Medals and Ribbons

Apr. - Jun. 2022 | Vol.2 | Issue 3 ■ Price Rs.200/- ■ Annual Subscription Rs.700/- (ENGLISH QUARTERLY)

A Salute to our Valiant Warriors



COUNTERING
The Proxy War and
INSURGENCY

Actions and Insights from J&K and the North East

Operation Cactus in Maldives
Strategic Intervention by the Indian Armed Forces

Leading the Army Through Uncertain Challenges
An Interaction with General MM Naravane, the Army Chief

Remembering Colonel V Vasanth, AC
Valour and Sterling Leadership Personified

In honour of

General Sunith Francis Rodrigues

PVSM, VSM,
our Chief of Army Staff
from 01 July 1990 to 30 June 1993,
who departed for Valhalla
on 04 March 2022



IN MEMORIAM

September 1933 to March 2022 – General Sunith Francis Rodrigues was with us for these 88 plus years. Born and educated in Mumbai, he joined the First Joint Services Wing course in Dehradun in 1949 and was commissioned into the Regiment of Artillery on 28 December 1952. Wanting to soar in the skies, he opted for the Air Observation Post Branch, and logged more than 65 hours of combat flying during the 1965 Indo-Pak War, accurately directing fire onto many enemy targets.

Intellectually sharp, Rodrigues contributed positively in various staff and command assignments and went on to attend the Royal College of Defence Studies Course in the United Kingdom. He was an ebullient and witty officer, and did not hesitate to speak his mind. He held high moral principles and came down heavily on officers found lacking in moral fibre and officer-like conduct.

Interestingly, Rodrigues, Admiral Ramdas and Air Chief Marshal NC Suri were course mates from the 1st JSW course, who were Chiefs during the same period – a feat repeated about 29 to 30 years later by the 56th NDA Course. During his tenure as the Army Chief, Kashmir witnessed a violent upsurge and Rodrigues marshalled troops in an optimal manner to contain the insurgency.

After his retirement Rodrigues was Director of the International Centre, Goa for nearly six years, besides serving two terms on the National Security Advisory Board. He was engaged in social and literary pursuits and took keen interest in education and empowering children to achieve their potential. He was on the Executive Council of Goa University for seven years and on the Managing Committee of the Goa Chamber of Commerce. He was a long-standing Member of the Goa Planning Board and on the Board of Governors of the Goa Institute of Management.

Rodrigues was appointed the Governor of Punjab and Administrator of the Union Territory of Chandigarh and was sworn into office on 16 November 2004. Rodrigues passed away at the Manipal Hospital in Panaji on 4 March 2022. The secular bonds prevalent in the Army had a deep influence on General Rodrigues, and his last rites were carried out by a Hindu priest in the Hindu crematorium Panaji, with his children and the Catholics joining the Hindu funeral ceremony.

Undoubtedly, General Rodrigues was an inspiring personality and a dedicated leader with exceptional social skills. Dear General, Rest in Peace!!

FOUNDER'S NOTE

Col David Devasahayam



As a young officer, my first taste of counter insurgency operations was in Mizoram in 1981 against the Laldenga founded Mizo National Front. That insurgency ended well after the Mizoram Accord of 1986, with the cadres coming overground and also forming the state government three times after elections led by their President, Zoramthanga.

Those days we all used to study General Nguyen Giap and "People's War", a treatise on the Vietnam War, which was also a part of our syllabus for promotion examinations. Such military studies are extremely beneficial, as they give officers a better understanding of operational aspects and war. Gaining immensely from such studies, the Indian Army has handled counter insurgency operations well, with sagacity and foresight. Our expertise in dealing with counter insurgency and counter terrorism has received international acclaim, and many militaries have conducted training events with our Forces on these subjects.

While the Russians used overwhelming firepower to quell the Chechen fighters, the Israelis have combined precise intelligence and accurate targeting to contain the Palestinian Intifada. Closer home, the Pakistan Army has used brutal means including the employment of helicopter gunships, strafing by fighter aircraft and artillery fire to suppress the Baluch insurgency and the Tehrik-e-Taliban. In comparison, we have rarely used airpower, armour or artillery to defeat insurgent and terrorist designs in the North East and in J&K. Our finely tuned, controlled application of combat resources has successfully reduced the angst in the people – after all, it is a "battle of hearts and minds of the people" as described by Sandy (Lt Gen J S Sandhu), our Editor. His stellar role as the Kashmir Corps Commander in restoring normalcy after the turbulent 2016 post-Burhan Wani agitation is undoubtedly praiseworthy. The editorial team has strung together a series of fine articles and insights into our counter insurgency and counter proxy war operations in the North East and in J&K, besides excellent narratives on Operation Cactus in the Maldives in November 1988. The COAS, General Manoj Naravane's interview is also thought provoking, pragmatic and visionary.



Lt Gen JS Sandhu... as Corps Commander

I am glad that Medals and Ribbons has gained greater readership, with increasing hits on our website too; and a good feedback from the defence community at large. I am sanguine that readers will give this issue a 'thumbs up' as well.

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Medals and Ribbons
A Salute to our Valiant Warriors (English Quarterly)

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EDITOR'S NOTE



Lt Gen J S Sandhu, (Retd).

The Indian Armed Forces have been engaged in containing internal strife right after independence. In the mid-50s, the Army was deployed to control the Naga Hills insurgency. Later, in the next couple of decades, violent groups emerged in Mizoram, Manipur, Assam, while the Naxalite movement also drew in the Army's involvement in the early 70s. Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) took centre stage in the early 90s and fighting Pakistan's proxy war in J&K has become the primary *'conflict arena'* for our troops thereafter.

The Army's involvement in tackling such civil disturbance or violent elements does not imply that the other instruments of the State have failed, as we tend to sometimes portray. A rational analysis indicates that dissension occurs during national stabilisation, insurgencies are faced and that these cannot be contained by 'peacetime policing'. It is just that the law and order machinery needs greater firepower to subdue the militant challenge.

Considering the extensive engagement of the Armed Forces in counter insurgency campaigns, it is apt for us to focus on these and such sub-conventional operations in this issue. We have tried to strike a balance between operations in J&K and in the North East, between action reports and analytical insights. Lt Gen Mohinder Puri (Retd) takes us through the turbulent 90s in J&K, recounting how the Indian Army brought the volatile Valley under control. The Hizbul Mujaheddin (HM) was the dominant tanzeem in the late 90s, but foreign terrorist groups started gaining prominence too. Dissension within the HM was a fallout, and Lt Gen JR Mukherjee (Retd), the then Chinar Corps Commander was intimately involved in the ceasefire negotiations with Abdul Majeed Dar, HM's Kashmir operational commander. He reminiscences about his command tenures in Assam- Arunachal and in Kashmir in our Reflections column. Fascinating experiences indeed!

Infiltration of terrorists has been a major ploy of the Pakistani deep state, and counter infiltration is extremely troop intensive, requiring continuous vigil. Maj Gen BS Ghotra (Retd) describes an extremely challenging but successful operation in Mashkoh Valley in November 1993 wherein 27 infiltrators were killed, and readers will realize the immense difficulty faced when neutralising terrorists holed up in inaccessible caves. We also pay tribute to Colonel V Vasanth, AC who was killed in action in a counter infiltration operation near Uri. In my review of Kashmir dynamics, I have discussed the many devious players involved.

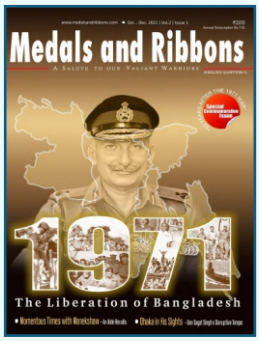
In our North East operations coverage, two of my worthy colleagues, Lt Gen Shokin Chauhan and Maj Gen Binoy Poonnen, discuss the Naga and Manipur insurgencies. Readers will get a historical perspective of the problem. We also cover the 14 BIHAR operation in which Kunj Bihari Singh, the Chairman of People's Liberation Army Manipur was killed and have included a photo feature on Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School, Vairengte, Mizoram.

The Indian Armed Forces strategic assistance to the Maldives leadership in November 1988, called Operation Cactus, has been a *'feather in the cap'*, indicating our regional power projection capability. The Army, Navy and Air Force narratives of Operation Cactus are worth reading. In addition, Brigadier BK Ponwar, who heads the Counter Terrorism and Jungle Warfare College, Kanker, Chhattisgarh gives us an overview of operations in the Red Corridor in Central India.

We are grateful to General MM Naravane, the Army Chief, whose interaction with me has graced this issue. His wisdom and strategic understanding gives us a fair idea of our security challenges and the roadmap towards greater capability. And, in our regular columns, Dr. Renuka David highlights the importance of *"looking good to feel good."* Purchasing a house or flat is a major venture for personnel of the Armed Forces, and our financial expert gives us tips related to property acquisition in our Money Matters column. We also have a remarkable conversation with ex-Captain Deepam Chatterjee, whose book *"The Millennial Yogi"* is getting good reviews. An interesting chat with a young officer who embarked on a "self-discovery voyage".

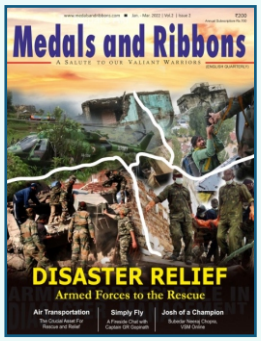
All in all, I am sure the readers will find a good mix of articles and insights in this issue – we look forward to your tips and feedback. **In our next issue, the primary theme would be on UN Peacekeeping Operations.** We invite articles and experiences about **"life in a blue beret"**, which may please be sent to chiefeditor@medalsandribbons.com by end April '22 / early May '22.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Oct. - Dec. 2021 ISSUE

Capt RG Prakasam (Retd),
Medals and Ribbons.
1. Ref your letter dt 29 Dec 2021.
2. It gives me immense pleasure to express my deep sense of gratitude to you for the two issues of 'Medals and Ribbons'. **The layout and presentation of the content of the magazine is truly attractive and appealing for a good & informative reading. The articles, authored by senior, experienced and knowledgeable officers of the Defence Forces are extremely educative. They bring out an appropriate narrative of the Olive Green professional account of our heroes in uniform.**
3. I am sanguine that the editorial team will continue to provide the readers with authentic historical information and data of various operations, battles and events, which will motivate and inspire the youth in times to come.
Warm Regards
Sincerely,
Brigadier James Thomas
Commander
Headquarters
330 Infantry Brigade
908330



Jan. - Mar. 2022 ISSUE

Lt Gen JS Sandhu
Chief Editor
Dear General,
1. I have read the 'Medals and Ribbons' Jan-Mar 22 Edition Vol.2 Issue 2 - DISASTER RELIEF (Armed Forces to the Rescue).
2. **Its contents make for a very interesting read, highlight contemporary issues and cover a vast swathe of activities undertaken by the Armed Forces in Disaster Relief as also ops. My kudos to the editorial team, sir.**

With warm regards & best wishes for the New Year.
Yours sincerely
Lt Gen C Bansi Ponnappa
AVSM, VSM
Headquarters
11 Corps
Pin - 908511

The Chief discusses the Northern Borders face-off, Kashmir, AFSPA, jointness, integrated battle groups, modernisation, social media and other issues.



LEADING THE ARMY through Uncertain Challenges

General Manoj Naravane has been at the helm of the Indian Army for over two years, and has steered the Army through the challenges on the Northern borders, besides other capability improvement measures. The Editor had an insightful chat with him.

The Northern borders have been a major security challenge that the Army has faced in the last few years. Troop densities had to be expanded rapidly, and infrastructure upgrades necessitated. Do you expect the Line of Actual Control (LAC) border management posture to return to pre-Galwan levels? Considering Chinese and Indian rivalry and competition, as also the Sino-Pak collusion, would the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and Indian Army be able to restore confidence along the LAC, avoid face-offs with a long term stabilisation of the border put in place?

Chinese belligerence during and post events of April 2020 have created a new reality which will be hard to retrench. The border and LAC issues with China have always been marked by mutual trust and understanding by both sides that collaboration and competition must be managed and one should not impinge on the other. However, the events of the last couple of years have made us realise that the Chinese cannot be taken at face value and territorial integrity and sovereignty needs to be safeguarded by constant monitoring and vigil.



General Naravane at the Agency for Defence Development, Daejeon, South Korea

There is an attempt to slowly and steadily go back to the status quo ante of April 2020 but the trust factor will be very difficult to gain back. Our border management posture has therefore become more permanent and proactive.

We have taken a number of steps such as augmenting and re-balancing of forces from the J&K and Western front to the Northern borders. Development of requisite infrastructure to support operational and logistic requirements on the Northern Borders is being undertaken to include construction of critical roads & railway lines along with tunnels, construction / resuscitation of Airfields, Advanced Landing Grounds and helipads to enhance connectivity in difficult terrain and weather conditions. Habitat for troops deployed in forward areas during the ongoing operational contingency was an important focus area.

There was a felt need to upgrade Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) capability especially along the Northern Borders. Toward this, all weather ground and air / space based ISR capability for sustained durations at strategic / operational & tactical levels has been achieved and real time inputs from drone and satellite imagery are being made available at short notice. In addition to these, integrated Human Intelligence (HUMINT) / Electronic Intelligence (ELINT) / Space / Cyber Intelligence (Int) capability from various agencies is being made available to Field Formations. It is imperative that the Northern border remain calm, however, the onus is equally on the PLA and the Chinese leadership to ensure this.

We have taken steps and issued instructions to our soldiers to exercise maximum restraint and resolve issues locally through talks and hotlines. However, we remain prepared for all contingencies.

The call to revoke Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in the North East has gained currency, after the unfortunate incident in Mon district. How should we deal with this periodic outcry against the Act, drive home the necessity of the Act, dispel the misperception and highlight that it is not draconian as portrayed?

The Indian Army deeply regrets the loss of lives in the Mon incident and we have cooperated fully with the SIT ordered by the State government, whose findings will be revealed to the public in a short time. However, the Army has faced a lot of flak for AFSPA through a number of publications and protests. There are a lot of misperceptions regarding AFSPA, its implementation and the supposed impunity allowed to the security forces. I feel that there is a need to set the record straight. The operationalization of AFSPA is based on a number of sequential steps taken by both the State and Central government. Once the State government feels that armed insurgent movement(s) have reached such extreme levels of violence and the existing Law and Order mechanism is unable to act effectively to stem the violence levels, the area is declared as "Disturbed Area" by way of an Official Gazette notification. AFSPA is an enabling act which empowers Security Forces to operate in insurgency affected areas and as long as the area remains disturbed the need for the Act remains. The Act affords minimum essential protection to members of Armed Forces to ensure fulfilment of the constitutional obligations. The Central government can sanction prosecution or other legal proceedings against personnel who act in contravention to applicable laws and SOPs.

Once the area is no longer assessed to be "disturbed" and Law & Order situation is not in a "dangerous condition" that the use of Armed Forces in aid of the civil power is not necessary, applicability of AFSPA is no longer extended, following which the Army can be withdrawn. One may recall that applicability of the Act has already been withdrawn from Meghalaya, Mizoram & Tripura where the security situation has shown improvement.

The Armed Forces have established a robust mechanism to ensure that all allegations of Human Rights (HR) violations are investigated and defaulters if any, punished. There has been a substantial decrease in the number of allegations of HR violation against the Army over the past few years. AFSPA needs to be understood in this context and the same needs to be explained to the larger and general audience.

With their constant presence and vigil, the security forces have contained turmoil in Kashmir post the August 2019 change in its status. But the Kashmir situation remains sensitive with anti-Indian elements reorganising and trying to escalate the violence. Consequent to political activities picking up, disturbance may be triggered too. What are the worrisome signals that we should be watchful of in the Valley in 2022?

Post abrogation of Article 370, conduct of peaceful District Development Council elections with extensive participation of Awaam, execution of developmental projects and signs of near normalcy have hurt the Pakistani narrative. To disrupt incipient normalcy, Pakistan has adopted a new strategy to spread the narrative of an indigenous struggle in J&K. Acts of terrorism are currently being claimed by proxy tanzeems like People's Anti-Fascist Front (PAFF) & The Resistance Front (TRF), to circumvent any indication of Pakistani complicity. However, proactive and synergized operations by security forces have resulted in substantial reduction of terrorist cadres and crippling of their networks.

Despite this, Pakistan's intransigence to disrupt various initiatives by the government in J&K continues primarily in form of rhetoric and attempts to draw international attention to the issue. Expecting the situation to become peaceful too soon may not be prudent and security forces continue to keep a tag on the ground situation.

As seen in the recent past, terrorist tanzeems have attempted to garner media attention by resorting to barbaric acts of killing minorities, non-locals and political workers. Such worrisome trends are being watched out for and will be arrested immediately on occurrence. The summers could also witness possible impetus to infiltration and smuggling of arms & ammunition along the Line of Control. Influx of foreign terrorists and sophisticated foreign origin weapons in the Kashmir Valley is another concern that own troops continue to watch out for & remain prepared to thwart. Pakistan is also expected to exploit sensitive issues and initiatives of the Government to trigger violence in the Valley. While recruitment has seen a drop in 2021, exploitation of such situations to garner cadre strength is always a possibility.

The planned introduction of Integrated Battle Groups (IBGs) would be a major reorganisation of Army formations and structures. It may be possible for Corps HQ to control eight to ten IBGs, resulting in synergy, faster decisions, execution and better situational clarity. Do you feel it viable to do away with Divisional HQs once IBGs are in place in those areas?

Over the last couple of years, we have carried out a careful analysis of future threats and challenges, the constantly evolving character of war and the influence of existing/ emerging disruptive technologies. It is only thereafter, that we are now embarking upon force restructuring, reorganisation and capability enhancement of the Army in various fields.

One key initiative in this regard is the currently underway IBG-isation of certain Army formations. With regard to the shape and form that the IBGs will take, I assure you that the same is being undertaken after careful study and evaluation. An in-depth study, of both, successful and not so successful models of various countries, has been carried out to inform our force re-shaping. The IBGs will be modular and structured as per threats, challenges and operational requirements of each formation. The overarching considerations are rightsizing and optimisation to arrive at the most cost-effective teeth to tail ratios.

It may be prudent to note that structures for each lBG are being created after careful war-gaming, due test bedding, rigorous validation and mid-course corrections. The implementation itself will be phased and measured. To answer your specific question, the process lends itself to removal of redundancy in the chain to some extent. However, as I have said, structures for each IBG will be concretised based on the validation exercises on a case to case basis.

In the last couple of years there have been several discussions on enhancing integration between the three Services. How much of the talk has actually translated into visible steps and systems to achieve jointness? What are the achievable steps that you expect this year in 2022?

There have been major strides towards enhancing integration between the three Services in the past two years. 2020, in fact had been a landmark year. The decision of the Government to create the Department of Military Affairs under the Chief of Defence



General Naravane being briefed at Israel Defence Force's Special Operations Unit

Staff is a seminal step. It has given a formal veneer to long standing informal linkages. The twin decisions and the consequent efforts towards military modernisation are significantly changing the way the defence establishment operates and reforming the long overdue military system.However, it is a work in progress. Such transformational changes don't happen overnight. They need to be discussed and deliberated at various levels to smoothen single Service angularities and concerns. Needless to say, a lot of movement is happening in this regard.

Modernisation of the Armed Forces is not only about procurements and acquisitions. It is rather vital to incorporate suitable improvements in organisations, structures and training so as to enable optimal and efficient absorption and exploitation of newer technologies and platforms. To that end, the ongoing efforts to reorganize as Joint / Integrated Theatre Commands and Integrated Battle Groups are major steps towards modernising our forces.

There are possibly some contentious issues too between the three Services on joint structures. Some aspects are necessary to be addressed, despite the objections. In which of these contentious issues, do you expect to achieve an acceptable consensus amongst the Services?

In today's world of ubiquitous information, misinformation and disinformation is growing with equal rapidity. You will find various narratives being built, demolished and rebuilt as per convenience, understanding and bias. This is why there is a misperception that there is no consensus among the three Services. Let me place it on record that there are no major contestations amongst the three Services. There definitely are certain divergences in thoughts owing to peculiar service ethos and ways of functioning but there is no dissonance whatsoever on the need for integration. The three Services are conscious that there is no better way to address the security challenges of the future / fight modern wars. A healthy and frank discussion amongst all stakeholders is mandatorily needed and rigorously war-gamed to arrive at a robust structure. In so far as the Indian Army is concerned, we are committed to making jointness / integration an overwhelming success. I am confident, that the three Services will demonstrate maturity and farsightedness to arrive at solutions that are in the larger organisational interest.

Revenue expenditure is taking up about 83% of the Army Budget, in addition there are committed liabilities. Capital procurements and capital expenditure possibly is affected and cost cutting measures have been put in place in the last few years. What roadmap would you prefer to take to rein in the share of revenue expenditure in the Army Budget?

Army is a manpower oriented organisation and our operational role and tasking requires boots on the ground to monitor the vast frontiers in remote, inhospitable areas. The existing situation along the Northern Borders, the collusive threat and existing state of infrastructure along the treacherous Northern Front precludes any immediate downsizing.

We are in the process of reviewing internal structures to increase the teeth-to-tail ratio and reducing manpower from those Arms and Services where modernisation can reduce manpower requirements, however it will take time for these actions to bear fruit. Presently, approximately 25% of the Revenue expenditure is spent on operations and maintenance which includes ammunition, rations, fuel, clothing and repairs, with the balance going towards hardship-related and other allowances as also salaries.

The solution to correcting the Revenue to Capital skew lies in enhancing capital allocation to the Indian Army. At present we are getting only about 18% of the overall allocation of the MoD Capital Budget. We have a large number of major modernisation schemes that are in advanced stages and are awaiting approval. We are also aiming for a major push to improve our operational logistic and other infrastructure

to ensure better utilization of Capital funds. Besides, the Army has been at the forefront in leading the Atma Nirbhar Bharat initiatives of the Government and we aim to give these a further fillip.

Several initiatives have been taken in the last couple of years to improve indigenous manufacturing in the defence sector. But a tardy and lengthy process results in phenomenal delays in procurement. Which major policy adaptations are required to improve efficiency and effectiveness of 'Atmanirbharta' in the defence sector?

Strategic independence can only be attained from a position of strength. Strengthening of our military capabilities and developing cyber, space and strategic communications is thus an undeniable requirement today. Critical technologies currently held with a select few are either denied or made available with conditionalities.

The desired capability advancement rests on multiple factors such as robust policy, sound planning, efficient processes and a credible technology and defence manufacturing base. Hence, in the last few years, boosted by the Atmanirbharta call, the Indian Defence Industry has been energized to develop niche capabilities in defence technology development to meet the requirements of a future ready force. Capability Development & Modernisation of the Indian Army is aimed at ensuring and enhancing operational preparedness. This is a continuous & dynamic process. With the promulgation of DAC 2020 and the impetus given by the Government to Atmanirbhar Bharat, the Indian Army endeavours that bulk of our equipment be manufactured in India. With the assistance of DRDO, Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) and Ordnance Factory Board (OFB), we are continuously working to ensure a higher domestic content in all our equipment procurements.

Numerous initiatives like earmarking of budget for private defence industry, streamlining of processes, promulgation of positive indigenisation lists, corporatisation of OFB, driving the start-up ecosystem etc have been taken up to energise the defence sector in India. In order to channelize our efforts, we created the Army Design Bureau to provide direction to our capability needs in collaboration with the Defence Industry, MSMEs, start-ups, the Academia as well as the Government and private R&D organisations. It has galvanised our industry connect, resulting in development of indigenous weapons, equipment and identification and induction of niche technologies.

We are now in the process of enhancing this footprint by establishing Regional Technology Nodes with the first one already raised at Pune. With the aim of facilitating greater outreach, we also established an Indian Army Cell at IIT-Delhi with the posting of a serving officer to work in close coordination with the Academia and start-ups incubating therein. Our collaborative engagement with the industry, Academia and Start-ups indicates huge potential and promise.

Corporatisation of the OFB has been a welcome step. What are its likely effects as far as supplies to the Army are concerned, in terms of costing, quality, time delays and other related issues?

In light of the Corporatisation of OFB, it is envisaged that there would be a paradigm shift in the organisation and functioning of Ordnance Factories, thus leading to enhancement in their efficiency & overall production standards. The concerns of the Indian Army with respect to quality standards and role of Quality Assurance (QA) agencies post corporatisation have been flagged at the highest level. Master General Sustenance (MGS) Branch has recommended that reforms in QA process in Ordnance Factories should be spread over 3-4 years and benchmarked to demonstration of higher quality output.

The present QA cover by Directorate General of QA at critical armament and ammunition factories should continue to ensure that highest quality of armament and ammunition is supplied to the Indian Army. The corporatisation of OFB into DPSUs is a much-needed welcome step. All our existing indents with the OFB have been converted into contracts with the newly formed entities. We are hopeful that the issues of frequent delays and quality concerns will get resolved by the DPSUs.

The Army has introduced a digitally designed disruptive combat uniform. Will we be able to ensure differentiation of our troops from the Central Armed Police Forces and prevent misuse of our combat uniforms by unauthorized persons?

Keeping in mind security concerns based on proliferation of combat fatigues, similarities with other security forces and need of the Armed Forces for an improved version of combat dress, a new design has been approved which has a number of advantages over the previous version. The improvements are based on the feedback from the field Army resulting in lighter and stronger fabric, a digital camouflage print suitable for most terrains and ergonomic design.



With the Commander, Royal Saudi Land Forces in South Block, New Delhi

The existing camp pattern consists of a combination of organic shapes in Beige, Brown, Green and Black colours. Keeping the existing percentages unchanged, National Institute of Fashion Technology developed 15 unique camouflage patterns by variations in shapes, sizes and pixilation. Based on internal assessment, four camouflage patterns were shortlisted for obtaining feedback and the approved pattern was finalised based on the user inputs. Camouflage School, CME Pune has certified that the improved camouflage pattern will provide optimum protection in various terrains.

The new camouflage pattern will be registered with the Controller General of Patents to avoid unauthorized proliferation. Further, by means of Bar Code and QR Code, exclusivity of the fabric and stitched garments will be established. QR codes will reveal the details of manufacturer. Ordnance and CSD inventory management system will also establish the source tracing. This will clearly differentiate the authorised Combat Uniform from the counterfeits. Major Armies provide stitched uniforms and do not have authorised fabric for open sale. Same policy will be adopted. Accordingly, only stitched uniform will be provided through MGS channels and CSD to cater for the requirements of officers, JCOs and other ranks. Uniforms in CSD will be available on producing the valid CSD Cards by the serving individuals of Indian Army. Availability of Combat Uniform Fabric in civil market and thereby being available freely to any person is a grave security concern, therefore, we will take stern disciplinary action against an individual selling the fabric / uniform in an unauthorised manner or any service personnel found in possession of Combat Uniform obtained from an unauthorised source. The transition between Combat Uniform within Army and the establishing of a reliable supply system will mature over next two years.

The exposure of officers and troops to social media has grown exponentially, impacting perceptions. Besides resulting in security lapses, social media also spreads negativity to a great extent, affecting morale. What steps should be taken to insulate our personnel from these dangers?

A number of cases pertaining to suspected espionage activities, and compromised digital artefacts of service personnel with malicious malware circulated by our adversary intelligence agencies through innovative social engineering methods are being reported. Prompt actions have been initiated to bring these cases to logical conclusion at the earliest, hence, ensuring minimum security damage to the organisation. A number of proactive measures have been adapted to inculcate positive social media hygiene in the Indian Army.

A revised and updated SOP on Use of Social Media Platforms and Mobile Phones was issued and promulgated in June 2020. A number of counter intelligence exercises featuring use of social media have been conducted across the Indian Army. Security advisories to sensitise the environment with regard to modus operandi of inimical agencies have also been issued.

Officers' intake into the Army is changing subtly with more youth from smaller towns and cities joining as officers. But Army is not a preferred career option, especially amongst brighter students in metros and in the upper middle class echelons. Are any corrective measures required? Your comments please.

Indian Army continues to be a preferred option for youth in India including women. Every year, more than five lakh candidates appear for NDA and close to 30,000 for CDS exams. Efforts are also underway to "Make the Short Service Commission More Attractive". The low officer intake from metro cities and upper middle class families needs to be looked at from a fresh perspective. This needs to be seen from the prism of cultural and societal growth in India as a whole. In the current perspective, we should not confine ourselves to metros, because the

erstwhile satellite towns have themselves developed to be comparable to metros and definition of upper middle class has expanded beyond the metros to smaller towns / villages. As far as the Indian Army is concerned, adequate numbers of youth are applying for various entries from across the spectrum. Fresh impetus for social outreach is being given through social media platforms.

There are few issues which are under consideration with the Government to improve the service conditions, modernisation and hygiene factors. We are working jointly with the Government to mitigate the challenges.

Grant of permanent commission to women officers has been resolved after a prolonged legal drama. A perception prevails that, under judicial pressure, lady officers were granted more than due and that similar relaxed yardsticks were not applied to male short service officers of the same batches. Your comments please.

The grant of Permanent Commission to 506 women officers recently based on directions of Hon'ble Supreme Court has been an epochal event. All aspects of each woman officer were considered by a Special No 5 Selection Board which also had a woman officer as a member.

The Supreme Court has given directions after all facets of the case were presented to them. We have promulgated a new policy for future career management of these officers. We are sanguine that they shall contribute immensely in all domains and achieve higher ranks in an equitable gender neutral environment.

In most Armies where women have been inducted in greater numbers, the induction has been across all ranks, whereas we have largely only taken them in at the officer level, barring the recent Military Police recruitment. What could be a possible roadmap for inducting women into other components of the Army at the Other Ranks level?

The induction of women into the Army has been a progressive and evolutionary process. Today, barring the major combat Arms, women officers have the freedom and flexibility to choose any Arm or Service they want. With the option of permanent commission and entry into NDA, the career prospects have improved immeasurably. As far as inducting women into the Other Ranks category, we have started with the Corps of Military Police and are carefully monitoring their integration with the rest of the rank and file. There are internal debates and discussions that are being held and we hope that we can further the prospects of women in the Other Ranks category too.

About two decades ago as Commanding Officer 2 Rashtriya Rifles in the Valley, you would have faced innumerable challenges. Could you recount the most difficult challenge that you faced and how you handled it?

My tenure as Commanding Officer of a Rashtriya Rifles Battalion was memorable, to say the least. We faced a number of operational challenges, primary amongst which were conducting operations against hardcore terrorists in the presence of innocent civilians. We had to take utmost care while carrying out cordon and search operations to ensure the safety of men, women and children, carry out our mission in accordance with the law and exit without disturbing the surrounding habitat. I was assisted in my task by a team of wonderful and dedicated officers whose ears were tuned to the ground realities in the area under my jurisdiction. The Kashmiris also helped a lot. Living in their midst, I could see that the common public perception about them was so skewed and incorrect. Their love for India and the Army was evident in the number of successful operations conducted by the unit. I feel they are one of the most patriotic people in the country and the current situation prevailing in the Valley will lead to a bright future for the Union Territory.



The Army Chief with the Editor at Mhow

It has been a momentous journey from childhood days in different schools to NDA, IMA and then in the Regiment. What has been your most profound experience from childhood or from your younger days in service, which you cherish?

My schooling days in Jnana Prabodhini Prashala and later training days in both IMA and NDA instilled in me a sense of discipline, camaraderie, esprit-de-corps and a deep love for the country. I spent my time in the Regiment learning the ropes of unit life, in the process mixing with troops who taught me so much and I still retain a significant portion of their training till now.

Lt Gen JS Sandhu (Retd) *Editor*

THE RATO KHUKRI

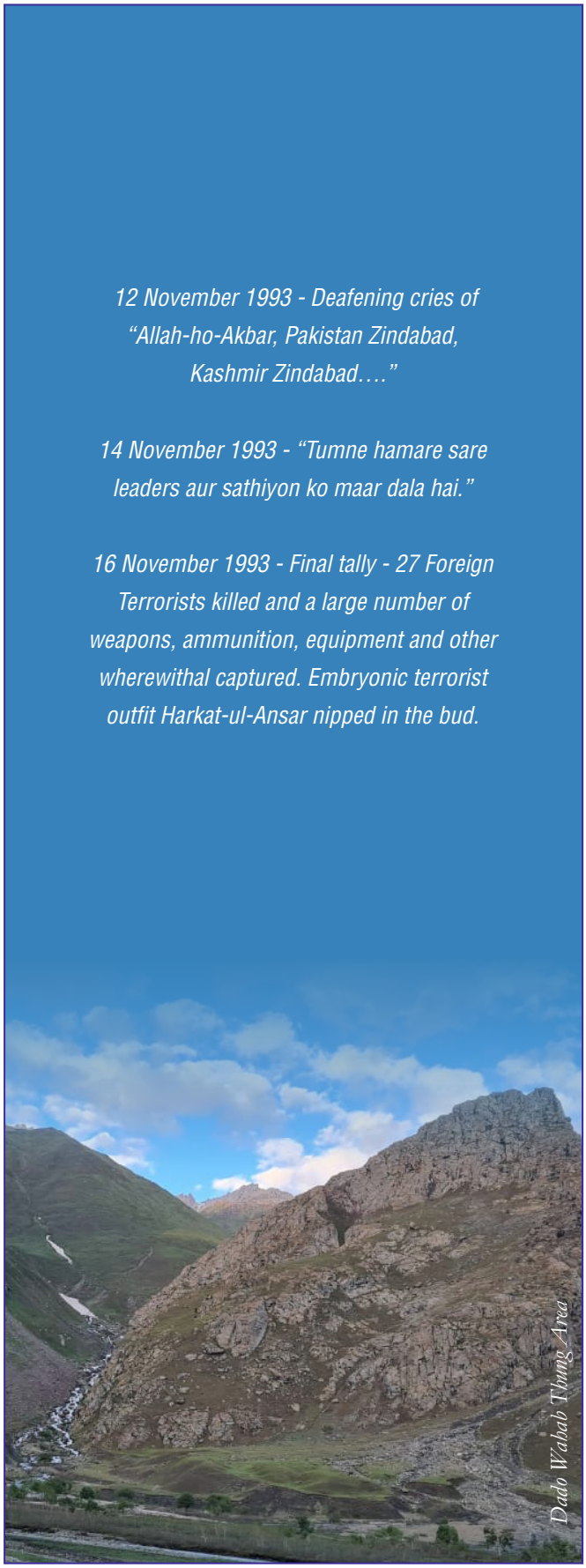
(Blooded Khukri)

Infiltration of terrorists into J&K has been a constant design of the Pakistani agencies, and they have often used extremely difficult routes. In this detailed account, the challenges of neutralizing terrorists holed up in caves are brought out vividly

12 November 1993 - Deafening cries of "Allah-ho-Akbar, Pakistan Zindabad, Kashmir Zindabad…."

14 November 1993 - "Tumne hamare sare leaders aur sathiyon ko maar dala hai."

16 November 1993 - Final tally - 27 Foreign Terrorists killed and a large number of weapons, ammunition, equipment and other wherewithal captured. Embryonic terrorist outfit Harkat-ul-Ansar nipped in the bud.



