

Assam decides to defy militant's diktat



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If it becomes a ritual for the separatist groups of Northeast India to impose diktats on the Republic and Independence Day of the country, it seems to emerge as a self regulated responsibility for the conscious citizens to reject it outrightly. With that spirit a citizens' meet in Guwahati on January 21 called upon the people of Assam and Northeast to celebrate the Republic Day in each and every locality of the State and hoist the National Tricolour atop every house. Organised by the Journalists' Forum, Assam (JFA) at Guwahati Press Club, the meeting came to conclusion that 'a clear message should go to those issuing a diktat against any celebration of the Day, that people will no longer tolerate any anti-national threat and will give them a fitting reply'.

Mentionable that four armed groups of the region had earlier imposed a boycott call on the forthcoming R-Day celebration. In a Solidarity Statement issued by Kamatapur Liberation Organisation, Manipur People's Liberation Front, Tripura People's Democratic Front, United Liberation Front of Asom had urged the people to boycott and prevent any celebrations on January 26 in Northeast India.

The region, surrounded by Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet, Burma and Bangladesh, nurtures nearly 30 armed groups who have been fighting New Delhi for demands ranging from sovereignty to self-rule. The

draconian law like the Armed Forces Special Power Act 1958 is still applicable in the region. In the last few years, many armed groups have gone for ceasefire with the government, but the region remained conflict ridden till date.

"The imposition of Indian constitution in the region completes 59 years this 26th January. During this period, scores of thousands of our peoples have been killed, tortured, maimed and hundreds of our womenfolk have been raped by the Indian Occupation Forces," the statement, signed by the ULFA chairman Arabinda Rajkhowa and e-mailed to the media persons, stated.

"We will fight to the last for our sovereign independence. There can be no compromise on this issue," the statement declared adding that they 'believe in a political process to resolve the conflict satisfactorily.' But, the armed groups reiterate, they remain firm in their stand 'to counter India's military repression' in the region.

Upholding the genuine and legitimate aspirations of all the people and ethnic groups of the region, the statement revealed, 'a general strike will be observed on January 26, 2009 from 1 am to 6 pm throughout the region'. They appealed the 'patriotic organisations of the region' to endorse the statement and observe the Boycott and General Strike in their own capacities.

But defying the diktat, a group of journalists and senior citizens of Assam had already decided to observe the 60th Republic Day as they had been doing in the previous years. The celebration will include the hoisting of national flag on the premises of Guwahati Press Club and also a procession in the city streets.

"The martyrs (of India's Freedom movement) embraced death during the

struggle so that we can live today as independent nation. This day is an occasion to express our gratitude to them. We cannot forget them just because a group of militants want to terrorise us into forgetting them. We must inculcate a sense of patriotism in our younger generation and teach it to respect the Flag," said D N Bezboruah, a veteran journalist based in Guwahati.

The former president of Editors Guild of India, Bezboruah also added, "We may not be happy with a particular government or successive governments. Governments come and go, but should that make us blame our glorious history of freedom struggle that has given us the right to determine our own future, or even to change the governments we dislike?"

The R-Day celebration last year witnessed the participation of citizens, students and journalists, who had joined both the government and public celebrations. The participants in the press club programme also took out a procession that paraded the main streets chanting slogans like Vande Mataram, Bharat Mata Ki Jai, Jai Ai Asom etc.

The Guwahati citizen's meet in another resolution asked the State government to activate the defunct citizens' committees in every ward under every police station of the city. Various speakers pointed out that if the government wants people's co-operation in its anti-terror campaign, the authority must ensure honour and legitimate support to those committees.

Mentionable that the authority initiated for 60 ward committees in Guwahati during 2001, where the local police station in-charge was assigned as the secretary and a distinguished citizen as the president of the committee. But the structure got deteriorated due to negligence and ill-treatment of the authority.

Presided over by JFA chief Rupan Baruah, the meet was addressed by Hiten Mahanta, Ranen Kumar Goswami, Pramod Kalita, Jagadindra Rai Choudhury, Shaktimoy Das, Nava Thakuria, Dhanjit Kakati, Mukut Singha Chutia, Biraj Das, Pankaj Duara, Ruby Das, Ajai Dutta, Simanta Barma, M. S. Mazumdar, Gaurdas Roy and R. K. Buragohain.

Almost every speaker claimed that the common people had lost its trust on the police. And hence, it is difficult to motivate them to come forward for an engagement with the police and also the authority. The speakers emphasized that the new committees should deal with terror issues with utmost conviction and the government must propagate a legal structure to nurture the public support in the ongoing anti-terror campaigns.

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