

I stand by and applaud Lal Thanhawla's remarks



Comments 15



DavidMThangliana 29 June 2009 32405 views

Mizoram Chief Minister Lal Thanhawla's remarks in Singapore about his racism experience even in his own country has certainly caused a commotion in India with the media taking a more than a passing interest to what could have caused the CM to utter such remarks that could give India a bad name in the international community. To some, especially those Indian delegates attending Singapore's International Water Week, Lal Thanhawla's remarks were in poor taste and completely out of context with the reason they had come to Singapore. On the other hand, most people of the North East, including myself, welcomed the remarks since they are completely true. My childhood experiences in Calcutta (now Kolkata) have been indelibly imprinted in my memories much as I would like to forget them. We were called 'Chinkies' (for Chinese) in the streets and no one seemed to know the North East existed despite the fact that Calcutta is the doorstep for the NE Region. Teachers in our school also showed discrimination towards us and I still remember an incident where my answer papers were manipulated and I had to be content with the third position in rank while I could have been first had my answer papers not been tampered with. Despite my complaints and clear signs that my answers had been rubbed out and replaced with wrong answers in a handwriting that was distinctly without any similarities with mine, my teacher failed to entertain my complaints. This is just one of many incidents of discrimination I experienced and I feel deep sympathy for those students studying outside the region still facing the same problems I had faced some 40 or so years ago. As the Mizoram Chief Minister pointed out, there are three main races in India. One is Aryan and they are found in North India. Second is Dravidian and they are predominantly found in the southern portions of the country. The third race is Mongoloid and they are found mainly in the NE Region. As such, we have Aryan, Dravidian and Mongolian stock as the main races of India but out of these three, only the first two seem to be identified as Indians even by Indians themselves. It is understandable for foreigners to mistake those Indians with Mongoloid features as

someone not Indian, but it is unforgivable and deeply discriminatory for Indians not to know that India is a multiracial country with people of different facial features and skin colours ranging from very fair to very dark living in it. These different facial features and colours are also to be found in the North East. Whose fault is it that a majority of Indians do not know that India has a Mongoloid race too and that the North East itself has a multiracial population?

Neglect has been an age-old complaint of the people of the North East by the Centre and this neglect has not been contained to the political circle, but also to the national media. Being a journalist, I have friends all over the North East Region from the journalist community. Whenever we come together, one of our main topics still remain the neglect shown to the Region by the national media. The North East is given coverage only when violence erupts, NE students are molested, raped or killed and when a controversial issue comes out, such as the present incident where Mizoram CM Lal Thanhawla brought up the racial discrimination issue in an international forum. Apart from this, the national media, whether electronic or print, never give enough coverage of the region to the public in other parts of India. I believe it was in 2004 that Professor Laltluangliana Khiangte of the Mizoram University and I had an opportunity to interact with members of the national media in New Delhi. We had succinctly and repeatedly pointed out at that time too how the national media do not give enough coverage of the NE Region. Five years hence, it is a Chief Minister who had to bring the issue out again although he did not say this in so many words.

To give credit where it belongs, Lal Thanhawla, a Congress chief minister, braved the high possibility of a reprimand from the Congress leadership in New Delhi by pointing out the NE Region's decades' old complaint in a foreign country where his remarks was certain to attract international attention. In all fairness, the Central Government has shown attention to the NER during the last decade or so till now, and because of its Look East policy, has been deluging the Region with funds. But has the national media paid the attention the Region deserves as being part of the country? Except for Legislative Assembly elections, the national media rarely come to such remote parts as Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh and to an extent Manipur and Nagaland. Clearly, the discrimination in this day and age is from the national media and not the Central Government. To the national media, Guwahati, the capital of Assam, is the North East. While no one disputes that Guwahati is the hub of the North East, there clearly is ignorance that the North East Region is in itself segmented into several self-contained communities and societies even in the different states, not to mention that these states have their own distinctive cultural and traditional backgrounds. For example, Manipur has its plains dwelling people and hills dwelling people as does Tripura and Assam who are completely different communities. It is the same in Mizoram where Chakmas, Brus and Mizos live within their own distinctive communities. Meghalaya too has its Khasis and Garos, communities who can be differentiated through their facial features alone. There clearly is a need for the national media to understand the NER better because a better understanding is the key for national integration as well as an instrument to curb the rising terrorist activities being experienced in some parts of the Region.

Where has the national media gone wrong? Has it become so money-oriented that it has forgotten the role of the press as the Fourth Estate of a democratic country and can see the North East Region only as a financial liability? If this is so, then it is imperative that the national media wake up to its responsibility as a nation moulder and pay less attention to profits and losses. Does the North East merit mention only when North East students are molested and raped in New Delhi and other parts of mainland India? Does it merit mention only when terrorists kill and maim innocent citizens within the Region? I would not think so. The North East Region is not only part and parcel of India, but is part of the reason why India is such a great country through its diversity. Such negative attitude as ignoring the North East in most part of its reportings by the national media, both print and electronic, will only lead to deeper self-alienation by the people of the NER which would be most detrimental for a better integration of India.

Lal Thanhawla, I believe, should be honoured by the people of NE India for bringing out their problems to the international community since it has been a hard lot they have been facing ever since India's independence. I also believe that the Mizoram resident Commissioner based in New Delhi Sanjay Pratap Singh reacted a wee bit too quickly because a majority of North Easterners, especially those students studying in mainland India, hugely appreciated Lal Thanhawla's outburst. The Mizoram Pradesh Congress Committee also acclaimed its president's remarks saying, "The MPCC lauds the bold statement of Mizoram Chief Minister which reveals the truth the North East people in particular had experienced in mainland India," in a press statement issued on June 26, 2009 in Aizawl.

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ON THIS DAY

NE culture programme in London from Monday

1 NDFB(S) cadre, 2 suspected linkman apprehended in Udalguri

Lady bank manager shot dead by miscreants

7th pay commission to implement in Tripura

Girish Chandra Bhattacharjya remembered