Dado Wabab Thung Area

The Khukries are Sharpened

The VC Paltan, renowned for its three Victoria Cross winners including two in the same battle, moved to high altitude in Ladakh in June 1993. We trained hard for the operational tenure, with Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's words in mind, that **"training errors are recorded on paper while tactical errors are etched in stone."** Several war-time movies were screened and explained to ignite the warrior spirit in the 'Lahures'. *"Give me a man and I will make him a marksman"* boasted Brigadier Jagmal Singh Rathore, VrC, VSM to whom I sent 15 soldiers, including one tradesman, and they all returned as marksmen. A soldier's capability and capacity to shoot *'straight and sure'* enhances his motivation and urge to be in active operations. I concurrently established an adhoc specialised team of

17 Ghataks (Commandos) by milking the tough, sharp shooters and mavericks. Trained hard to excel, this team dreamt of the day when they would put their skills to practice. These Ghataks were to play a singular role in the operation later. The VC Paltan was well geared, with sharp khukries.

We took over operational responsibility on 18 October 1993. Barely a week later, one Foreign Terrorist (FT) fell into the lap of one of our patrols. This madrasa trained terrorist from Baluchistan had been left by his associates for dead under a pile of stones but Allah had willed otherwise. Interrogation only reinforced my view that the terrorists were exploiting gaps, high altitude, rugged terrain, and rough weather with high velocity winds. Their activity would increase as the Pakistani handlers would make concerted efforts to pump in maximum numbers before the snow piled up.

Dras November 1993

Dras - *'the Gateway to Ladakh'* at 3300 metres is the second coldest inhabited place in the world, 140 km from Srinagar, along the strategic National Highway (NH 1A) to Kargil - Leh. The Mashkoh Valley (valley of wild tulips) at 3400 metres with heights towering to 5000 metres plus towards Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) extends for about 40 kms from the Great Himalayan Range, with the Mashkoh nala draining into the Dras river. This valley gained prominence as an infiltration / exfiltration avenue for terrorists from POK. The ridgelines overlooking Mashkoh valley have many cave-like rocky outcrops, providing hideouts for caches and resting places for terrorists.

Second Fifth guarded the Line of Control (LC) with a lean deployment, large gaps, and arctic tent-based operating bases in the Mashkoh valley in the second tier. Owing to the impending winter, we tweaked our modus operandi - shifting to maximum operations at night, marking challenging routes for utilization at night, changing emphasis from nala beds to spur lines; and deploying at daytime a string of Observation Posts (OPs) at heights for better surveillance.



The Upper Cave

11- 12 November 1993 (Chhoti Diwali)

10 November 1993 was the 107th Raising Day of the Paltan which could hardly be celebrated as Himaraja (king of snow) descended upon Dras with full vigour, forcing a satellite operating base in upper reaches of Mashkoh valley to shrink into its mother base. I with my Radio Operator, Intelligence NCO and one sub-team of four Ghataks trudged 25 kms from the road head along the Mashkoh valley to the affected Operating Base.

On 11 November 93, we were returning to Dras. Around 3.30 p.m, when we were close to the junction of Dado Wahab Thung (DWT) - Mashkoh Nala, the Ladakh Scouts Company Commander informed that his OP perched on the Northern heights of Mashkoh valley had sighted four to five groups, each of five to six personnel moving with inter-se gaps of four to five minutes on the slopes of DWT.

DWT nala is approximately five to six kms in length, has many rocky outcrops and flows steeply into the Mashkoh nala. One cannot see the movements in the DWT nala from the lower Mashkoh Nala. The DWT nala also was the closest infiltration route to NH 1A, and to the habitats of Pandras, Matayan, Mashkoh and Dras.

I was certain that there were none of our patrols in the reported area which I double checked from unit Headquarters as well; and hence the adrenalin rush. We immediately shed our packs and heavy equipment, crossed the knee deep Mashkoh Nala, and wheeled Southwards to begin



The captured weapons being shown to the Officiating Corps Commander

climbing the DWT Nala. The going was tough due to more than knee deep untrodden powdery snow and slippery slopes. I also moved additional troops to the area to ensure that the militants are trapped.

Around 5.30 p.m, we observed an East to West foot trail in the snow. The trail was fresh, appeared to have been used by a number of persons heading Northwards. Following the trail, we began to climb the steep Northern slopes. This slope was strewn with huge boulders and rocks, and a portion had scree challenging our movement. The trail disappeared in the rocky slopes and fading light. We searched for tell-tale signs and spotted one rucksack and one AK rifle abandoned on the side of a huge convex shaped rockface, confirming their presence in this area. Realising that they had been discovered and that we were few in number, the militants opened fire and hurled hand grenades shouting *"Allah-ho-Akbar, Pakistan, Kashmir Zindabad,"* confirming their location. Their firing and grenades were ineffective due to the configuration of the rock and steep slopes. We returned fire and began to move to better and higher fire positions. Meanwhile, other troops were moving to their blocks.

The firing subsided for a while when around 8.30 p.m. we hazily observed some movement in the rocks below our position. We fired at the movement, and they shouted that they were locals by various names from nearby villages. Finding that our firing continued, the militants opened up relentless volleys of fire. Appreciating that the terrorists intended to move towards the West, we established a block there, interspersing individually at 30-40 metres. Additional troops took up positions on the Southern slopes across the DWT nala (Subedar Dal Bahadur Rana) and on the Northern higher reaches (Major Rudra Singh from Ladakh Scouts). Our aim was to ensure that the militants remain holed up in the area through the night and to psychologically build an impression that they were effectively encircled. Intermittent firing continued and we illuminated the area with 2-inch mortar illuminating ammunition off and on.

Our feet were drenched and became heavy. We constantly kept moving our feet and toes to prevent the water freezing and to avoid chilblains / frostbite. The night temperature was minus 25-30 degrees Celsius. Fortunately there was no wind. The moon was in the last quarter, the sky was clear and well lit up with stars, and ambient light reflected from the snow.

In the early hours of 12 November, Subedar Dal Bahadur was hit by an automatic burst from across the DWT nala. Efforts were made to extricate and evacuate him but he succumbed to his injuries - a sad loss.

13- 14 November 1993 (Badi Diwali)

We set up another ambush at the junction of the DWT - Mashkoh nala with troops from the Dras base. Around 7 a.m, they detected one militant attempting to move through a rocky patch. When challenged, he not only opened AK fire but also yelled *"Hindustani kutton ke hath mein nahin anewala, mai tum sabko maar dunga."* The ambush team replied with bullets, despatching him to *'Jannat to the awaiting 72 Hoor'.*

Our search commenced, as we were sliding down a huge rock, I came face to face with a cat eyed, agile, fair and chinky face in combat dress. He was as surprised, but was ready with his weapon. We fired at each other. On the other side, a similar militant in cap balaclava, light green fatigues with coat jacket and AK rifle was seen and engaged with our weapons. This huge rock turned out to be a cave that the militants were using. I asked Major Rudra Singh to come down to the cave with his patrol. We bottled up the militants in the cave by 10 a.m.

This rock was 10-12 metres at the base, 5-6 metres in height and approximately 40-50 metres in circumference. The rock had an

overhang going beyond the mouth of the cave and this coupled with the convex curvature on the North East side provided concealment to its mouth as also a 2-3 metres semicircular base, thus forming two firing bays at its mouth. The base had a natural rock configuration jutting out upwards providing cover to the Eastern firing bay. Fortunately, the western portion provided a limited avenue for action and for lobbying grenades into the cave. The cave base also had a contiguous rock-wall 3-4 metres long to its South along the spur forming a small platform at its Southern end. The spur lines were bereft of any vegetation and folds in the ground, had loose gravel and a steep gradient up to the DWT nala bed. *The cave configuration only permitted three to four troops to reach from any one direction.*

We established a tighter cordon with additional troops primarily to take care of any militants attempting to break away. Climbing up the rock overhang from the rear using ropes, we spotted a militant in the Western bay and killed him on the spot. We kept exploring new firing positions to keep the militants engaged. Naik Mohan Bahadur Gurung - a crack shot with his weapon and a daredevil of a soldier moved lithely from one position to another and attempted to snipe at the militants. Going onto the Eastern - bay side, holding my hand while descending the rockface, he spotted a militant but before he could engage him, he was hit by a burst of AK fire directly in his face. With the words *'Sahab, ma to gayo',* (Sahib, I am gone), - a big loss to the Ghataks and the unit.

Resupply of ammunition and additional weapons of Rocket Launcher (RL), Automatic Grenade Launcher (AGL), Medium Machine Gun (MMG), smoke generator and explosives was done by troops trudging over 20 kms distance. A provisional helipad was cleared in the Mashkoh valley and everything from thereon was lugged up the difficult high altitude slopes to the site of the operation. The radio set batteries exhaust faster in the sub-zero temperatures, and our logistic personnel ensured their regular resupply. The Ladakh Scouts troops were very effective in providing us the last mile logistic support.

Militants were making efforts to crawl to the bays and engage us, while collecting splintered stones and rubble available to raise a 'sangar' wall at the mouth of the cave. They did not shy away from using their dead militants' bodies for cover and support as a firing position. Concurrently, our RL team fired High Explosive Anti-Tank (HEAT) and High Explosive (HE) ammunition from precarious positions but not too effectively which nevertheless kept the militants engaged and stressed as their casualties increased. Similar was the case with AGL and MMG not finding level positions for the tripod legs.

Explosives and hand grenades were lobbed and we also lowered explosives down from the overhang with a rope but with marginal success. During the night, intermittent deliberate firing continued to prevent the militants from escaping in the darkness.

On 14 November, the militants were kept under pressure by firing various weapons. Around 4.30 p.m, using cover from the southern side, an assault was planned with the war cry **"Ayo Gorkhali"** being yelled as a decoy from the eastern side. Extensive fire of MMGs and LMGs, thereafter smoke generators and smoke candles followed by explosives and hand grenades preceded the assault.

As the entry to the cave was restricted, I led the assault with four Ghataks only. Heavy firing ensued in this restricted space at 3-8 metres and the stench of burnt flesh and explosives was strong and nauseating. The militants had chipped stones from the



The Mashkoh Valley



The complete haul of weapons, ammunition, clothing and equipment

boulders and their dead corpses of their colleagues to fortify themselves in sangars and had receded into the deeper recesses of the cave. Around 6 p.m. the militants pleaded for stopping fire in the name of Allah.

One militant came out from behind the sangar with raised hands wanting to surrender. The militant was crying that his leaders, besides many others, had been killed and they wanted to surrender. Not believing that a Colonel himself was in the assault with only four others, he was very doubtful that their lives would be spared. He was in a dilemma as he could not trust us and if he did surrender, their near and dear ones back home in Pakistan would not be spared.

We provided him with water which he thought was mixed with poison, and made me have a sip first. To establish trust, he handed over one militant to us on whose interrogation another operation was launched by the unit leading to elimination of two militants and recovery of a number of weapons and huge quantity of ammunition and equipment.

He requested to read *'namaz'* one last time before surrendering but they used this occasion to fill their magazines with ammunition. While standing up in their prayers, they came out with weapons blazing and we retaliated. We were able to extricate ourselves from the cave successfully.

15- 16 November 1993 (Diwali Continues)

Efforts continued during the day to further blast the cave with scant success. Helicopter sorties and troops logistic columns continued to bring in our administrative requirements. A final assault to clear the remaining militants was launched at 4 p.m. after lobbing smoke generators and smoke candles. The assault team crept to the sidewall and lobbed Molotov cocktails and petrol bottles, resulting in increased human flesh burning and its stench. Knowing that this was their fate and not wanting to be consigned to burning (being against their religion), three militants charged out from the cave, their AKs blazing, and were gunned down. Thereafter, the fight was taken to the last recesses in the cave. We accounted for 13 militants killed, besides recovering a large amount of ammunition and equipment.

While searching the area to the South towards the DWT Nala, another cave was spotted on the same spur and exchange of firing ensued. This cave was about 300 meters from the Nala and almost similar to the upper cave, albeit smaller in size. It had three major recesses while its southern side was protected by its convex configuration. The combat strength that could be applied at any chosen point was as restricted as for the upper cave. As it had become dark, we decided to eliminate militants in this cave the next day. During the night, one militant attempted to rush out and was struck down at the mouth of the cave itself.

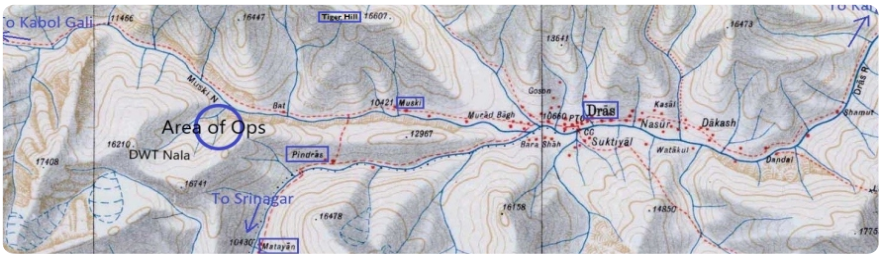
Additional logistics were moved up during the night and day by other soldiers. Fairly effective fire positions for RL and AGL were located and firing commenced. One more militant made a futile effort to run out of the cave and jumped down firing his weapon. He was gunned down too. In the afternoon, intense firing was done onto the cave, which had sangars, natural rocky protection and dead militants' bodies piled up for concealment. Major Rudra Singh and Captain Vivaswan Suhag with four Ghataks crawled to the cave while from another direction Molotov Cocktails and petrol bottles were hurled resulting in fire which the militants attempted to extinguish by throwing mud over it. The stench of burning flesh was overpowering. The assault team lobbed smoke grenades and smoke candles and thundering the **"Ayo Gorkhali"** war-cry, charged into the cave. Intense firing continued till there was complete silence from the militants' side. Smouldering bodies were taken out and the area search accounted for another 10 militants killed. The final tally was of 27 militants killed, capture of 29 AK rifles (including one Sniper rifle), 9 pistols and a huge quantity of ammunition including that of GPMG and RL, mines, explosives, Indian currency and medicine. We unfortunately lost two of our valiant braves in the operation.

Highlights of Rato Khukri

An alert OP spotted a movement which expanded into a major successful tactical level sub- conventional operation in the barren, snow covered high altitude of 3500 meters in minus 25-30 degrees Celsius for five days - *Diwali with live ammo*. The terrorists were a large group of foreign militants, well trained, equipped with good weapons, and indoctrinated having good fighting prowess and fire control. The militants in the lower cave lay silently in freezing temperatures while fighting raged on for three days close by. They fought to the last man probably out of indoctrination and fear of the Damocles sword on the wellbeing of their families.

Dreams are such that do not allow you to sleep. We dreamt, prepared and volunteered. The grueling training, improved firing standards, formation and training of an adhoc Ghatak platoon into near specialized troops, motivation to seek difficult operational tasks resulted in improved individual physical and mental mobility. The professional proficiency of each soldier counts in all forms of warfare but its importance gets exponentially greater in sub- conventional operations such as this operation.

Appreciating that Dras lent itself geographically due to the weather and thin military deployment to nefarious designs of Pakistan and their instruments of proxy war, modifying our operating tactics on the ground helped. In words of Sun Tzu - in warfare, there are no constant conditions, he who can modify his tactics in relation to his opponent will succeed and win. Opportunities are like sunrises; if you wait too long, you miss them. We (CO and six soldiers) were presented an opportunity albeit late in the day around 3.30 p.m. at the Mashkoh - DWT Nala junction, and we seized it with enthusiasm. Paraphrasing General George S Patton - a good plan



Map of the area showing the DWT Nala in reference to Dras and Tiger Hill

enthusiastically executed now, is better than a perfect plan, executed next week. Having established contact with militants in the failing light, it was never broken during the night despite the adverse strength differential and wet clothing including shoes and socks. This was the main strength of the operation that resulted in eliminating the Harkat-ul- Ansar militant group.

Junior leadership is the hallmark of sub conventional operations. There were a number of ambushes / search patrols led by junior leaders (Officers/ JCOs/NCOs) who performed splendidly. An outstanding feature was their enthusiasm to work round the clock untiringly in difficult situations. Very little is accomplished without rugged determination and fighting spirit, both were exhibited in abundance by the troops whether in fighting or logistics management throughout the operation against the militants, terrain, weather and temperature. The fighting spirit is the epitome of infantry morale.

There were troops who were injured due to ricochets of rock / stone splinters, developed chilblains bordering frost bite condition of hands and feet and remained hungry, initially eating snow for water but refused to move out of the scene of action. Their *'never say die attitude'* remained a force multiplier effect to others. This spirit radiates not only to those present but also subsequent generations down the line in the battalion. Late Naik Mohan Singh's son, then a toddler, is now a Subedar in the unit, epitomising the spirit and bonding within the unit.

The best reward for this operation was that the unit was orbatted to Siachen Glacier and moved a few months later to what we aspired and dreamt for.

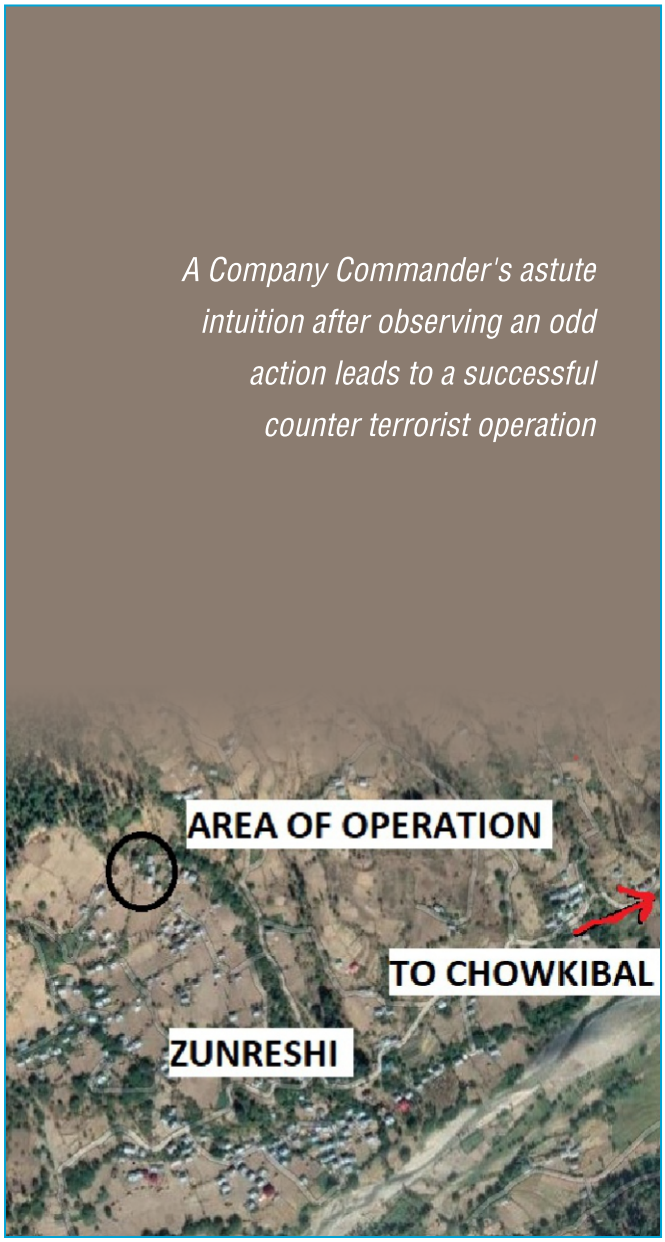
❑ ❑ ❑

Major General Bhupinder Singh Ghotra, AVSM, SM, VSM, (Retd), an alumnus of NDA, participated in the Indo-Pakistan War 1971 immediately on commissioning to 2/5 GR (FF). He has served in operations in J&K, Punjab and in the North East. He has commanded 2/5 GR (FF), 7 Sector RR and raised IGAR (South) in Manipur. He has qualified on DSSC, LDMC and NDC courses and has held prestigious appointments at various HQs. He was awarded Sena Medal for gallantry. After superannuation, he was the first Chief Operating Officer (COO), Sector Skill Council for the Private Security Industry.



Major General Bhupinder Singh Ghotra

A Company Commander's astute intuition after observing an odd action leads to a successful counter terrorist operation



OPERATION ZUNRESHI

Precise, realtime and actionable intelligence is the key to successful neutralization of terrorists. And the ability to locate hideouts of terrorists is also an important attribute. This action report highlights the ups and downs in conduct of counter terror operations.

Zunreshi

As you drive Northwards towards Tangdhar from Kupwara, one crosses Chowkibal, at the edge of the Kashmir Valley, from where one climbs up towards the Nastachhun Pass (also called Sadhana Pass, named after the actress Sadhana, who had visited troops in the area after the 1965 War). Just beyond Chowkibal, a narrow road branches Eastward towards Zunreshi, a village with a few hamlets nestled at the edge of the forested slopes. Zunreshi is one of the suitable reception areas for infiltrating terrorist groups, who sneak across the Line of Control (LC) from the Bugina Bulge and areas adjacent to it. Zunreshi was in the area of operations of 19 MARATHA LIGHT INFANTRY (19 Maratha LI), a unit under the famous Hajipir Brigade.

The village was reasonably prosperous with several two and three storeyed houses, cemented and wooden structures. I remember the then Sarpanch's house looked like a mansion. There were a number of "grey zone" elements in Zunreshi having clandestine links to terrorist groups and Pakistan. Sadiq Mir's house was on the fringe of the village, just near the edge of the forest, suitable for surreptitious entry and exit of terrorists. He was a known terrorist sympathizer, an overground worker, and his mobile number had figured in some terrorists call records.

The Intelligence Input

The Superintendent of Police (SP) in Handwara in 2014 was an active, dynamic police officer, and the Special Operations Group (SOG) under him at Handwara was also

'ready for action'. The 4 PARA (Special Forces) (SF) team commander at Kupwara maintained constant liaison with the Handwara police. The Handwara police were monitoring the mobile calls of Sadiq Mir. One afternoon in the summer of 2014, the call intercepts clearly indicated the presence of "Mehmaan" in Sadiq Mir's house. SOG Handwara got in touch with the 4 PARA (SF) team at Kupwara and linked up with them for the counter-terror operation at Zunreshi. I gave the go ahead for the joint counter-terror operation under the Commanding Officer (CO) of 19 MARATHA LI, with the 4 PARA (SF) team and SOG Handwara coopted. Swiftly launched, with well rehearsed, coordinated drills, Sadiq Mir's house was cordoned within a couple of hours of receiving the intelligence input, by about 5 p.m. that evening.

Cordon and Search Operation

The cordon and search operation drills commenced, the occupants of the house came out and were checked. They denied any presence of terrorists in the house. The house search commenced thereafter, with customary precautions. The first search was deliberate, the building, outhouse, cattle shed were searched, but there was no whiff of the terrorists. Sadiq Mir was not present in person, being away in some other location. His family members informed him of the joint Army – police operation on his mobile. From the intercepted communication, it appeared as if the "Mehmaan" were still in the house. Sadiq thereafter switched off his mobile.

The house was searched again, trying to locate any hideout therein, but still no trace of their presence. The intelligence input had indicated that three terrorists had taken shelter in the house. Considering the high credibility of the input, the three-storeyed house was searched a third time, but still no sign of the terrorists. It would soon be dark, CO 19 MARATHA LI decided to call off the operation as NTR- nothing to report.

Some of the village elders and neighbours were standing in a group near the cordoned house. Major Sachin, the company commander of 19 MARATHA LI, moved to shake hands with these elders, before moving out and to have a light-hearted chat. As he shook hands with them, one of the neighbours shook his hand in a different way, twisting his arm in the process. As their eyes met, Sachin sensed that the neighbour was conveying that the terrorists were still there. Sachin knew that hideouts in buildings had been built cleverly, and an undetected hideout was still a possibility. He spoke to his CO, and it was decided to search the house again – a fourth time.

The Contact

Sachin and a few of the soldiers moved up, searching room by room. On the first floor, Sachin noticed that two adjacent rooms appeared smaller than the rooms directly below them on the ground floor. Was there a hideout in the walled space between these two rooms? No opening was however visible. Sachin and his buddy moved up to the next floor to look for any telltale signs. The second floor had a sloping roof, was like an attic, largely used for keeping provisions.

A few wooden planks were stacked on the floor, Sachin indicated to his buddy to move the planks. As he did so, they saw some gaps in the floor. Suddenly, a burst of automatic AK fire from the opening and the Maratha warriors dived back reflexively. They heard a cupboard door being slid in the room below, and footsteps of the terrorists running out onto the landing. SOG men were milling around in the hall on the ground floor, some of them ran out as the firing commenced.

They were expecting an 'NTR' operation and had hence become casual. The terrorists running down the



Troops in position in a cordon of a house and doing a search of the house. Representational Images.



Troops ready to enter and search a house. Representational Image.

stairs sprayed bullets at the SOG men, as they were diving for cover. Two SOG personnel received fatal injuries, while another two men were injured.

Two terrorists jumped out of windows on the ground floor and moved towards the neighbouring buildings, and trees. It was nearly dark, fading light conditions. One of the terrorists turned a corner, and was challenged by Maratha troops deployed in the cordon. As the terrorist fired at them, the troops responded and gunned him down. The second terrorist, similarly came face to face with 4 PARA (SF) commandos and was brought down unerringly. During the firing from the cordon, rounds hit the building too, and SOG personnel in the building fired back, it wasn't clear if there was another terrorist in the house, who had fired. It was dark, the situation was not very clear.

The house occupants were grilled again – how many terrorists were there? They confessed that there were three terrorists, which was in line with the intelligence inputs too. The cordon was tightened, lights switched on. Inside the house, Sachin and his buddy were on the top floor, some SOG men were injured in the hall on the ground floor, a couple of them had succumbed to injuries. It was decided to search for the third terrorist in the morning. Come daylight, the search was completed. Dame Fortune had smiled on the third terrorist that evening. We learnt later that he had left the house a few minutes before the operation, and had gone to a neighbouring locality to pick up some stuff. He saw the troops arrive, and hid in that area undetected. That is destiny!! Sadiq Mir went into hiding, subsequently his relatives contacted 19 MARATHA LI, stating that Sadiq wanted to surrender. The unit said that they would accept his surrender and hand him over to the police, as per the law. Sadiq was wary of the police. Ultimately, he was caught by the police a few weeks later.

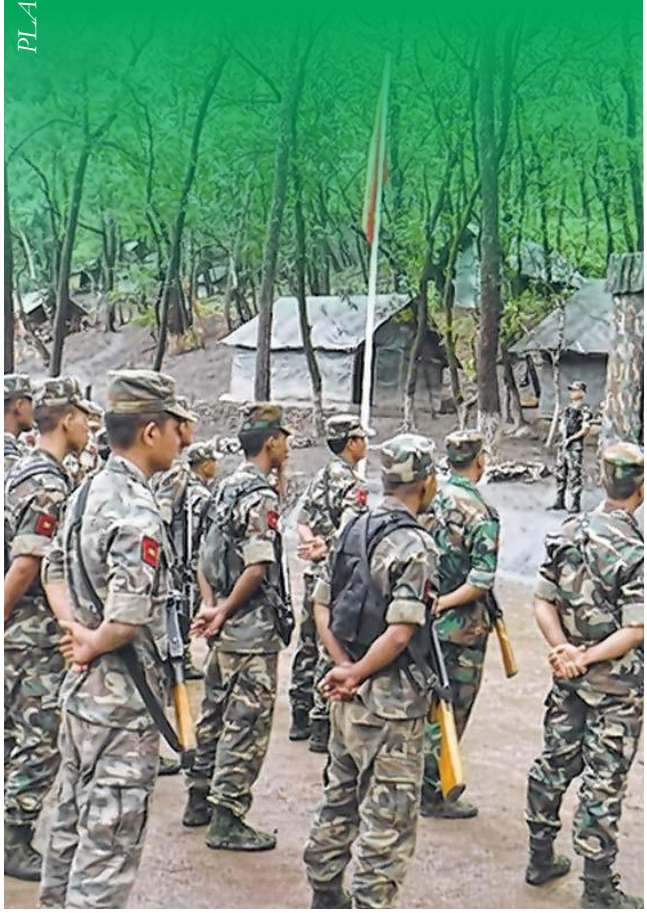
Takeaways

The hideout was the space between the walls of the two rooms, with access from the backside of a cupboard, and a hidden catch was used to slide it open. The gaps between the planks on the floor of the third storey provided ventilation. In Kashmir, we often come across ingenuously developed hideouts. I recall that there was an 'IED Doctor' in Bijbehara, who often eluded the troops, despite very specific and credible intelligence leads. He was hiding in a space above a built in cupboard, and was noticed because a soldier observed a hole in the wall above the cupboard, through which he saw the glint of steel!!

In Zunreshi, a neighbour's clever method to alert the company commander was a key input, and Sachin's ability to read the strange signal was crucial. In Kashmir, as in other places, neighbours often have sour relations, there is envy, enmity and rivalry which plays out. Women often contributed to such intelligence clues. The terrorists in Kashmir are pawns of Pakistan's deep state, and have to be neutralized to keep the violence levels in check, and to prevent coercion of the Awaam. Successful counter terrorist operations have mostly been a result of actionable, hard intelligence, which has to be developed assiduously. The Jammu and Kashmir Police have provided excellent intelligence on many occasions. Later in this issue, Lieutenant General John Ranjan Mukherjee, an erstwhile Corps Commander of the Chinar Corps, has also highlighted this aspect in his reflections. Operation Zunreshi was a classical example of a hard intelligence based operation. With their eyes and ears tuned to the situation and feet rooted firmly to the ground, the Indian Army troops have excelled in battle skills in intense counter terror operations. Kudos to them!!

Lt Gen J S Sandhu (Retd) - *Editor*

The QRT moved swiftly, excellent drills caught the extremists by surprise and nine top cadres of the People's Liberation Army Manipur including their Chairman Thodam Kunj Bihari Singh was killed - But it was an intense firefight.



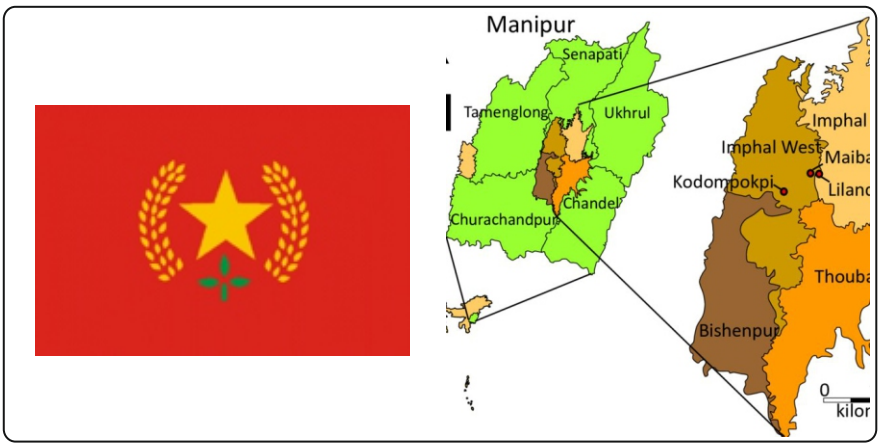
PLA Cadres on their 41st Raising Day. Photo Credit www.sangaiexpress.com

OPERATION KUNJ BIHARI

- An encounter at Kadampokpi Khunao

In live firing situations, situational awareness is never perfect. Actions are dynamic, with terrorists numbers and positions unclear – and the possibility of own casualties is always high. Military men understand this as "courage under fire." This detailed account depicts the actual dimensions of a counter terror operation.

On 13 April 1982, Subedar Ram Dhari Tiwari and Sepoy Yadunath Prasad laid down their lives in OPERATION KUNJ BIHARI in village Kadampokpi, just about 2-3 km as the crow flies from the battalion HQ located at Tulihal Airport, Imphal, Manipur. This operation, conducted by the four years old 14 BIHAR, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Pinaki Basu led to the elimination of nine hard core extremists – the unit wiped out the entire top leadership of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). While PLA Chairman Kunj Bihari had an award of Rs 20,000/- on his head, the other extremists had awards of Rs 5000/- to Rs10,000/-. This operation has been studied in Army schools of instruction and



(Left) PLA flag. Map showing location of village Kadampokpi (Right).

is amongst the most successful operations ever in Manipur. The crux of the operation was the instantaneous mobilisation of the Quick Reaction Team (QRT). Within three minutes of the go ahead for deployment, the QRT thundered out of the unit main gate. Back in 1976, Lieutenant Colonel ARK Reddy raised 14 BIHAR. By 1981, this young battalion was already a topper in the Army echelons and earned their name as a formidable force. However, the outfit was yet to prove its mettle in actual harsh operations. The end of 1981 saw 14 BIHAR commanded by the second Commanding Officer (CO), Lieutenant Colonel Pinaki Basu as it set off for its first field tenure to the Manipur valley.

A number of insurgent organisations were seeking independence within the borders of Manipur. China capitalised on the issue and wooed these insurgent groups with training at Lhasa and supplied them with the wherewithal for war. Thus between 1977 and 1980, the People's Liberation Army of Manipur (PLA), People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK) and the Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP), started acts of terror by loot, ransom and robbery besides terrorising police stations to steal arms and ammunition. So, on 08 September 1980, Manipur was declared a disturbed area, and the Indian Government imposed the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 in the state; the Act currently remains in force.

The Battalion HQ of 14 BIHAR and two rifle companies were located at Tulihal airport in Imphal. It was a fine bright day in the Imphal valley and the unit was readying itself for normal routine sanitising actions and patrolling operations. Imphal in those days was a hotbed of insurgency. The patrols of the previous night were returning to base, while fresh foot and mobile patrols were being launched when the CO received intimation from the Brigade Major (BM) to be ready for a mission. It was about 0700 hours on 13 April 1982 and some insurgent movement had been discerned at a village called Kadampokpi Khunao. The battalion was tasked to seek and eliminate the extremists holed up there.

Kadampokpi is an oval shaped village 10 km South of Imphal surrounded by rice fields near Tulihal airport of Imphal. The village had a bunch of thatched and CGI sheet roofed huts with one double storey brick dwelling. There were thick groves of bamboo hindering visibility and giving good cover interspersed with ponds called *'pukhries'*. The village had an open ground and a school at the edge.

Lieutenant Colonel Pinaki Basu knew the area intimately; he immediately appreciated that speed and surprise was of the essence. Terrorists never hang around for too long and they were possibly vacating the previous night's hideout. Major OP Deswal with 2nd Lieutenant Sajjad Ali took off almost instantaneously with the QRT since they were already on readiness. Their task was to block all routes and tracks into and out of the village. Following on their heels, two 50 men columns mobilised to cordon the village off - one from the North and East and the other from the South and West.

It was a text book cordon with the men creeping upon their designated blocks and stops with stealth. The cordon was effective by 0800 hours and the troops began to close in towards the dwellings. Drills had been perfected over so many relentless hours of training and the exquisiteness of the manoeuvre was such that the terrorists had no clue that doom was about to befall them. They were oblivious to the fact that four search parties were closing in. As the cordon tightened cutting off escape routes, the CO and his command team located themselves in the village school to control the cordon and search groups. Four search parties under Major OP Deswal, Major RK Bains, Captain Ajit Singh and 2nd Lieutenant Sajjad Ali fanned out in a systematic fashion to search out

the terrorists. Till then, no one was aware of where they were holed up. The search parties were clearly briefed as to their area of search with boundaries visibly demarcated so that there would be no overlap and to obviate casualties due to friendly fire.

At about 0810 hours, the extremists opened up with heavy and accurate fire on the search party led by Captain Ajit Singh. The officer keeping his calm about him, deployed his team and returned the fire. Despite the Meitei extremists firing from a vantage point, Ajit engaged them effectively and closed in towards them, moving from cover to cover.

