



## 150 years of First National War of Independence 1857

The nation is celebrating the 150th anniversary of the War of Independence that was waged against the British colonial rulers in 1857. The year 1857 represents the nation's united spirit of resistance and the indefatigable spirit and uncompromising courage of the Indian masses, in general, and leaders, in particular, against the foreign power. 1857 symbolizes the culmination of the sense of nationalism that was getting strengthened because of the oppressive foreign rule. The revolt of the army became widespread with the masses coming out in the open to fight shoulder to shoulder with their brethren in the army shaking the foundation of the colonial rule in India. 1857 marks the events culminating in a great anti-colonial war in which Indians cutting across caste, class, region and community participated in large numbers. It was a moment of great historical significance when sepoys, peasants, artisans, shopkeepers and people from almost every walk of life joined hands to throw the colonial power out of India.

The memory of the golden pages of history becomes all the more relevant as it creates consciousness to safeguard the future of the country. Indian history is replete with golden chapters whose memory evokes national pride. This national awareness determines the national character. Whenever the country is faced with a crisis, the nation has always witnessed



a rare ambience of unity. Whether it is the war of 1962, 1965, 1971, Kargil war, or natural calamity like Tsunami and earthquakes, the spirit to work above self-interest among the citizens is clearly visible. But if this zeal and spirit has to be kept alive forever, then we should not wait for war or natural calamity. For this, the Bharatiya Janata Party has decided to celebrate 150th anniversary of 1857 War of Independence between 9th August 2007 to 10th May 2008. The memory of inspiring past, call for patriotism, commitment towards independence and democracy, pledge of unity and integrity of the nation and resolve to usher in a prosperous and strong India will be the motto of the programmes throughout the year.

150th year of 1857 national War of Independence is an opportunity to create a new consciousness in the nation by recalling the war that was fought from Punjab to Bengal and from Nepal to far off south. The Congress-led UPA government



is attaching little importance to this historical occasion. Had the government wished, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh could have jointly celebrated the 150th anniversary. But it is not expected of the government, which derogates Veer Savarkar and innumerable other patriots. Not only the UPA government, but even the Congress as a political party has failed to take the initiative to revive the memory of the sacrifices made by multitudes of Indians for the cause of freedom of our motherland. The manner in which the Congress shamelessly compromised with the national dignity on the *Vande Mataram* celebrations finds a repetition in celebrating 1857 as the national War of Independence. This Congress approach is motivated by its political compulsion in appeasing the communists on whose support it is dependent for the survival of the government. The communists have always tried to denigrate the great national war of 1857 refusing to recognize the nationalistic feelings that strengthened the spirit of united resistance against the foreign rule. While Veer Savarkar wrote

the book, “*The Indian War of Independence*” popularising it as a national war against the foreign rule and strengthened the nationalistic spirit, RP Dutt, one of the main ideologue-theoretician of the Indian Communists, writes in his book *India Today*, “The revolt of 1857 was the last attempt of the decaying feudal forces, of the former rulers of the country.... from this point of view feudal forces no longer presented the main potential menace and rival to British rule, but the main barrier against the advance of the awakening masses”. Moreover, nothing more can be expected from the Congress-led UPA government headed by Prime Minister Dr.



M a n m o h a n Singh, who in that very Britain whose rule set new records in loot and plunder, hailed the 200 years of colonial rule as highly beneficial for our nation. It reflects a

mentality and approach which is Macaulay-Marxist in character and refuses to acknowledge the sacrifices of our immortal heroes who kindled the flame of independence and strengthened our sense of nationalism by dedicating their lives to our motherland.

This booklet attempts to summarise the events that commenced with the firing of the first shot of revolt by Mangal Pandey in Barrackpur leading to sepoy revolt in Meerut and reached Delhi, Lucknow, Kanpur, Rohilkhand, Bareilly, Jhansi, Banaras, Allahabad, Assam, Calcutta, Madras, Chingelpet, Arcot, Calicut, Cochin, Patna, Danapur, Jagdishpur, Mewat, Gurgaon, Nasirabad, Bharatpur, Satara, Kolhapur, Ahmadnagar, Ratangiri, Bijapur, Hyderabad, Kurnool, Vishakhapatnam, Karwar, Mysore, Goa, Pondicherry and other parts of the country. It will bring back to the people the memory of national War of Independence of 1857.

