

ARMY CHIEF GEN. BIPIN RAWAT'S STATEMENT WAS ABSOLUTELY RIGHT

SANGEETA SAXENA - AVIATION AND DEFENCE UNIVERSE

For the last twenty four hours the story which is attracting maximum eyeballs and shooting up TRP ratings is the statement made by Indian Army Chief Gen. Bipin Rawat at the Seminar titled North East Region of India : Bridging Gaps & Securing Borders. As someone who was present at the Seminar, I feel this controversy raked up by the media is absolutely unwarranted.

The Seminar jointly organised by MOD's Integrated Defence Staff (IDS) and Centre for Joint Warfare Studies(CENJOWS) was a brainstorming half day event to identify the reasons for the states' being in the condition they are and hindrances in development and growth , pinpoint the reasons for the vulnerability of the region and specific geographical features and finding solutions to keep these border areas secure thereby maintaining the security of the nation.

And a mountain out of a molehill is being created when it comes to his statements. As the Chief of the nation's Army, he is one person who knows the absolute pros and cons of the existing situation and reasons for the existence of this situation. During his speech, the Army chief said, "There is a party called AIUDF, if you look at... they have grown in a faster time-frame than the BJP has grown over the years. When we talk of Jan Sangh with two Members of Parliament and where they have reached, AIUDF is moving at a faster pace in the state of Assam. Finally, what will be the state of Assam, we will have to take a call."

So what is wrong in the statement? In a strategic brainstorming it is necessary to identify all reasons for a crisis existing and dwell on all possible solutions to solve it. It is a fact that Bangladeshi illegal immigrants are being welcomed with open arms and settling in the North-East states, getting all possible identifications made. And if it is a secret, it is a very badly kept one, that the AIUDF is the one which helps them become citizens so easily in a foreign country. If he has given a simile to the BJP's growth there is nothing wrong. Comparisons always make facts easier to understand. Which book of law says the Armed Forces Chiefs cannot draw conclusions from facts? Especially facts which they need to tackle in keeping the nation secure. And the security of the nation depends on informed armed forces which can strategize on these existing ground conditions and truths which political parties want to hide to protect a vote bank they have created and nurtured.

There are no political and no religious insinuations in the statement. It was just a bare stating of facts which are hindrances to army maintaining security. Amalgamation and development, planned migration and inversion of demographics are analysis of the hindrance. It is sad if people are being instigated to read more than what was said and give it connotations which I am

sure the Chief never had in mind. With the region under constant Chinese eye and vulnerable to its designs, makes it imperative for brainstorming security hazards to the armed forces, in maintaining peace. An influx of illegal immigrants both from Bangladesh for decades and Rohingyas now from Myanmar have created an instability in the region, which needs to be looked into very seriously by the armed forces. So what is wrong if the Army Chief points out these challenges in the region? Can we all close our eyes to existing problems and think tanks stop discussing them? And his statement that it was a proxy dimension of war by both the not so friendly neighbours is absolutely true and the biggest challenge in the region. So what is wrong in discussing it in an internal forum.

A very well organised seminar and a topic of great importance to the nation got hijacked by unnecessary discussion a day after the event. Dragging the Chief into controversy might initiate debates, get TRP rankings for the media, political mileage for the parties but leaves a bad taste in the mouth of the normal citizen of the nation, for whom Army is an institution to be revered and the Army Chief a person the nation places its trust and security on. There was nothing wrong in the statement made by Gen Bipin Rawat and the truth is that the likes of Asaduddin Owaisi and Maulana Badruddin Ajmal found a perfect vehicle of publicity for themselves, when media flashed the statement.

So the best thing would be to keep strategic discussions and seminars off press. In Hindi there is a perfect saying - na rahega baans na bajegi baansuri. Hope the think tanks learn a lesson or two from such episodes.

Disclaimer: Views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of CENJOWS.