The CO immediately ordered Major Deswal to rush towards the scene of fire and aid and reinforce Captain Ajit's team. Major Deswal moved up to Ajit's position and took command of the situation. The CO also closed in on the spot from a different direction cautioning the cordon to remain alert and ready to quell any break made by the militants. Apparently, this was a diversion by the suicide squad of the terrorists to hold the Army's attention while their colleagues made their escape. At about 0830 hours, a group of militants were seen trying to escape to the South. Major Deswal asked Ajit to take his team and cut off their escape route. Ajit accompanied by Subedar RD Tewari moved out and managed to cut off the escape route. A volley of fire broke out, and Ajit and his boys crawled towards the fire when they spotted one youth making a break towards the rice fields. Heavy exchange of fire followed in which Captain Ajit was hit - before he lost consciousness, he let off a volley of shots at the fleeing terrorist and wounded him.

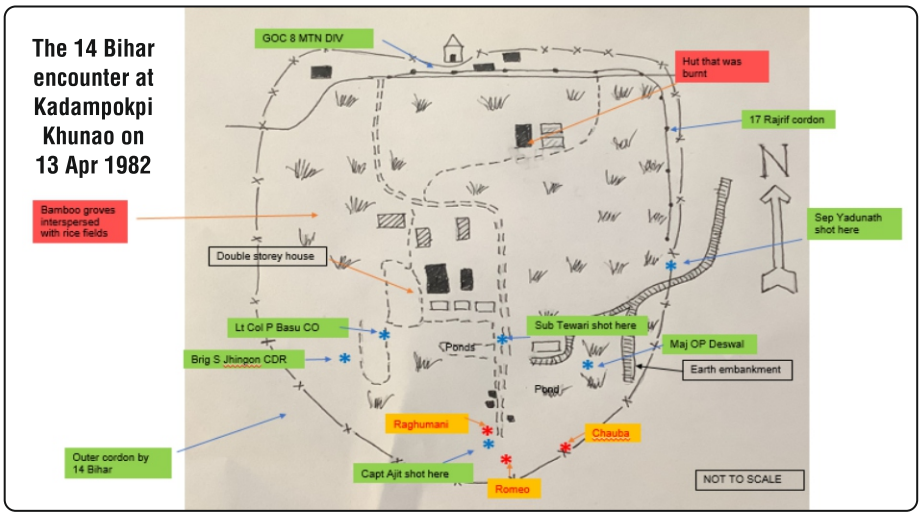
The outer cordon then pounced on him and brought him down. Meanwhile the men in Captain Ajit's assault team tried to evacuate him out of the field of fire but were unable to do so as the PLA terrorists continued a steady barrage of fire from their vantage position in the double storey building. Subedar Ram Dhari Tewari took charge of the situation, determined to extricate his Captain and charged towards the extremist fire thus diverting attention from the hail of fire directed towards Ajit's prone body. As he moved ahead, he saw a youth emerging from the house with arms raised in surrender.

In a sudden lull of gunfire, the Subedar moved forward to arrest him expecting him to surrender when a bullet cracked the silence felling Subedar Tewari at almost point blank range. The surrender ruse was successful; a good army soldier bit the dust.

Meanwhile young Sajjad and his party closed in towards the fire fight that had broken out near the double storey building. He saw the action to recover Ajit and reported the matter to CO, who told him to work under command Major OP Deswal and retrieve the situation. Keeping an earthen bank as cover, Sajjad crawled back towards Major Deswal. Enroute, he saw Subedar Tewari's unresponsive body and informed Major Deswal, who ordered him to storm the building.

Under the covering fire of rifles and machine guns, the improvised assault team charged the double storey building. One terrorist was felled while the rest dispersed into the bamboo thicket. In the meanwhile, Major OP Deswal's team was engaging another group of terrorists who were trying to escape under covering fire from the double storey building. He dropped an extremist trying to crawl away along the earthen bund with one clean shot. The terrorist dropped his Belgian G 3 automatic rifle and fell into the adjacent pond. Later he was identified as Raghumani, a hardcore PLA extremist and a jail escapee.

Lance Naik Kamal Deo who was close by saw three more extremists in the same party trying to escape by



Sketch depicting Operation Kunj Bihari actions



PLA Celebrates 43rd Raising Day. Photo Credit www.sangaiexpress.com

crawling away. Major Deswal shouted at them to surrender but they returned his call with automatic fire. So Deswal shot one extremist in the leg, he was later identified as Romeo Singh the notorious leader of PLA Unit No 1. At this juncture Major Deswal and Kamal Deo came under effective fire from the double storey house, but their 9 mm carbines were ineffective due to the distance. So, Kamal crawled back and returned with a rifle. The extremists were in the meantime kept under suppressive fire.

Alert Kamal Deo saw an extremist aiming for Major Deswal and immediately shot him with two consecutive shots thus enabling Major Deswal to close in. The wounded extremist was later identified as Rajen alias Chaubal, another hardcore PLA member. There was a lull that followed, another militant made a break in a futile bid to escape. Firing with his pistol he ran through the cordon but Havildar Philmon Kujur raced behind him and tackled him to the ground. He was identified as Robin, second in command of the PLA, another jail escapee and the mastermind of the Imphal jail break on 11 January 1982. The CO had by now set up the command post at the school, and the unit medical officer Major Asis De set up the regimental aid post (RAP) also alongside. An identification post was also set up in the open ground adjacent to the school and the villagers were made to assemble there. The operation continued, Major Deswal's party closed in on the bamboo grove. At this time Sajjad's party had occupied a part of the double storey building while Major Bains and Captain Verma constantly monitored the outer and inner cordons. On the spot interrogation of the wounded extremists by Sajjad revealed that the trapped extremists in the double storey house were the mobile HQ of the PLA and included their Chairman Kunj Bihari.

This news electrified the boys who were now determined to wipe out the entire opposition. While this encounter was going on, the CO reached with his team to the North of the double storey house which had barred windows with good observation all around. The CO's team engaged the house from that direction. He realized that the extremists being driven back in their attempts to escape would become even more desperate. He thickened the cordon with more Bihari soldiers. Major Deswal and Lance Naik Kamal Deo then crawled up to Captain Ajit who was lying unconscious. However, they got pinned down due to accurate fire from the house the militants were holed up in. Deswal then redeployed his team to engage the extremists with covering fire. Havildar Philmon decided to make a second attempt to evacuate Captain Ajit. With total disregard to personal safety and full of concern for the fallen officer who needed emergent medical attention, Philmon braved the hail of bullets and brought Ajit out. On learning that Ajit was grievously wounded with a gunshot wound to the head, Major Asis De, the unit Regimental Medical Officer (RMO) rushed to the spot despite the firing going on. He met the evacuation party enroute and rendered immediate and lifesaving first aid which eventually saved the life of the officer. Ajit was not bleeding, but brain fluid was leaking and he needed emergent medical assistance.

2nd Lieutenant Sajjad and his men then crawled up to about ten yards of Subedar Tewari's prone body but were forced to take cover due to accurate fire from the building. With the help of covering fire from Deswal's party, Sajjad again crawled out and recovered Subedar Tewari, who was found to be dead. The brigade commander also reached the scene of action and joined the CO about 50 yards from the house. He was briefed about all the actions that had taken place so far. Major Deswal was ordered to regroup and rush the house from the West. On reaching the house, Deswal found that the extremists had crawled away to the North East of the building. In their hurry they had abandoned their packs, clothing, documents and equipment at the site. One Self

Loading Rifle was also recovered later in a pond.

At this time heavy fire was heard from the Eastern part of the village. The extremists were attempting to rush the cordon at that area and were trying to break through. Sepoy Yadunath Prasad who was in the block position observed them trying to jump the cordon and opened up with rifle fire and wounded one extremist. Despite the several number of extremists, Yadunath displayed gallantry and presence of mind and drove them back. The terrorists became desperate and fired back, he was hit by a burst of automatic fire in the chest. Undeterred Yadunath continued firing till he breathed his last. This courageous action by Sepoy Yadunath prevented the Meitei extremists from escaping and they were forced to seek shelter in a nearby house and make a last ditch stand there. Considering the intense action in progress, the brigade commander had ordered 17 Rajputana Rifles (Raj Rif) to reinforce the operation. One Raj Rif company reinforced the 14 BIHAR cordon at the Eastern part of the village and CO 17 Raj Rif was told to close in on the house where the hostiles had taken shelter.

OP Deswal and his team moved to the Eastern part of the village where Sepoy Yadunath lay. While his team gave covering fire, Naik Chamru Oraon wriggled forward to retrieve Yadunath's body. Thereafter Major Deswal's team closed in within 50 yards of the Meitei extremists hideout. The Raj Rif column had also closed in on the house within 50 yards directly opposite Deswal's team. The Brigade Commander joined the Raj Rif column led by Lieutenant Colonel Yash Bhatia. The hostiles were warned to surrender but they continued to fire. The hut was set on fire but the extremists continued a staccato fire through the inferno till the hut began to collapse. They then emerged one by one firing their weapons and were felled in succession.

Suddenly the sound of helicopter rotors added to the din of the firefight. The General Officer Commanding (GOC) 8 Mountain Division was enroute for a meeting with the Chief Minister of Manipur, when he learnt of the encounter and diverted to the scene of the operation. It was a lucky break for the wounded Ajit. Major Asis De, the RMO accompanied Ajit, who was flown out to Military Hospital Zakhama in Nagaland. This action saved Ajit's life who had a grievous gunshot wound to his head. Major Asis De's commitment and dedication earned him a VSM. In fact, the GOC himself ensured this award.

The last hostile was smoked out by about 1300 hours after which a detailed search of the place was carried out. The cordon remained in place during the night of 13/14 April 1982 and as soon as 14 April dawned Major RK Bains conducted another detailed search of the village and considerable material was recovered. On 13 April 82, seven extremists were killed, five were wounded and one taken alive. Of the wounded two succumbed to their injuries. A total of 13 extremists who comprised the complete PLA HQ were accounted for and neutralised. Kunj Bihari, the leader of the rebels was eliminated - lady luck really smiled on 14 BIHAR that day.

A word about 2nd Lieutenant Sajjad Ali the youngest officer of the unit. It was good old Sajjad who was in the forefront of the action, always breaking through and always the cause of success. He was Deswal's right hand man who set up the action by fire and movement, causing the militants to lose their balance and attempt to escape. My only regret is that he was not recognised adequately. The battalion earned awards as follows: Captain Ajit Singh, Kirti Chakra, Major O P Deswal, Shaurya Chakra, Havildar Philmon Kujur, Shaurya Chakra, Lance Naik Kamal Deo Singh, Sena Medal, Lieutenant Colonel Pinaki Basu, Vishisht Seva Medal and Major Asis De, Vishisht Seva Medal.

In infantry parlance we talk of brotherhood, which epitomises esprit-de-corps in any operation of war. Good COs instill these values and 14 BIHAR was led by such role models. It is also seen that after an action, some undue credit is also taken by those not as deserving. In Operation Kunj Bihari, the brigade commander was awarded a Kirti Chakra for an operation executed by Lieutenant Colonel Pinaki Basu, VSM who coolly led from the front armed with just the CO's baton and his packet of Capstan cigarettes!

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Colonel Ashok Mukerjee an alumnus of Lawrence School, Lovedale and NDA, was commissioned into 14 BIHAR in June 1980. He has served in myriad appointments in insurgency and high altitude areas in the North East and J&K. He was also an instructor in the Commando Wing, Infantry School at Belagavi. He is presently settled in Delhi.



Col Ashok Mukerjee

TURMOIL in the valley in the 1990s

Kashmiri Pandits take flight - a mass exodus, the Indian Army pulls Kashmir back from the brink. Pakistan pushes in foreign terrorists to up the ante. A proxy war playing out....

This time travel traces the ups and downs of the Kashmir violence, the volatile situation in the early 90s, the restoration of calm by mid 90s, the resurgence of violence with foreign terrorists flooding the Valley, the expansion to the South of the Pir Panjal, the revival of the political process, and so on, leading to the Kargil Conflict.



Brig Mohinder Singh, PUNJAB Regiment, in front of charred Charar-e-Sharief, May 1995. Photo Credit Meraj ud Din, Kashmir Life

Pakistan as a nation, its Army in particular, is obsessed with Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), and more so the Kashmir Valley, and this continues to bedevil relations between the two neighbours. With its weak polity and a domineering military, democracy could not take deep roots in Pakistan, which has witnessed several military dictatorships since its independence. The disdain with which the military looks upon its political class and the extra-constitutional authority that it wields through the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in policy and decision making is an open secret. Kashmir for Pakistan Army is not only the unfinished agenda of Partition but is also its raison d'etre, which it considers of paramount importance to retain its relevance as the

primary power centre of the country. Having suffered a humiliating defeat in 1971 by losing its Eastern wing, and after unsuccessful attempts to wrest control of the Kashmir valley militarily in conventional conflicts, late General Zia-ul-Haq decided to opt for covert, unconventional approaches in the low-intensity conflict domain and conceived the diabolical 'Operation Topac' to inflict a 'thousand cuts' on us. Having supported the terrorism based secessionist movement in Punjab in the early eighties, Pakistan stoked the fires of a massive insurrection in the Kashmir valley in the early nineties.

There have always been isolated but nonetheless strong currents of dissidence in Kashmir. The political situation which eventually led to the outbreak of insurgency had its genesis in the 1983 State Assembly elections when a majority government of Mr Farooq Abdullah was replaced by Mr GM Shah, a lame duck Chief Minister, whose Government was dismissed after a short tenure. Mr. Farooq Abdullah's National Conference (NC) returned to power in alliance with the Congress Party after the 1987 state elections. The local population perceived that the coalition between the Congress and the NC had deprived them of an effective platform to air their grievances and protest against the wrong doings of the Centre.

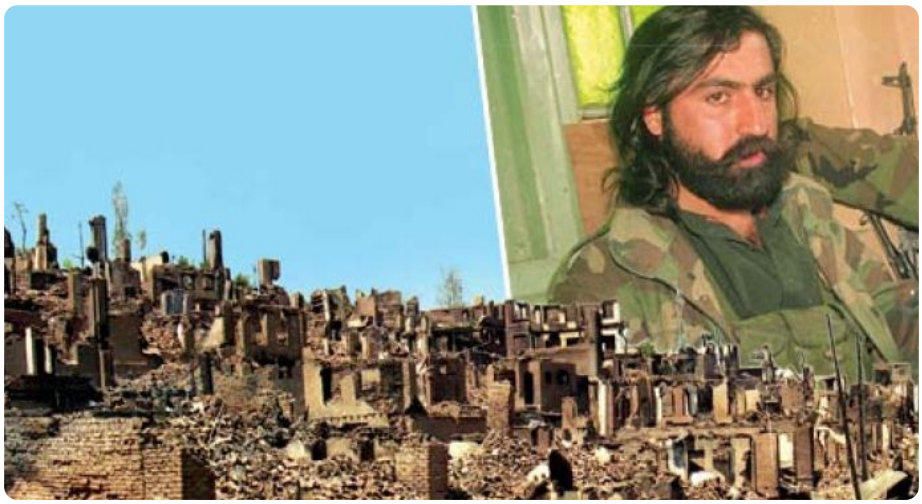
In the mid 1980's, Pakistan began locating, training and equipping the misguided youth in the valley, most of whom were against the Centre's rule in Kashmir. To activate this plan, they used Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), an organisation which espoused independence from both India and Pakistan. Pakistan had correctly assessed that the Islamists had very little appeal in the Valley and the only group which had some grass root support was the pro Independence JKLF.

This also provided a plausible explanation that the insurgency in the Valley was an independent and indigenous liberation struggle and that Pakistan was only providing diplomatic and moral support in their struggle for independence. In the initial stages, Pakistan allowed the JKLF to handle the insurgency but by early nineties had abandoned them in favour of the pro-Pakistan groups like the Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) which became the main militant group by 1991.

In 1989, the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan witnessed a dangerous phase and the Valley was engulfed in an unprecedented violent uprising, the likes of which had not been witnessed before. The incidents of 1989 in the Valley represented the greatest danger to the sovereignty of the Indian State, and a greater challenge than the secessionist movements in Nagaland and Punjab.

It was no longer a law and order problem but was the first indication of a rebellion which soon took on the character of a full-fledged insurgency with active support from Pakistan. In the initial phase, Pakistan launched a massive psychological operation to subvert large segments of the society and create a wedge between the majority Muslim population and the minority Hindu populace, leading to the mass exodus of the Kashmiri Pandits. The theme of these operations was to indoctrinate the population and make them believe that their interests would be better protected and served by aligning with Pakistan and becoming a part of that country. A well-orchestrated campaign was undertaken to infiltrate the government, particularly the police, education department and the judiciary.

The Dukhtaran e Millat, the rightist wing which takes up women's issues, passed strictures to compulsorily wear burqas and follow Islamic laws which lay large restrictions on conduct of women. Similarly, Hindi movies and



The destroyed Charar-e-Sharief: Image of Mast Gul to the top right. Photo Credit Kashmir Life.



From Inside Hazratbal Shrine, October 1993. Photo credit Gert Holmertz, trekearth.com

any goods coming from the mainland were banned. Pakistan had to a great extent succeeded in influencing the predominantly Muslim population that the future of Kashmir lies with Pakistan.

In early 1990 our intelligence network was more or less non-functional and no worthwhile information was forthcoming. This was also the year in which the proxy war gained momentum and the terrorists succeeded in destroying infrastructure, communication networks and looting banks for their organisational funding.

A wave of terror spread in the valley, which compelled the Centre to enact the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in J&K in September 1990. The civil administration had more or less collapsed and the police was totally compromised. The occasional information when passed to the Army was out dated and generic in nature, like, a large number of militants were seen in such and such village, or that a number of them were expected to gather at a certain location in the next few days. Several operations were launched with no success and resulted in jungle bashing and fatigue to the troops. The population remained alienated.

15 Corps, operationally responsible for the Valley was woefully short of troops, and therefore 8 Mountain Division was shifted into the Valley from Nagaland. With the additional troops in the Valley the Counter Insurgency grid was reorganised and a number of successful encounters took place with the terrorists. While the uprising was contained to a large extent in the Valley, another ominous dimension was added; the insurgency began to spread across the Pir Panjal Ranges, to the neighbouring Doda District. In the summer of 1993, 39 Mountain Division was inducted and deployed in South Kashmir, leaving North Kashmir operationally under 8 Mountain Division. Our intelligence network improved and our operations widened to engulf area domination, road opening, cordon and search and winning the hearts and minds of the local population. Our psychological operations based on large scale civic action programmes and operations executed on specific actionable intelligence were meeting with some success in rural areas. The larger urban centres like Srinagar and Sopore had a considerable presence of militants who were actively supported by the local population. Similarly in South Kashmir, with the marginalisation of JKLF, the HM became very active in Anantnag, Kulgam, Shopiyan and Tral. The urban centres were by and large under the Border Security Force (BSF) and Central Reserve Police Force, and despite their presence in large numbers, the mujaheddin roamed about freely.

Religion played a dominant role in spreading the insurgency and discontentment amongst the youth across the Valley. In October 1993, information was received that Hazratbal mosque with 120 civilian worshippers, had been intruded by approximately forty terrorists who were planning to open the lock of the room where the Holy Relic (Moi-e-Muqaddas, hair of the Prophet) was placed. The aim of the militants was to force the security forces to storm the mosque and release the hostages and in the process damage the holy shrine. Fortunately, the security forces did not resort to force and instead laid a siege, and under court orders, subsequently supplied food to the hostages and the terrorists. Negotiations commenced with the terrorists, and after fifteen days, the siege ended by giving a safe passage to the militants.

Another important urban centre under the control of the militants was Sopore, 50 kms North of Srinagar, and the fourth largest town in the Valley, perhaps the richest after Srinagar. It had become the hot bed of extremism and religious intolerance. Being close to the Line of Control (LC), it was the most convenient place

for the militants to collect and regroup after successfully infiltrating across the LC. By late 1993 it came to be identified as a Liberated Zone and the "Rajdhani" of the militants. By end 1993, in a phased operation stretching over two months, 15 Corps cleared the town with minimum civilian casualties and made it safe for vehicles and convoys to pass through freely. With the situation improving, 39 Mountain Division was deinducted from South Kashmir and 8 Mountain Division once again assumed operational responsibility of the Valley with an additional RR Sector inducted from Punjab.

Srinagar town however, continued to remain under the BSF. After the success at Sopore, operations in the South were intensified in the urban centres surrounding Kulgam and Tral.

With the intensification of operations by the Army duly supported by the police and paramilitary forces, the militants began to suffer heavy losses in encounters. Gradually, the Kashmiri youth began to give up arms, but the presence of foreign militants was seeing a steady rise. It was generally believed that they had hijacked the insurgency at the behest of Pakistan. Notwithstanding this, the situation had improved considerably and the Centre was contemplating restoration of the political process. In a deliberate and desperate move by ISI to delay the political process, the terrorists laid siege at the holy Shrine of the Sufi Saint Sheikh Noor-u-Din Wali at Charar-e-Sharief, also known as the Holy Charar, which finally led to its destruction in mid-1995. After his death in 1460 CE, a Ziarat was built for the Saint which was revered as the second most holy place in Kashmir, next only to Hazratbal, worshipped by both Hindus and Muslims. Due to the religious sentiments associated with the Shrine, security forces stayed away from the town, and when they did go there, it was with utmost restraint and never into the Ziarat complex.

The absence of security forces from the close proximity of the mosque allowed the town to be extensively used by the militants for rest and recuperation. The town was traditionally a HM stronghold and at any given time it would have 20-30 local militants and 10-15 foreign terrorists. A tacit understanding had developed amongst the tanzeems to keep the area free of inter group rivalry. Within the administration and the residents too there was an understanding that the mujaheddin would be left alone provided they did not indulge in violence in the town. There was a stalemate between the militants and the security forces, mainly due to the latter's respect in maintaining the sanctity of the Shrine.

By early May 1995 there were indications that the terrorists were moving into the Shrine. The layout of the terrain precluded establishing of a close cordon as was done at Hazratbal. Taking advantage of this and the security forces reservations on storming the Shrine, the terrorists led by the notorious Mast Gul, a Pakistani militant, set the Shrine on fire on night 11/12 May 1995. In the gun fight which ensued twenty terrorists were killed, but Mast Gul managed to escape.

While this incident was a setback, the strategy adopted by the security forces of wearing out the militants by attrition, restoring local trade, sealing the LC and promoting tourism was bearing results. There was a sharp decline in the encounters and to enhance troop levels in the Valley, Counter Insurgency Force (Victor) was raised in Anantnag in November 1994. A number of initiatives were also bearing fruit.

A Surrender Policy formulated by the government which included a sum of money for every weapon surrendered depending on its calibre



Charar-e-Sharief Shrine and Inset Hazratbal Shrine, photo credit en.wikipedia.org



Kukka Parray with his Ikhwan. Photo Credit Kashmir Life.

and a monthly dole of Rs 1500/- led to frequent surrenders and a certain amount of disenchantment with the militancy. This gave rise to the Ikhwanis, the Counter Militant Group led by Mohammed Yusuf Parray, better known as Kukka Parray, who came overground and cooperated with the Army to root out the atrocities of the HM.

With the improvement in the law and order situation and a reduction in the militancy, an environment had been created to take the political process forward. The decision to hold parliamentary elections in May 1996 was taken as a trial run for the important assembly elections, and with the successful conduct of the former, the assembly elections were held in September 1996. The restoration of the democratic process revitalised the police force which had become defunct and with operational successes in encounters their confidence was restored. Schools and colleges began to function and commercial activities including tourism resumed. While the NC led state government revived the administration, the Army continued to maintain its pressure on the militants and along with the offensive operations conducted civic actions to ameliorate the hardships of the Awaam, particularly in the rural areas.

By the late 1990's, the militancy was past its peak though residual insurgency still remained in the rural areas. Srinagar, Sopore and other urban centres had been freed of militants, with paramilitary forces being retained to enforce normal law and order. The change in the character of the insurgency resulted in better support from the local population and consequently an improved intelligence network. Attacks on the Army were less frequent, though there was an increase in targeting the civil police and paramilitary forces. Internationally and in the United Nations, the interest in Kashmir had steadily receded. In this changed environment, and to revive the international interest in Kashmir, in May 1999 Pakistan perfidiously intruded with regular forces in the Kargil sector leading to the war which once again resulted in its humiliating defeat.

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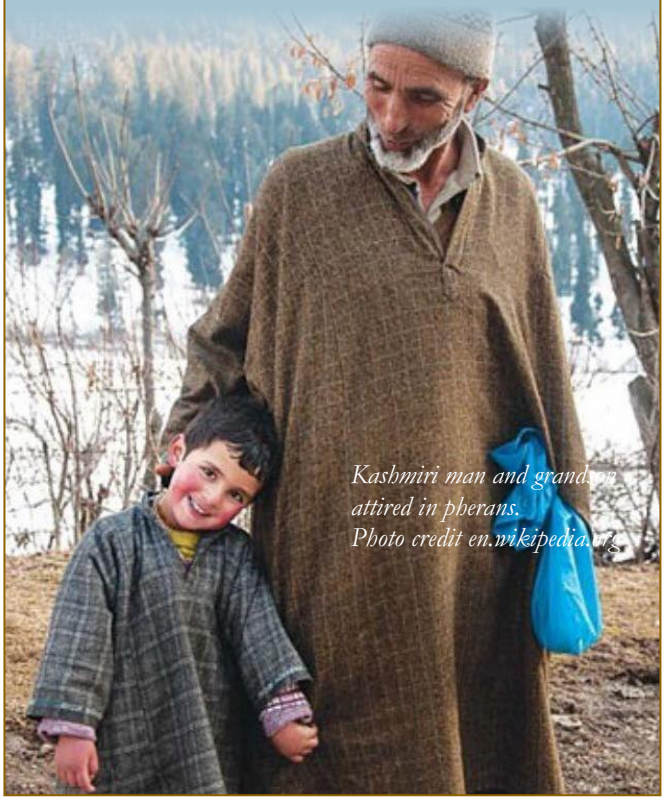
Lt Gen Mohinder Puri

The battle against terror must be won not only in the physical domain but also by dominating the "battle of narratives" in the cognitive domain, through better cultural empathy with the people.



Kashmiri man and grandson attired in pherans. Photo credit en.wikipedia.org

CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE in Counter Insurgency Operations

Sun Tzu had emphasised the importance of knowing the enemy, in his treatise on the Art of War. This article highlights that cultural inputs about the area of operations help the soldier and leader understand his adversary and related aspects in a far better way.

The recent withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan has brought to fore many lessons about the conduct of sub conventional operations. Pertinently, one of the peculiar characteristics of the coalition troops in Afghanistan was their cultural incompatibility which contributed to the hardening of negative sentiments amongst the local population. Many analysts feel that the lack of cultural understanding was probably one of the biggest weaknesses in the conduct of military operations in Afghanistan.

It is therefore essential to assimilate the importance of cultural intelligence. This important facet of modern conflict is commonly defined as *"understanding of local culture, customs, behaviour, etc and incorporating them in military operations"*.[1]

However, despite growing awareness about the importance of cultural understanding, application of cultural intelligence in planning and execution of military operations has generally been neglected.

[1]Juan Carlos Ant nez, Understanding the Operational Environment: the Human Dimension, https://global-strategy.org/understanding-the-operational-environment-the-human-dimension/, Accessed February 12, 2022

In asymmetric conflicts like the ones that are currently being faced by the Indian Army in Jammu and Kashmir and the North Eastern States of India, cultural spaces are also an extension of the battle field. Unless the security forces understand local sensitivities and traditions, they cannot contest the false narratives that are being propagated through diverse domains like arts, music and literature. It is therefore essential that commanders at all levels must encourage the understanding of local culture and ensure development of cross cultural competencies amongst their subordinates. The security forces should not only undertake people friendly operations but also work towards winning "hearts and minds". **However, several officers in the Armed Forces consider these activities as "futile" and "unwarranted diversions from their core tasks".**

In our context, cultural awareness can certainly assist the security forces in enabling more meaningful engagement of the Awaam in Jammu and Kashmir. Similarly a thorough knowledge of the cultural landscape will help units successfully navigate through the complexities of multi ethnic, multi tribal insurgencies in the North East.

Developing Cultural Competence

Cultural intelligence involves acquiring knowledge about the people, developing language capabilities and understanding social habits. This helps in creating an accurate picture of the *"human terrain"* within which terrorists organisations may be operating. This also enables better understanding of all actors in the battle space and the ground realities that may be driving the violent cycle of insurgency. For example, why does a particular area always remain volatile or why does a specific sect have more followers? Similarly, there are many facets which make mapping and understanding of the cultural terrain in the area of operations a vital component of military planning. These range from studying characteristics of population to analysing demographic fault lines and anticipating local behaviour.

It is also a continuous process of learning the historical, social and cultural aspects of an area. Since Indian Army is concerned primarily with sub conventional operations in J & K, and North East, this implies that an institutional focus on inculcating knowledge in these aspects must be made. Modern armies across the globe have now begun to recognise the value of developing **"Cultural Quotient"** (CQ) as an important military trait. Dr. David Livermore of the Cultural Intelligence Institute describes CQ as *"the capability to function effectively across national, ethnic, and organizational cultures."*[3] Troops with high CQ are likely to perform better as they have the requisite **skills to relate** and adapt to the values, beliefs and styles of communication of people from different cultures.

It is felt that many officers and troops are not well conversant with the local demographic peculiarities in the area of responsibility. This aspect should therefore be emphasized in the pre induction training and also be encouraged on a regular basis during the period of deployment in a counter insurgency area. Establishment of *"cultural galleries"* in Headquarters of formations / units highlighting the peculiar aspects of local traditions and customs can contribute immensely to promoting cultural intelligence. Commanders at all levels can also explore avenues to incentivize the imbibing of local knowledge and expertise amongst their command in order to encourage the pursuit of cultural competencies. Creating a vast pool of soldiers who can speak the local language will be another potent force multiplier for any unit / subunit.

Operational Value

The need for cultural intelligence for conduct of, kinetic as well as non-kinetic operations, in any low intensity conflict is immense. In Counter Insurgency / Counter Terror operations, intelligence is absolutely critical for success. Personal contact with vast sections of the population enables effective generation of intelligence. These contacts can be developed and strengthened only if there is a greater understanding of the mindset of the people amongst which both security forces and terrorists operate. A deep cultural knowledge also assists in smooth conduct of operations. Cultural competencies such as the ability to converse with locals in their language and awareness about their habits can reduce the complexities of operating in densely populated areas. That is why, the equation of any unit /subunit with the local population is often the defining factor in successful combating of terrorists in the area of responsibility.

Special Forces and intelligence operatives, in particular, have over the years, experienced the importance of cultural nuances while operating in the counter insurgency environment in J and K and North East India. Slight deviations from local practices such as use of an inappropriate gesture or an

[3] About Cultural Intelligence ,https://culturalq.com/about-cultural-intelligence/ ,Accessed February04 ,2022



US Marines interview an Afghan, December 2009. Photo credit AP

unusual expression have compromised many covert and clandestine operations in the past.

One of the biggest challenges faced while operating in a counter insurgency environment is the difficulty in differentiating between innocent civilians and terrorists. A thorough understanding of the population and their cultural habits enables the commanders and troops to distinguish between sceptical civilians, fence sitters, sympathisers, hybrid terrorists and ideologically motivated hard-core terrorists.

By virtue of its employment in the low intensity conflict environment, the Indian Army plays a significant role in integrating the people of these areas into the national mainstream. Unless officers and troops take it upon themselves to understand and assimilate aspects such as the historical context, traditions and identity markers of local population, they will not be able to contribute effectively towards mainstreaming of these areas. In areas like Kashmir Valley, where agitational dynamics have become a key ingredient in the prevailing operational environment, understanding social norms and personal traits can be quite helpful in analysing how people will interpret and react to various events and even predict their behaviour. For example, if commanders are fully aware of the cultural tendencies of people, they can often predict the possibilities of unrest and protests in their area of responsibility.

Perception management and Information Operations constitute a key component of the fight against terror. Every unit / subunit contributes to the efforts in this domain through various civic action and outreach efforts. Every soldier therefore becomes an "information warrior" who should be sensitive to the sensibilities of local population. This **"cultural empathy"** amongst all ranks needs to be developed by introducing them to the different aspects of cultural intelligence.

To sum up, the battle against terror can be won not only by neutralising terrorists and their support structures in the physical domain but also by dominating the "battle of narratives" in the cognitive domain. A greater cultural understanding of the ways and habits of local people is an essential prerequisite for waging this psychological campaign. Just imagine the impact of a company commander who can engage a religiously indoctrinated youth in a theological debate and discourage him from joining the terrorist ranks. This is what cultural empathy can ultimately achieve. What we can do for a start is to observe closely, listen patiently, talk extensively, understand clearly, appreciate and assimilate.

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Col Sushil Tanwar

The NAGA INSURGENCY
- the mother of all insurgencies

The Naga movement has been a major security issue for India since the early 50s. In this educative overview, the author traces the historical origins of the problem, and reviews the dynamics of the Naga Armed Groups and the peace process therein.

"Truly, we are a peculiar people. We are all equals. Men and women have equal status. We have no caste divisions, no high class or low class of people, we believe in that form of democratic government which permits the rule not of the majority but of the people as a whole. We have no land tax, no wine tax, no water tax. Forests, rivers and woodland belong to the people for their exploitation without paying taxes. We have no beggars, and wonders of wonders, we have no jails. We do not 'arrest' or 'imprison' anybody…. We fear nobody, individually or collectively. We are a healthy people and fear corrupts the health of man…. We talk freely, live freely and fight freely too. We have no inhibitions of any kind…. Wild? Yes …But free. There is order in this chaos, law in this freedom. If we were to choose a country, it would be my Nagaland, my fair Nagaland - again and again"

-AZ Phizo, Naga Leader



Adinno Phizo, daughter of AZ Phizo. Photo credit economictimes.indiatimes.com

Backdrop

North East India as a whole is not a single entity with a common political destiny; rather it comprises eight different states. The tribal communities in the Northeast are living on the fringe of three nation states: India, China and Myanmar.

Historically, some of these communities played the roles of buffer communities, and others the roles of bridge communities between these nation states. This region is of geopolitical importance to the Indian sub-continent due to its terrain, location and peculiar demographic dynamics. However, it's 40 million population accounts for only 3.1% of the Indian population. Post-independence, the history of this region has been marred by bloodshed, tribal feuds and under-development. Protracted deployment and

operations by the Army and the Assam Rifles have reduced the levels of violence and restored the security situation to ensure that civil governance elements can function. But over the years, the governance of the region continues to be a challenge.

In 1817, the Burmese empire invaded Assam and in 1819, annexed the independent Kingdom of Manipur. In 1823, they also annexed the Kingdom of Cachar, a strategic area for the impending invasion of Bengal. In March 1824, Britain officially declared war on Burma, a war which ended two years later with the signing of the Treaty of Yandabo.

The Nagas emerged as a political entity on 24th February 1826, the day representatives of the Kingdom of Burma and the British military signed the Treaty of Yandabo, in which Burma renounced all claims to Assam and Manipur. This westward expansion pursued by Burma which was at that time, the most powerful kingdom in Southeast Asia had begun in the 1780s when Burmese troops occupied the independent Kingdom of Arakan and crossed for the first time the Eastern border of British India. Gradually Britain occupied the whole of Assam and intensified its diplomatic and military relations with Manipur, which was intended to have a key position in monitoring and defending the border between Burma and the British sphere of influence.

