere tokenism.

Our state now is plagued with so many uncertainties which arise out of the lopsided centre-state relationship. Either may be because of the weak state political leadership or the apathy of the high command, even though the same political party is heading both the state and the centre at the moment, most of the issues which is of grave concern and causes great anxiousness so far remain unaddressed though it has been for quite some time. Merely taking part in the ritualistic part of the patriots day in the capacity of VIPs by the state political leaderships without imbining themselves with the patriotic spirit deserving to be called as their worthy descendants would surely be a dishonour to those valorous souls of the forefathers who sacrificed for our better tomorrow.

The Congress government at those times when for the first time Patriots Day was observed later pulled the regional party MPP led government by manufacturing a split. It reinforced the credence set by earlier precedence that regional aspiration cannot be fulfilled through democratic space. Already, the state, during the earlier BJP rule at the centre, had over the issue of extending ceasefire to the state of Manipur to the Naga ethnic outfit, NSCN (IM) had experienced massive outrage resulting to the loss of 18 civilian lives. The situation would more become worse if there is a fall out resulting out of not timely addressing the present impasse. So, on this auspicious and eventful day of selfless sacrifice which is a significant landmark in the history of Manipur, the Imphal Times, through this editorial took the opportunity of appealing the state political leadership to stand rock solid to better serve the cause of the state and also immediately to overcome the impasse that the state is presently snagged with. Doing so will be real homage to those valiant souls of our forefathers rather than being in just routine showmanship.

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A shot at survival

From _ IT desk

" You who are so-called illegal aliens must know that no human being is illegal. That is a contradiction in terms. Human beings can be beautiful or more beautiful, they can be skinny, they can be right or wrong, but illegal? How can a human being be illegal?" - Elie Wiesel, Writer, Nobel Peace Prize winner and Holocaust survivor.

Today, the 13th of August is an important day for all the Manipuris as it is on this day that the two heroes of Manipur, Tikendrajit Singh and Thangal General were hanged by the British for waging war against the British Empire—a short yet significant struggle by a tiny hilly Asiatic kingdom against the most powerful empire in the world at that time. The 'Anglo-Manipur war' of 1891 drives home the irrefutable point of men's willingness to go to any length to safeguard their identity and dignity even in the face of insurmountable obstacles. It is also a struggle against exploitation and subservience and at the root of it, a struggle for survival.

At this time and age, while outright war might not be an immediate possibility, ethnic persecutions, atrocities and crimes against the weak and vulnerable on a social, political

and economic level has been continuing, and with an imperfect and insensitive administration, the problem can and does get serious. When such problem gets out of hand, the only option is to look for safer places, and more often than not, such oppressed people will invariably try and seek shelter in some neighboring state or country where the political and economic conditions are more favorable. It is not easy or desirable for anyone to uproot their lives and decide to take unseen risks and obvious troubles to move away from the lives they have been used to unless absolutely necessary and options are closed, when the very survival is threatened.

India is such a country whose social, economic and political situation is considerably more stable and secure than many of its neighbours for a long time, and people from these neighbouring countries have been crossing over to India in search for a better and more secure life, often illegally who are collectively and generally termed 'illegal immigrants'.

Under the Citizenship Act an "illegal migrant" is defined as a foreigner who has entered into India—

(i) without a valid passport or other travel documents and

such other document or authority as may be prescribed by or under any law in that behalf; or (ii) with a valid passport or other travel documents and such other document or authority as may be prescribed by or under any law in that behalf but remains therein beyond the permitted period of time.

An illegal migrant (though the term is often misleading since their presence inside the country is a civil infraction, not a criminal offense) is excluded from the acquisition of citizenship through birth, registration, or naturalization. There is no program to grant citizenship to illegal migrants or their children. They are also denied the right to legal recourse and other basic amenities, reducing them to non-citizens.

While the concerns on the pressures on the resources like land, law and order situations and economics of a state or country as a result of the influx of undocumented immigrants is legitimate and understandable, in the absence of an official deportation or any formal repatriation treaty with Bangladesh whose citizens form the largest number of such undocumented immigrants (Kiren Rijiju, Minister of State for Home Affairs in the NDA government has put the figure at around 20

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million), the issue is a humanitarian one as much as any and needs to be dealt with empathy and understanding in a pragmatic and diplomatic manner. At the end of the day, a starved, tormented individual at the risk of losing one's life will embrace the vague hope of a better life and a shot at survival, even with the punishments, trials and troubles that is more than likely to unfold.