The 1857 national War of Independence started after English East India Company was able to conquer large parts of India and attempted to bring the numerous Indian rulers under their suzerainty. In 1757, East India Company won the battle of Plassey under Clive

defeating Sirajudaullah, the then Nawab of Bengal. While Mir Zafar who helped Clive against Sirajudallah became the Nawab, Clive became the Governor of Bengal. As Bengal became a centre of conspiracies for the control of power, the Britishers extracted huge indemnity and bribes from the contending parties. In 1764, Battle of Buxar again decided the issue in favour of the British and the Diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa was granted to the Company by Shah Alam II. In 1803, Delhi was captured by Lord Lake in the battle fought at Patparganj, on the outskirts of Delhi against the joint front of Sikhs and Marathas ( 11nd Anglo-Maratha war 1803-1805). A memorial of the war erected by the Britishers still stands in one corner of NOIDA golf course. The Emperor Shah Alam II who was under the protection of Scindia now came under British protection. The East India Company was able to establish itself as supreme military power in India after a series of battles against the French, Marathas, Sikhs, Mysore, Afghans and Burma. In these battles, the fortune kept swinging from one side to the other but in the end, Britishers emerged victorious. As they went on scoring military victories, they continued to assert their political power more and more aggressively resorting to unfair and treacherous means to impose their exploitative rule to almost every part of the nation. As a result, the Indian sepoys in alliance with the masses resolved to take on the Britishers militarily in 1857.

Today, while we are celebrating 150th anniversary of national war of 1857, it is incumbent upon us to recall the historic events:

### Main Events

- ♦ **29th March 1857:** Mangal Pandey of 34th Bengal Infantry killed one of the European officers in Barrackpur near Calcutta. He was later arrested and hanged. His supreme sacrifice consolidated the nationalistic spirit and initiated the national war of 1857 against the colonial rulers.
- ♦ **24th April 1857:** In Meerut, sepoys of the III Cavalry unit refused to use greased cartridge, 85 of them were removed from the service and put behind bars.
- ♦ **10th May 1857:** The sepoys in Meerut revolted, broke the jail and released the arrested sepoys and killed the European Officers before crossing over to Delhi.
- ♦ In Delhi, the sepoys who reached from Meerut appealed to Bahadurshah II, the Mughal Emperor, to become their leader. Bahadurshah II was declared *Shahenshah-e-Hindustan*. The



British Officer in Delhi was killed and Court of Administrators was established to direct the actions against the Britishers.

- ◆ Britishers started their bid to win back Delhi on 14th September 1857 and were able to recapture it after five days. The British assault on Delhi was very barbaric and surpassed cruelties of all kinds. Two sons and a grandson of Bahadurshah II were shot dead and about 27,000 people were hanged and a large number was massacred. The British soldiers even raped women. Bahadurshah II was arrested, tried and exiled to Rangoon where he died on 7th November 1862 at the age of 87.
- ◆ In Lucknow, on 1st July 1857 the Indian sepoy attacked the British residency where British resident Henry Lawrence was compelled to encamp himself along with two thousand soldiers. On 4th July, Henry Lawrence was killed and the united front of sepoys, peasants and artisans repelled the repeated attempts of the British to recapture the city. In March 1858, the Britishers under the leadership of Colin Campbell were able to recapture Lucknow with the help of Gurkha regiment.
- ◆ In Kanpur, Nana Sahib, Azimullah Khan and Tantia Tope organised the sepoys into revolt.
- ◆ In Jhansi, the revolt started on 4th June 1857 and it was declared independent on 8th June 1857 when Rani Lakshami Bai ascended the throne. In Kalpi she met Tantia Tope and captured Gwalior. After a series of tough battles, Rani Lakshambai offered her supreme sacrifice on 18th June 1858.
- ◆ Maulvi Ahmad Shah led the revolutionaries in Rohilkhand but unfortunately he was treacherously murdered at the behest of the brother of Raja of Pavan.
- ◆ Khan Bahadur Khan led an army of 40,000 soldiers against the Britishers in Bareilly.
- ◆ Local people in Benaras revolted against the oppressions of Col. Neil who undertook repressive measures by hanging a large number of people to quell the revolt.
- ◆ Revolt started against the Britishers from 6th June 1857 in Allahabad under the leadership of Maulvi Liakat Ali. Col. Neil continued his repressive measures and hanged and massacred innocent people. Even old women and children were not spared. In addition to this, uprising started in Agra, Bulandshahar, Bijour, Muradabad, Aligarh and other places.
- ◆ **Bengal and Assam:** The news of revolts completely shook the



