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Mirror reflection

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LIVE Updates

During the course of service, one had the honour of hoisting the national flag in some of the remotest parts of our country: Tiger Saddle (20,000 feet plus) on the northern edge of Siachen, Moreh Gate at the eastern tip of Manipur, Ghantamula astride Baramula-Uri Road, to name only a few.

This year, the privilege of unfurling the national flag was rather unique, the venue being the high school at my ancestral village in Hoshiarpur.

The school has a rich heritage, being one of the oldest in the region. I studied there for two years before going off to Sainik School. However, the invite to be the chief guest was primarily due to my family's association with the school. My grandfather, an eminent doctor, and father, an Indian National Army veteran, were both ex-students of the school, sometime in the late 19th and early 20th century, respectively.

The gathering besides the students and staff had prominent village representatives, old students and ex-servicemen. The spirit of nationalism was feverish as also the frustration at the declining moral standards and level of corruption. It was an opportune occasion to bring home the significance of the national flag. In the armed forces, each soldier is a flag-bearer and no sacrifice is deemed too great to protect the sanctity of the national flag. After all, it is the status of the flag that defines victory on the battlefield.

How each citizen can contribute in upholding the national pride came out through one of the narrations. A local resident was working for a multinational in the Middle East as a truck driver and the co-driver happened to be an American. To make an extra buck, he took the American into

confidence to sell off portion of goods which could be officially written off as losses during transit, so as to tide away financial crisis back home. Having made some extra money, in all fairness he offered half the share to the co-driver. His friend refused saying his folks did not need the money and he could keep all as required at the latter's home.

I also recalled a similar experience when I was on a diplomatic assignment in China. While we were packing up to return, my wife offered the maid a used refrigerator and some kitchenware. She politely refused despite our insistence, saying she had been well paid and treated as a member of the family. Therefore, she had no moral right to accept the offer, even though well intended.

Both these nations are not corruption free. However, malice is not accepted as a fait accompli by an average citizen. In our prevailing environment, corruption is rampant as it is a win-win situation, serving both the giver and the taker. In case India has to earn its rightful place in the polity of nations, every one of us ought to become stakeholders in cleaning the system.

While as cadets at the National Defence Academy, in the morning before leaving the lines, we were required to stand in front of full-size mirrors placed in the corridors and salute. Besides checking the turnout and correctness of our salutation technique, the underlying rationale was also to assure ourselves whether we were worthy of the salute. As citizens, if every morning we faced the mirror, sparing a few moments for self-introspection, we may find the remedy to the malignant ailment at our doorstep, without having to seek it elsewhere.