The Naga Club

"If the British government, however, wants to throw us away, we pray that we should not be thrust into the mercy of the people who could never have conquered us themselves, and to whom we were never subjected but leave us alone to determine for ourselves as in ancient times." -Naga Club memorandum.

The origin of Naga dissent or the beginning of the thought of an independent state is traceable to colonial patronage and probably manifested itself in the British backing of a rudimentary "club" in 1918. It was called the **"Naga Club"** and consisted informally of some Naga government officials, who submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission on 10 January 1929.



Naga Club meeting on 13 November 2021 at Kohima. Photo credit eastmojo.com

All 20 signatories were mainly from Kohima, mostly from the Angami tribe. No representative of any other Naga tribe met the Simon Commission, wherein they explained to them that *"You (British) are the only people who have ever conquered us and when you go, we should be as we were."* Socio-economic issues raised pertained to poor education; a small population and fear of an impending "alien" rule. They feared that their minority presence in the Council of the Assam province would be politically inconsequential. The text of the memorandum showed the emergence of "ethnic solidarity."

The Naga Club further induced the birth of several tribal-based Naga Councils, the Lotha Council 1923, the Ao Council 1928 and several others by the mid-1940s. British officials persuaded the Nagas to change the name of the Naga Club to the "Naga Hills District Tribal Council" in 1945.

The Naga National Council

"The Naga insurgent groups hold that theirs is an independence movement and not secessionist. The argument is that they lost their freedom to the British as did India and that the colonial power ruled both from Delhi as a matter of convenience, even as they fragmented the Naga peoples by placing them under different administrative jurisdictions within India and Burma, which was long administratively part of India until 1937. Hence, when the British departed in 1947 both India and the Naga people became independent." - BG Verghese.

The Naga Hills District Tribal Council acquired a new name, "Naga National Council" (NNC) in 1946. The NNC initially advocated a simple approach of protest though it matured as a viable political organisation representing the "genuine grievances"

of the Naga tribes. The NNC submitted a four-point memorandum to the government on 19 June 1946, and desired to be constitutionally included in an autonomous Assam with local autonomy and "a separate electorate" for them. The irony was that the NNC was born as a pro-government moderate body intending to improve the economic condition of the Nagas through constitutional means.

Hydari- Naga Agreement 26-28 June 1947

The NNC, in a landmark move, signed a "Nine-Point Understanding" with the Government of India, represented by the British Governor of Assam, Akbar Hydari after talks in June 1947. Clause 9 of the Understanding mentioned the "renewal" or the "re-negotiating" of a new agreement after 10 years. Various historical events contributed to the growth of Naga dissent and the subsequent start of the "insurgency". The NNC leader, Mr AZ Phizo's calls for independence provided a direction to the movement, mainly to the faction he led. This small NNC "Independence group" consisted mostly of members from the Khonoma village and consisted mainly of the Southern and Eastern Angami group, most of them being "relations" of Phizo. Phizo declared Naga independence on 14 August 1947, but there was no furious outbreak of movement or insurgent activity. Rather, in a peaceful atmosphere, on 15 August 1947, the NNC only insisted on the implementation of the "Nine-Point Understanding between Akbar Hydari and the NNC signed in Kohima on 26-28 June 1947", which the Government of India did not accept.

The Naga Insurgency Begins

By June 1955, a rift between Phizo's extremist group and the moderates widened and inter-factional assassinations commenced. At this juncture, a small section of the supporters took Phizo to Zeliang Naga area and thence to Dhaka on 6 December 1956. The then Pakistani government arranged for an El Salvador passport for Phizo, and he reached Zurich in May 1959. Michael Scott, who was once a member of the peace mission, reportedly helped Phizo get to London on 20 June 1960. In 1956, the NNC declared formation of the underground "Federal Government of Nagaland" (FGN). Underground activists started a forcible recruitment drive alongside killings of the informers and other dissidents. Increased violence in Nagaland can be traced from 1955 onwards, as Indian forces were inducted and tried to quell the Naga secession efforts. Armed insurgency began in March 1956. Many of those who opposed Phizo were assassinated, prominent among them being the distinguished T Sakhire, Imkongliba and "General" Kaito Sema.

The State of Nagaland Comes into Being

Nagaland was just a district (Naga Hills district) of Assam until 1957. In order to change this status, some Nagas, who were earlier with the NNC, informally discussed other avenues and started the Naga People's Convention (NPC) and chose Imkongliba Ao as its president. NPC remained very active and organised three Naga People's Conventions during 1957 and 1960. In its very first session held at Kohima from 22-26 August 1957, the NPC proposed for a larger administrative unit by merging the Naga majority Tuensang Division of the then North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) with the Naga Hills district. Nehru met the NPC delegation on 25 September 1957. In July 1960, following discussions between PM Nehru and the NPC leaders, a 16-point agreement was arrived at whereby the Government of India recognised the formation of Nagaland as a full-fledged state within the Union of India. An interim body of 42 members was constituted, which functioned as the de facto council of ministers from February 1961, with Imkongliba Ao as chairman of the interim body and P Shilo as chief executive councillor. Shilo went on to become the first chief minister of Nagaland.

This 16-point agreement was unique in many ways. It acknowledged the distinct status of the Nagas within the Indian federal system. It ensured that no act or law passed by Parliament would affect the religious and social practices of the Nagas, their customary laws and procedure of criminal justice would have no influence in the new state unless passed by a majority vote of the Nagaland legislative assembly. The 13th amendment of the Constitution by which the state of Nagaland was created, not only showed that the Indian democratic system could be flexible but also revealed the accommodative capacity of the Indian Constitution. Gradually a significant section of the Nagas came to concede that the 16-point agreement fulfilled most of their aspirations. But the NNC argued that the 16-point agreement was a complete "sellout" of the Naga political cause. Ultimately the growing animosity between the NNC and the NPC resulted in the assassination of Imkongliba.

The establishment of the state of Nagaland led to another turning point because a sizeable group of "over-ground" Naga leaders had emerged, who chose to participate in the electoral democratic political

system, which resulted in the formation of the Nagaland Nationalist Organisation (NNO). A second political party emerged in the shape of the Democratic Party of Nagaland, which harboured sympathy for the secessionist underground group. In the aftermath of the total boycott of two Indian general elections of 1952 and 1957, the NPC and the Interim Body confronted the first test of "democracy" and successfully organised the general elections in Nagaland during January 1964. Amazingly, over 70% of Nagas exercised their franchise. This set-in motion the growth and maturing of electoral politics in Nagaland and caused a setback to the insurgency. This has continued ever since, right till the national elections of 2019.

The 60s and 70s Peace Process

The ongoing Indo-Naga peace process has continued over the past several decades and still eludes culmination. The peace talks of the 1960s had resulted in the 16-point agreement and the establishment of the "Peace Mission" consisting of Michael Scott, an Anglican pastor, Jayaprakash Narayan, and BP Chaliha, the then Chief Minister of Assam which resulted in a "Cessation of Fire" or a Cease Fire (CF), which first commenced from 23 May 1964. By 1966-67, the venue of the peace talks shifted to New Delhi where six rounds of talks were held, but meanwhile, the NNC, FGN and the Federal Army aggressively increased their bloodshed. On 3 August 1968, "General" Kaito was assassinated. On 8 August 1972, Chief Minister Hokishe Sema had a miraculous escape and his daughter was seriously injured.

By the end of 1968, an anti-communist faction calling itself the "Revolutionary Government of Nagaland" came into being, and then followed a series of splits within the NNC and FGN, largely along "tribal" lines. The government did not extend the ongoing ceasefire and active hostilities restarted. The Nagaland Peace Council was formed again at the initiative of the church leaders along with a liaison committee which succeeded in persuading the underground leaders, who sent six representatives to have discussions. After more than five rounds of talks, the Shillong Accord was signed.

Shillong Accord 11 November 1975

The Naga leaders who signed this accord represented the FGN and NNC where they accepted the surrender of their arms and personnel. The representatives of the underground organisations conveyed their decision, of their own volition, to accept, without condition, the Constitution of India. It was agreed that the arms, now underground, would be brought out and deposited at appointed places. Details for giving effect of this agreement would be worked out between them and representatives of the Government, the security forces, and members of the Liaison Committee. Clause 3 of the accord stated that *"reasonable time would be given for the underground representatives to formulate other issues for discussion for the final settlement"*.

Many of the NNC leaders who were living abroad criticized the agreement saying that the agreement was signed by "representatives of the Naga underground," rather than the organizations like NNC or the FGN. Isak Chisi Swu, then NN Vice-President, and Thuingaleng Muivah, then NNC General Secretary, along with 150 insurgents who were in Myanmar, returning from China at that moment, rejected the agreement terming it as a "betrayal" by the NNC and censured it as a complete "sell-out" of the Naga rights, and swore to fight for unquestionable sovereignty. This led to the creation of a group called the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) which split from their old organisation the NNC on 2nd February 1980.



NSCN leaders with the Prime Minister and then Home Minister after the Framework Agreement in 2015

The NSCN and Factionalism

The Shillong Accord did not lead to peace but instead led to a split within the NNC, which further led to the creation of the NSCN in 1980. The

manifesto of the NSCN was based on the principle of "socialism" for economic solution backed by a spiritual outlook of *"Nagaland for Christ"*. Later, animosity developed within the leadership of NSCN and two factions, the NSCN (IM) and NSCN (Khaplang) emerged by April 1988. The NNC, too, post-Phizo's death split into two factions, one led by Adinno, Phizo's daughter and the other by Khadao Youthan, an old associate of Phizo. Clashes amongst these factions resulted in a large number of Nagas, including those not connected to these groups, being killed. NSCN (K) further split in 2011 to form a splinter group called NSCN (Khole- Khitovi (KK)) which further split into NSCN (Khitovi-Neokpao) (NSCN (KN)). Prolonged violence gave way to hope of peace when NSCN (IM) signed a CF with the Government in 1997 followed by NSCN (K) in 2001. NSCN (KK), on formation, signed a CF with the Government. In 2012, NSCN (K) also entered into a CF Agreement with the Government of Myanmar.

The progress of talks between these groups and the Government suffered a setback in 2015 with NSCN (K) unilaterally abrogating the CF Agreement. This decision of the group led to another split and resulted in the formation of NSCN (Reformation). NSCN (K) further went on to join hands with ULFA (I), NDFB (S) and KYKL to form the United National Liberation Front of Western South East Asia (UNLFW). In short, over the years, every group further split into smaller factions, some more rabidly violent and extreme. This made the prevailing situation even more difficult to deal with.

The Framework Agreement 2015

Ever since the signing of the ceasefire in August 1997, several rounds of talks have been held in India and abroad. NSCN (IM) had held their last discussions in December 2020. The ongoing talks, led by the erstwhile government-appointed interlocutor, Mr Ravi, the Governor of Tamil Nadu, failed. The Union government broadened the scope of the peace talks by roping in six other Naga armed groups. In 2019, post the death of Khaplang, the Khango Konyak-led splinter faction of the NSCN (Khaplang) accepted the CF and joined talks along with the NNPGs (Naga National Political Groups). With the involvement of these groups in the talks, the Union government was in a better bargaining position, but the NSCN (IM) felt that it was done to undermine its influence. The NSCN (IM)'s insistence for a separate flag and constitution for the proposed Nagalim emerged as the major stumbling block in inking the Naga accord.

Termed as "historic" by PM Modi, the Framework Agreement 2015 was signed after over 80 rounds of talks between the Government, NSCN (IM) and various stakeholders. The details of this agreement have yet to be declassified. In a statement, the Government said it recognised the unique history, culture and position of the Nagas and their sentiments and aspirations and pledged not only 'to heal wounds and resolve problems' but also to be the partner of the Nagas in their 'pride and prestige'. To the leaders and the people of Nagaland, the Prime Minister had a special message, *"You will not only build a bright future for Nagaland, but your talents, traditions and efforts will also contribute to making the nation stronger, more secure, more inclusive and more prosperous, further, you are also the guardians of our Eastern frontiers and our gateway to the world beyond"*. A similar framework agreement was signed with the NNPGs which consisted of seven groups including the NSCN (Reformation), the NSCN (NK) and the splinter group of the NSCN (Khango) and NSCN (Nikki Sumi).

Unfortunately, the Naga tribes remain divided and this has allowed peripheral issues to be highlighted. Some of these peripheral issues include the demand by the Eastern Naga People's Organisation (ENPO) for a separate 'Frontier Nagaland' state and the growth of several other organisations, each more radical than its earlier parent.

Further, this framework agreement has not led to permanent peace and in August 2020, the NSCN (IM) released copies of the confidential Framework Agreement and insisted on changing Mr RN Ravi, the interlocutor and Nagaland Governor. Later the government appointed Mr Mishra, a senior official of the Intelligence Bureau as the interlocutor, to continue the talks.

Is there a Solution?

Jayaprakash Narayan (JP), in his interactions with the Nagas, showed incredible comprehension and empathy about their history and origin. He traversed the length and breadth of Nagaland, later bringing out a book, *"Nagaland Mein Shanti Ka Prayas"* (The Attempts to Forge Peace in Nagaland). He was perhaps one of the first national leaders to

argue about a civilizational unity in India which preceded its political unity. JP was speaking about all the tribes inhabiting India's Easternmost periphery, much before the term "India" was coined to define this country. Even today the tribes of this region are not influenced by the "Indian" culture. They are proud inheritors of their own unique culture.

Anthropologist B K Roy Burman in 2004 had suggested a solution through a non-territorial jurisdiction with legislative, administrative, judicial and development - oriented powers by constituting coordinating bodies. In October 1993, Roy Burman proposed "internal self-determination" for people like the Nagas, which implied the right of people to determine their own social, economic and political system, to depose their resources and to create conditions for their own development within an existing state.

Epilogue

The main issue, "sovereignty" to include a separate flag and constitution has become difficult to resolve. Can our government deal with this vexed sovereignty in a more flexible manner? Can the NSCN dilute their stand? The answers to these questions lie in our ability to trust each other. We have had innovative solutions in the past, and we certainly can come up with an acceptable solution now. However, what needs to be asked is whether such a political solution is possible within our Constitution? The fact that the Naga leaders have almost moved away from the original demand for "independence" brings great hope for peace. The federal principles enshrined in the Constitution allow a great deal of flexibility relating to the "autonomy" of particular areas and people. We need pragmatism and the imperatives of peace, demand that the ultimate aim of a permanent agreement should not be derailed again. In fact, the need for circumspection is greater now than ever before. The current phase of peace parleys should not be left halfway for yet another future futile failed accord. There's no doubt that an end to "Naga insurgency" will have an enormous impact on the prevailing peace within tribal North-Eastern societies. The success of our Look East policy too will depend, in the long run, on the success of these peace talks.

The current phase of peace parleys should not be left halfway for yet another future futile failed accord.

The mainstream Naga society and the youth have also undergone a huge transformation over the last 30 years and today's educated Naga youth identifies with the idea of India and is increasingly looking both at economic and political advantages of being part of the larger federal democratic system of India. Unfortunately, concerns about the vast number of weapons held by the insurgents, increased militarisation and brutalisation of its society, fuelled by six decades of continuous armed conflict need to be addressed and rectified as soon as possible. Regardless of a political solution, we must find a way to re-assign and convince the approximately 4000 armed cadres of the various groups to give up their weapons and accept a handsome stipend and job oriented training instead. This will remove the armed cadre and the weapons from the hands of the leadership and hopefully force an 'acceptable political solution'.

It is clear that the threat from China today is real and has affected and altered the external and internal security environment of the North East. Cyber - warfare, increased cross-border terrorism, the emergence of non-state actors, the growth of Islamic fundamentalism, the narcotics-arms nexus, illegal migration and left-wing extremism together gravely impact the security of our already fragile North East. Permanent peace in this region is absolutely necessary and should not be delayed any further.

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Lt Gen Shokin Chaukan

WILY WEAVERS OF KASHMIR'S Fractured Fabric

Subversive, sinister, separatist designs have been nurtured for several decades in Kashmir. The Editor throws light on some of the nefarious instigators.

The Jannat of Kashmir needs careful tending, and disruptive or separate identity forces cannot be allowed to take centre stage again. The syncretic culture too must be revived.



The Indian nation has faced many security challenges since Independence, with the Kashmir issue being the oldest and most intense. The challenge started even before the princely State of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) formally acceded to India on 26 October 1947, when the kabailies (raiders) entered the Maharaja's Kingdom on 22 October 1947. The nascent years after Indian Independence were a period of consolidation when all Princely States merged into the Indian Union. But Kashmir remained aloof, as if the Himalayas were a barrier to complete integration. There were many players who muddied the waters of the Indus, Jhelum and Chenab over time. I plan to highlight the major anti-Indian elements in the Kashmiri quagmire.

Jamaat-e-Islami Kashmir (JeIK)

The Kashmir Chapter of the Jamaat-e-Islami Hind (JeIH) was founded in 1945, and was the vociferous proponent of J&K's accession to Pakistan, mainly because many of their initial members were pro-Pakistan. The Jamaat was primarily a socio-religious organization – they looked at Pakistan as the Muslim State. However, J&K acceded to India.

The Kashmir chapter chose to remain separate from JeIH, and separated out as JeIK by 1954 – a clear indication that they did not wish to be a part of 'Hind'. The JeIK has never altered this stance and has always been a clandestine proponent of separatism in Kashmir. Why is the Jamaat sinister and dangerous? The JeIK is the ideological fountainhead of pro-Pakistan sentiments in J&K. Their presence is widespread in Kashmir, they run schools under the Falah-e-Aam Trust, giving scholarships to poor but bright students, indoctrinating young minds continually, placing their cadres and like-minded persons as faculty in schools, colleges, universities and similarly filling the State bureaucracy with their ideologues covertly. The separatist mind-set was fanned by the Jamaat, and to reverse these anti-Indian perceptions nurtured in young impressionable minds is extremely difficult. In 1983, when I first visited Kashmir, I recall that the local people would state that we have come from India, and we would be pointedly told that we are outsiders. The separate identity mind-set has thus existed for many decades, and grew in strength in the last three decades.

In 1989, Hizbul Mujaheddin (HM), a militant group was adopted as the *'militant wing'*, the sword arm of the Jamaat. JeIK was accordingly banned in 1990 for a few years.

The JeIK has been banned recently on 28 February 2019 for a period of five years, but the organization has not been defanged. They continue to operate covertly, with the Jamaatis going underground. The Indian State has to remain wary of the JeIK in future too.



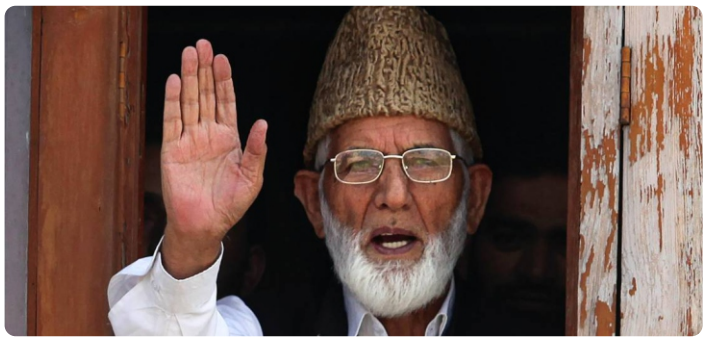
Jamaat-e-Islami J&K leaders. Photo credit PTI.

Pakistan – Inter Services Intelligence (ISI)

Pakistan's nefarious designs in J&K are planned and orchestrated by the ISI. Pakistan has never accepted J&Ks accession to India, a stand that they will not possibly change. Due to adverse international pressures, they may reduce their Kashmir activities, but will revive it once the situation improves. The Pakistani leadership believes that they must keep the pot boiling or simmering in Kashmir. Like Shivaji going to meet Afzal Khan, we too should keep our 'Tiger's Claws' with us when dealing with Pakistan. In simple lingo - don't trust them. Pakistan has been the **"master control"** of anti-Indian activities in J&K.

Their proxy players are not merely the tanzeems and the terrorists, but the Pakistani security challenge is multi-faceted. Its levels include lobbying in international organisations, diplomacy, creation of Kashmir Liberation fronts, Khalistan bodies, human rights organisations and so on. Their nexus in J&K extends from narcotics smuggling, funding, information warfare through social media narratives, radicalization, religious indoctrination, supplying arms and ammunition, training local youth as terrorists, infiltrating foreign terrorists, etc. The Hurriyat and the over ground workers (OGWs) are their known face, but there are several unseen Pakistani proxies in the political and bureaucratic class, and in the J&K police too.

Prior to dilution of Article 370, there were several leakages in our fight against these proxies, as many of them had political patrons or maintained negotiating linkages with Indian forces or agencies. After August 2019, these proxies are finding it difficult – the Indian State's crackdown is far more



Syed Ali Shah Geelani, the Hurriyat leader. Photo credit Altaf Qadri, AP

efficient. Naturally, some proxies are lying low, waiting to rise again at an opportune moment.

The Tanzeems

The terrorists are the pawns – cheap and expendable fodder, playing to ISI's tune. Every year, the ISI plans to infiltrate at least 100 plus foreign terrorists, so they train, equip and prepare at least 500 odd cadres, knowing that many of them will not succeed in infiltrating. Infiltration routes are not only in the Valley, but they do push in groups through the Jammu – Samba – Kathua border as also through the Poonch – Rajouri Line of Control. At times, they send in cadres through other border states too. This 'tap' will continue with the flow moderated by the ISI. The tanzeems have metamorphosed in the last 30 plus years. In the early 90s, Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) was the predominant group, but Pakistan was not cosy with them, as they espoused an independent J&K. The ISI propped up a new entity – the Hizbul Mujaheddin (HM), which was pro-Pakistan. By 1995-96, Pakistan realized that the local terrorists were not effective, and therefore they started inducting Pakistani and foreign terrorists under the Lashkar – e – Toiba (LeT) and Harkat-ul-Mujaheddin banners. Some lesser known tanzeems like Al Badr and Al Faran also came up. After the December 1999 Kandahar Hijack, Jaish-e- Mohammed (JeM) rose in prominence. Seeing greater funds from Pakistan flowing to the foreign terrorist organisations, and seeing ISI relying more on the Pakistani terrorists, many Kashmiri militants in HM were disillusioned. Some of them surrendered and Abdul Majeed Dar, their Kashmir Operational Commander entered into a secret dialogue with the Indian Forces. In his Reflections in this issue, Lieutenant General JR Mukherjee, the then Kashmir Corps Commander has elaborated on the episode, and the ISI had Abdul Majeed Dar eliminated through their foreign terrorists.

Post 2001, Al Qaeda, and later the Islamic State Iraq and Syria (ISIS) gained global notoriety. They were primarily based in the Middle East and Afghanistan, some local tanzeems were created with affiliation to the Al Qaeda or Islamic State. Ansar Ghazwat-ul- Hind, led by Zakir Musa, grabbed attention due to its linkage with the Islamic State. Ansar Ghazwat-ul- Hind operated mainly in Tral, was a small group, and has largely been neutralized. ISIS presence in Kashmir was negligible, though at times black flags with the ISIS emblem made fleeting appearances in Srinagar.

As the Global War on Terror gained ground post 2001, many terrorist organisations were black listed. International pressure increased on Pakistan, the ISI has therefore conveniently renamed different tanzeems to enhance their cloak of deniability and non-involvement. The latest name has been *The Resistance Front* (TRF), a new name for the LeT- JeM combine.

The terrorists have not been able to expand their presence or control in the last decade plus. The major terrorists initiated incidents (TIIs) have been the fidayeen attacks on some bases like Uri, Nagrota, Sunjuwan, and a few car bomb or IED attacks on convoys like Pulwama February 2019. Most TIIs have been against soft targets like policemen on leave, local civilians perceived as 'mukhbir' (informers), grenade lobbying on security piquets in markets, attacks on policemen performing duties in crowded places. The inability of the terrorists to generate greater violence and increase turmoil or turbulence is indicative of the exceptional operational calibre and capability of the security forces. The terrorists have not been able to put the security forces on the back foot - the Indian Army has retained the upper hand.

The Hurriyat, Overground Workers (OGWs) and the Sangbaaz

Another group spreading poison in Kashmir has been the Hurriyat Conference – a conglomerate of separatist parties and organisations, who bow to the Pakistani diktat. The Hurriyat has deep linkages with the Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi, and sponsors students and Kashmiri youth to visit Pakistan for training or education. These students and youth are invariably sympathetic to the separatist cause.

The Hurriyat Conference is ridden with factionalism. I have observed that Kashmiri political leaders are not able to unite, they do not

wish to work with or under some of their counterparts. The Indian intelligence and other agencies were always able to exploit these divisions and disagreements, within the Hurriyat and other political organisations. The late SAS Geelani was the prominent hardline face of the Hurriyat, and Mirwaiz Mohammed Umar Farooq is perceived as a moderate leader. Other leaders like Yasin Malik, Shabbir Shah, Naeem Khan, etc negotiated based on their personal agenda and interests.

The OGWs are the 'middle class' in this anti-Indian conundrum, indoctrinated towards the cause of separatism, loyal to their controllers and to the terrorists. Many of them take financial advantage of their position, surmising that they are entitled to a fair share of the funds coming in from Pakistan. Being on the ISI payroll also ensures their loyalty. Many of the OGWs take part in stone pelting, attacking security personnel during operations to try and help the terrorists flee. The OGWs also organize the protests and the bandhs. Several OGWs graduate to become local terrorists, and soon thereafter find their rightful place in a *'Kabristan'*.

Stone pelting too became a business. A young, enterprising Kashmiri 'Sangbaaz' (stone pelter) told me that he is paid about Rs 25000/- on a day when he has to organize stone pelting, and is expected to get at least 40 to 50 boys to join him. He actually manages about 20 to 30 boys, some join him without seeking any remuneration, he pays the others about Rs 10000/- to Rs.12000/-, and pockets the rest.

The Regional Political Parties

Kashmir has not merely been a security bugbear, but has also been a political swamp – caused by the circumstances of its accession, its special status, demography and historically inherited culture of patronage. The regional political parties felt it vital to maintain a separate identity and a separate constitution. At periodic intervals both the main regional parties promised autonomy, self-rule, etc. This separate identity thought process inexorably leads away from the national identity, in turn it created a divide between Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh. Political power has rested in the Valley, the other regions felt neglected.

Like most of India, J&K was a princely state. An ethos of patronage is the norm in monarchies, with jagirs and largesse doled out to one's own or to the loyal courtiers. Right from the 50s to the 80s, the National Conference (NC) and the Congress Party continued the patronage culture, with jobs, businesses, licences, properties being prioritized to kith and kin or party cadres or influential gentry. Such patronage fuels corruption, J&Ks Special Status made it easier for Kashmiri politicians. The Kashmiri Awaam suffered, giving rise to disillusionment. Pakistan fanned the flames in the 80s, the people sought an alternative platform, but the 1987 Assembly elections threw up an NC led coalition. Pakistan overplayed the 'rigged elections' story. The separate identity idea was turned into an anti-India idea, a cry for independence initially – *"Hum kya chahte hai, Aazadi!" Later, the sentiments were modified to "Kashmir Banega Pakistan".*

In the last couple of decades, the main regional political parties ignored the growing anti-Indian voices, or clandestinely supported such elements. Many of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) cadres nurture anti-Indian sentiments, a clear case being Wahid-ul Parra, the PDP Youth Wing leader.

Kashmir is thus a story of devious leadership, where the State's leaders couldn't integrate the three regions, couldn't set up fair systems and processes, couldn't guide the Awaam towards peace and development, and failed to maintain Kashmir's syncretic culture. The State leadership was not able to counter Pakistan's design of disruption and turbulence. The



Sangbaaz. Photo credit Hafsa Khawaja's Blog



Omkarnath Bhat's residence in Haal village, Shopian. (Photo Credit Shuaib Masoodi/Express Archive)

regional mainstream became a forum of 'soft separatism', and the Centre had to side-line them, initially with Governor's Rule and thereafter by restructuring the State into two Union Territories. With this pivotal step, the Central Government is now able to control the narrative and establish cleaner and people friendly neutral systems in place.

The Administrative Machinery

Slippages in delivery of services to the people occur in all nations and states, is a reality, though not an ideal situation. The Kashmir bureaucracy, especially the State Services was riddled with corruption. Due to a large number of educated, unemployed youth, desperation for employment resulted in jobs going to the influential or based on monetary inducements. The people had scant faith in a fair selection process. The allegiance of several individuals in Government Service is suspect, and actions to dismiss some such individuals have been taken recently including the dismissal from Government service of Syed Ahmed Shakeel and Shahid Yousuf, two sons of Syed Salahuddin, the HM Chief. But there were many good and competent bureaucrats too, the security forces gained from their support. The officers from Central Services are less tainted, and are the saving grace.

The Jammu and Kashmir Police (JKP) has played a commendable part in containing the violence, they have been the critical factor in the counter terror campaign. Yet there were many policemen who clandestinely supported the tanzeems, ex-Deputy Superintendent of Police Davinder Singh of Tral being a clear example. In our joint operations with the police, we knew that information leakages from within the police set up may take place. The Awaam considers the police corrupt, a perception prevalent in other states too. In November 2016, when the post Burhan Wani agitation was controlled, one of the local leaders informed me that the corruption in the police helped reduce the stone pelter numbers. After stone pelting incidents the police would view the videos, and pick up suspected youth from their homes at night. He told me that the parents had to cough up Rs 70000/-, to get their children out of the lock-ups. The parents struggled to arrange the money, consequently the pressure from parents compelled the youth to stay away from the *Sangbaaz*. I also learnt of cases where parents forced the Hurriyat cadres or the OGWs to arrange finances for the release of their *'Sangbaaz'*. Such environmental realities and the business losses in the tourism and other sectors forced the Hurriyat to peter off the agitation. The endemic corruption possibly facilitated a cooling of the street violence, but it is detrimental in the long run. It increases the angst against the establishment.

Erosion of Kashmir's Syncretic Culture

The organized and systemic violence against Kashmiri Pandits in January 1990 generated fear and panic and was the most significant act to destroy the brotherly co-existence between Pandits and their Muslim neighbours. In some instances, Muslim neighbours helped the Kashmiri Pandits, but in most cases the neighbours did not come to their aid, and at places helped in the targeting of this community. Thereafter, this long drawn proxy war has eroded Kashmir's Sufi traditions further. Kashmir is renowned for famous sufi shrines like Charar-e-Sharief, Makhdoom Sahib, Khwaja Naqshband Sahib, Mir Ali Hamadani Sahib, Dastgeer Sahib, Baba Reshi, Pir Mohkam Shah Wali, but the fundamentalist or puritan Islam influence from Saudi Arabia, Deoband, Tablighi Jamaat, Ahl-e-Hadees has impacted the Awaam.

The elders still have great faith in the various Pir babas and Ziarats spread across the Valley, but the younger generation has been weaned away. Hanfi-Aithkadi mosques were the predominant Sunni faith in the Valley, but Salafi mosques have expanded at a faster pace, under the patronage of Jamiat e AhliHadith J&K. This organization runs Salafi Muslim Institutes and Salafia Colleges in Kashmir, and tried to set up "Trans World Muslim University" near Srinagar.

In 2014, when I was going towards Chowkibal in Kupwara district, I noticed a large mosque being built in Malikpura. The mosque had received Rs 85 lakhs from Saudi Arabia, as a part of Saudi Arabia's international proselytization campaign to increase followers of the Saudi brand of Islam. Masjid and Mohalla Committees are the local influencers, many of these committees were filled by JeIK cadres or by anti- Indian individuals, funded by Pakistan or by separatists.

Over a 1000 Imams in Kashmir were on the payroll of the State Government, but there were scant checks to ensure that they did not espouse violence, extremism or separatism. Radicalization is not taking place only through the mosques, but social media and the internet are also playing a major part. Social media is able to alter perceptions of the young and gullible easily because of professionally managed, tailor made audio visual content – designed to provoke or arouse passions. The schools and colleges have also played a part in the radicalization, with fundamentalist minded teachers indoctrinating the children. With J&K becoming a Union Territory, it will now be feasible to weed out the anti-nationals from the educational field – more CBSE Schools can come up, the curriculum of the State Board schools can also be aligned to that followed in the rest of the nation. The education sector is a vital sector which requires tending, to reduce the hatred and reduce the anti-India mind-sets.

Prognosis

Sometime in 2017 when I was the Corps Commander in Kashmir, I was chatting with the father of a local terrorist from Downtown, Srinagar. He mentioned that in the alleys and by-lanes of Nowhatta, Maisuma, Khanqah, Downtown, there are large number of idle, frustrated young men with no worthwhile employment – their inability to earn results in friction and worry within families. These young men take to stone pelting, venting their anger onto the establishment and its forces. Some of them are lured into the glamorous image of the 'Mujaheddin'. I empathized with him, realizing that the lack of industrial development and prevailing turbulence has fostered social and economic disruptions, with consequent unemployment: it has fractured Kashmiri society. As the 'voices for violence' arose in Kashmir, the peace-seeking elderly and elders lost their hold over the youth. The pro-Pakistan and pro-Azadi platforms have engulfed the perceptions of many young boys and girls, resultantly the social fabric in Kashmiri families and societies is under stress.

Simultaneously, the proxy war has also thrown up economic gains for many who became sources (informers to security forces), many who are doing business with the security forces, people who are working in Army units; and likewise, several individuals who receive funds from Pakistan to sustain the separatist movement. Even the JKP has benefited from 'intelligence funds', reward money, out-of-turn promotions for successful operations, gallantry awards, and has been able to operate with lesser oversight. There are many people who have gained from this terror economy too, and would want the counter terror operations to continue – not a desirable situation.



Burhan Wani (middle row, centre) and other Hizbul Mujaheddin terrorists, All have been neutralized by now.

It will be a long haul in Kashmir, and will take us 10 to 15 years to transition the Union Territory into an industrially progressive, flourishing business and tourism destination. The most difficult task would be to effect the mind-set changes – a generation will possibly pass. Executing the education reforms would be the key determinant, along with a major anti-corruption drive.

The Kashmiri society and its cultural past will need to be rejuvenated – again a challenging project. But there is light at the end of the tunnel – the remarkable improvement in the security situation in the last two decades. In North Kashmir, Kupwara, Handwara, Lolab, Bandipur and most of Baramulla are largely peaceful, with minimal terrorist presence or activity.

Hajin and Sopore remain the worrisome places in North Kashmir, and even Pattan (a Jamaat base) has been quiet. Most of Ganderbal and Badgam are also 'terrorism free'. The hot spots have reduced and are mostly in South Kashmir, even therein there are many places with relatively less terrorist movement, like Pahalgam and Aishmuqam.

You would realize that the sinister campaign to erode Indian control in Kashmir has many prongs, and we cannot afford to lower our guard. We need to continue our close control and "hands on approach" in J&K, to ensure that the radicalization embers don't erupt and that the soft separatist elements don't return to power. They have already torn asunder Kashmir's social fabric. We cannot let the anti-Indian sentiments be nurtured again.