Obituary:

In politics, Somnath Chatterjee was acceptable to all

(Courtesy: The Hindu)
By Suvojit Bagchi

Born in the family of jurist and parliamentarians, the former speaker of Lok Sabha, Somnath Chatterjee had learnt complex ropes of Indian politics from his father Nirmal Chandra Chatterjee, a barrister, a judge and a parliamentarian. But above all Nirmal Chandra was the president of All India Hindu Mahasabha and one of the most influential politicians outside the Congress in his time.

Nirmal Chandra was a Hindu nationalist and he won his first Lok Sabha election in south Bengal in 1951-52 with the help of his friend and Jana Sangh founder Syama Prasad Mookerjee. However, he briefly aligned with centre-right Swatantra Party in 1959. He even won the 1963 Lok Sabha election with the support of the Communist Party of India (CPI).

Nirmal Chandra managed his relationship well with leaders from right to left while being rooted in his Hindu nationalist ideology — a reason why the biographer of Bharatiya Jana Sangh, historian and American diplomat, Craig Baxter described Nirmal Chandra as one with "degree of moderation" among Mahasabhaitees, usually considered hardcore nationalists compared to other groups. But, perhaps, in the process he made young Somnath understand that one should have friends in all circles in politics.

Somnath Chatterjee, who joined Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) in 1968, maintained an exceptionally cordial relationship with all, including members of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). In a later interview, Mr. Chatterjee said that he could not be a "die hard" Communist in "style of living, thinking or targeting some A, B or C" or his political rivals.

Born in Assam's Tezpur in 1929, Mr. Chatterjee did his schooling in Kolkata. He completed his college and university in Calcutta and moved to Cambridge in the early

fifties to do his B.A. Eventually, he studied law in England and returned to Calcutta. He practiced in Calcutta High Court before joining politics.

In politics, Mr. Chatterjee was acceptable to all which is one of the reasons why BJP-led National Democratic Alliance backed him as the Speaker of the 14th Lok Sabha in 2004; Mr. Chatterjee was the unanimous candidate for the post.

Writing for this paper soon after Mr. Chatterjee assumed office, essayist and DMK's MP Era Sezhiyan noted: "This is the first instance of a pro-tem Speaker himself being elected Speaker." He was the first Lok Sabha Speaker from CPI-M in its 50 years' history. Sezhiyan was a close friend of Mr. Chatterjee. He compared him to Nirmal Chandra.

"When we raised any debate on federalism, Centre-State relations, especially the imposition of one language as the official language, we got spirited support from N.C. Chatterjee...Somnath has been an able speaker in the House; hereafter he will be the Speaker of the House. Even in the tradition of the House of Commons, the Speaker is one who does not speak in the House, but one who speaks for the House," noted Sezhiyan, who passed away last year.

Mr. Chatterjee was elected 10 times to Lok Sabha from three south Bengal constituencies; Burdwan (1971) and Jadavpur (1977, 1980) and seven times from Bolpur between 1985 and 2004. He lost only once (in 1984 in Jadavpur) to Mamata Banerjee. But he maintained a cordial relationship with Ms. Banerjee, his arch rival.

Perhaps Mr. Chatterjee's flexibility and openness to his opposition is often interpreted within his party as one that is detrimental to the interest of the party. In Bengal, he has often been criticised for being close to "big business", according to one of his party colleagues. "I may not meet



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with all the requirements [of a Communist] which...I should have," Mr. Chatterjee said once.

A decade back, in July 2009, the relationship between a Communist, who in his words was not a "die hard" one, and the Communist Party finally collapsed when Left parties withdrew support to the UPA government. Mr. Chatterjee, however, went against his party's wish and refused to resign from the post of the Speaker before the special session on July 21. The party's highest decision making body, the Polit Bureau, headed by the then general secretary Prakash Karat, eventually expelled him.

Mr. Chatterjee's "friend, philosopher and guide" Jyoti Basu sided with the party's decision and did not protect him. In his personal circles, Mr. Chatterjee, who rarely

spoke against the party in public, said that he was "disappointed" with Mr. Basu. He, however, never said that in any of his unteemed official interviews. But after the party's debacle in successive polls, he did criticise the highest leadership of the CPI-M in his declining years.

The grand old man of Indian politics was unusually warm to people. After threatening legal action against a correspondent for a report about 10 years ago, he did not file one. "I wanted to warn him, not harm," he said when asked why he did not press charges.

Mr. Chatterjee's autobiography 'Keeping the Faith: Memoirs of a Parliamentarian' was reasonably successful, say publishers and book sellers in Kolkata.