European community in Calcutta, the centre of British power. The attempt of the Indian sepoys to capture Fort William was quickly suppressed. In Assam two constabularies of Purbharlos challenged the British rulers. The attempt to restore the throne to last Ahom King was also crushed in 1858.

- ◆ Kunwar Singh led the revolt against the Britishers in Jagdishpur Bihar. A man of eighty years, Kunwar Singh, repeatedly defeated the British troops sent to contain him. He died three days after he received a gunfire injury on his hand. He valiantly resisted the Britishers for eight months writing a history of his indomitable courage and gallantry. Mir Ali led the revolt in Patna.
- ◆ In Haryana, then a part of North West Province, also witnessed a series of uprisings. A tough battle was fought near Narnaul in which 75 British soldiers were killed. Sadruddin led the revolt in Mewat and Rao Tularam and his nephew Gopal D e v participated in p e a s a n t revolts. Revolt also broke out in Rohtak, Kharkhoda, Hissar, Sirsa and other places.
- ◆ In Central India, Mhow, Sagar, Bundelkhand and other places reverberated with the war cry of "Kill the Firangis". Although, the Holkars and Scindias were with the British, yet the people of this area participated wholeheartedly in the revolt and 20,000 soldiers of Gwalior joined Rani Lakshambai in her battle against the British.
- ◆ In Rajsthan, revolt started in Nasirabad Army camp on 28th May 1857. The same story repeated itself in Nimach on 3rd June 1857. It ignited similar reactions in Devali where the army camp was burnt. On 10th August, the cavalry in Naseerabad again refused to obey the orders of their commander. On 15th October, in Kota army camp revolt started. In Tonk, the sepoys supported Tantia Tope.
- ◆ Rangobapu Gupte was the main leader of revolt in Maharashtra.





Pune was the centre of revolutionary activities. The sepoys revolted in Kolhapur repeatedly on 12th, 13th, 23rd June and 2nd August 1857. Revolts also started in Nasik, Ratnagiri, Bijapur, Aurangabad, Ahmad Nagar and other places.

- ◆ Sonaji Pant, Rangarao Pange and Maulavi Syed Allauddin led the revolts in Hyderabad. In June, some Rohilla troops reached Kadappa claiming to be the supporters of Nizam but they were hailing the name of Nansahib. In 1858, revolts started in Golkunda and Rajmahendri that reached Guntur.
- ◆ In Karnataka, eighth cavalry of Madras Constabulary stationed in Banglore in July and 20th infantry in Belgaon in August threw off the yoke of Britishers. Uprisings also started in Mysore, Karwar, Jamakhindi, Shorapur, Koppal and other places.
- ◆ Fearing the repetition of sepoy revolt in Meerut, the Britishers started disarming and executing the sepoys in Punjab. The sepoys suspected of indulging in Mutiny or desertions were rounded off and killed mercilessly. One of the most shameful chapters was the inhuman execution of 282 sepoys of 26th infantry of whom 237 were slaughtered in batches of 10 each by Cooper, the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar and 45 of them were suffocated to death in the place where they were holed up. The historians have termed it as re-enactment of another Black-Hole tragedy. Contrary to the impression the British had tried to create that Sikhs had supported them, the general masses excluding the Rajahs of cis-Sutlej area, supported the war. The British administration had to arrest 8000 people in Punjab in the first year of war.
- ◆ Uprisings also started in Peshawar, Singapore, Chittagong and Madras.



