

30-year-old ends life over Rajoana issue?

GAGAN K. TEJA/TNS

PATIALA, MARCH 30

A 30-year-old youth allegedly committed suicide by hanging himself to express solidarity with Balwant Singh Rajoana, the assassin of former Punjab Chief Minister Beant Singh.

Identified as Ranjit Singh Choudhary of Guhla Cheeka town in Haryana, the deceased's body was found hanging from a tree in Tafa-jalpura locality near the bus stand here. The police also recovered some posters and other printed material relating to 'Save Rajoana campaign' from his possession. The note read that he was part of a 21-member group formed to save Rajoana and in case he was hanged, all of them would commit suicide as per the plan.

However, the police refused to buy the point and claimed Choudhary was in depression.

Patiala SSP Gurpreet Singh Gill claimed deceased's father Jagir Singh met him after the incident and said his son was in depression.

Ranjit, the police said, went to the UK on a student visa two years ago and got married there. He divorced his wife and returned to India last year. Though his second marriage was fixed for January 18, the bride's parents got to know about his first marriage on the wedding day. As a result, the girl was married off to Ranjit's younger brother.

SHO Tripi Satnam Singh said the deceased left his house yesterday. He said the credentials of his suicide note were yet to be verified. The body has been handed over to the family after a post-mortem examination.

Gujral and Gill want death penalty to go

PRABHJOT SINGH
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

CHANDIGARH, MARCH 30

Rajya Sabha member Naresh Gujral (Shiromani Akali Dal), speaking in Parliament today, advocated abolition of death penalty, saying it was not only denial of human rights but also went against the tenets of various religions.

Son of former Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral, Naresh Gujral wanted the government to make a law abolishing death penalty in the country. His special mention followed a nationwide debate stirred by the stay on the execution of Balwant Singh Rajoana, convicted in the Beant Singh assassination case.

Congress MP Manohar Singh Gill, too, has demanded abolition of death penalty. "The entire civilised world is rapidly abolishing the barbaric practice of capital punishment. As on May 2011, as many as 96 countries have banned it. Amnesty International regards another 34 countries to be de facto abolitionists," Gujral said in his special mention.

Tracing the history of debates on the abolition of capital punishment, he said after Independence, India retained the 1861 Penal Code that provided death penalty for murder. During the Constituent Assembly debates between 1947 and 1949, several members had expressed



RAJOANA
HANGING

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— MS Gill, Rajya Sabha member

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— Naresh Gujral, SAD MP

their views against capital punishment.

Gujral held that unsuccessful attempts were made to abolish the death penalty in 1956, 1958, 1961 and 1962 through the introduction of private members' Bills in both Houses. The legality of capital punishment had been challenged several times in

the Supreme Court.

"India is the country of Buddha and Gandhi whose ideals we all cherish. Guru Granth Sahib, Buddhist tenets and the New Testament all believe that the power to give or take life lies only with God. The death penalty is the ultimate denial of human rights. It is a premeditated and cold-blooded killing of a human being by the state in the name of justice. It violates the right to life as proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights," he said. "I urge the government to take immediate steps and bring forward a legislation to abolish capital punishment," Gujral concluded.

Former Union Sports Minister and sitting Rajya Sabha member Manohar Singh Gill said: "The civilised world gave up the death penalty in the last century. India too rejected this barbarian concept. Unfortunately, it was brought back, through judicial approval in 'the rarest of rare cases'. Since then judges have awarded it frequently. It is difficult to see any consistent philosophy in their decisions.

"I oppose the death penalty totally. I call upon the government, to put an immediate stop to this form of justice, if necessary by a parliamentary change of the law. I am of the view, that the death penalty be replaced by a very long life sentence in jail in appropriate cases. This will avoid the tensions that arise every now and then."