Lt Gen J S Sandhu (Retd) *- Editor*

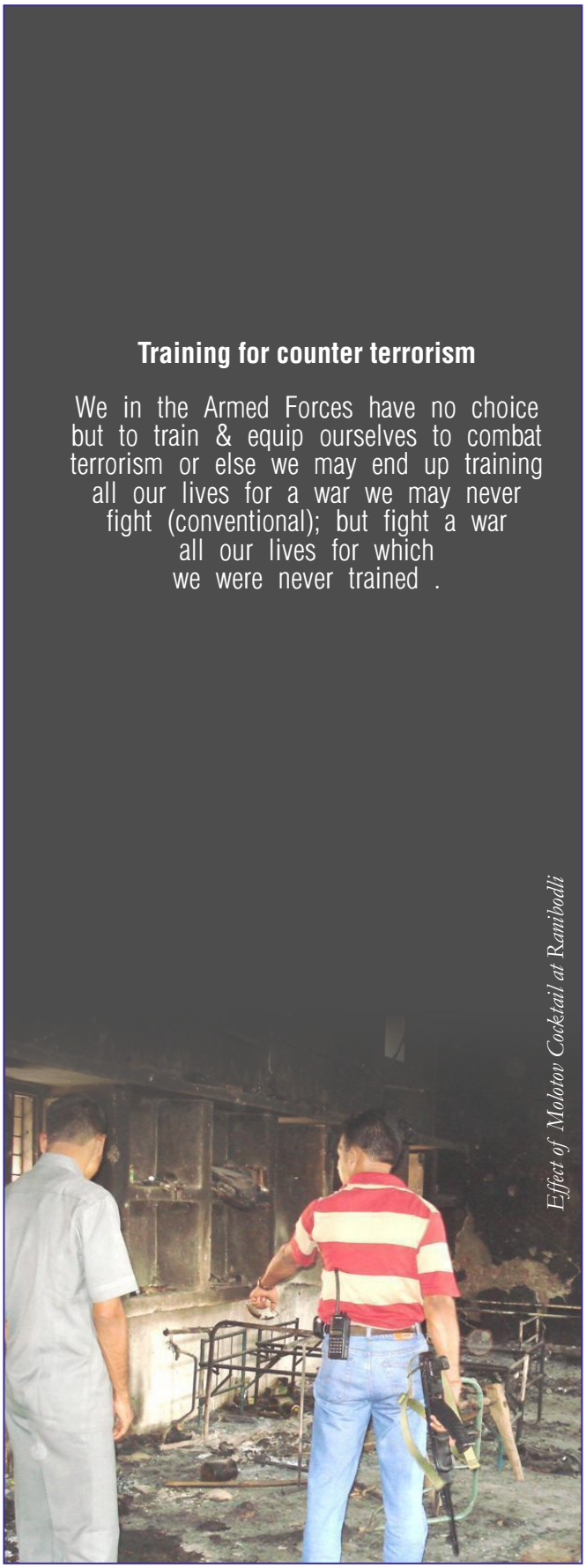
THE NAXAL THREAT

While the Indian Army has been contesting insurgents and terrorists in the North East and in J&K, the Central Armed Police Forces and the State police have been involved in fighting the Naxalite movement in Central India. This overview takes us through the Red Corridor and the operations therein.

On 25th May 1967 in Naxalbari, a nondescript town in North Bengal a violent movement was launched to claim land, livelihood and a classless society. The activists named Charu Mazumdar, Kanu Sanyal, Ram Prabhav Singh and Jangal Santha, started questioning the prosperity of industrialists, bureaucrats, police, Government officials and vowed to kill them using the wretched of India, the poorest of the poor from the countryside and move towards the cities, surround them and **establish a Communist India**. They felt that their revolution has to be violent as they will not achieve their mission by democratic means. The violence spread in the late 60s in West Bengal and the Army was utilized to contain the movement. West Bengal Police infiltrated into the Naxalite ranks and many Naxalite leaders were

Training for counter terrorism

We in the Armed Forces have no choice but to train & equip ourselves to combat terrorism or else we may end up training all our lives for a war we may never fight (conventional); but fight a war all our lives for which we were never trained .



Effect of Molotov Cocktail at Ranibodli

arrested. Charu Mazumdar was arrested on 18 July 1972 in Calcutta's Lal Bazar Police Station area and he died on 28 July in police custody.

The urban people were not ready to accept the violent means of the Naxalites or follow their diktat of a classless society. Naxalites were defeated, but Naxalism stayed as did India's poverty and the Adivasis demand of Jal, Jungle, Zamin. Revolutionary groups again arose in the 90s to press for these demands, the major groups being the Maoists Communists Centre (MCC) in Bihar and the People's War Group (PWG) in Andhra Pradesh.

Revival of Naxalism

Sometime in the late 90s, elements of the PWG led by Mupalla Laxman Rao @ Ganpathy from Karimnagar in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh united all the 'Left Wing Extremism' (LWE) warring groups into a political party. On 21 September 2004 in a joint meeting in the jungles of Bastar, Maoists called themselves the **Communist Party of India Maoists - CPI (Maoists).** They drew up a grand strategy to start their violent campaign in the remote areas, generally following the Forest Belt of the country – the belt got named as the **Red Corridor** from Pashupati to Tirupati.

They used assorted weapons like bows and arrows, AK – 47 rifles, Under Barrel Grenade Launchers, and Rocket Launchers to strike at the untrained lethargic policemen. An impetus was given to their violence by the Improvised Explosive Device (IEDs), usage of which they learnt from the LTTE rebels of Sri Lanka. Explosives were available in plenty from the mining industries in the States of Chhattisgarh – Odisha – Jharkhand. Armed with these weapons they spread their ideology killing policemen, reluctant villagers and all who opposed them. The activities of the CPI (Maoists) expanded from **55 districts across nine states** in November 2003, to as many as 231 districts in 20 states. With the efforts of the government and the Security Forces now only 25 affected districts are left.

Red Terror

The Naxalites say that they are fighting oppression and exploitation. They claim to represent the most oppressed people in India, those who are left untouched by India's development and bypassed by the electoral process. Invariably, they are the Adivasis, Dalits, and the poorest of the poor, who work as landless labourers for a pittance, often below India's mandated minimum wages.

The Naxal Strategy is to target tribals and lower castes for support. The rebels generally enter an area and identify the causes of people's grievances against the state. They then begin to convey to the people the government's acts of omission and commission against them that are responsible for their continued deprivation. Once the rebels develop a support base among the people, they proceed to breakdown the structures of civil governance through threats and murders. Their objective is to create an administrative vacuum where the writ of the state does not run and then they entrench themselves. Stress is on elaborate militarization all over India. Particular attention was paid to the development of the Peoples' Guerrilla Army (PGA) as a powerful instrument capable of destroying the state machinery and establishing a 'New Communist State'. A song was going around in the Abhujmarh area which says *"Gher Lobo, Gher Lobo, Dilhi ko Gher Lobo".*

The Naxalites are ideologically motivated, reasonably trained explosive experts. They are causing damage to the economy, imposing a new social order and carrying out forcible redistribution of wealth. They were spreading Naxalism with the gun in one hand and the Maoist Ideology in the other. The easy availability of arms and explosives is one of the major factors contributing



(Left) The Red Corridor in 2006-07. (Right) Red Terror - local people killed by the Naxalites.



(Left) Tadmetla Ambush April 2010. (Right) Paddeda IED Blast on MPV, September 2005.

to the survival, consolidation and expansion of the movement.

The Paddeda IED Blast

On 3rd September 2005 at 1730 hours, a Mine Protective Vehicle (MPV Casspir) was blasted by a 40 kg IED using battery operated command mechanism by an operator sitting just 50 metres from the road at Paddeda in Bijapur district. 24 policemen were killed. The MPV was returning from an operation along the same route and was overloaded with the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) personnel. Road opening was not done in gross violation of the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). The MPV is supposed to seat 12 personnel, but 24 Police personnel were sitting inside. The MPV is capable of withstanding conventional mines of 4-6 kg only.

Naxalite Raid on Ranibodli

To increase area domination a **fresh post was established at Ranibodli in Bijapur** District of Chhattisgarh, with 25 regular police personnel and 50-60 SPOs (Locally recruited 'Special Police Officers'). The force was housed in an Ashram building and compound. One half of the building housed 20-30 young tribal girls of the Ashram with their matron in an adjacent one room cottage. The other half of the building had about 20 police personnel. The SPOs were in huts in the compound. Two machine gun bunkers were on the roof top and there were some bunkers along the boundary wall. On the night of the Naxal raid, SPOs were mostly on duty, and the machine gun sentries had only one magazine each. An abandoned building 75 yards away was used by the Naxals as their fire support base. At 0200 hours on 15 March 2007, a force of about 700-800 Naxalites and their supporters launched a fire assault from two directions on the Ranibodli post. Portable generators were used to illuminate the targets, firing was confined to half of the building which housed the police. In the course of the heavy firing a small Naxal team lobbed Molotov Cocktails inside the building setting the room on fire.

Thus the police personnel were not only killed by bullets but were also burnt to death. The police reaction was tardy and ineffective. A total of 55 police & SPOs were killed. By 0600 hours on 15 March, the Naxals disengaged and vanished into the jungles carrying away over 60 weapons and a large quantity of ammunition. There was no collateral damage on the tribal girls of the Ashram. The Naxal attackers were divided into various groups, like cordon group, assault group, a fire support group which was located in the abandoned building across the Ashram, a logistics group to carry the looted weapons and ammunition, a Molotov Cocktail group to set the building on fire, a first aid team and a command element with radio sets to coordinate the raid.

The machine gun personnel having expended their ammunition jumped down from the roof and hid under the beds of the Chhattras to save themselves, some SPOs and police surrendered. The Naxals shot them at close range, mutilated their bodies, carried away all the weapons and all valuables, like watches, mobiles, money, boots, clothing. In the operation, a few Naxalites were killed and some were wounded, who were carried away by their logistics group.

The Ranibodli raid was a well-planned, professionally sound operation launched by the Naxalites which met with total success. The Naxalites took advantage of the lethargy in the police ranks. On the evening of the attack, some local villagers had invited the police to a birthday party, had served them Mahua, the local brew. Relatives of the

Chhattras of the Ashram regularly visited their wards. In the garb of relatives, the Naxalites had carried out a complete reconnaissance of the post. There was no barbed wire, there were no patrols out, no lighting of the post and no sentries on the red abandoned building. No reinforcements came from Kutru, a police post which was a mere 5 km away. Why was the police staying in an Ashram where civilians could come in and go?

The Ranibodli raid was not a one off incident, but the Naxalites have launched similar attacks on other police posts like Giddam, Vishrampuri, Ara Chowki, NMDC Magazine and Bhatgaon causing severe casualties and looted weapons. Consequently, the police posts in Chhattisgarh have been further fortified. Naxalites did attempt to attack other PS but due to improved police reactions, they suffered casualties and now further attacks have stopped. They however, do fire on posts from a distance, like harassing fire.

The Tadmetla Ambush on 06 April 2010

In a routine area domination activity, the CRPF ex Kistaram, Chintalnar, Chintagupha and other contiguous areas, sent out company size patrols into the deep Naxal Zone in Dantewada district. Naxalites in this area enjoyed full local support of the population as many of their family members were in Naxalite ranks and the CRPF was not seen with much respect. In the course of this 48-72 hours patrol, an CRPF column ex Chintalnar was to establish a harbour near Tadmetla on the night of 5th /6th April. However, for some reason, the 82 strong column got into a confined space on the outskirts of village Mukram in the early hours of the morning of 6th April. The Naxalites, who had been tracking them all along, surrounded the security forces from the overlooking higher ground and the jungle. They opened fire from three directions on the temporarily halted, unsuspecting security personnel. The firefight lasted for about an hour in which the surrounded security force column had very little reaction ability. Moreover, the reinforcements coming towards Mukram from Chintalnar were blasted by IEDs, killing another few personnel and also destroying the MPV. The other columns in the area did not react. This well planned military like ambush by the Naxals succeeded in killing 76 personnel and their weapons were taken away. **A lack of understanding of jungle warfare, Naxal tactics and most importantly no contact with the local population led to a total intelligence vacuum in the area, leading to one of the gravest strikes by Naxalites on the CRPF.** In the past, such a large number of security personnel have never been killed in one operation in the North East or Jammu & Kashmir.



Ranibodli Chhattra Ashram

Gadchiroli November 2021

In a changed scenario, trained police forces launched a successful operation in the recently formed Maharashtra – Madhya Pradesh – Chhattisgarh (MMC) Confluence Zone in Gadchiroli, which led to the neutralization of several members of the outlawed Naxalites including a Central Committee member Milind Teltumbde. Information was received by the villagers of Alondi that a large group of Naxalites were camping in the close-by hillocks. After detailed planning a joint operation was launched with Chhattisgarh Police in the outer cordon, while Maharashtra Police's elite C – 60 Squad formed the inner cordon and launched a two directional assault on the morning of 13 November 2021. After a nine hour long encounter, the rebel hide out was destroyed and 26 Naxalites were killed and many others were wounded. Some managed to escape only to be intercepted on the Chhattisgarh border. The operation was an example **of jointness by specially trained Commandos under the outstanding leadership of the police delivering a severe blow to the Naxal movement in the region.**



A fortified police station in Chhattisgarh

Possible Resolution of the Naxalite Problem

The resolution process requires immediate establishment of the Government's authority in the **guerrilla zones** for which police has to be re-oriented for combat, specifically in, **Counter Terrorism and Jungle Warfare**. The police have to carry out a creeping re–occupation of the guerrilla zones. As the areas are secured, socio-economic activity should follow and the political leadership must expand their base. A Psychological Warfare campaign has to be launched to wean away the population from the Naxal influence. Modernization of the police should not only be in weapons, equipment, communications and technology but also in upgrading the **'policeman'** in his mental, physical and psychological re-conditioning, his soldierly skills, fire power, technology and in conduct of large scale operations to meet the Naxal challenge.

The **Counter Terrorism and Jungle Warfare College (CTJW College) in Kanker** is performing this task diligently, and has developed combat skills and psyche in the trainees. Over 35000 commandoes have trained at this institution in the last 15 years. Many of the anti – Naxal commando groups in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Odisha, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh had trained here. The State Police and all police forces dealing with the Naxalite movement should be trained for effective Counter Naxal operations. They need to make their officers physically tough and develop their soldierly skills and leadership qualities. There is a need for a **"FOLLOW ME ETHOS".**

State Response Mechanism. In all the Naxal affected states, a state level coordinating committee must be formed under the Chief Minister with all the security forces heads in the state, socio-economic related state Secretaries and local Area / Sub Area representatives for internal security and combat training advice. The committee should meet at regular intervals to address all the Naxal issues at the State level. A joint command in Chhattisgarh is functioning very effectively.

Orchestration of the Campaign

Political – economic - military – psychological facets have to be addressed conjointly to bring normalcy in the troubled region. With the Chief Minister as the coordinator, the political process should include a political will of all the political parties towards resolution of the Naxal conflict. The local MLAs should be involved in helping the tribals participate in development projects. The Naxal outfits need to be encouraged to come over ground and join the main stream of democracy by participating in elections, while ensuring free and fair elections.

On the economic front, lop sided development or lack of development is to a great extent responsible for the underdeveloped situation. Neglect, isolation, backwardness is a major reason why unemployed youth take to Naxalism. Small Scale Cottage Industries specific to the requirement of the people can be opened, tourism can be encouraged and communications improved to facilitate development.

As far as the social sector is concerned, the State Government should undertake an enlightenment campaign. The social process should include and ensure functional schools, health centres and public distribution centres in remote areas. Cultural visits can be organized to inform about job opportunities and on-the-job training can be arranged for self-employment. The security personnel should help in resolving villagers' problems with the civil administration through the Collector. CTJW College carries out a regular survey of the 65 villages in its training area.

A very important facet of the Counter Naxal campaign is psychological war which should aim to change the thinking of the

Naxalites and the target population. Certain measures suggested are an attractive surrender and rehabilitation package, mass communication through village level meetings, posters and newspapers to portray the benefits of the peace packages. Civic action programmes of medical camps and security forces interaction during festivals would also help in improving a connect with the people. It is imperative that there should not be any human rights violation and innocent villagers must not be killed. The psychological campaign should focus on the might of the security forces and highlight that Naxal organizations are no match.

Security Forces Operations

Synergised Operations. Unity of effort is a fundamental principle of any counter insurgency campaign. 'Synergised operations' be started wherein, on a declared date all security forces in the State are out on operations. Each Company Operating Base would send out two to three teams to gain information and launch operations, carry out extensive checking on the roads and tracks and generally dominate the entire area of responsibility for a period of 48 to 72 hours. In case of a lead, operations would continue. Recently, Operation Hakka was done in Bastar in such a manner.

Small Team Operations. Resources of the security forces are stretched over a large area of responsibility. In this environment, small team operations based on specific intelligence increase the chances of contact and success against insurgents.

Strong Counter Naxal Grid. Since the population is spread across vast areas, there will generally be a paucity of troops for deployment. Specific deployment ratio or density, will depend on a host of factors, besides Naxal strength, tactics and motivation; tactics of SF, technology in use, availability of troops, demographic realities, attitude of public, terrain, political, economic and social conditions will collectively dictate the establishment of a grid deployment. The battalion HQ of all security forces should be within the Area of Responsibility (AOR).

Opening Guerrilla Zones. The Chhattisgarh police has now re-organised for combat to enter the Abhujmarh area. In a similar manner other States should also venture out to clear and establish government authority in the Naxal dominated areas. The security forces however need to avoid human rights violations and collateral damage.

Present Situation

With the several synergized actions of the Government and the security forces, the 231 disturbed districts from across the country has reduced to just 25. More and more areas under Naxal Control are now being secured by the security forces. The local population is not supportive of Naxalites with negligible recruitment into Naxalite ranks. The State administration is now reaching out with excellent roads, schools, hospitals.

Naxalites are getting arrested / killed, surrenders are a daily affair. Rehabilitation Schemes are drawing the Naxalites to join the main stream. Naxal leadership is old and declining with no relief forth coming. Naxal General Secretary Mupalla Laxman Rao has migrated to the Philippines. The current General Secretary Nambala Keshava Rao (Baswaraj) is barely able to keep the movement going, their dream of hoisting the Red Flag on the Red Fort has disappeared.

At the National level to address LWE a group under the Home Minister, affected Chief Ministers and Special Officers has been formed. The Central Government is providing various funds under the Security Related Expenditure Head to the States which is contributing to infrastructure development in the region. With constant police pressure we are now moving towards a resolution. The balance 25 districts will be shortly neutralized and **Bastar will soon become a Popular National and International Tourist Destination.**

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Brigadier BK Ponwar, AVSM, VSM (retd) was commissioned into 1 MARATHA LI, the Jangi Paltan in December 1969. He was in the forefront of operations of the unit in the 1971 Indo-Pak War, in the Eastern Theatre and was amongst the first Indian troops to enter Dhaka. During his service, he has been an instructor at several Indian Army training establishments. He went on to command the Jangi Paltan, 30 Infantry Brigade and 21 Sector Assam Rifles. After his retirement, he established the CTJW College in Kanker in August 2005, and is presently the Director of this illustrious institution. He has a passion for outdoor adventure activities.



Brigadier BK Ponwar

THE MANIPUR IMBROGLIO :

Insurgency, drug trafficking, ethnic conflicts and an unstable neighbourhood

The Naga Insurgency had a spill-over effect on neighbouring states and Manipur was seriously affected. This review throws light on the various dimensions of the turmoil in Manipur.



RK Meghen, former Chief of United National Liberation Front, Manipur. Photo Credit www.deccanherald.com

India is wedged in between the two largest sources of illicit drugs in South Asia – the Golden Crescent which encompasses Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran to the North West and the Golden Triangle encompassing Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos to the North East. The Golden Triangle is Southeast Asia's main opium producing region and one of the oldest narcotics supply routes to Europe and USA. The States of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram share their border with Myanmar. Drugs including opium, heroin, methamphetamine and many more are smuggled from Myanmar into the North East. Add to this the challenges from terrorism, gun running, ethnic conflicts, large-scale migration and environmental degradation infringing national security, makes this a very volatile border.

The rough terrain on the Indo Myanmar border is a major security challenge as it consists of high mountains in the North and hills and river channels in the South covered with dense tropical rainforests. There is a lack of basic connectivity and the limited roads and tracks get damaged due to natural disasters. The movement of security forces is hampered and their ability to rapidly respond to myriad situations posed by criminals of all hues gets affected. Poor state of education, unemployment, poverty, increasing spread of HIV/AIDS, ethnic conflicts are some of the other ongoing challenges. With unemployment rife in this region there exists a predominant lure to join the criminal and /or insurgent outfits.

Demography and the Golden Triangle Connect

The Manipur hills consist of a series of parallel ranges extending from the Naga Hills in the North to the Mizo and Chin Hills to the South. The hill ranges are divided into the Eastern and Western hills. The Manipur Eastern hills form a continuous chain along the Indo-Myanmar frontier for about 200 kilometres with an average height of 1500 metres. The Manipur valley enclosed by the Eastern and Western hills is a large basin about 70 kilometres long and 35 kilometres wide

and an elevation of 760 metres. The people of Manipur fall into three groups who migrated into the valley from the East and the South from Myanmar. The main group the Meiteis, chanced to settle in the fertile valley by its flowing streams and developed into an agricultural community and thereby a flourishing civilisation. Of the second group consisting of three tribes, the Thangkhuls settled in the hills to the East in the present Ukhrul district, the Maos in the North in present day Senapati, and the Zeliangs in the North and West in Tamenglong district. The third group came from the South and settled in Churachandpur district. This is the Chin-Kuki- Mizo group, comprising several sub-tribes. The main Kuki tribe which is more enterprising spread to other districts and even into the Naga Hills and North Cachar Hills of Assam. The Meitei Rajas controlled the valley and hills and their domain extended well into the Naga Hills up to Assam and into Myanmar up to the Kebaw valley.

Insurgency in Manipur – A Quick Overview

Manipur acceded to the Indian Union on 15 October 1949. Certain sections of the people who were loyal to the erstwhile King called this a forced accession and started insurgent activities against the established government. The sizeable population of Nagas in two districts of the State also followed the pattern of insurgency prevalent in the State of Nagaland. Similarly other ethnic groups such as Kukis, Paites etc have their own insurgent outfits which promote the narrow political agenda of the extremists of such ethnic groups. The first insurgent outfit to emerge in the State was the United National Liberation Front (UNLF), which was formed in 1964. Since then several other outfits, like the People's Liberation Army (PLA), founded in 1978, People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK) set up in 1977 and the Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP) that came into being in 1980 have emerged in the Manipur valley areas consisting of four districts (Imphal West, Imphal East, Thoubal and Bishnupur) of the State. The hill areas of the State have been affected by different types of militancy. From Nagaland, violence by the Naga groups has spilt over into Manipur, a substantial part of which is claimed by the Isak-Muivah faction of National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM) as part of Nagalim, the claimed unified territory of the Nagas. In the early 1990s, the Kuki tribals initiated their insurgency against the alleged oppression by the NSCN-IM. Following ethnic clashes between the Nagas and Kukis in the early 1990s, a number of Kuki outfits were formed. Several other tribes, such as the Paite, Vaiphei and Hmars have also established their own armed groups. Similarly, Islamist outfits like the People's United Liberation Front (PULF) have also been formed to protect the interests of the "Pangals" (Manipuri Muslims).

Status of Insurgency

All seven states of the North East were affected by insurgency in one or the other form. Currently, the areas of concern are Upper Assam, South Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Manipur. The remaining states remain free of insurgency or the state of insurgency is insignificant. As far as security is concerned, the main worry is the Indo-Myanmar Border where various insurgent groups have bases. The present status of insurgent groups in the North East is explained in subsequent paragraphs.

Naga Groups. These are active in Nagaland, South Arunachal Pradesh and the Northern part of Manipur. All insurgent groups emanate from NSCN and all but one are in ceasefire with the Government of India. NSCN-IM is the most important group in terms of strength of cadres and quantum of weapons. The ceasefire has allowed NSCN to establish camps at designated places with weapons inside. The balance NSCN factions are under a coalition called Naga National Political Group (NNPG) having cadre strength of approximately 1400 and 250-300 weapons. The non-ceasefire group is the NSCN faction K-YA, a predominantly Konyak Naga group with majority of cadres from across the Indo Myanmar Border. All ceasefire groups have intimate links with various civil society organisations.

Assam. The last potent group of Assam is ULFA under the leadership of Paresh Barua. The group is active in Upper Assam and is now heavily involved in kidnapping and extortion. The group has 100-125 cadres and is in possession of about 100 modern weapons. ULFA also has camps across Indo Myanmar Border and it maintains close links with NSCN-KYA.

Manipur. Manipur, with 56% Meitei population is marred by Meitei-Kuki-Naga ethnic dynamics. At the peak of insurgency, the State was home to over 50 insurgent groups. Since 2008, the majority of Kuki groups are under Suspension of Operations (SoO) and the Pangal groups surrendered in 2012. The Meitei groups i.e. the Valley Based Insurgent Groups (VBIGs) have refused to negotiate for peace till date. Though the groups are no longer potent, they refuse to lay down arms. These groups also enjoy an alliance with the Myanmar Army.



(Upper) Apprehended drug traffickers at Moreh with a 165 crore drug haul. Photo courtesy Indian Express. (Lower Left) Cadres of the Zomi Revolutionary Army. Photo credit www.newindianexpress.com (Lower Right) Kuki National Organisation cadres. Photo credit Sentinel Assam

Myanmar – An Unstable Neighbourhood

After the coup staged in February 21, democratically elected members of the country's ruling party, the National League for Democracy were deposed by the Tatmadaw (Myanmar's military). The President and State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi were detained along with ministers, their deputies and Members of Parliament.

Cross Border Migration. The influx of migrants from the Indo-Myanmar border after the military coup to the three North Eastern states – Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland – is a cause of concern for India as it may inflate the issue of insurgency once again. Currently, more than 22,000 Myanmarese migrants have taken refuge in these States and more numbers are expected in the near future. Should the rebel outfits also cross over, the Naga and Manipur insurgency may grow in strength. The entire North East region may possibly witness an upsurge in insurgency related activities.

Narcotics Terrorism. Criminal groups find safe havens along the porous Indo Myanmar border. The inhospitable terrain and dense forest cover offer ideal conditions for all kinds of groups to move about undetected. Proximity to the Golden Triangle, ethnic conflicts, poverty and unemployment are other reasons which contribute to drug trafficking. Many ethnic war groups in Myanmar such as the Kachins, Karens, Mon etc have linked insurgent activities with drug trafficking. There is also an alarming nexus between local ethnic insurgent groups of North East India with their counterparts across the border. Thus, narco terrorism is a common feature and portends a grave risk to our national security.

India's Security Concerns

Amongst all the other states of the North East, strife torn Manipur gets highlighted as a pot boiler. India's Look East policy is an effort to cultivate extensive economic and strategic relations with Southeast Asia to bolster its standing as a regional power and as a counterweight to the strategic influence of the People's Republic of China. But are we looking too distant into the East? There is trouble brewing at the Indo Myanmar Border which, outwardly, may appear to be only simmering but has the potential to erupt into monstrous proportions if not dealt with carefully. A few aspects of India's security concerns are outlined in the following paragraphs with special reference to Manipur.

The China Factor. China has made inroads into most of our neighbours especially Myanmar. There have been numerous clashes between civilians and rebel groups on one side and the Tatmadaw on the other. It is now fairly well established that China is playing a double game by supporting both sides. Our Act East Policy hardly addresses issues such as these nefarious linkages that China has in our neighbourhood. Every effort is also being made by China to complete the China Myanmar Economic Corridor and to bring Kyaukpyu Port within its influence so as to gain direct entry into the Indian Ocean. A direct threat to Andaman and Nicobar Islands as also a land incursion is a real threat to India's sovereignty. With drug trafficking in place, extensive narco - funding of rebel groups is an obvious outcome. All this has the trappings of creating an unstable neighbourhood which suits the Chinese. India has to exert maximum influence upon Myanmar by engaging it in various spheres of activity to ensure that Myanmar remains neutral. The ultimate aim should be to nudge Myanmar towards a genuine democratic mould. Only then can this neighbourhood be stable. The Indian Army and the paramilitary forces have a major role to play in providing fresh impetus to the existing Indo Myanmar Border Management arrangements.

Border Management. Under the Free Movement Regime, both governments have allowed the free movement of Indians and Myanmarese within 16 kms of the border without visa restrictions. In view of the vexed and changed circumstances should this arrangement continue? This calls for a deliberate joint study by both the countries. Technological solutions like employment of UAVs to monitor activities in specific parts of the border need to be taken up seriously. Coordination between the security agencies on the border is most important with specific emphasis upon intelligence sharing.

Comprehensive Development. The pace of development in the North Eastern states is still a far cry from the rest of the nation. The poverty index and the levels of insurgency must be brought down with a focused effort on bringing up the infrastructure to include roads, rail, Inland Water Transport, tele-communications, airports and power. The Border Area Development Programme that was extended to the North East in 1993-1994 has not, according to a Niti Aayog report, met the intended targets of development.

Legitimate Trade. Every effort must be made to ensure that our Land Customs stations in Manipur, Nagaland, Arunachal and Mizoram are energized to monitor and encourage legitimate trade. As of now, it is only Moreh, in Manipur, that is handling more than 95 % of trade, which is also an indicator of the heightened levels of illegitimate trading of narcotics, gun running etc from this particular region.

Empowering Civil Society. The North East Region has many unique close knit societies which have the potential to assist the State in controlling drug trafficking and abuse. Awareness campaigns by these societies assisted by the army and paramilitary forces will have a telling impact upon an uneducated and distraught community. Women who fall prey to drug abuse and allied ills need to be rehabilitated lest they join the ranks of insurgents or turn to the drug and flesh trade.

Governance. There are systems of tribal customs and panchayats in Manipur. The Manipur valley has adopted the panchayat system, while hill districts still follow the tribal customs. There is a requirement to harmonise both systems with more financial powers and review of responsibilities. To be economically viable, both regions require distinct engines of growth, not depending only upon agriculture. Infrastructure development is riddled by opposition as the valley inhabitants feel that more tribals are pouring in (and vice versa). The Government needs to rebalance this issue with a long term strategy.

Maintaining Ethnic Balance and Identity. The delicate ethnic balance of the region has been affected by stratification and class formation in the earlier classless tribal society. This resulted in more fissures and is damaging the social and cultural fabric. There is a requirement of correctly assessing the interests of tribals and non tribals so as to chart a strategy for inclusive development. Historically, Manipur flourished as a multi-ethnic society by ensuring that the delicate balance of communities is maintained in culture and traditions despite differential in the pace of economic growth in the hill and valley regions. To overcome ethnic divisions, there is a requirement of an all-inclusive development drive with a review of the colonial land laws.

End Note

The North Eastern region of India and Manipur in particular has suffered for many decades now at the hands of inimical forces. Insurgency and drug trafficking and the intrinsic linkage between both have contributed to instability and strife in this part of our country besides other factors like inadequate development and poor governance beset with corruption. With an unstable Myanmar in the neighbourhood and the overarching influence of China in supporting the Tatmadaw and the rebel forces (ie the ruling and the opposition) to expand its global outreach and influence, we have a precarious situation. The Act East Policy must now factor in our security concerns and Myanmar must be engaged on all fronts to wean it away from the Chinese influence.

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Major General Binoy Poonnen, AVSM, VSM (Retd) was commissioned in 1978 into 13 MAHAR as a second generation Army officer, and went on to command his battalion from 1997 to 2000. During his illustrious service, he attended many professional courses to include Defence Services Staff College, Higher Command and National Defence College courses. After commanding a mountain brigade in an operational area, he went on to command a Mountain Division in a Counter Insurgency role in Manipur. He has served in Sri Lanka as a part of IPKF, and has also done stints in Bhutan and Lebanon. He has handled defence cooperation and defence diplomacy aspects with foreign countries during his tenure in Army HQ. After 37 years of dedicated service in the Indian Army, he has settled in Mhow, Madhya Pradesh.



Maj Gen Binoy Poonnen

COUNTER INSURGENCY AND JUNGLE WARFARE (CIJW) SCHOOL

Training Soldiers to Defeat the Guerrillas



Exchanging jungle survival tips with foreign trainees

Amidst the lush green tropical forests of Mizoram, in a quaint village of Vairengte lies a premier Category 'A' training establishment of Indian Army, **The Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare (CIJW) School.** Identified as a Centre of Excellence for Sub Conventional Warfare, the School conducts Low Intensity Conflict Operation (LICO) courses, Pre Induction Training Courses and tailor-made courses for the Indian Army, paramilitary forces, Central and State Police Organisations as well as Armed Forces from Friendly Foreign Countries on Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare.

Raising

The Naga insurgency commenced in 1956 and a decade later the Mizo insurgency started in1966. The Indian Army battalions were deployed to tackle the problem. The battalions inducted in the insurgency affected areas faced numerous challenges highlighting the need and importance of specialised training for the units prior to induction. Field Marshal SHFJ Manekshaw, MC, the then General Officer Commanding in Chief of the Eastern Command, decided to establish a school to meet this training void and thus, an adhoc Jungle Training School at Mynkre near Jowai (Shillong) was established in 1967. This adhoc training school evolved into the present day CIJW School, at Vairengte on 01 May 1970, with a vision **to attain excellence in imparting quality training in conduct of Counter Insurgency and Counter Terrorist Operations.** Brigadier (later Lieutenant General) Mathew Thomas, PVSM, AVSM, VSM was the founder Commandant of this premier institution.

School Insignia. An insignia symbolic of the Counter Insurgency (CI) and jungle warfare technique was adopted for the school. The emerald green background depicting the natural greenery and jungle environment, a thin scarlet border signifying the predominance of the Infantry's role, the crossed arrows depicting unconventional warfare and the bayonet symbolic of the Infantry's close quarter battle techniques found their place in the insignia. Inscribed at the base of the insignia is the School motto, **'FIGHT THE GUERRILLA LIKE A GUERRILLA'.**

CIJW School Goes to War

CIJW School distinguished itself as the only training establishment of the Indian Army to have participated in an actual war. During the 1971 War, the Headquarter of the CIJW School provided the nucleus for Kilo Force and led the advance towards Chittagong. Owing to their experience and

deep understanding of Jungle and Guerrilla Warfare, personnel from the School participating in the 1971 Indo-Pak War proved to be vital assets in the theatre of operations inviting numerous awards and accolades in recognition of their contribution. The then Commandant, Brigadier (later Lieutenant General) Anand Sarup was awarded the second highest wartime gallantry award, the Mahavir Chakra, for his exemplary contribution during this operation. The Chittagong Brigade of the Pakistan Army had surrendered to the Kilo Force. In 1972, the School reverted back to its basic role and has since grown in stature and strength.

Evolution of Courses Conducted

At the inception three types of courses were conducted, the first one for the Junior and Non Commissioned Officers, termed as CIJW (JN), the second for Staff Officers of the army formations operating in counter insurgency environment, termed as CIJW (SO) and the third for the Officers of the battalions, operating in the North East, termed CIJW (O). Constant evolution in Sub Conventional Warfare required continuous modifications to the curriculum and structure of training.

Rise of terrorism in J&K in the 1990s necessitated training specific to combating terrorism. The School was tasked to undertake a study to evaluate the dynamics of terrorism and develop the training to counter it. Accordingly, the School commenced Counter Terrorism Courses from August 1992. As the proxy war in J&K evolved further and the insurgencies in North East India graduated into a protracted conflict, the CIJW School conducted a detailed study to evaluate the nuances of the conflicts and in 2007 restructured the existing Counter Terrorism Course into LICO Course for Officers and JCOs/ NCOs. The first LICO Course commenced in September 2007. Currently, the School conducts four LICO Courses in one training year, for eight weeks duration each. Trainees from Friendly Foreign Countries also participate in the course.