The 1857 War of Independence is highly significant for its widespread reach and intensity based on the concepts of *Swarajya*, *Swadharma*, *Swadeshi* and *Goraksha*. It is the greatest of all the



anti-colonial wars fought in different European colonies. It also represents the positive aspects of Hindu-Muslim unity that was not based on politics of appeasement but on the tenets of mutual respect and tolerance. The constitution drafted by Bahadurshah II known as Azad Hukumat totally banned cow slaughter in India keeping the issue on top priority. *Kamal* (lotus)—the symbol of our culture —and *roti* (bread)—the symbol of the basic needs of common man—were used as war symbols and distributed among the people to revolutionise and organise them. The Britishers could suppress this great national war only by resorting to naked repressive measures, massacring a large number of revolutionaries and even innocent people, indulging in rape, loot and arson and by brutally using force in a most barbaric manner.

There were attempts by the British scholars to belittle the significance of this national war. It was portrayed as a localised affair involving some mutinous sepoys lacking the general support. It was also denigrated as 'feudalistic outbursts' and as 'dying groans of an obsolete aristocracy'. Such attempts were made to weaken the nationalistic sentiment that was further strengthened among the masses.

The main causes that led to this nationwide war against the colonial rule may be summarized as following:

- ◆ East India Company claiming the status of paramount power over the Indian rulers and Dalhousie's Doctrine of Lapse through which Satara (1848), Nagpur, Sambhalpur, Baghat (1850), Udaipur (1852) and Jhansi (1853) were annexed. Awadh was annexed on the ground of misgovernment in 1856.
- ◆ The land revenue policy was most unpopular. The Britishers had to resort to extreme coercive measures to realise land revenue from the peasants. The peasants, on the other hand, were driven to extreme poverty and a life of despair.
- ◆ British economic policies in India worked against the interests of Indian trade and industry. The East India Company used its political power to destroy Indian handicrafts and industry and developed it into an appendage of foreign exploitative system.
- ◆ It was generally believed that the Britishers were trying to convert India into a Christian Colony. The missionaries were given ample facilities in terms of land and financial grants. Idolatry was denounced and Hindu Gods and Goddesses were ridiculed by them. In 1834, study of Bible was made compulsory in schools and sepoys were promised promotion on accepting 'True Faith'.



- ♦ The policies of racial discrimination practiced by the Britishers against the Indians found their expression in army also. The Indian sepoys were denied promotions and given less facilities, pay and allowances as compared to their European counterparts.
- ♦ The immediate cause of revolt is considered to be the introduction of greased cartridges in the army, which contained cow and pig fats. These cartridges needed to be bitten off before use. Sepoys were forced to bite the greased cartridges, which they refused considering it to be against their religion.

The 1857 national War of Independence had far reaching consequences. As a result, in 1858, the Government of India Act abolished the rule of East India Company. India was to be governed directly in the name of the Crown of England. Several administrative measures were initiated to safeguard the interests of the Crown in India. The British also felt the need to break the Hindu-Muslim-Sikh unity displayed during the war and to keep the Indians divided along the lines of region, caste, language and community. Such realization led them to pursue the politics of "Divide and Rule" whose recent manifestation may be found in the "Politics of Appeasement" currently pursued dogmatically by the 'secularists' in the nation.

The war also ignited the nationalistic sentiments among the masses that started believing in the power of unity and sensed the vulnerability of the British Empire. The spirit of resistance and courage displayed by the Indian masses consolidated the revolutionary urge in favour of nationalism. The war also brought to the fore great Indian leaders like Rani Lakshambai, Tantia Tope, Nana Sahib, Bahadurshah Zafar, Kunwar Singh and many others for showing exemplary courage and indomitable spirit. They attained iconic stature in the eyes of Indian masses. The memory of their heroic resistance continues to inspire us even today.

The year 2007 is the year when we are celebrating the 150th year of the national War of Independence of 1857. The message of nationalism, unity, integrity, sovereignty and independence that 1857 gives us should reach every citizen of independent India. As an awakened nation India has to be always in guards against the disruptive and divisive forces seeking to undermine our ancient civilization. While we pay our homage to the memory of great leaders and millions of people who participated and even laid their lives at the altar of Bharat Mata, we resolve to continue to strive for rebuilding a prosperous, secure and strong Bharat.

