

Khalistan in 2007? - Chauhan's 'dream' dies with him

The Khalistan ideologue's 'intuition' - that the separate Sikh nation would become a reality in 2007 - died with him Wednesday morning when the once fiery separatist passed away in a Punjab town following a heart attack.

The 78-year-old Sikh leader spent nearly half his life propagating a separate Sikh state - Khalistan (land of the pure) - after he first inserted an advertisement in the New York Times in Oct 1971 conceptualising an idea.

In an interview to a newspaper in June 2004 - the 20th anniversary of Operation Bluestar launched by the Indian Army to flush out terrorists from the holiest of Sikh shrines, the Golden Temple - Chauhan had said that Khalistan would be formed in 2007.

'I correctly predicted the deaths of Indira Gandhi (who had ordered Operation Bluestar) and Rajiv Gandhi. My intuition on Khalistan is not without reason,' he had told the interviewer.

Despite not doing anything actively on the issue of Khalistan in the last decade, Chauhan never gave up the idea for a separate Sikh state. He got support from hardline Sikh groups like the Dal Khalsa.

Not many tears are going to be shed in Punjab - the only Indian state where the Sikh community is in a majority - and political leaders, from the ruling Akali Dal to the Congress, are likely to disassociate themselves from him even in his death.

In the last six years, ever since he was allowed to return to India by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government at the centre, Chauhan lived a low-profile life in the Tanda town of Hoshiarpur district in Punjab, 180 km from here.

The BJP is now the alliance partner of the Akalis in the ruling government in the state.

Though Chauhan never changed his stance on Khalistan, he did not do anything publicly to attract media attention.

In March 2006 he was arrested for propagating Khalistan in a TV programme and charged with sedition, but was released a few days later.

From the heady days of demanding the creation of Khalistan through all means, including violence, Chauhan had confined himself since 2001 to setting up and running a charitable hospital for the poor.

A former Punjab finance minister (1967), he set up the Khalsa Raj Party just before the 2002 assembly polls and even fielded candidates. But Chauhan never became ambitious about politics again.

Sikhs in Punjab are unlikely to be affected by his death - just like his coming back in 2001 did not matter to them.

Even though he believed that most Sikhs 'wanted Khalistan' but were not ready to say so, there are not many buyers for his theory in the community, known for its valour and enterprise.

'About 5-10 percent Sikhs supported the demand for Khalistan at one stage in the mid-1980s. After 1990, no one has really bothered about it. Now, I don't think anyone has the time or the inclination to even give it a thought,' said retired professor Balbir Singh.

Jaideep Sarin (© IANS / India eNews)