

## Field Marshal doesn't figure in India's protocol list

The rank of Field Marshal, the highest-ranked officer of the Indian Army, does not figure in the country's protocol list, leading to the sorry spectacle of no senior minister or armed forces' chief being present at the state funeral Friday of Field Marshal Sam Hormusji Framji Jamshedji Manekshaw, an officer said Monday.

'The day Manekshaw died, there was confusion about the protocol to be followed during his funeral as his rank does not figure anywhere in the warrant of precedence,' an army officer said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

A furore was created after Defence Minister A.K. Antony and the three services chiefs failed to make it to Manekshaw's funeral Friday evening. Minister of State for Defence M.M. Pallam Raju was the senior-most central minister present on the funeral.

Manekshaw died at the Military Hospital in Wellington in Tamil Nadu Friday after developing acute bronchopneumonia. He was 94.

The decision to accord state funeral to Manekshaw, the war legend who scripted the decisive victory over Pakistan in 1971 leading to the creation of Bangladesh, was taken after Antony spoke to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

'The decision to accord a state funeral to the iconic soldier was taken at the last moment due to the initiative of the defence minister. Even then, the MHA (ministry of home affairs) did not go ahead with it, saying it did not have anything in writing from the Prime Minister's Office.'

'It is only after Defence Secretary Vijay Singh gave it to the MHA in writing that the ministry agree to a state funeral,' the army officer said.

The Indian President occupies the top-most position in the warrant of precedence to be followed at all state functions. The three armed forces chiefs are at the 12th place in the list.

The MHA is the nodal ministry that takes decisions on amendments to be made to the list and notifies whether the national flag will fly at half-mast in the event of a dignitary's death.

A proposal for making changes or additions to the list are considered by the warrant of precedence committee that is chaired by the cabinet secretary and includes the secretaries of the home, defence, and external affairs ministries as its members.

'Their recommendations are submitted to the home minister, the prime minister and the president for approval. Ultimately, the amendments are notified by the President's Secretariat,' the officer said.

The list was amended to include the post of deputy prime minister at position 5A after L.K. Advani, then home minister in the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance, was elevated to the position in June 2002.

Manekshaw was elevated to the field marshal's rank in 1973.

Antony sought to downplay the controversy while speaking to reporters Monday on the sidelines of a ceremony at the India Gate war memorial to the Unknown Soldier where he signed a condolence book opened to enable the people pay their homage to Manekshaw.

'There could be differences in opinion on how the funeral could have been conducted. But, the fact is that we accorded him the highest honour by ordering a state funeral,' Antony maintained.

( © IANS / India eNews)