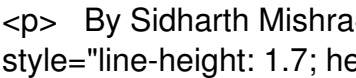


Let Netaji's legacy rest in peace

Written by Administrator

Wednesday, 15 April 2015 04:22

By Sidharth Mishra



Over the past few days, newspapers have been full of reports about how successive governments of post-Independent India kept a close eye on issues related to the former Congress president and founder of the Indian National Army (INA), Subhash Chandra Bose, popularly known as Netaji. Bose's legacy over the years has shown remarkable resilience. His legacy continues to resurface back into the news cycle of Indian media. This has been the case with the Indian media for nearly sixty years, ever since Netaji is supposed to have died in an air crash in 1945.

The timing of the latest Bose leak, which looks to be an attempt to smudge the image of the erstwhile Jawaharlal Nehru-led government, should probably invite skepticism. It cannot be a mere coincidence that the report which appeared in the media was to do with the Nehru government keeping a hawk eye on the correspondence of Netaji's family just days before Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Germany visit. In fact the report came out like a curtain raiser to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting with Netaji's relatives in Germany.

Much more interesting is the second leak that claims that Nehru wrote letters to officials enquiring about foreign visits by Netaji's next of kin, since the first media report had indicated the possibility of adopted BJP icons Sardar Patel and Lal Bahadur Shastri's concurrence in continuing with the colonial policy of maintaining surveillance on Bose's family.

Growing up in Patna in the 1970s, especially when Emergency was all around us, children would eaves drop on drawing room conversations enthusiastically discussing the possibility of Netaji walking in and taking charge of the mass movement gaining momentum against the Indira Gandhi-led totalitarian regime at the Centre. Those engaging in such gup-shup did not understand the politics of those times fully; it was very unlikely that the helmsman of the anti-Emergency movement-Jayaprakash Narayan would have accepted Bose as his leader.

Leaving aside the discussion on ideological differences and political possibilities for some other day, there can be no disagreement on the fact that Bose was one of the most magnetic personalities to emerge out of the freedom movement. With the lack of an official stand on how Bose met his end, his final years have remained shrouded in mystery, waiting to be unraveled. Till date successive governments have appointed four commissions of enquiry to find out where Netaji had gone from Formosa (Taiwan) on 18 August 1945.

The first was Figness report, authored by Colonel (later Sir) John Figgess, an intelligence officer, who headed the enquiry, ordered into the death of Bose by then Supreme Allied Command, South-East Asia, under Admiral Louis Mountbatten. As a result of a series of interrogations of individuals named in the following paragraphs it is confirmed as certain that S.C. Bose died in a Taihoku Military Hospital (Nammon Ward) sometime between 1700 hours and 2000 hours local time on the August 18, 1945. The cause of death was heart failure resulting from multiple burns and shock. All the persons named below were interrogated at different times but the several accounts of the event agree both in substance and detail at all points where the knowledge of the subjects could have been deemed to be based on common experience. The possibility of a pre-arranged fabrication must be excluded since most of the individuals concerned had no opportunity of contact with one another prior to interrogation, it said.

The second panel was headed by Major General Shahnawaz Khan, who was Netaji's

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much celebrated and respected comrade from the INA and later a minister in the Nehru government. This committee had SN Maitra from the Indian Civil Service as nominee of West Bengal government and Suresh Chandra Bose, Netaji's elder brother, as members. This panel too reached a similar conclusion: Netaji succumbed to the burns received in the Formosa plane crash. Suresh Bose, however, disagreed and wrote a note of dissent.

The third committee, which was headed by retired chief justice of Punjab High Court GD Khosla, also concurred with the earlier findings of Netaji having died in Formosa and went on to attribute political motives to those who wanted to keep alive the theory that Bose did not die in the crash and that the ashes kept at Renkoji temple in Tokyo belonged to somebody else.

The fourth enquiry, headed by retired Supreme Court judge MK Mukherjee did not concur with the earlier reports of Netaji having died in the air crash. He speculated that the ashes kept in the temple at Tokyo were of a Japanese soldier and not of Netaji. But he too ruled out the possibility that Netaji was alive at the time of filing of the report in 2005. The report was placed in parliament in 2006 and summarily rejected by the government.

Mukherjee's report also brought out in public domain the dispute within the freedom fighter's family, while one branch supported rejection of the panel's findings, whereas another opposed it.

The latest media reports have the potential of adding fuel to a resurgent BJP's attempt at garnering some political space in West Bengal-which goes to polls next year. Though the BJP's founder Syama Prasad Mukherjee hails from the same state, he has not been able to find space on the walls of Bengali homes alongside Netaji and Rabindranath Tagore. Proving Nehru to be a comprador of the British could come in handy to pursue this agenda. But will such a political stratagem be of any use? Only time will tell.

Prime Minister Modi would do this nation a great service if he orders the release of all the documents related to Netaji from the government strong rooms for public viewing. The government's refusal to transfer a few remaining files to the National Archives for public scrutiny has helped the imagination of many conspiracy theorists in running riot. The government would help restore to Netaji's legacy much prestige by releasing these files and by letting the world know what exactly happened to this supreme patriot. This would save his legacy from being subjected to unbridled speculation and petty politics.

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