Training at CIJW School

The CIJW School is headed by the Commandant who is assisted by the Deputy Commandant cum Chief Instructor. The School is organised into a Courses Wing to conduct LICO courses, a Battalion Training Wing to conduct Pre Induction Training and a Faculty of Studies to conceive, develop and review concepts relating to Counter Insurgency and Counter Terrorism. In addition to LICO courses and Pre Induction Training, the CIJW School also runs a Foreign Training Node under the Battalion Training Wing where foreign contingents are trained. The training methodology is based on outdoor exercises, demonstrations, tutorial discussions, sand model discussions, case studies and lectures. The training in CIJW School is focused more on outdoor training along with adequate practice on enhancing various skills required to operate in Counter Insurgency and Counter Terrorism environment. Experts in various domains are invited as guest speakers to share their experiences. The objective of the training is to prepare the students for today's low intensity conflicts by enhancing their physical and mental fitness, imparting tactical and technical skills, generating awareness of the nuances of tackling insurgency including a good understanding of the demographic terrain and facilitating dissemination of comprehensive knowledge of the area of operations.



(Left) Counter IED Training at CIJW School.
(Right) Photo. Semi Urban Firing Practice.

Training Infrastructure

A thorough study of insurgencies, terrorism and guerrilla warfare from across the globe has inspired the training infrastructure at CIJW School. Infrastructure development is a continuous process based on the evolving techniques and modus operandi of insurgents and terrorists. The biggest training asset of the School is the availability of suitable terrain around it. The jungles provide the exclusivity that any training establishment longs for. For J&K, the School has designed an area that is akin to the terrain encountered there.

The CIJW School prides itself in having more than a dozen innovative **firing ranges** which cover all possible combat scenarios in a counter insurgency and counter terrorism environment. These ranges help practice the students in quick identification, acquisition and engaging targets in realistic timeframe. Each of



(Left) Gecko Challenge Obstacle Course. (Right) Foreign Training Node at Lailapur.

these ranges are different and make training versatile, realistic and help trainees hone their firing skills for different operational scenarios likely to be encountered.

The Improvised Explosives Device (IED) Trail is an area developed in an innovative way to provide realistic Counter IED training based on past IED encounters/ incidents. The trail extends for 300 metres with IEDs laid in diverse configurations, which allows the trainees to experience how IEDs are employed by terrorists/insurgents. To further enhance the understanding of trainees, an IED Hall preserving a number of different kinds of IEDs and their initiating mechanisms has also been created at the School. The IED training at CIJW School exposes trainees to practical aspects of detection and disposal/neutralization of IEDs.

Inspired by the agility, climbing prowess and survival instincts of the Gecko, a lizard commonly found in tropical forests such as in Mizoram, CIJW School has created a **Gecko Challenge Course** comprising of various obstacles which one is likely to encounter in insurgency and terrorism affected areas. The obstacles have been designed to challenge the physical and mental faculties of trainees through simulation of combat stress. The obstacle course is to be negotiated individually and as a small team to encourage the Small Team concept in its trainees. To enhance learning value, training aids such as War Gaming Software which allows planning and conduct of counter insurgency/ counter terrorist operations and **Infantry Weapons Training Simulator (IWTS)** which is used to improve firing skills are exploited.

Sand Model Exercises are an inherent part of the training curriculum. The Sand models depict the terrain of Northern as well as the Eastern theatre to enable brainstorming on the operational aspects of both the regions. A number of **case studies** held with the School are utilised to make the sand model exercises as realistic as possible. Technology is progressing at a very fast pace and various technological solutions can be leveraged for employment in counter insurgency and counter terrorism operations. The School has set up an **Innovation Hall** displaying such technologies with the aim of germinating ideas for innovative use of technology in the minds of trainees.

The School has created an Information and Research Centre which acts as the repository of data on terrorist and insurgent organisations both regionally and globally. It contains informative display sections providing overviews on North East India, J&K, and regional and global terrorist organisations. It contains assorted literature by eminent authors on topics of low intensity conflict, magazines and journals, case studies, assessments, and interactive display panels.

Conduct of Research Studies

The School has a well-stocked library with over 13000 books and 55 periodicals covering various aspects of insurgency, terrorism, technology, physical fitness and adventure.

Foreign Training : CIJW School is one of the designated Foreign Training Nodes in the country. The node is located at Lailapur in Cachar district of Assam and conducts training of large foreign contingents and joint training. The School has had a training footprint in over 50 countries across the World. Conduct of Joint Training exercises, training of contingents from Friendly Foreign Countries and setting up of Mobile Training Teams in Friendly Foreign Countries are a regular feature, contributing towards Defence Engagement and Cooperation.

Since its establishment the CIJW School has been at the forefront of Jungle Warfare, Counter Insurgency and Counter Terrorism training. Considering the changing dynamics of sub conventional conflict, the School has been evolving its concepts and philosophies of training. Its relevance and significance have constantly been enhanced by the tireless efforts of its instructional and support staff. The School, in over half a century, has achieved professional distinction in training personnel in Sub Conventional Warfare and has proved itself as the **"Centre of Excellence"** for Counter Insurgency and Counter Terrorism. Today, the School has become a premier destination for armies, the world over.

Lt Gen J S Sandhu (Retd) - *Editor*

Professional Insights from Major General VMB Krishnan, AVSM, YSM, Commandant CIJW School

The Commandant of the prestigious CIJW School answers our queries.

Q&A



Maj Gen VM BHUVANA KRISHNAN
AVSM, YSM
took over as the thirty second Commandant of CIJW School on 15 December 2021. He was commissioned into and commanded 12th Battalion, The DOGRA Regiment. He has been General Officer Commanding of an Infantry Division, Brigade Commander of an Infantry Brigade, Military/Defence Attache at High Commission of India in London, Directing Staff in Defence Services Staff College, Wellington in addition to other Staff and Command appointments.

Intelligence is the key ingredient for success in Counter Terrorist operations. Techint has become an extremely important source of inputs too. How does the School train students in the development of techint and use of emerging technologies in intelligence acquisition for Counter Terrorist (CT) Operations?

The importance of intelligence for successful conduct of operations in CI/CT scenario cannot be over emphasised. In addition to the aspects of HUMINT, advent of technology has ensured availability of TECHINT from various sources to troops operating in CI / CT scenario. To keep the trainees at CIJW School abreast with the various modes of obtaining TECHINT, the school has a well-developed capsule on Electronic Warfare and Information Warfare in the curriculum. The trainees are put through a series of academic classes, black board exercises and sand model discussions in intelligence acquisition at company and battalion level. Aspects of intelligence acquisition from various sources are practiced and rehearsed in various outdoor exercises to help trainees develop a better understanding of employment and exploitation of such technology in simulated operational environment during the conduct of the course.

An innovation hall displaying available Commercial Off the Shelf technology has been set-up at the School. Analysis of case studies and after action reports during conduct of the LICO course in light of how technology could be better exploited in an operational scenario is discussed to encourage unconventional employment of available technology during operations. Yet we are careful to emphasise that HUMINT is vital and the fusion of both is an absolute imperative in CI/CT operations.

From classical insurgencies of the last century, internal conflicts have morphed into terrorism and the dynamics of violence have changed. Car bombs, drone attacks as seen in the Middle East, lone wolf attacks may possibly manifest in our area too. What method is adopted in CIJW School to continually update the students on evolving threats from terrorist groups?

In order to keep the learning at CIJW School contemporary, continual upgradation of curriculum is undertaken. The constantly evolving dynamics of terrorism at a global level are studied and analysed by the faculty at CIJW School. Topics such as Global terrorism, Cyber terrorism and changing dynamics of Sub Conventional Warfare to include Grey Zone Warfare and Lone Wolf Terrorism are covered for the trainees of LICO course, Pre-Induction Training Battalions and Unit Training Teams (UTT). The School publishes study papers on such contemporary topics.

As part of faculty development programme, instructors are encouraged to study and brainstorm terrorist initiated incidents from across the globe, draw out lessons learnt and analyse the response of security forces to such incidents.

The relevant lessons from the same are incorporated in the academic classes and tutorial discussions. We closely interact with our field formations on the emerging threats on the ground. We engage with specialist institutions such as College of Military Engineering, Pune, Military College of Telecommunications Engineering, Mhow and NSG Training Centre.

'Forewarned is forearmed' and the need to stay ahead of terrorists' learning curve is well appreciated.

In the last few years we have faced fidayeen style attacks on our bases like Uri, Panzgam, Nagrota, Sunjuwan, Pathankot and even in Naxalite affected areas. Security of bases and posts has accordingly been improved in many places. What innovative techniques does the School suggest to the trainees to counter such attacks on bases?

As they say, *'the terrorist needs to be successful only once, the counter- terrorists have to remain alert always'*. We have studied the terrorist modus operandi in fidayeen attacks which form an important part of our curriculum. While the choice of target and timing could be with the terrorists, it can be made extremely hard for terrorists through a combination of measures. Intelligence - both HUMINT and TECHINT are vital; we emphasise on developing intelligence by the local garrisons & bases. A number of surveillance & deterrence measures have evolved over the years - better surveillance especially at night, domination of the area around and ahead, quick reaction drills and rehearsals, access control, hardening of physical security of the posts, night enabled quad copters, Pan-Tilt-Zoom (PTZ) cameras etc.

As we go forward, change detection using Artificial Intelligence and all weather persistent surveillance are two areas which would merit attention. We are looking at indigenous and affordable technologies considering the dispersed deployment of Security Forces both on frontline and in the hinterland.

It is important to understand that despite the technologies, rapid response to and neutralization of threats will be dependent on *'boots on the ground'*.



No obstacle for Pratividrohi!!

Jungle operations are extremely difficult for soldiers, as they tend to be long drawn, and detecting / neutralizing terrorists holed up in a forest is undoubtedly challenging. What tips and devices can help troops in jungle operations against terrorists?

There is an old saying that *"Jungle is neutral";* it is an asset to the side willing to exploit it as a force multiplier. Security Forces need to be adept in conducting operations in jungles which necessitates understanding the jungle and its characteristics. Endurance and survivability are essential for conduct of successful and sustained operations in the jungles, highlighting the importance of *"Living off the Land"*.

In order to inculcate better understanding of fighting and surviving in jungles, CIJW School conducts a jungle survival capsule for its trainees. Trainees of LICO course are taught skills to help exploit jungle as a force multiplier enhancing their endurance, survivability and chances of success while operating in jungles. Knowing the jungle better than your adversary will exponentially enhance the chance of success.

Training with friendly foreign countries has enabled CIJW School to earn a place as a world renowned institution. Joint multinational exercises are being regularly conducted or supervised by your faculty. Can you share some of the lessons learnt by Indian Forces from their foreign counterparts while training together, and the gains accrued from such training?

CIJW School has its training footprints across over 50 countries through conduct of Contingent training, joint military exercises, Subject Matter Expert visits and Mobile Training Teams in friendly foreign countries. Interactions with various armies from across the globe help us in understanding the nuances of terrorism/insurgency faced by the specific countries and the tactics, techniques, procedures and drills employed by armies of these countries in combating threats specific to their environment. Though lessons learnt from each country is specific to their operational environment the broader lessons learnt

and the gains from such interactions can be summarised as follows:-

- Sharing of training, operational experiences and best practices.
- Overview of the various regional cultural, ethnic affiliations of terrorist and insurgent groups, their origin and current capabilities. Evolution of global terror organisations like Taliban, AI Qaeda, Haqqani Network & ISIS (Daesh), their operations, modus operandi and tactics specific to each operational environment. Broad organisation of the security forces of friendly foreign countries employed in combating such threats.
- Building and promotion of positive relationships including enhancement of mutual cooperation in countering terrorism and inter-operability.
- Latest technologies incorporated by armies of various countries.
- Experience and exposure of handling each other's weapons and equipment.

We deeply cherish and value the opportunity to train and exercise with Friendly Foreign Countries. We gain from each other's best practices in addition to affirming and strengthening our friendly relations. *'Every Indian Army Soldier is a Military Diplomat'* and contributes to the Nation in both the roles - as a Soldier and a Diplomat.

Collateral Damage does occur during operations, despite endeavours to avoid such situations. What tactical measures are practiced by the trainees and awareness conveyed to them to reduce such collateral damage?

Use of minimum force is the abiding rule for the Indian Army while operating in CI/CT scenario. The COAS Commandments of 2005 explicitly reinforce the message: *"Operations to be people friendly, using minimum force and avoiding collateral damage - restraint to be the key"*. CIJW School has designed its outdoor and firing exercises so that trainees are put under adequate simulated mental and psychological stress equivalent to the stress experienced in actual operations; this allows the trainees to develop better assessment of the situation, and measured response and employ minimum force required in any scenario. Strict fire control, time based responses and contingency situations are practiced and rehearsed repeatedly to develop instinctive response to combat situations in the trainees. Debrief of all tactical exercises are conducted by the instructors in order to brainstorm the best response to situations experienced during the exercise.

Small team operations have been a major component of counter insurgency/ counter terrorist operations in India. How is small team training conducted at the School, and what testing system is followed to check the learning skills acquired by students?

'Fight the Guerrilla like a Guerrilla' has been the abiding motto of the CIJW School. We appreciate the fundamental role of Small Team operations in CI/CT environment. Operating in Small Teams is a function of Confidence, Skills and Mental Agility & Strength. Training at the School aims to inculcate this concept in all its trainees. At the very onset of the training, all trainees are allocated their groups and further sub-allocated syndicates down to buddy pairs. The idea is to instil a sense of confidence in their buddies as also their small team during preparation, planning and conduct of all tactical exercises. Case studies and training videos also help internalise the concept of Small Teams. Firing practices such as Simulated Ambush Fire and physical training exercises such as the Gecko Trail assess the application of small team tactics and drills by the trainees in simulated operational environment. The application of Small Team concept by trainees contributes towards the overall assessment of trainees and the award of final grading on the course.

Training exchanges have become a reality in professional and higher education, with online programmes and knowledge sharing. Contact training is being reduced to practical training aspects only. Do you feel that the training expertise and knowledge repository in CIJW School can be shared extensively with other similar institutions, and how should such integration be achieved?

CIJW School shares its training methodology, knowledge repository and operational experiences with other institutions through faculty exchange, distribution of study/research papers and informal interactions with other training establishments. Instructors from CIJW School are invited to conduct training capsules for Central Police Forces and other Security Forces such as the NSG and COBRA. Outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic restricted the physical movement of faculty of CIJW School to other training establishments which is now being circumvented by conduct of faculty interactions through video conferencing. CIJW School also invites Subject Matter Experts and officers from operationally deployed formations to share their experience and expertise.

Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) have been incorporated in education institutions in many places, to improve the quality of instructions. Should CIJW School develop a bank of SMEs and include them in imparting training, either in online or in contact mode.

It is a good idea to supplement our own faculty with SMEs. They enrich our discussions and bring in specialist knowledge and varied perspectives to the table. The engagement with SMEs have been largely online through Video Conferencing. We look forward to inviting them over to the School once we get past the Covid-19 generated situation.

What is your primary mission in CIJW School, and what major asset or strength makes CIJW School a unique and unparalleled Centre of Excellence?

The Mission of CIJW School is to support the Indian Army's ability to conduct CI and CT operations by providing the best contemporary training and relevant conceptual development. CIJW School's strength resides in its realistic outdoor training with 70% of training conducted outdoors.

The hilly jungle terrain, varied combat shooting ranges, the urban training facilities and the number of training exchanges we have with the Friendly Foreign Countries provide value for money, time and effort for the Country, the Army and the trainees.

Physical fitness and mental robustness training are an extremely vital part of training in CIJW School. Are any psychological or motivational tools being used to enhance physical and mental fitness of the students, and to develop an attitude to take on challenges in harsh conditions?

The training programme designed at CIJW School ensures that trainees are put through a structured curriculum with progressive increase in intensity as time progresses. Physical and psychological conditioning of trainees starts on reporting to the school and gradually progresses over time to mould them to efficiently respond to the physical and psychological challenges likely to be encountered by them while operating in a CI/CT environment.



Trainees ready to practice room intervention

A 'can do' attitude & motivation to perform is never in short supply though levels of physical fitness may vary. By the half way mark into the course, there is this sense of all round confidence. We also engage with Army School of Physical Training to structure the physical fitness programme. De-stressing in a CI/CT operational environment is an absolute imperative and we emphasise the same through various techniques including Yoga.

Case studies form an interesting part of the curricula. Does the School develop audio- visual packages or content to convey the training lesson in a more effective way? Does the School have adequate technical support for such audio-visual tools development and preparation?

To enhance learning through engagement of multiple sensory inputs of the trainees, CIJW School has created a set of training movies on a number of essential tactical operations conducted in CI/CT environment. These movies highlight all aspects for conduct of operations including preparation, planning, organisation of various parties and tactical drills. The movies help trainees understand the nuances of conduct of tactical operations in CI/CT environment.

Any queries and doubts arising in the minds of trainees thereof are discussed and clarified during tutorial discussions and exercises by the directing staff. The creation of training movies has been done by the faculty of CIJW School with videographic and technical assistance from civilian videographers. Going forward, augmented/virtual reality would play an important role in experiencing from the immersive feeling of operational environment. Yet, nothing beats the real on ground experience of going out and operating in the physical world.

Lt Gen J S Sandhu (Retd) - *Editor*

We had successfully delivered about 400 of some of the finest soldiers of the Indian Army onto Hulule within 15 hours of the first telephone call received from the Maldives. That evening, 44 Squadron flew 5 aircraft into Hulule.

ROUTE FOLLOWED TO HULULE



OPERATION CACTUS:

Indian Air Force (IAF) flies in the Paratroopers

The IAF acquired strategic airlift capability with the induction of IL-76 aircraft in the late 80s. This capability was gainfully used to defeat a coup attempt in Maldives. A first person account from the Commanding Officer of the transport squadron involved in that intervention.

The IL-76 Arrive

To boost her strategic airlift capability, the IAF sent a team of aircrew, engineers and technicians to USSR to train on the IL-76 in 1984; I was one of the 12 pilots. This beast could carry 43 tons or 300 passengers and had a radius of action of 4000 kms with four powerful jet engines. The first IL-76 with IAF colours came into India in March 1985 and I took command of 44 Squadron at Agra in September 1987. Baptised in fire, I was immediately involved in the induction of troops to Sri Lanka, as part of Operation Pawan. In February 1988, I led the induction of 28 tanks and two armoured recovery vehicles into Leh over 15 continuous days without a break, a singular achievement for 44 Squadron.



AN-12 aircraft - They maintained an air bridge between India and Maldives in support of 6 PARA

44 Squadron Gets Ready

On 03 November 88 at 0715 hours, I was ordered to place three aircraft on 'Stand By'. Jadhav, Ramu, Ahuja, Badle Vishu, Dilbagh, Patankar, Bhatnagar, all key personnel of 44 Squadron, activated their time tested systems, and by 1000 hours we were ready with three IL-76s fuelled at 40 tons which would take us to any place in India. Doordarshan was reporting a coup in Maldives and that India will give all help. Since there was no other crisis within India, I assumed the target must be Maldives. Navigators studied their maps and entered the coordinates of the Way Points from Agra to Hulule, via Thiruvananthapuram into the Navigation Computers of the aircraft. Hulule is the island that has the main runway of Maldives, not too long at about 6500 feet in November 88. It is 10,000 feet today. I had a meeting with the Flight Commanders, Navigators, Signals, Engineer, Gunner Leaders who later conducted their respective briefings. This was followed by a briefing from the Squadron Technical Officer. We awaited further instructions. As is normal in a Stand By status, the squadron cafeteria was working overtime, anticipation of an operational task activates the gastric juices. Not to be ignored.

The big question was, what will the IL-76s carry? Which forces? From where? How many? When do I get going? Unknown to me, the Parachute (Para) Brigade, also at Agra, had been activated and Brigadier Farook Bulsara, their Commander was busy getting his battalions together as they were out on training. He gave the initial task to 6 Parachute Battalion, commanded by Colonel Subhash Joshi. Joe, as Joshi was called, had planned to go on leave the next day to Gangtok. It is ironic that I flew Joe 180 degrees opposite. There was feverish activity at the brigade to reach the airfield the soonest. On Male, as readers can well imagine, uncertainty was overpowering, and President Gayoom was reportedly in an 'unsafe' house. Interestingly, the international call made from Male to India at 0700 hours on 03 November 88 was kept active till well after 0800 hours on 04 November 88, possibly the longest international telephone call ever.

I had no inputs but the brigade was told that up to 500 terrorists armed with Rocket Propelled Grenades, AK-47, controlled the TV station, Telephone Centre, and important installations on Male. Mercifully, they had not attacked the island of Hulule with the runway. In Delhi there was a high level meeting taking place in Army Headquarters (HQ) Operations Room with Shri Rajiv Gandhi, the Prime Minister, and everyone who was anyone in the Government of India. Information was coming in from various countries. While speed was of essence, it was prudent to be prepared for all contingencies. To add to the uncertainty, Bulsara was told that there may be shoulder fired anti-aircraft missiles with the terrorists. No one told me about those missiles. Was it to make sure I do not hesitate? So here I was in Agra at approximately 1230 hours waiting for some orders, when the leading elements of 6 Para started pouring onto the squadron tarmac and that is how I came to know that our cargo was paratroopers. No inputs to me from Air HQ or Central Air Command or from my Air Officer Commanding. By 1500 hours the Para Brigade had mobilised, creditable by any standards. I can say with certainty that by 1545 hours, 44 Squadron and 6 Para were ready to be launched. But where were our orders? It was then that officers from Army and Air HQs arrived in a Dornier.

Should We Drop or Land?

New Delhi suggested a paradrop which Bulsara, Joshi and I jointly rejected. There was no map, sketch, drawing or photograph of Male or Hulule to assess whether a paradrop was feasible. Time was now 1600 hours. The island of Hulule with the main runway had been ignored by the terrorists. How much longer would they neglect it? It is significant to note that no one had any idea as to which group of terrorists we were up against. It was therefore not possible to make plans based on what is commonly termed as *'known enemy capabilities and style of operations'*. No one knew anything, including me.

An IL-76 drops 126 paratroopers in 22 seconds, but the DZ must be at least two kms long. Winds at Hulule are generally Westerly at around 15 kms. To do a drop with the intention of capturing the runway, I would have to fly about 3 kms West of the island of Hulule, over the Hind Mahasagar, at night, and release the troops hoping they will drift exactly 3 kms, without a steerable parachute, and land on the runway. Those who fell into the Indian Ocean onto the shallow sharp coral would be cut to ribbons and many would drown with their heavy loads. Not one of them would be fit for battle. I would take four hours to reach Male, could I drop troops by parachute being completely 'blind' on a dark night? Out of the question.

Time was running out, the only option for me was to make a direct landing at Hulule, and I must get airborne soonest. Bulsara and I said that a landing was the only option. It was agreed to. Loading of aircraft was initiated, and orders to refuel the three aircraft were given. Our IL-76s needed another 22 tons of fuel each to fly to Hulule and return to Thiruvananthapuram. The squadron tarmac resembled a combination of a beehive cum anthill.

Trucks from the Para Brigade moving all over, fuel tankers running to and fro, loading being supervised by Flight Gunners, technical staff preparing the aeroplanes, ground power units connected and aircrew at their stations preparing to start engines. Our Chief Engineering Officer, then Group Captain (now Air Marshal) Gururani got all three aircraft refuelled with 62 tons each by 1745 hours. Normally it would have taken three hours. Hats off to 'Guru' for achieving the unprecedented in the history of the IAF.

The result was that aircraft numbers K-2878 and K-2999 were starting engines at 1750 hours and taxying for take-off that was recorded by Air Traffic Control (ATC), Agra as 1804 hours on 03 November 88. I had decided to launch the operation with two IL-76s, I was flying in K-2878 in the lead and late Wing Commander Amardeep Gill was #2 in K-2999.

Planning Onboard

My plan was that Gill would maintain a distance of a km behind me. He would not put on Navigation Lights and he would not speak with any ATC and keep in touch with me on a confidential frequency. His weather radar kept me in 'sight', and our Tail Gun Radar kept K-2999 in 'sight'. In effect K-2999 was a "Ghost Aircraft'. Readers must understand that all deliberations between Joshi and me were held on board K-2878 between Bhopal and Hyderabad, we had no time for this before take-off. Joe and I discussed some important issues. The code word that Hulule ATC would transmit was **HUDIYA**. The most critical part was how the troops would exit from the rear and reach in front of the aircraft to deploy, because my engines would be running. As we neared Nagpur, the crew and I ate a well-earned dinner prepared by Mast Ram, the superb cook of 44 Squadron.

Our next problem was what information do we divulge to various ATCs enroute? My flight plan stated that K-2878 was on a routine flight from Agra to Thiruvananthapuram (TVM). No flight plan was filed for K-2999. As far as the aviation authorities were concerned, a single IL-76 was flying from Agra to TVM. As I approached TVM, the ATC ordered me to commence descent at 80 kms. I had no intention of doing that so I asked TVM if a Group Captain Panicker was with him, to which he replied yes. Panicker and I had been in Iraq together, I spoke with him in Arabic telling him that I am pressing on without mentioning any names. What Panicker explained to the ATC controller in Malayalam, I never asked. Between TVM and Hulule is a Dead Reckoning Check Point, NOKID. All direct air traffic between Middle East and South East Asia flies over NOKID



IL-76 - ready by 1000 hours at Agra



Hulule Runway on 03 November 1988

and a mandatory position report is made to TVM. I decided not to report our position at NOKID since we had no intelligence to indicate whether anyone was monitoring the open frequency of TVM. At 2125 hours it was time for me to establish contact with Hulule.

Landing in Darkness at Hulule Airport

In Agra I had decided that about 30 minutes before our ETA, we would establish HF contact with an aircraft on ground at Agra, they just listened and we kept informing them about our position. At about 2125 hours, I made first R/T contact with Hulule and transmitted, *"This is Friendly One"*, the ATC replied, *"Go Ahead"*. I said *"Do you have a message"*. His response was *"Hudiya, Hudiya, Hudiya"*. The code word was correct, it was safe to land. I was about 20 kms from touchdown when I asked for runway lights, they came on for about 5 seconds and were switched off. In those 5 seconds I aligned with the runway, my only sight of the runway. I kept descending towards an unlit runway in the Indian Ocean. No further transmissions were made. The exact position of the runway could not be ascertained. Nor did I have any kind of perspective to adjust my approach path. The codeword was 'positive' and I was committed to land.

I had flown more than 3,000 kms with 200 paratroopers right across India, with a **ghost aircraft** behind me, I could not look for ideal landing conditions. I had to land on this very first approach, making a second attempt was unthinkable. From the cockpit nothing could be seen on ground, actually it was water. Diwali was on 09 November 88, moon rise was at 0140 hours on 04 November 88. It was now 2140 hours 03 November, and the ocean was pitch dark with no reference lights to differentiate sky from ground.

At the back of my mind was the fact that the Izzat of India, of the IAF and of 44 Squadron lay in the successful delivery of 200 paratroopers into Maldives. Failure was not allowed. Gill was orbiting at 3000 feet waiting for further instructions. The IAF with 44 Squadron in the lead was about to make history in a clandestine strategic operation. At about 200 metres above sea level, indicated on the radio altimeter I put on the aircraft Landing Lights and transmitted "Lights". They came on, I flared out, cut power, and as the tyres touched the concrete, the runway lights were switched off. It was not expected and pretty unnerving. Phase I of OPERATION CACTUS was successfully achieved.

Having read the story so far, the reader would realise that I must have touched-down well ahead of the desirable point, I asked for Reverse on all four engines, normally inadvisable, and sat on the foot brakes. When I stopped I could see the end of the runway. I turned around, ordered opening of cargo doors and lowering of the ramp to ensure swift exit for the paratroopers. As the aircraft stopped the maroon berets were out like a shot. We could see them scurrying across the tarmac, totally professional well trained rapid action forces. However, this rapid action to get onto the Eastern side of the runway had its extremely comic and near tragic consequences. I advised Gill to land after it was clear that there was no enemy response as yet. Imagine his horror, when he saw our paratroopers crossing the runway during his landing run. Amazingly, no one was even grazed by the aircraft. Some agility these para boys have. Talk about living dangerously! According to MK Singh the navigator, our landing time was 2148 IST. That makes it a flight of 3 hours 44 minutes from *'wheels up to touch down'*.

Who deserves unqualified credit is late Amardeep Gill maintaining formation and position for all those hours, and then practically chasing me onto the runway at Hulule. Last minute changes in Para Brigade plans resulted in all the troops going into battle with no one left to offload. So the aircrew and our technical crew offloaded the stores from the aircraft. We wanted to get off as soon as possible. There was no need to expose two giant IL-76s to some stout-hearted terrorist. Recall that

time was very short in Agra, and short cuts had been forced upon 44 Squadron and Para Brigade. The end result was that ammunition was issued on board the aircraft contrary to all regulations and in violation of safety procedures. But under the circumstances, it had to be done. I of course was oblivious to all this, merrily flying the aircraft, while the lean and mean troopers of 6 Para were being armed to their teeth. No one took my permission to issue ammunition, had they, what could I have replied? But here is more. Close to Bengaluru, the Subedar Sahab realised that his 'boys' were without hand grenades.

Yes, dear reader, nearly 200 para-troopers were issued hand grenades, very carefully, at 30,000 feet inside K-2878. It would be interesting to know which other country's Army and Air Force indulge in such close co-operation. By 2230 hours on 03 November 88 I left Hulule for Thiruvananthapuram, and Gill followed. Our task was over; we had successfully delivered about 400 of some of the finest soldiers of the Indian Army onto Hulule within 15 hours of the first telephone call received from the Maldives. That evening, 44 Squadron flew 5 aircraft into Hulule.

It is said that the Maldives are extremely beautiful. Unfortunately, I have not seen it by day, I landed on a moonless night, and left in 30 minutes. I got back to Agra by 0500 hours on 04 November to see the sixth aircraft being readied. All of us had been awake for more than 24 hours. Once again 44 Squadron had lived up to its reputation. I again very humbly place on record that I was uniquely privileged to command such a fine body of officers and airmen.

END NOTE

Medals & Ribbons is the ideal place to discuss lessons for the Indian Armed Forces. The story has been recounted in first person intentionally to make it personal from me to the reader. India's predominant geographic position in the Indian Ocean, the size of her economic, political, commercial, technical, industrial, mercantile strength, and of course her military potential, places a heavy burden on her. We have proven our capacity to react swiftly and determinedly. One lesson therefore is to be fully prepared militarily, politically and diplomatically with level headedness and smart intelligence. If we are lax, those inimical to India will be tempted to create mischief. An unprepared India will pay dearly to re-establish normalcy in the region.

The air assault at Hulule was India's first secret strategic intervention at the request of a neighbour. It was also a first for me. We got OPERATION CACTUS right because of tough training, measured audacity, daring initiative, swift action, bold decisions and no political interference. It is true that world powers were in awe by the rapid and determined reaction from India. Three operations are comparable; Operation Oak, the rescue of Mussolini by SS troops on 12 September 1943; Operation Thunderbolt, the Israeli rescue at Entebbe on 04 July 1976 and Operation Eagle Claw, the US attempt to rescue hostages in Iran on 24 April 1980. Oak and Thunderbolt were stunning successes, Eagle Claw was an abject failure. In these three operations, there were many intelligence inputs and many days for preparation. OPERATION CACTUS was conceived, planned and executed within 20 hours. I therefore seek the reader's indulgence, compare those three actions with Cactus and then proudly conclude,

'Hindustaan ke faujiyon ki vakai kuch baat hai na'.

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Group Captain A G Bewoor, VM (Retd) was commissioned into the Transport Stream of the IAF in October 65. He has flown more than 5000 hours on 11 types of aircraft and is a Category 'A' Flying Instructor. He served with the Iraqi Air Force for two years, was an Air Force Examiner and later the Senior Instructor Air Wing at DSSC, Wellington. He was one of the 12 pilots selected for training on IL-76 in USSR. During his tenure as the Commanding Officer 44 Squadron, OPERATION CACTUS was launched on 03 November 88 to defeat a coup in Maldives. Settled in Pune, Bewoor writes regularly for journals and magazines on military and other subjects.



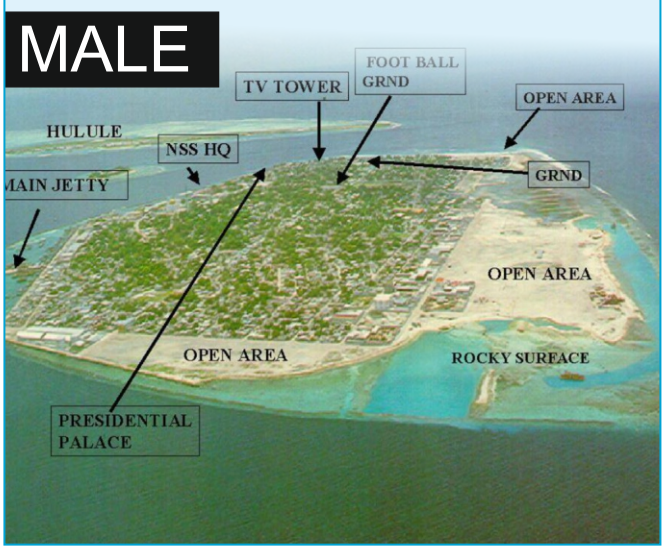
Group Captain A G Bewoor

OPERATION CACTUS:

6 PARA in Maldives

India's strategic intervention capability was demonstrated on 3rd and 4th November 1988, when the Indian Armed Forces came to the rescue of the legitimate Government in Maldives, and foiled an attempted coup. The Commanding Officer of the battalion narrates.

Swift response - time and again the Indian Armed Forces have risen to the occasion, at short notice, in times of crisis, calamities or operational emergencies, and delivered successful results. We salute them!!



Backdrop

The Parachute Regiment and Brigade work in close conjunction with the Indian Air Force (IAF), to be employed speedily where rapid mobilization at short notice is needed to far off places within or outside the country. The mercenary supported attack in November 1988, in the Republic of Maldives, was one such situation when the besieged country sought India's help after their appeal to the US, UK, Pakistan and Singapore was regretted by these countries expressing inability to provide timely assistance.

I had assumed command of my Battalion, 6th Battalion, The Parachute Regiment (6 PARA), a part of 50 Independent Parachute Brigade in Agra on 10 July 1988. Like any Commanding Officer, I put my well trained battalion through its usual paces in training, to acquaint myself with their current level of all round skills, having recently returned from an insurgency area. Amongst other things, studies of countries in the neighbourhood, for officers was regularly carried out. We were sketchily aware of most of our neighbouring countries, including Maldives, and their terrain peculiarities etc.

Activation

On 03 November 1988, I had a company of my battalion guarding the Ordnance Depot, which was necessitated by a major fire accident. I was in the Training Area when there was an urgent call from the Brigade Major (BM), the principal operational staff officer. Major (later Lieutenant General) Vinod Bhatia, the BM, asked me to reach the Brigade Headquarters (HQ) forthwith for some operational task. I reached the Brigade HQ around 1020 hours, where I met

Brigadier Farooq Bulsara, our Commander, a seasoned officer and a very fine professional. He informed me that there were approximately 500 mercenaries operating from a red mother ship anchored about 3 kms from Male. Some of them had gained control of the Radio Station, TV Station and Telephone Exchange. The rebels commuted to Male using commandeered speed boats.

