

Bhagat Singh's centenary: Punjab spends Rs.3 crore in a day

A day-long function organised last year by the Punjab government to mark the birth centenary of one of India's best known freedom martyr, Bhagat Singh, cost the taxpayers a whopping Rs.30 million (Rs.3 crore), a Right to Information (RTI) Act query has revealed.

The main function was organised at the martyr's village, Khatkar Kalan, 80 km from here near Nawanshahr town, Sep 27, 2008. The event was the culmination of one year of centenary celebrations of the martyr who faced the gallows under British rule in 1931 at the age of 23 years.

In all, Punjab spent nearly Rs.60 million to organise two functions - one to mark the start and the other to end the year-long birth centenary of the martyr in 2007 and 2008.

The exorbitant expenditure on just one day's function has been revealed by information sought under the RTI by Nawanshahr based non-government organization (NGO), HELP.

The martyr, who was known for simple living and rebellious ideology, would be pained to know that out of the Rs.30 million spent on the event, nearly Rs.15 million was spent only on providing the stage setting, sound and sitting arrangements for the function.

The event was attended by Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal, Union Minister of Tourism Ambika Soni (a Rajya Sabha MP from Punjab) and several other dignitaries.

The organisers also spent nearly Rs 11.27 million on inviting artists for the function and paid for their travel, lodging and other expenses. Nearly Rs.1.9 million was spent on video and TV production of the event. Another Rs 1.1 million was spent on putting up advertisements about the event in various publications.

Nearly Rs 1.3 million was spent by the organisers on other expenses like entertaining guests, transport charges and other miscellaneous expenses.

Relatives of the martyr have objected to the needless waste of money on glamorous functions and said that instead of these shows, the government should have spent the money on promoting the philosophy of Bhagat Singh through seminars, talks and debates.

'Such ostentatious functions have nothing to do with the memory of Bhagat Singh. It is more for the promotion of political leaders. After great effort, the government released a book on Bhagat Singh at the event but has failed to supply it to schools across the state for the youth to know about the martyr,' Jagmohan Singh, a nephew of Bhagat Singh, said.

For the inaugural function of the centenary, which was held in Amritsar instead of Bhagat Singh's village, the organisers spent over Rs.28.6 million. Out of this, Rs.17.6 million was released to a Delhi-based event management company for making arrangements.

Over Rs.10.1 million was spent on other expenses including providing Bhagat Singh look-alike dresses for hundreds of youth, hotel stays for VIPs, entertainment of guests and other expenses.

Jaideep Sarin and Parminder Singh Bariana (© IANS / India eNews)