# Bharatiya Janata Party

Central Office

11, Ashok Road, New Delhi-110001



July 17, 2007

## Important Circular

Sadar Pranam!

The first country-wide war of independence was fought in 1857. Swatantrya Veer Savarkar termed it the First War of Independence. The BJP has decided to celebrate 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this First War of Independence throughout the country on a large scale.

The BJP National President Shri Rajnath Singh has constituted a 1857–WAR OF INDEPENDENCE PROGRAMME ORGANISING COMMITTEE under the convenership of General Secretary Shri Anant Kumar. The other members of the Committee are — S/Shri Kailash Joshi, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, Kalraj Mishra, Balbir Punj, Prabhat Jha, Vijaya Goel, Smt. Kiran Maheshwari, O. Rajagopal, Dharmendra Pradhan, Amit Thakar, Shyam Jaju and Prakash Javdekar.

The objectives of this year-long programme are respectful remembrance of our inspiring past, invocation of patriotism, pledge for freedom and democracy, oath of unity and solidarity and resolve for strong and prosperous India.

The programme will commence from August 9, 2007 and conclude on May 10, 2008.

There were three striking features of 1857 War of Independence. It was peoples' countrywide collective struggle against British rule. It had large public participation. It had communal convergence as Hindus and the Muslims joined together to wage fight for the country.

This is an opportunity to arouse new spirit in the country by remembering the great war that was waged from Punjab to Bengal and from Nepal border to far off South. Unfortunately, the Congress-led UPA is not attaching due importance to this historical occasion. Had the UPA government so wished, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh could have jointly celebrated this anniversary of War of Independence. But a government, that nurses ill feelings towards Veer Savarkar and other patriots, cannot be expected to act on such

lines. That is why the BJP will emphatically take this theme of national pride to the people.

While observing this programme, this holistic vision would have to be kept in view.

In order to observe these programmes in each state and in each district, 1857-War of Independence Programme Organizing Committees should be set up for which senior party functionaries of the state and districts would be co-opted as its conveners and co-conveners. The Committee may comprise 5 to 11 members. One active member – each from Mahila Morcha, Yuva Morcha and Minority Morcha should be included in this Committee. Other prominent persons from the society may also join this committee. This Committee will prepare outlines of this programme in consultation with all prominent leaders of the party and will actively co-operate in its implementation.

The main programme in your state would be held at places connected with 1857 War of Independence. Various programmes may be observed in other districts of the state keeping in view the main theme of the programme. For example, programmes like – Prabhat Pheris, Cycle Rallies, Torch Processions, Memorial Photo Exhibition. Essay and Speech competition in schools and colleges, Seminars, Rallies, Honouring of Freedom Fighters, Staging of Special Programmes on Freedom Memorials, Honouring of Veeranganas (Martyrs' wives), House to House distribution of message placards, Special conferences of youths & women, Jagruti Yatra etc. can be considered.

At least one impressive programme in each district with adequate public participation should be contemplated to be held during this one year period.

In order to make this programme a success, members of the Organisation Committee have been charged with the responsibility of various states, the details of which are enclosed with this circular.

**(Anant Kumar)**  
*General Secretary*

To All State Presidents/General Secretaries (Orgn)  
All Central Office Bearers  
All State Incharges



## 1857 – War of Independence Programme Organisation Committee

**Convenor**

**Shri Anant Kumar**

**Name of Incharge**

**State**

Shri Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi	Bihar, West Bengal
Shri Balbir Punj	Punjab, Chandigarh, Kerala
Smt. Kiran Maheshwari	Rajasthan, Gujarat
Shri Dharmendra Pradhan	Orissa, Chattisgarh
Shri O. Rajagopal	Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Andaman & Nicobar, Pondicherry
Shri Kailash Joshi	Madhya Pradesh
Shri Kalraj Mishra	Uttar Pradesh
Shri Vijay Goel	Delhi, Haryana
Shri Prabhat Jha	Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand
Shri Prakash Javdekar	Karnataka, Maharashtra, Goa
Shri Shyam Jaju	Himachal Pradesh, Uttaranchal
Amit Thakar	J& K, Assam & North Eastern States