He also apprised me that the Maldivian National Security Service (NSS) HQ along with all troops therein were under siege and attack. The President was reported to be safe and in hiding in Male (in an unsafe) house. The rebels were equipped with infantry weapons, Rocket Propelled Grenades and Surface to Air Missiles and there were reports of white mercenaries in the group. The airport was reported to be safe (though I was not sure about it). The Commander instructed me to move with one company and be ready to take off by 1230 hours in the IL-76 aircraft. We could be para-dropped or airlanded. In the event, these two modes were not workable, I was to be prepared to camp at Thiruvananthapuram for 2-3 days and should carry my logistics loads accordingly, including tentage. I passed on these instructions to Major Rupinder Dhillon – not only that, I considered this an opportunity to withdraw the company at the Ordnance Depot which I did and briefed their Company Commander, Major Umed Singh, anticipating an escalation of force level for the task.

There were some difficulties – whereas the pouch scale of small arms ammunition was stored in the companies, the rest of the ammunition viz mortars, recoilless antitank guns, Rocket Launchers etc were elsewhere and would need some time to fetch. A short cut was to have other personnel of the battalion get the said ammunition and deliver it to the troops at Agra Airport or within the unit. Rupinder's company was at the airport at 1230 hours and the Ordnance Depot company also moved straight there. In the meantime, the ammunition had been speedily given. Rupinder was to have the parachutes collected and positioned; he reported a difficulty which meant that I could drop only 70 paratroopers. Considering that if the jump option was to be exercised to be made from IL-76, I had to change the weapon carried by the initial para wave to 70 carbines, not exactly the weapons that I would like except for those otherwise so armed.

Planning the Nitty Gritties

My tasks as derived from the information that my Commander gave me were to secure the airport, get boats and cross over to Male. I would need to secure a beachhead, establish a base rapidly, secure the President and secure the vital installations and eliminate the enemy rendering Male safe soonest. Thereafter, I would have to mop up and receive additional forces if required. In case of a halt at Thiruvananthapuram, I would monitor the developments and await further orders.

As mentioned, Rupinder was at the 44 Squadron Area around 1230 hours; around 1145 hours I was told that I was to go with two companies – a combination of paradrop for a company and airlanding the second company, with the lead company securing the airport. My allocation was to be three IL-76 aircraft – accordingly I planned that aircraft 1 would carry the para assault force of Rupinder with a platoon of the second company and my command group. The remainder of the second company would fly in the second IL-76 along with the Artillery Troop and the Engineer Platoon. They would hold the airport after we went to Male, along with the Brigade Commander's tactical command group. The third aircraft was exclusively for F-echelon transport, guns and logistics loads, and my medical group from the Para Field Ambulance.All above was to change further – my second company had reached the airport around 1320 hours and I reached around the same time. I quickly briefed the troops and Orders Group, carried out a quick rehearsal lasting about 30 minutes for the tasks envisaged with these two companies. I was then given a company of 3 PARA under command for the operation who were yet to reach the airport. My loads too had arrived but we saw little Air Force activity except that it appeared as if there were only two aircraft which were being readied. This rankled me and I was debating on revision of the load tables including where the third company would be carried along with the loads meant for the third aircraft, when I received a message that a team from Army HQ is awaited – the final plan (and briefing) would emerge thereafter. Loading too could only start thereafter except some of the heavier loads. The Delhi Team arrived a little after 1500 hours. We all met in the 44 Squadron Briefing Room where Brigadier Bulsara told me that the whole brigade was being mobilized. The Delhi Team told us that, firstly we had to jump in Male where they had selected (highly unsuitable) drop zones which were rejected concurrently by the Commander, Group Captain Bewoor and me.

At this point, three things – we were told that the line sketches on the board were not of Male or that of Male international airport, our only landing airport; secondly, air landing for all was

to be attempted and, lastly the pilots would try and land to commence further operations. In the mean time, loading had started but was delayed a bit by reduction of one aircraft. Consequently, my troops loaded some loads into both the aircraft including the Thiruvananthapuram halt logistics loads. There was also a mix up of the lead and follow up aircraft.

The Action

My final battalion ground plan evolved as we took off; in Phase 1, we planned to clear and secure the Western and Eastern sides of the Hulule Airport by Rupinder and Umed respectively; and in Phase 2, Rupinder's company would cross over to Male from Hulule by obtaining or commandeering boats locally. In Phase 3, we planned to clear Male and rescue the President, for which a platoon was designated under Lieutenant MK Singh, as also the 3 PARA Company would take over the Airport responsibility. Phase 4 would be the final search and confirmation of clearance of Male.

We were airborne from Agra at about 1800 hours and I got on to the PA System of the aircraft and briefed my troops for about 40 minutes during the flight between Gwalior and Nagpur. Thereafter, a detailed briefing of my company commanders was done using a tourist book given by our High Commissioner to Maldives, Mr Arun Kumar Bannerjee, who accompanied us on the flight to Hulule and was of great help. The book had photographs of Hulule runway and the President, HE Maumoon Abdul Gayoom. The photograph was shown to all members of the Presidential Rescue Team by MK and both photos were used for my detailed briefing of the company and platoon commanders. Instructions for Major (later Lieutenant General) NKS Ghai, 3 PARA Company Commander were conveyed by Major Umed Singh. I gave instructions to check and fit parachutes of the designated personnel, the process lasted about 20 minutes; these were put by the men under their seats and grenades were issued on board – I was not going to land with ineffective armament. I moved over to Group Captain Bewoor and asked him regarding any specific instructions for disembarkation and informed him broadly of my ground plan. By now, about three hours later we were headed towards Thiruvananthapuram on the final leg of the flight. As we came over the Indian Ocean, I sat considerably relaxed. About 10 minutes before landing, I moved over to the Navigators Cabin to get a view of Hulule as best as I could but there was nothing to be seen, as we approached the runway blindly solely on instruments – highly skillful flying by the Groupie.



6 PARA troops in front of NSS Hq in Male

The runway lights came on just about three seconds before we touched down and they were put off within another three seconds of touch down. Groupie Bewoor completed the landing run on landing lights and activated the opening of the rear ramp as we were taxying towards the parking area. We disembarked leaving the ammunition and logistics loads in the aircraft because it was critical to secure the airport at the earliest; a few unidentified people were rounded up. Rupinder contacted NSS HQ who told him of the siege and requested speedy arrival at Male. We were offered the services of the airport rescue boat whose driver was missing. He turned up after 20 minutes of search. The boat carried the Sappers and battalion pioneer platoon personnel some of whom were adept at handling of motorized boats. They brought 10 plus small boats (mostly 4 and 6 seaters) and their drivers from an island resort called Kurumba, Rupinder proceeded immediately with most of his boys to Male around 0040 hours, I followed closely behind. At Hulule after I left for Male, Captain Ramesh Poonekar of 3 PARA was sent to divert the attention of the hostiles with a platoon, which he readily endorsed and implemented after we had brought in boats to ferry his troops. Around this time, when all the lead troops were headed towards Male, we saw a ship moving in the harbour between Male and Hulule; suspecting it to be an attempt by the rebels to escape, it was engaged by rocket launchers of Umed's company. Out of the three rockets fired, two hit the ship while the third perhaps fell short; I believe this engagement made the subsequent task of surrender of the rebels somewhat easier for our Navy.

At Male

After securing the beachhead, Rupinder was met by some guides from NSS who, at our gunpoint though happily, took him to the Deputy



6 PARA troops at Male

Defence Minister, Mr. Ilyas Ibrahim. The Minister had been wounded by the rebels; he contacted the President and informed him of the arrival of Indian troops and provided guides to take Rupinder to the President's hiding place. I was on the beachhead, when he reached the President and I too reached there immediately. Rupinder was tasked to take the President personally to the NSS HQ. I requested Brig Bulsara to come and meet the President. He came across from Hulule, accompanied by Mr Bannerjee, and met President Gayoom around 0330 hours; pleasantries were exchanged. Later President Gayoom spoke to Shri Rajiv Gandhi, the Prime Minister around 0430 hours, when Brigadier Bulsara, Mr Bannerjee and Rupinder were present along with some other Maldivian dignitaries. In the meantime, I received all clear reports from all over Male from my troops. I had ordered a house to house search, in which we captured 11 rebels and some sympathizers who were taken into custody for further follow up in conjunction with the NSS. A second search commenced soon after first light. The rest of the brigade kept building up at Hulule and operations were undertaken to search the neighbouring islands – another dozen sympathizers were rounded up and handed over to the NSS. There was a small but significant action by Subedar (later Subedar Major and Honorary Captain) Pritam Singh; he noticed a boat trying to escape despite proclamation of no movement into or outside Male. He chased this boat and hit it with a rifle antitank grenade and sank it. The occupants tried to escape but were picked up and the contents were searched in the presence of the NSS (Police Wing). The Government of Maldives requested our Government to provide security assistance to them. I was ordered to stay back in Male with my battalion – our initial strength was 500 troops which was later reduced to 200 – I still wonder why we do not retain the integrity of units and sub units. I returned only a year later when 44 Squadron sent the same aircraft to bring me and my 200 soldiers back home to Agra. At this stage, I was with two truncated companies, 200 all ranks.

What We Learnt

I believe we have great soldiers in the Army, Navy and Air Force who will always deliver – war or peace. We have trained hard, trained very well jointly and have shown excellent jointmanship whenever the country needed us. My company commanders, especially Rupinder and Umed, showed superb leadership at the delivery end of this operation because they trained and inspired their men by leading from the front as did their subordinate leaders. All ranks showed great initiative where required – take the case of Subedar Pritam Singh; some others might similarly have escaped my notice.

By training with the IAF, we had built in a great degree of mutual appreciation of each others' needs, peculiarities, limitations, modus operandi and perhaps even psyches!!

I consider myself responsible for any small or big flaws that may have occurred. Lack of Intelligence was the worst – the tragedy was that the information we needed was known to the rest of India on Door Darshan at 2100 hours but was not available to us who needed it the most, six hours before the broadcast and we went in ignorance of what was available aplenty. But rest assured, the Indian Armed Forces proved that **WE CAN and we did then and will do it again when the country needs us – in war or in peace!!**

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Brigadier SC JOSHI, YSM, VSM, (Retd) was commissioned in April 1966 into the Parachute Regiment. Besides command of 6 Para, he has commanded the prestigious 50 Independent Parachute Brigade in Agra. He has been the Force Commander and Chief Military Observer in UNAMSIL (United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, Africa). He has also served as an instructor in Intelligence School, Pune, DSSC, Wellington and in Army War College, Mhow. He is often called upon to deliver talks at DSSC, CDM, CAWS, USI, NDC, CENJOWS, Army War College and NDC on Operation "CACTUS" and UN Peace Keeping Operations. He has also lectured on disaster relief at Sikkim University, Sikkim Manipal University and to Government officers.



Brigadier SC Joshi

OPERATION CACTUS:

The Navy's Overt Strategic Leap

After the paratroopers had landed in Hulule, the mercenaries who had attempted the overthrow of the legitimate Government in Maldives, sailed away in a hijacked ship. The Navy went for them, the action described hereafter by the Captain of INS Betwa, who intercepted the hijackers.

Ugly things began to happen in Male, the capital of Maldives (an archipelago of 250 coral islands which lies about 400 nm South West from Sri Lanka) on 03 November 1988. A coup, with assistance of some Sri Lankan Tamil desperadoes from a group called PLOTE (People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam), had occurred against Maldivian President H.E. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom and he had gone into hiding. At about 0730 hours, President Gayoom somehow managed to ring up New Delhi and sought Indian assistance. By 2200 hours, that is within a mere 15 hours of President Gayoom's request, two Indian Air Force (IAF) transport aircraft with paratroopers landed on the small, unlit airstrip of Hulule. The coup was smashed and by 0700 hours on 04 November, within 24 hours of his urgent request, President Gayoom had been rescued from captivity and reinstalled as the President of Maldives. For the Indian

Operation CACTUS was a Tri-Services operation between 03- 07 November 1988. The geographic canvas of the naval part of this operation was the seas between India, Maldives and Sri Lanka, (Kochi, Maldives and Colombo are also indicated on the map). Major shipping lanes pass through the area.



Army and IAF, Operation Cactus had finished successfully. Earlier, India had covertly intervened or ensured strongly signalled willingness to intervene on governmental requests in Mauritius, Seychelles and Sri Lanka.

The Action Shifts to the Seas

Sensing capture, the rebels, took some tourists and Maldivians, including their Transport Minister hostage and hijacked a merchant vessel Progress Light (MVPL). They escaped Male in the early morning of 04 November. A little background of naval dispositions is necessary here. On 03 November 1988, the relatively new frigate, *INS Godavari* was East of Sri Lanka returning from Sydney after representing India in the Australian Bicentenial Fleet Review. To the West, the cadets' training ship *INS Tir* was returning from Mauritius. Most naval ships and Marine Commandoes (MARCOS) were in Mumbai and the IL-38 maritime surveillance aircraft were based at Goa. *INS Betwa,* an aging air-defence frigate that I was privileged to command, was tied up alongside in Kochi. With the escape of rebels from Male, the naval part of Operation Cactus began. Destroyers, frigates, a landing craft and a team of naval commandos were ordered to get ready for deployment. *INS Tir* and *Godavari* were ordered to shape course towards Male with "despatch" which is navalese for sailing at best speed. Aircraft from Goa started searching for the hijacked ship, MVPL. At 0930 hours, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Southern Naval Command (FOCINC South) ordered Betwa to come to *"immediate notice for motoring"* which meant that within eight hours the ship was to be ready in all respects to proceed to sea to carry out a given mission. As said, I was the Captain, and had a "ringside" seat in what unfolded.

I got a bare essential briefing that there had been a coup in Maldives and naval presence in that area was essential. I was not to share this information with my crew until *Betwa* had sailed from Kochi. My assumption, in the absence of definite plans, was that the Indian Navy (IN) intended to establish a 'cordon sanitaire' around Maldives so that nothing entered or left Male without our knowledge. We departed Kochi at 1620 hours on 03 November.

During the night, *Betwa* continued South towards Male. The sea was moderately rough, with frequent squalls and heavy clouds. We still did not know our exact mission, but as signals from Naval Headquarters (NHQ) and Flag Officer Commanding Western Naval Command (FOCINC West) began to flow in, a tactical picture began to build up. However, we did not know that IAF and the Indian Army had foiled the coup attempt, and that the rebels had then hijacked a ship and escaped with hostages. We learnt of these events 12 hours later through further signals from shore authorities. Such delays in information exchange at sea were common in the '80s because of manual encryption and decryption.

At 0925 hours on 04 November, a Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) spotted a ship between Male and Sri Lanka heading easterly. Apart from radar searches, MPAs often spot a ship's wake and then trace the ship. CINC West signalled details of this ship to *Betwa* and we began an Intercept Search. Searching for a ship at sea is difficult and prolonged because a ship is relatively a small target, easily camouflaged by waves and the weather. In 1941, the Royal Navy took days to find the German battleship Bismarck before sinking it in the Atlantic (Today with so many satellites as "eyes in the sky," such problems would be rare). Four hours later, NHQ signalled data of the same ship which did not match the earlier report and we became doubtful of the efficacy of our search. Information management systems of IL-38 MPA were primitive by current standards and such mistakes were common.



INS Godavari. Photo credit en.wikipedia.org



INS Betwa. Photo credit en.wikipedia.org

Preparing for Action

It became obvious that some sort of confrontation between *Betwa* and MVPL was inevitable. Would it be a gun action or a pirate style boarding operation? We did not receive any instructions and we decided to prepare for both. For gun action, fusing of separate ammunition of 4.5" guns was begun. This is done by screwing in a detonator into the high explosive body of a shell. This is a dangerous task because mishandling of ammunition in a ship can be very dangerous for itself. This action was irregular because fusing of ammunition is done only after getting orders from higher authorities. I decided not to wait and ordered fusing of 120 shells. This paid off later because without this ammunition, *Betwa* could not have disabled MVPL and forced the hijackers to surrender. This operational oversight by Headquarters occurred because in the 70s and 80s, weapon awareness in the Navy had declined. It was an era of exciting bridge work like formation anchoring and high speed manoeuvres. The idea of going alongside hijackers' ship and boarding like pirates was not appealing because 20th century warships were not built for such tasks. But in a crunch situation, a boarding could not be ruled out. We prepared by building fortifications with *atta* (wheat flour) bags around the bridge. To shield our own snipers, we carried these bags up in the crow's nest which was about 25 metres high.

We polished up our small arms skills by firing machine guns, rifles and pistols on a "jury-rigged" target towed behind the ship. The entire crew was excited that they were doing something which was for real and not mere practice. I had never seen this kind of collective enthusiasm before. At 0245 hours on 05 November, we found the hijacked ship. NHQ instructed us to shadow the ship and await arrival of negotiators from Male. We closed the ship to 6 miles. MVPL called us on Channel 16 (International initial VHF calling frequency) and asked *Betwa* to remain far away and not follow them. We recorded these radio exchanges on the ship's cassette tape recorder. After Operation Cactus, I wished to handover these recordings for analysis or archives, but NHQ was indifferent and those tapes still remain with me. Why so? Is it because Indians are known to be cavalier towards records and history? Is that why most do not trust official histories and multiple versions of history from limited personal perspectives abound? I play these recordings during presentations on Operation Cactus and three decade old sounds in an auditorium are a big hit.

I began to sensitise my crew about the possibility of the hijackers doing a reverse trick and boarding *Betwa*. This may sound outlandish, but USS Pueblo was seized by North Korean soldiers in 1968 and Commander Pete Bucher could never live down this shame till his death in 2004! Sri Lankan Tamil militants were known to be tough and ruthless. Armed watch keepers roamed the decks of *Betwa*. All the time, the ship's guns were kept pointed at the hijacked ship. We made it clear to hijackers that we were alert. I had slung a loaded pistol on my belt. Just in case!

During this period, our Marcos were having multiple problems. On the morning of 03 November, they embarked a ship in Mumbai for Male but that mission was cancelled. On 04 November, they were flown to Bengaluru from Mumbai and on the 05th, an AN-32 landed them at Ratmalana / Colombo airport in Sri Lanka (SL) where they learnt about the successful operations by the Indian Army and IAF, hijacking of a ship from Male and its interception by *Betwa*. Marcos began to plan for the possibility of mid-sea storming of MVPL. Two helicopters with special ship intervention gear departed Mumbai but landed at Chennai due to some technical snags. Interestingly, Sri Lankan commandos then loaned their equipment to Indian Marcos for air-assault on the hijacked ship.

Meanwhile, hijackers at sea continued asking *Betwa* to keep away. We kept quiet and of course, continued to shadow. Sometime later, around noon on 05 November, the hijackers asked for negotiations. The earlier arrogance was gone and tone had become conciliatory. These nuances can be sensed even today while hearing the three decade old taped conversation. *INS Godavari* reached the scene by 1130 hours, having sent her Seaking helicopter to Colombo to pick up a few

Maldivian negotiators. *INS Godavari* and I took station on each quarter of MVPL.

Hijackers continued their harangue that both warships go away and let their ship proceed to Colombo for negotiations with Sri Lankan and then the United Nations Organisation. Neither the Maldivian nor the Sri Lankan Government wanted them to reach any Lankan port. We, therefore, insisted that they proceed to either Male or to an Indian port. Negotiations became heated and soon Maldivian negotiators gave up. The hijackers now threatened killing of hostages and forced Mr. Ahmed Mujtaba, the minister they had taken hostage, to plead to us to go away lest the hijackers start killing hostages. We heard gunshots on the radio. Hijackers told us that they would be throwing dead bodies overboard. We all strained our eyes at the sea but did not see any bodies. I still do not know whether it was an empty threat or they did kill somebody. The situation was becoming ugly. As twilight set in, we darkened our ships totally to make the hijackers feel even more threatened. The hostage ship was brightly lit to prevent boarding attempt by us.



MV Progress Light on fire. Photo Credit oneindia.com

To Battle!

There could not have been more dissimilar ships than *Godavari* and *Betwa*. *Godavari* was a newly built front line ship with surface to surface missiles, a 57mm gun, and rapid firing 30mm guns and the latest operations room facilities. *Betwa* was more than 30 years old, converted to a training role, her 4.5in guns were on their last legs. This is when a role model of my younger days came to my help.

In 1972, sixteen years before Operation Cactus, I was the Gunnery Officer in *INS Cauvery*, a small World War II frigate. A maverick named Captain Pasi Bindra took charge of the training squadron. He behaved as if he were commanding a front line fighting squadron. We were relentlessly drilled for next three months in which we learnt to fire with confidence and accuracy at air targets using a vintage electro-mechanical fire control system. I emulated Pasi Bindra on *Betwa* which paid handsome dividends during Operation Cactus.

There was operational uncertainty and *Godavari* asked FOCINC West for Rules of Engagement against MVPL. No reply was received. At 2220 hours, Captain (later Vice Admiral) Gopalachari of *Godavari* asked me if I was ready to fire at MVPL with the 4.5" guns. Yes, Betwa was ready but I would not fire because NHQ and CINC West had categorically ordered *Betwa* not to engage but merely shadow MVPL. No Officer in Tactical Command (OTC) had been formally appointed. Whom should I obey? Uncertain command and control in a volatile situation is dangerous. I recalled an incidence in a tactical exercise during early '80s. A ship coming to join fleet at sea, sailed under C-in-C's orders, had fired her missiles (fortunately on paper only) upon a unit of fleet she was to have joined. Debrief revealed that a correct understanding of the concept of OTC would have prevented such fratricidal fire. My dilemma was soon resolved when *Godavari* was made the OTC by NHQ.

Meanwhile at Colombo, a plan for storming the hostage ship at sea by our Marcos was finalised. The commandos planned to slither down on to the hostage ship from a hovering Seaking helicopter, overwhelm the rebels with heavy fire and capture the ship. The team leader considered this plan suicidal at worst and foolhardy at best, but there was no going back. Young Indian military officers were once again ready to do the impossible even if it cost them their lives.

When Sri Lanka declared that the hijacked ship would not be allowed to enter Sri Lankan waters and the Indian Government also did not want the hijackers to reach Colombo and internationalise the issue, *Godavari* and *Betwa* decided to begin coercion. In the early hours of 06 November, *Betwa* and

Godavari, alternately closed and fired guns around MVPL to coerce hijackers into surrendering. However, they would not give in. At 0550 hours, *Godavari* opened up with her anti-aircraft gun AK230, firing 1000 rounds per minute. There was havoc on the hijacked ship. A few hijackers were killed but still would not give up. At 0730 hours, *Godavari's* helicopter dropped depth charges ahead of the hijacked ship. The underwater explosion heaved up the bows of the ship out of water and yet, the fellows still would not give up.

At 0715 hours on 06th November, NHQ sent forth the crispest and most heartening signal of the entire operations. **"Stop Repeat Stop Progress Light from reaching Colombo."** *Godavari* immediately closed MVPL and fired another huge burst from her 57 mm gun and asked the hijackers to surrender. They refused. *Godavari* moved out and *Betwa* closed in and engaged with her 4.5" gun. Against the back drop of the climbing sun, we could clearly see the trajectory of the 60 pound shell shrieking towards MVPL. At 0844 hours, the first shell hit MV Progress Light and then the second one. A major fire was seen amidship. On radio, we could hear the pandemonium on MVPL. At 0854 hours on 06 November, the hijackers surrendered. The final act of Operation Cactus had been done.

Standing Down and Mopping up

With the surrender of the hijackers, the Marcos team at Ratnamala was asked to stand down. Some commandos reported that having psyched themselves for likely death during operations, the anti-climax of 'Stand Down' triggered a sharp adrenalin reaction causing heavy sweating and wobbly knees as the body began to detox itself. The hijackers and their leader Abdullah Lutfee looked a tough, resilient and professional lot. They were all herded on *Betwa's* foxle. Two loaded LMGs covered them. Sailors manning the LMG were told to shoot if they had slightest misgiving about the hijackers' intention. These instructions were explained to the hijackers in Tamil. A burst of LMG was fired over the heads of hijackers to make our intentions clear. The hijackers cooperated! Mopping-up operations began with airlifting the Maldivian Minister and other injured to Colombo. *INS Godavari* took all the hijackers and hostages and proceeded to Male. We stayed back to salvage MV Progress Light. Our boarding party found several dead bodies lying around. The fire caused in the action had spread to the entire midships portion; the engine room was flooded; there was no power supply on board and fire-fighting equipment was not working. We could do little and the ship sank at 0530 hours the next morning ie, 07 November. We shaped course for Male for an official handing over of the hostages to President Gayoom. The ship departed Male on 12 November and arrived in Kochi on 14 November to a rousing reception.

INS Betwa delivered during Operation Cactus because of the professionalism of our men and excellent performance of *Betwa's* aging weapon system brought about by relentless drills and proper maintenance. Both of us, Captain Gopalachari and I, knew each other well as Anti-Submarine warfare specialists and this rapport was of great help during the operations. It was a matter of pride that throughout Operation Cactus, India had projected her naval power robustly and *INS Betwa* was an important participant in this venture. A small joint force, otherwise tactical in composition for high-end combat, assembled at short notice, deployed urgently despite gaps in battlespace awareness. Yet, the results were strategically important not only for the lawful regime in the Maldives, but for India as well. At a time when the acronym SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) was decades into the future, the Indian Armed Forces delivered well. In this, two ships named after Indian rivers far away, gave battle and returned home "Running Proud."

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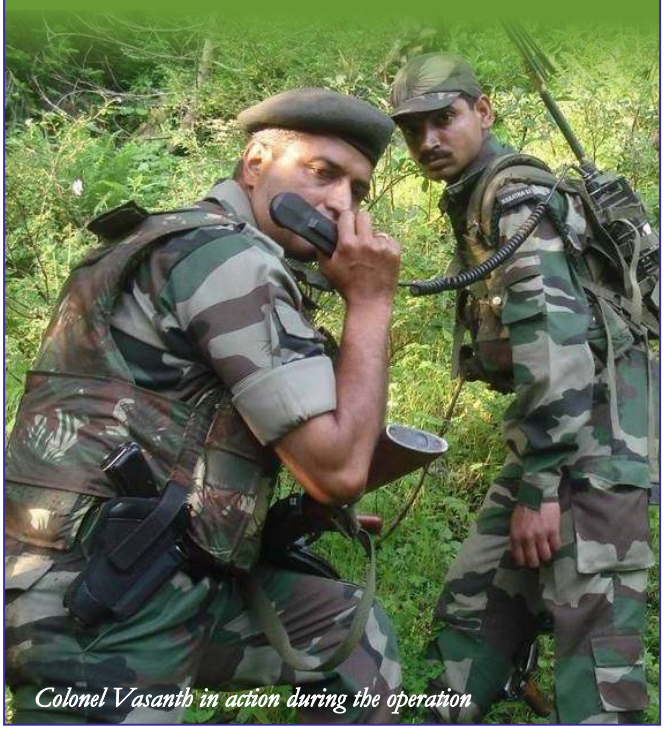
Commodore Hari Anant Gokhale, NM (G), CNS Commendation, (Retd) is an alumnus of Sainik School, Korukonda (Andhra Pradesh), National Defence Academy, Khadakvasla and Defence Services Staff College, Wellington. He was commissioned in the Indian Navy in 1970. In 1979, he was deputed to the erstwhile Soviet Union for acceptance of India's first missile destroyer, INS Rajput. He has been involved in intensive anti-smuggling operations off the Gulf of Kutch and has served as an Anti-submarine warfare specialist in ships, in the Eastern Fleet and in the Directorate of Tactics in NHQ. After his voluntary retirement in 1995, he worked in the corporate world and Merchant Marine. Thereafter he taught Marine Subjects as a Senior Professor in the internationally renowned Tolani Maritime Institute, Pune till June 2019. Presently he resides in Pune and periodically writes on defence issues.



Commodore Hari Anant Gokhale

Personal courage, fortitude, firing and battle skills, leadership and risk taking abilities - all these are tested to the extreme during prolonged operations in jungle clad mountains.



Colonel Vasanth in action during the operation

COLONEL V VASANTH, AC : Saga of Raw Courage and Sterling Leadership

Neutralizing terrorists hiding in jungles is an extremely challenging task, where they have the first burst advantage at close range. In this tribute to a daring and valiant leader, Lieutenant General Dushyant Singh narrates the high intensity counter infiltration operation which led to the elimination of eight terrorists near Uri.

A Handsome Entry

I was the Adjutant of the Battalion when young Vasanth joined the unit. I called Vasanth over to my office to chalk out his induction into the unit. I heard a smart anglicised salutation, *"Good Morning Sir, May I come in?"* I looked up and saw a tall, fair, 'straight out of Hollywood war movies' young man in his military uniform with a ramrod straight posture, chiselled jaw line and a smiling face. He had a magnetic appearance and my first reaction was, *"Oh my God! What is he doing in the Army, he should be in Bollywood."* Anyway, being the Adjutant, I held back my thoughts and interacted with him informally and casually to get to know him better. My first impression was that he was still raw and needed to be groomed under a good senior subaltern to transform this Greek God looking person into a seasoned soldier and young officer capable of leading his men into battle.

The Commanding Officer (CO) had made me the in-charge of the Silver Jubilee Celebrations. Vasanth proved handy in the immediate task of organising the various events during the Silver Jubilee Celebrations. He came out as a sincere and dedicated officer, keen and eager to learn. Thus commenced his service with 9 MARATHA LIGHT INFANTRY, we called ourselves Nashak Nauvi.

Years later, after serving in various challenging areas like East Sikkim and in operations with Rashtriya Rifles (RR) in J&K, he took over the command of NASHAK NAUVI. While serving in RR, he was face to face with militants on a number of occasions and gave an excellent account of his battle craft. During the RR tenure, he was also injured due to which he was downgraded medically, but this did not deter him. He was soon upgraded and, despite having some nagging issues with his knees, he volunteered to take over the NASHAK NAUVI in the challenging area of J&K in the Uri Sector.

Run-up to Operation Vasanth

Due to the medical category, Vasanth had to serve in peace stations on staff appointments and on regimental



Then Brigadier NPS Hira, the Uri Brigade Commander and Colonel Vasanth meeting local people. Inset - Vasanth presenting books to school children

tenures in other battalions of the Regiment. He thus had a long hiatus from the unit and returned to take over command of 9 MARATHA LI on 28 October 2006. After taking over the unit, he took stock of the unit and its area of responsibility. The situation did not allow him the liberty of an extended settling down. He quickly realised that the unit needed to take concrete measures to prevent infiltration. The brigade headquarters and the unit sources were constantly informing him of a possible infiltration from across the Line of Control (LC) in large numbers. He started building on the unit's intelligence base through meaningful Operation SADBHAVANA and strict population control in his unit area. Soon actionable intelligence started flowing in and Colonel Vasanth V was confident that when an opportunity came calling, the NASHAKS would deliver and leave behind a legacy for posterity to remember with pride. His efforts to galvanise the unit into a well-oiled counter infiltration force bore fruit on the 27th June 2007, when the forward troops reported some suspicious activity along the LC. Young Captain Justin responded with his troops and troops from the neighbouring posts were also side stepped to cordon off the area. **The Operation was nicknamed Operation JUSTIN after Captain Justin who was at the forefront of the engagement. The operation continued for four days till 30th June 2007 – the unit eliminated four terrorists.** Invigorated with the success of Operation JUSTIN, Vasanth enhanced the intensity of counter infiltration operations by laying more ambushes and launching patrols based on firm intelligence inputs in the area.

Opportunity Knocks Again

Having tasted success, the entire unit and Colonel Vasanth were on Cloud Nine. Simply put NASHAK NAUVI was a possessed unit entirely focussed on maintaining the sanctity of the LC and elimination of any terrorist who dared to cross from its area. About a month after Operation Justin, Colonel Vasanth V was sitting in his Tactical Headquarters Bunker chalking out plans to further strengthen the infiltration grid when the forward troops reported an infiltration along the LC on the night of 29th/30th July 2007. In his characteristic style, Vasanth jumped up from his chair enthusiastically and sensed that the opportunity to thwart infiltration from his area of responsibility had come once again. There was a major problem though - the unit did not have any senior officer as they were either out on courses or leave. Undeterred, in the spirit of the Indian Army, he decided to personally take charge of the operation. He mobilised four task forces to cordon off the suspected areas. These task forces codenamed S1 comprised Ghatak 2 led by Havildar Patil, S2 troops led by Captain Abhinav Handa, S3 comprised Ghatak 1 led by Subedar Dattu Gunjal and S4 comprised the CO's party and HQ troops led personally by Colonel Vasanth V, the CO. The groups moved with lightning speed to cordon off the area to prevent the terrorists from escaping back into Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. Displaying determined and resolute leadership, he deftly organised his troops to block the various avenues of escape. As the escape routes were blocked, the terrorists took advantage of the dense foliage and tried to evade detection by hiding in the dense jungle and nalas.

Battling the Terrorists Hiding in the Jungles

The terrorists were spotted again and Colonel Vasanth V engaged them in a fierce fire fight, rapidly closing in on them. This fierce engagement was punctuated by tactical manoeuvres by the troops to stop the terrorists from escaping. The action continued throughout the entire day and night of 30 July 07. The engagements were taking place at several places. Vasanth with his uncanny foresight and quick thinking succeeded in foiling all attempts by the terrorists to escape using cover of darkness and foliage in the night.

A few terrorists were hiding in a secure hideout in the forested and mountainous area. At daybreak on 31 July 07, Colonel Vasanth, wanting to take advantage of the first light, rallied his men and led the operation to flush out the terrorists. The terrorists had occupied dominating positions. Vasanth ordered Captain Abhinav Handa to provide him

covering fire from the other side. Seeing the time passing by, and that the terrorists might make good their escape, in an outflanking move Vasanth closed in further on to the terrorists location and engaged them from close quarter killing one terrorist but, in this process, he was severely injured. Unmindful of his injury and bleeding profusely, he exhorted his men to block all escape routes and personally killed another terrorist trying to escape.

By this time, Colonel Vasanth was severely injured and was unable to move. A third terrorist had moved to the flank of Vasanth and fired a burst, which hit Colonel Vasanth head on. Despite being severely wounded, brave Vasanth mustered his last reserves of energy, and in a daring act before losing consciousness, fired back at the terrorist and killed him. **Vasanth was a possessed man and kept giving directions to his subunit commanders to not let any terrorist escape till he fell silent never to rise again.** In the same action, his radio operator who had also killed two terrorists during the engagement also sustained a bullet injury and was evacuated to 92 Base Hospital, but he succumbed to his injuries. The operation did not end here and continued for another day under the leadership of young Captain Abhinav Handa. The outstanding bravery, unflinching courage and resolute leadership displayed by Colonel Vasanth V resulted in determined perseverance by the young officers and men to eliminate the complete group of eight foreign terrorists. The junior leaders of the unit led from the front and were instrumental in clinically eliminating the balance of the terrorists.

Operation VASANTH was an example of an operation conducted in the most difficult operating conditions executed with leadership and battlefield skills rarely seen which resulted in elimination of eight dreaded terrorists of Lashkar-e-Toiba. However, the Indian Army, the MARATHA LI regiment and the NASHAK NAUVI lost our brave Commanding Officer, Colonel Vasanth V, Ashok Chakra (Posthumous) and his radio operator Late Sepoy Shashi Kanth Bacchav, Shaurya Chakra (Posthumous). Young Captain Abhinav Handa was honoured with a well-deserved Kirti Chakra.

The act of valour, bravery and supreme courage displayed by Colonel Vasanth V, **the Commanding Officer of 9th Battalion, The MARATHA LIGHT INFANTRY** (NASHAK NAUVI) and his team of officers and men will always remain a constant source of inspiration and motivation for all of us in the Armed Forces. Late Colonel Vasanth V, AC (P) belonged to Bengaluru and is survived by his wife Subhashini Vasanth and two young daughters, Rukmini and Yeshodha. Ms Subhashini Vasanth received the Ashok Chakra bestowed on her late husband on 26 January 2008 from the Hon'ble President during the Republic Day Parade.



Mrs Vasanth receiving the Ashok Chakra from the Hon'ble President on 26 January 2008

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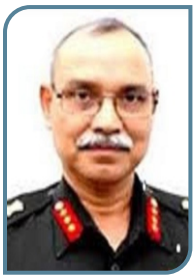
Lieutenant General Dushyant Singh, PVSM, AVSM (Retd) was commissioned into 9 MARATHA LI in December 1981. He is an alumnus of NDC, DSSC, CDM and Naval Post Graduate School, California, USA. He has attended the Regional Defence Counter Terrorism Programme with specialization in Terrorist Operations and Financing in US. Besides his service in varied operational areas, he has been an instructor of Human Resource Development in College of Defence Management, Secunderabad and also commanded the Army War College at Mhow. The General Officer has commanded an Infantry Battalion, Brigade and a Division in Jammu and Kashmir. He also holds the distinction of having served twice in the elite National Security Guards. He contributes regularly in various defence journals and newspapers, has written chapters in two books namely, "Understanding Suicide Terrorism (chapter on Deterring Terrorism)" and "Countering Terrorism: Psychological Strategies (Chapter on Impact of Virtual world in Creation and Sustenance of Terrorism)". He also has a website dushyantspeaks.com



Lt Gen Dushyant Singh

LET YOUR GOALS Consume You

Today, ex-Captain Deepam Chatterjee dons the diverse (and successful) roles of a spiritual guide, author and television consultant. He practices as he preaches – thinking big and being passionate about his dreams. In conversation with the self-admitted 'seeker'

Excerpts :

After a flurry of message exchanges on Instagram with Ex-Captain Deepam Chatterjee, I initiate our interview via email. The response that drops into my inbox is from 'Free Spirit'. I'm intrigued – by his moniker as well as his emails. He is witty and scathing, kind and philosophical in equal measure. As this edition goes to print, Chatterjee is amid frenetic days leading up to the launch of his book The Millennial Yogi, published by Penguin Random House India. "We'll speak in time blocks of 10-15 minutes every day, if that's alright," he tells me. Instead, the conversation – much like his spirit – is free-flowing, and we end up talking for well over two hours. His life trajectory is fascinating no doubt, but I come away with the most interesting anecdotes and insights to his personality and choices, in our off-the-record discussions.



You're a very private person. I was barely able to find any material on the Internet while doing my initial research!
That's true. I do value my privacy greatly. In fact, one day, I just decided to take down a whole lot of writings in the public domain. I don't like to put myself out there on the internet or on social media. Of course, now that I have a book to promote, that has changed a little, which is why we're talking!

Congratulations on your debut novel The Millennial Yogi. How did it materialise?
I met Milee Ashwarya, Publisher at Ebury India and Vintage Groups, Penguin Random House India at a book launch event conducted by my friend, the Late Anil Dharkar a couple of years ago. We got talking and hit it off. I shared my ideas on spirituality and spiritual books with her. Once we began to collaborate, it took an exchange of some 30-odd proposals for us to zero in on *The Millennial Yogi*. It's spiritual self-help fiction, and I knew when I was pitching this idea, that it would definitely get picked over all the others, but it also meant a lot of work! Non-fiction is easier to pen down than fiction. Having said that, Milee gave me full freedom to write the book the way I wanted to. I'm excited about the unique flavour of the book – it covers the landscape of Indian mysticism and spirituality, especially Baul and Sufi poetry. I've translated all the poems and verses in the text.

From serving as an officer in the Indian Army, to donning the mantle of a spiritual guide, to becoming a published author, your journey has been vibrant and varied. Did you know what you wanted to do while you were growing up?
I was not interested in getting into the forces initially. I was interested in astrophysics, the sciences and was very academically-oriented. My father is a retired Major General from Signals. His elder brother was a Lieutenant Colonel from

Engineers. Their oldest brother was in the Indian Navy. My father's uncle, Adhar Chatterji, had been the Chief of Naval Staff. Even coming from this lineage, the idea of serving in the Armed Forces did not lure me. My father was posted in Mhow, and it was there, that my friends decided to apply to the NDA – and wanted me to, as well. I wasn't at all keen, but they persuaded my father to sign my form, and submitted it. In fact, I wrote my exam only to avoid going on a pilgrimage tour with the rest of the family!

I remember a few things from that year – 1984 – very vividly. It was the peak of the anti-Sikh riots, and we saw the slaughter of friends and colleagues first-hand. Later, I arrived at my NDA entrance exam centre, which was at Bhopal, just days after one of the most horrific tragedies of all time – the gas leak at Union Carbide. It was like a ghost town. There was not a soul on the streets, and all we could see were corpses of animals, along with the air of gloom and death everywhere. It was under such circumstances that I appeared for the entrance exam. As lady luck would have it, I got selected into the NDA, and my friends who had studied hard didn't! That was the strange quirk of fate which started me off on my journey in the Indian Armed Forces. My time at the NDA also began memorably - with a rousing welcome address to us wide-eyed youngsters by the inimitable Col Hoshiar Singh, Param Vir Chakra, who was our Commandant at the Ghorpadi wing.

What was life in the NDA and the Indian Army like?

It was tough, but in hindsight, I can say that I really enjoyed life in the NDA. I was assigned to the Foxtrot Squadron. I was commissioned in December 1989, and following in the footsteps of my father, I joined the Corps of Signals and was posted to Leh. However, within the first couple of months, I realised I was not cut out for the Army – I felt like a square peg in a round hole.

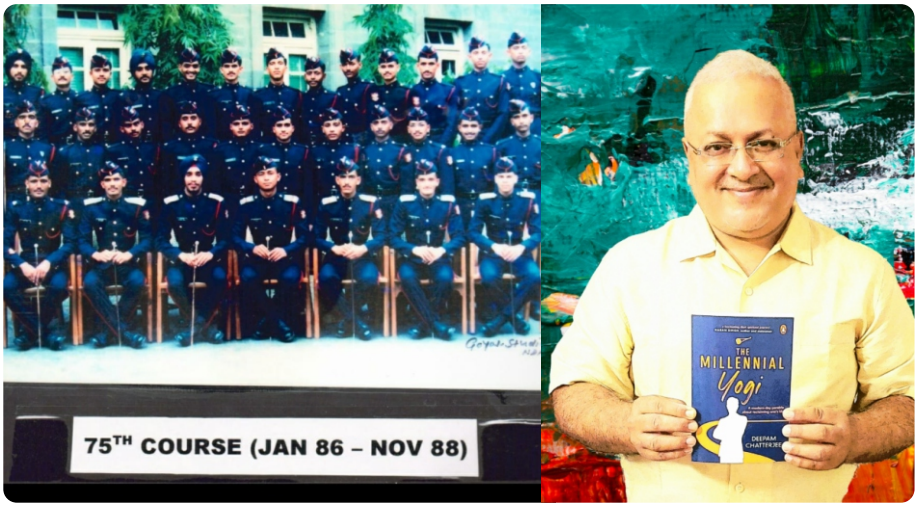
Are there any incidents from life in the Indian Army, which contributed to the person you are now?

In those days I wasn't on a spiritual journey. But, I do believe that some incidents have been stepping stones for me to becoming who I am. For instance, in January 1992, I was sent to a Brigade Signal Company as the Sparrow. I'd just become a Captain, so I was still pretty junior. During that time, there was a fire in one of the posts.

The hut was made of fibre glass and had burned down. One of the two men in that hut – a Muslim – had died. During that incident, I learnt so much about life and how to manage men. It was also my first encounter with death in the Indian Army. The body was burnt beyond recognition. I took his body back to Leh to bury it, and learnt all the Islamic rituals to do so. Much of what I learnt helped me in understanding the greatness of the secular identity of the Indian Army and has strongly moulded my free-spirited outlook to life.

In Leh, just as the winters ended, we youngsters from the Signals would go on month-long line parties with a couple of linemen, huddled amongst tons of porcelain insulators and massive rolls of copper wires, in 3-Tons open from the back, with a single kerosene pump stove as our only source of warmth, on the bone-freezing route along the Indus, checking for cracked porcelain insulators, that held the copper wires, stretched between poles.

There were hundreds of kilometres of these wires, with poles every 25 metres. The entire military communication lifeline of our area ran through these wires. Like monkeys, fully covered in our thick jackets, padded trousers, gloves and boots, we would climb every one of these poles, check each and every insulator and wire and change anything that was even remotely damaged. We couldn't risk



(Left) Course Photo at NDA. Photo credit Foxtrot Squadron, NDA
(Right) Deepam Chatterjee with the book he has penned

any communication breakdowns due to negligence. We were a quartet. Two linesmen, the driver and myself. We covered 7 - 10 km every day, and those guys taught me so much. We would walk along the partially-frozen Indus River, fishing for trout, making rotis using rum bottles as the belan and singing together, sitting around our rusty, trusty kerosene pump-stove. One other incident, when I had been detailed for Radio Relay equipment trials in the area of Daulat Beg Oldi (close to the Karakoram pass), was really memorable. There were these used parachutes, used for supply drops, lying all around; the rope used in parachutes is very tough. The two guys with me would keep collecting pieces of this discarded rope, and carry it along. It was around minus 30 degrees C with the wind chill factor, and I would wonder where they were taking these ropes! When our trials there ended, and my posting finally came, they gifted me a hammock made out of those ropes – they had made it with their own hands in the freezing cold. What a beautiful and touching experience that was!

Why did you decide to leave the Indian Army?

I constantly questioned things. I argued and rebelled. It must have been tough for the Commanding Officer, who wanted to handle me with kid's gloves, as I was a senior serving Signal Officer's son. However, I was a natural rebel. Predictably, the seniors saw me as a brat, taking advantage of my father's position. I quickly realised that it was not an ideal situation to put my father into. I also got quite sick while on a course in CME, Pune, and was admitted to the Command Hospital. I took it as a sign. After a couple of requests, I was allowed to resign my commission. I left Army in November 1995, after 5 years and 11 months of commissioned service. I had no degree, no pension, no skill sets that were relevant to civilian life, and no game plan.

What did you do then?

For a few years, I was mentally not in a great frame of mind. In 1996, I did get engaged, but we called off the wedding because I don't think I was ready. I started meditating and working on myself. In 1997 I joined The Art of Living and taught the courses for a few years. I soon moved into their ashram in Bengaluru. But I wasn't at peace. In February 2002, exactly 20 years ago, I left Bengaluru and came back home, to start life from ground zero, once again. My journey as a teacher and corporate lecturer began there. Later, I published a pamphlet on Hinduism titled *The Timeless Faith* and also worked closely with the owner of Vimalika Comics as an editor and writer. We published some interesting mythological titles like *Legend of Karna* and *I Am Kalki*. I was also invited by the Mumbai University to teach a course to PG students on Mysticism over the weekends.

You're also working as a consultant with television production houses…

Yes, around 2015, I became a consultant for TV shows based on ancient Indian history and mythology –like Ashoka, Shani, Mahakali, Porus, Maa Shakti and Krishna. This is something I've really enjoyed doing.

I know you don't like being boxed, but do you see yourself becoming a full-time author?

I don't know if I want to devote all my energies to being a full-time author. It's a time-consuming and laborious process that leaves me with very little time for pursuing my varied interests. However, I never say never again. I am quite sure that I will be writing a couple of books sometime in the future.

Who are your favourite authors?

There's a long list. Ernest Hemingway, Somerset Maugham, JM Barrie and Scott Fitzgerald are some of them.

Is there a spiritual message you have for our readers?

Think big. Be terrified of, fascinated by and passionate about your dreams. Let your goals consume you. Unless you dare to risk ridicule and death, you will never know your limitlessness and your greatness. There is absolutely no reason to think small, and simply exist to fill space on earth... It's perfectly fine to fall flat on your face when you are reaching for the stars, but if you play safe, you will never sprout wings...

German theologian Rudolf Otto said in his book Das Heilige, 'Mysterium Tremendum Et Fascinans', which literally means a mystery before which humanity both trembles and is fascinated. That's life in a nutshell.

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Neeti Jaychander has over 18 years of experience as a writer and journalist. For over a decade, she was the Senior Regional Editor (Southern India) at FEMINA, the country's oldest and largest-selling lifestyle magazine. She has been the Editor of ET Madras Plus, the erstwhile lifestyle supplement of The Economic Times, and has authored books for children. She is a writer with the Deccan Herald, Zenger News (the world's first digitally native wire service) and teaches a journalism course at the National Institute of Fashion Technology, Bengaluru.



Neeti Jaychander

The world's most beautiful mountain

The snow-capped peaks in the Himalayas have always enthralled and many of us love to gaze at their majestic splendour. But which is the most bewitching of them all, time and again drawing the viewer?

Listed among the latest publications in the weekly "Browser" strip of The Hindu Magazine (Sunday, 28 February 2021) was the Harper Collins title, "Raj and Norah". The name Rajendra Kohli and his image on the dust jacket of the book lit up my memory of a mid-morning at Gangtok, way back in May 1963. I was the junior most staff officer, a Captain with less than eight years in uniform, on active field service at Headquarters 17 Infantry Division. My make shift office had a broad window, as though cut out on purpose to frame the Kanchenjunga summit to perfection.

Brigadier R S Kohli had arrived to assume command of 112 Infantry Brigade and after receiving the operational briefing from his staff, he came for a formal meeting with the Divisional Commander but mistaking my office for the ADC's he entered, made polite conversation and in the process happened to look out of the window, showcasing Kanchenjunga in sunlit grandeur. He fell silent, pulled a chair to sit and watch the summit in a kind of silent meditation till jolted that he had an appointment to keep with the General! Turning to me he said in a pleasant tone *"Baljit, Kanchenjunga is beguiling but do you know what is considered the world's most beautiful mountain?"* Of course I had no clue but before I could say so, he left to enter the General Officer Commanding's office. I happened to be among the first few graduates of the Basic and Advance Mountaineering Courses from the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, Darjeeling under Mr Tenzing's tutelage and in the process soaked in considerable amount of history and lore concerning explorations and ascents of summits in the high Himalayas; the most notable source being the book "Fight for Everest" by Colonel Edward Norton, leader of the 1924 British Expedition. And my sense of the most beautiful peak was of Nuptse in the neighbourhood of Everest but in Sikkim, Pauhunri was Mr Tenzing's choice of the perfect pyramid. However during my subsequent two conversations with Brigadier Raj Kohli in the Officers Mess, his emphatic pronouncement on the most beautiful peak was "Siniolchu" which I was to learn later, overlooked the Zemu glacier and was in the immediate shadow of Kanchenjunga, a revelation that remained lodged in my memory bank.

When 18 years later, I was placed in command of the very same 112 Mountain Brigade, Siniolchu would become a kind of obsession. Luckily, my operational jurisdiction comprised the entire Northern half of Sikkim, hemmed by Kanchenjunga-Siniolchu in the West and Chomulhari in the East. And I would have innumerable opportunities to watch the peak from every conceivable angle during frequent, routine aerial reconnaissance flights over this beautiful jumble of lofty peaks permanently encrusted in snow, glaciers vast and small, perennially feeding streams to collectively form the River Teesta, hillsides clothed in dense forests of pink and scarlet Rhododendrons, Silver Birch and Himalayan Elm, home to gorgeous Monal pheasants and above all, an amphitheatre of pervasive silence. Under favourable flight conditions, helicopter pilots would oblige with one or more close circuits around Siniolchu, among my unforgettable moments of fulfilment!

Today, I am tempted to believe that Wikipedia had a mole in my office at Gangtok listening in to Brigadier Kohli's narration of Siniolchu, or else how on earth would they compose the words quoted below;

"SINIOLCHU: 6888 m (Sic. 22600 feet, first ascent 1936)... considered to be particularly aesthetically attractive; having been described by Douglas Freshfield as ***"the most superb triumph of mountain architecture and the most beautiful snow mountain in the world".***



White Siniolchu with the blue sky beyond. Photo credit in.pinterest.com

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Lieutenant General Baljit Singh, AVSM, VSM (Retd) was commissioned into the Regiment of Artillery in 1956. He superannuated from service in 1992 after a distinguished career spanning 36 years. He was invited to the Board of Trustees of World Wildlife India in 1990 and served two terms therein.



Lt Gen Baljit Singh

BUYING A HOUSE – TIPS

Armed Forces personnel are novices in the field of property acquisition, and lose their hard earned savings in incorrect house purchase deals. Our financial guide highlights important aspects which need to be checked when buying property.

A major financial goal in one's life is to buy a house. Fulfilment of this goal may cost you a lion's share of your lifetime earnings. House purchase affordability has risen since 2011 and made residential property most affordable due to the combination of three factors – household income, property prices and house loan interest rates. Earlier, the average cost of buying a house used to be equal to 7 years of the house buyers' income, which has now reduced to 5 years. Majority of first-time house buyers are in the age group of 30 to 40 years, which are vital years for individual and professional growth. It is thus important that these buyers are well informed to take a considered decision. The property market is full of unscrupulous dealers who have the money and muscle power and can defraud you of your hard-earned money. Generally, frauds rampant in the property market are title deception, false assured returns



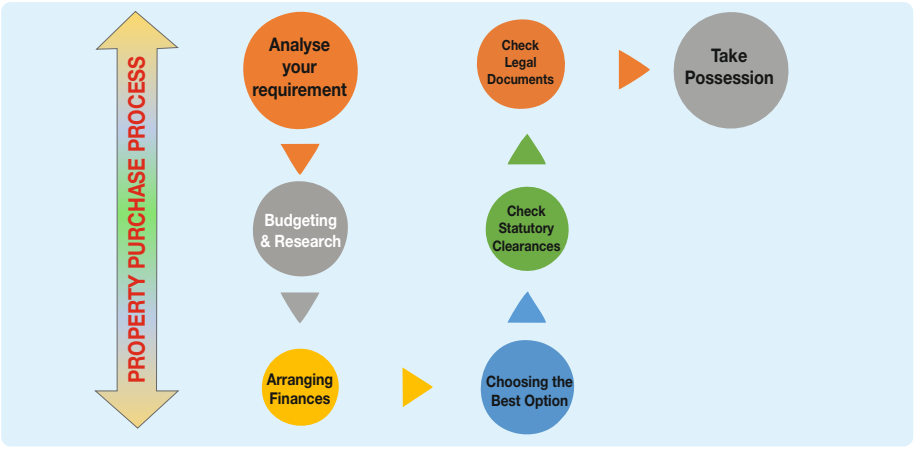
Your life's earnings go into buying a house. Be diligent and don't buy in haste - it is a long term decision. Be wary of fraudulent deals and false promises.

promise, fake promises on immediate investment, forced cancellations, selling without authorization, selling same unit to multiple buyers and encroachments. Therefore, before going ahead with fulfilling your dream, exhaustive planning, preparation and only then purchasing the house will save you from immense heartburn and falling prey to unscrupulous property dealers. Exhaustive process in this case implies analysing the purpose of buying the property (residential, commercial or mixed-use), pre-analysis of finances, full and thorough document check, risk analysis and final offering.

Planning and Preparation Process

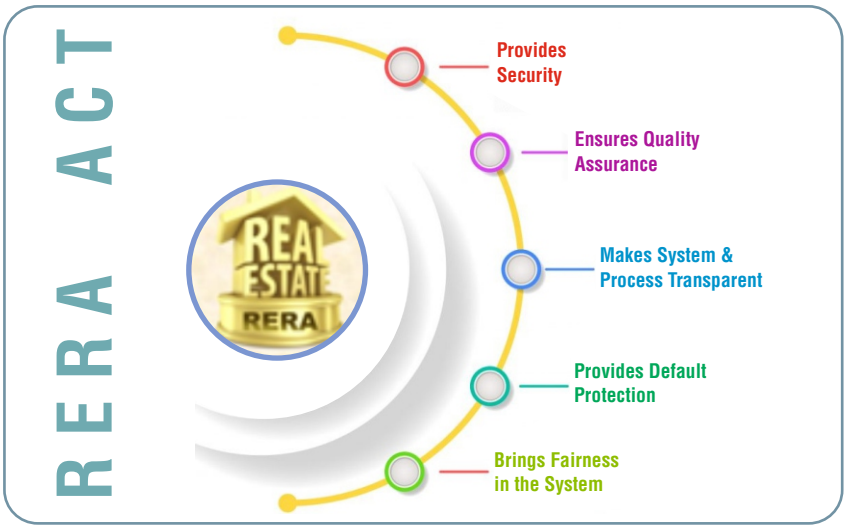
Planning and preparation to buy your dream house is very critical and the process will entail a few steps summarised in the image and elaborated below:

Analyse Your Requirement - The initial step in planning is to decide whether you want to buy property for investment or residential purposes. Investment properties generate income through rental income or resale, or both and can be commercial, residential or mixed-use. On the other hand, residential property is for self-occupation or for rental purpose.



■ **Budgeting**- This is another critical aspect of the planning process. You should be very clear on your requirements of the property and the purpose you want it to serve for you. Once that is clear in your mind, then proceed to analyse the budget and cash flow. This will entail your down payment capability, which you must accumulate through pre-payment investment rather than borrowing from relatives or friends. Because, such borrowing will add to your loan burden. The next part of budgeting is to carefully assess your loan eligibility and loan servicing capability. Check your credit history and your CIBIL score, which is one of the most important factors when it comes to your loan approval. A high CIBIL score is an assurance for lenders that you are a responsible borrower with a good track-record of making timely repayments. Generally, a score of more than 650 will qualify you for a house loan. As a thumb rule, your total EMIs for all types of loans put together must not exceed 30% of your gross monthly income. A cautious scrutiny of various banks and NBFCs house loan rates and prepayment options will help reduce your financial and interest payment burden. Furthermore, you must also include the GST (for under-construction property), brokerage, stamp duty and registration fee, and furnishing cost during budgeting. While the GST on property up to Rs. 45 lakh is 1%, it is 5% for property above Rs.45 lakh. Similarly, stamp duty and registration fee vary from state to state between 3.5% to 9% depending on the age of property, age and gender of owner, purpose, location and amenities. Brokerages may vary from 1% to 3% and furnishing costs could push your budget up by 5%. Ipso facto, all these put together may escalate your budget by 20% to 30%.

- **Research** - Time spent on research before property purchase helps you to negotiate from a position of strength, avoid fraudulent deals and cut costs. In today's digital world a lot of material is available online regarding project details, property laws and bye-laws pertaining to specific area, property valuation services, taxation and legal requirements. Three top websites that provide pan India information regarding property are Homebazaar (https://www.homebazaar.com), Magicbricks (https://www.magicbricks.com), and 99acres (https://www.99acres.com). Elaborated below are two important aspects that one must delve into during the research phase:
- **Location** - Choosing the correct location of property is very important because this is the only property attribute that is not changeable after purchase. The location will encompass the locale and view, connectivity, ecological considerations and proximity to



market places, airport/railway station, schools, work place, medical amenities etc. Location also plays an important role during resale of the property.

- **Freehold Vs Leasehold –** An important consideration of the planning process is to check whether the property is freehold or leasehold. A freehold property ownership stays with the owner for an indefinite period. Whereas, in a leasehold property, the ownership of the land stays with the owner for the period mentioned in the 'lease agreement', which is mostly for 99 years.

■ **Arranging Finances -** This will entail your arranging for the down payment and house loan. The minimum requirement of down payment is 10% and the best way to arrange it is to start accumulating your own corpus over a period. The other way is to borrow from a friend/relative, or taking loan against your deposits/life insurance policy/provident fund. Having shortlisted the best house loan deal during the planning phase, you must now contact the concerned lender for documentation and loan approval. A pre-approval will immensely help you to obtain the desired loan amount at the most reasonable interest rate and optimal repayment duration. Working out a time plan to fine tune the sanctioning of loan with the payment schedule of the builder is imperative, else you may default in payment. Proper documentation will save you the pain of loan rejection or delayed sanction and comprises your KYC documents, personal income/tax related documents (about 15 to 20), loan guarantor's documents and property related documents (about 20 to 25). If eligible, you must avail credit-linked subsidy under the credit linked subsidy scheme (CLSS) of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban). Under this, low-income and middle-income groups of our society get a 6.5%, 4% and 3% subsidy on loan amounts of Rs.6, 9 and 12 lakhs respectively. Besides other eligibility criteria, an annual household income between 3 to 6 lakhs will qualify you for low-income group, 6 to 12 lakhs for middle-income (MIG-I) group and 12 to 18 lakhs for middle-income (MIG-II) group.

■ **Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA) –** The government passed the RERA Act 2016 with the aim to protect the house buyers and boost the real estate investments. Therefore, you must only look for projects that are RERA registered. RERA is a state specific body and every builder and developer must register with the concerned state's RERA before advertising, selling, building, investing, or even booking. After registration, all the advertisements should bear a unique project wise RERA registration number. RERA Act provides numerous benefits.

Firstly, it provides security through a mandate that the builders must keep 70% of the buyers' and investors' money in a separate escrow account, which the builder can use only for construction and land related costs as per the stage of construction and after due certification from chartered accountants and engineers. It also mandates that builders cannot ask for more than 10% of the cost of the property as advance.

Secondly, it brings about transparency into the system by making it obligatory for the builders to inform the buyer about all aspects of the project, its plan layout and stage-wise execution through pamphlets and websites. Furthermore, they cannot make any changes to the plans without the buyers' consent.

Thirdly, it brings about fairness by ensuring that the builders/ developers sell properties based on carpet area and not super built-up area. In case the project gets delayed, the buyers can choose full refund of money or stay invested and receive monthly interest on their investment. Fourthly, the most important clause is that in case of any default from the buyer or promoter, both are liable to pay an equal rate

of interest, which is 2% above the lending rate of State Bank of India. Fifthly, it guarantees quality assurance through a fault rectification clause wherein the builder is responsible to undertake structural repairs, free of cost to the buyer, during 5 years from the date of purchase. He must undertake such repairs within 30 days from date of intimation by the buyer. Even with all the good features of RERA, it lacks enforcement and there are loopholes in the Act. The builders take advantage of the loopholes to avoid penalties and refunds.

■ **Choosing the Best Option -** After a deliberate planning and research process, we now put the plan into action by physically exploring various shortlisted projects, meeting builders and developers, and engaging a lawyer. Exploring the market and seeing onsite progress are the key ingredients to your success in striking the best deal. Avoid rushing into buying a house because of false claims by builders of only few units left, or bookings closing soon. During your reconnaissance for the house, you must not deviate from your need of the house and your budget. Do not let the hard selling by builders and developers get the better of you to go over your budget, or fall prey to your wants getting the better of your needs of the house. Getting professional help of a property valuer will help you to take a sound decision. A valuer will correctly assess the value of the property based on the locality rates, built-up area, floor on which the property is situated, depreciation, parking area, terrace and garden, social infrastructure and amenities available.

■ **Checking Documents –** A major bugbear in the journey to buy a dream house is the large number of documents and certificates required to close the deal and register the house in your name. These

Important Documents to check before buying a Property	Vacant Plot	FLAT (Apartment)	Independent House
Title Deeds / Mother Deed / Link Deeds	✓	✓	✓
Joint Development Agreement (if any)		✓	
Encumbrance Certificate (EC)	✓	✓	✓
Patta / Khatha / Mutation Records	✓	✓	✓
Approved Master Plan / Building Sanction Plan		✓	✓
Building Commencement Certificate		✓	
Building Completion Certificate		✓	
Occupancy Certificate (for completed / large projects)		✓	✓
Property Tax Paid Receipt(s)	✓	✓	✓
Conversion Order (if any)	✓	✓	✓
RTC Extracts (for Revenue/Converted Lands)	✓	✓	✓
Approved Layout Plan (if any)	✓		✓
Plot Allotment Letter (if any)			✓
Allotment Letter (if any by Society/Board/Authority)	✓		
NoCs from Local Authorities		✓	
Utility Bills (if any)		✓	✓

Document	Requirement	Necessity	Remarks
Title Deed/Mother Deed/Sale Deed	To establish the ownership of seller on title of property	Mandatory in original	Trace ownership from Mother Deed (parent document) to last sale deed
Encumbrance Certificate (EC)	To establish that property is free from lien or attachment	Important	Obtainable from the sub-registrar's office
Khata Certificate	For transfer of property ownership	Mandatory	Obtained from Revenue Department
Mutation Extract	To establish the Title of land when the property is located on converted land	Optional for urban land, but mandatory for agricultural land	Maintained by the Village Panchayat Accountant/Tehsildar or local civic body office.
Conversion Order	For land converted from agricultural to non-agricultural use	Mandatory	Also called Change of Land Use/ DC Certificate
RTC Extracts	To establish the Title of Land, if the property is located on converted land	Optional	Issued by the village accountant
Approved Building Sanction	To ensure building has construction approval from competent authority	Mandatory	Builder obtains it from local development authority
Approved Layout Plan	To ensure that plot of land has approval for construction from competent authority	Mandatory	In its absence you could face khata transfer and plan sanction problems.

www.relakhs.com/checklist-important-property-documents



are primarily in the form of statutory clearances that the builder/developer must acquire from local government and regulatory authorities for the land and project. These will ensure that there is no illegality involved in the project. Correspondingly, legal documents verify the ownership of the land and house. These will vary as per the requirement of the state authorities where you purchase the property and their names may vary as per the local vernacular. Nevertheless, refer the image on the previous page for the important documents and certificates that you must possess to purchase a vacant plot, flat or independent house.

■ **Taking Possession –** This is the final step towards achieving your financial goal and you must show patience and carefully scrutinise the aspects of the checklist given below to avoid problems later:

- Check that the builder has received the completion certificate (CC) and occupancy certificate (OC) from the local authorities. The local authority issue these after thorough inspection of the project and it signifies that the building structure meets the specifications as per the approved plans. It is the responsibility of the builder to obtain these. A mere application submitted by him to the local authorities means nothing since a deviation of more than 5% is reason enough for the local authorities to deny the CC and OC.

- Check safety (fire safety, gas leak etc.) and security (entrance, CCTV cameras, burglar alarm etc.) arrangements are in place and working.

- Check that all amenities (elevators, gardens and parks, clubhouse, swimming pool etc.) are complete as per the project plan. The builder must transfer the ownership of land and common areas to the Residents Welfare Association or building society within three months of receiving the OC by executing a Deed of Conveyance.

- Take over the flat/house as per the written agreement, which stipulates what all the builder must provide in the completed house, signed between you and builder earlier. As per the written agreement, check fixtures, fittings, utilities, premium fittings, and leakage/seepage, measure the carpet area and verify the demarcation and allocation of your parking spaces.

- Check waste disposal arrangements, hygiene and sanitation arrangements including rainwater and sewage drainage systems.

- It is important that you correspond with the builder / developer in writing regarding all defects, deficiencies and shortcomings observed, for which he shall be liable in future. Section 14 of RERA Act stipulates a five-year period within which the builder must rectify any defects in workmanship free of cost to the house buyers.

- Normally one keeps 5% to 10% payment due that you give to the builder at the time of possession. Make this payment only if you are fully satisfied to take possession. Do not give post-dated cheques to builders beforehand against his promise to complete the work later.

- In case you are not satisfied and yet must take possession due to compelling circumstances, then you must protest by clearly mentioning on the builders copy that you are receiving conditional possession of property while highlighting the defects / deficiencies.

Tips for Buyers



- Without doing your own research, do not agree to sign on the dotted line.
- Always check the builder's and developer's RERA ID and registration.
- Decide the type of house you need – apartment or independent house.
- Location of your house (proximity to schools, hospital, etc.) is important.
- Buy your house based on your needs and not wants based on your budget, number of family members, etc.
- Consider your need for amenities such as gymnasium, pool, etc.
- Remember, in high rise buildings, builders charge higher rates for apartments on higher floors.
- Buy a property from a reputed builder.
- Prepare your document checklist for the type of real estate you are buying and scrutinise all legal documents and clearances thoroughly before negotiating the price.
- Save down payment corpus through pre-pay investment.
- Must avail a house loan to fund your dream house and avail tax benefit u/s 24 (max 2 lakh) and 80C (max 1.5 lakh) of IT Act. Stamp duty and registration charges included in Sec 80C benefits. Additional deduction of Rs.50,000/- u/s 80EEE is available with certain terms and conditions.
- Increase your house loan eligibility by applying for a joint house loan with another earning member of your family.
- First time buyers require a broker to facilitate site visits, handle legal and paper work, negotiate prices and offer market expertise.
- Although not very prevalent, but seeking help from a house inspector may be prudent. He will advise you on the structural strength and durability of the property besides highlighting faults and potential problems in the house.
- Avoid restrictive exit clauses in the agreement that will hinder your ability to freely sell the property later.

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Colonel Raj Rakesh is a 1980 batch ex-NDA officer who commanded an armoured regiment and converted it to state-of-the-art T-90 tanks. He served as a Brigade Major of an independent armoured brigade and as Colonel General Staff of an infantry division. Post retirement, he is a consultant with an investment advisor at Jaipur and edits their monthly investment magazine. The officer has also contributed to DIAV annual magazine 'SAMMAAN' and number of web portals.



Col Raj Rakesh

GET UP, DRESS UP, SHOW UP

Before you start feeling weighed down by the numerous roles and responsibilities life throws up, always keep these cues handy to ensure emotional and mental wellness.

As the famous saying goes,
"You can't pour from an empty cup."



Photo Credits. (Upper) kevin-laminto unsplash.com (lower) arturo-rey unsplash.com

Recently I was on a Zoom call with my closest friends, all busy professionals in their own right. I was absolutely delighted to see all of them so well-dressed and dolled up, despite this being a casual and friendly online get-together. Like their appearance, they were glowing in their conversation, radiating with new ideas and with an unbelievable zest for life. That wonderful morning had left us all inspired, with a positive afterglow. However, I have also seen the reverse scenario in certain online and physical meetings, where some participants do not make any effort to dress up! Intentionally or unintentionally, their enthusiasm levels are at an all-time low, bringing down the fervour several notches. Three months have already passed us by since the New Year began, much of it spent under the shadow of the omicron variant and third wave of COVID-19. It has been a rough two years since the pandemic first started. Men and women alike have coped with children at home full-time, alongside limited domestic staff and increased chores. They have pursued their jobs from home in crowded - and sometimes less-than-ideal - spaces, with the uncertainty of employment loss looming large over them. It is no wonder then that all of this has taken its toll on us emotionally and physically. In the process of doing what is right and what needs to be done, we sometimes forget to do what is necessary to create joy within and keep ourselves going. This isn't just applicable to pandemic situations (although they have definitely made things worse!) – it also applies to many, who regularly get caught up in the day-to-day nitty-gritties of life, without pausing to take a breath for yourselves.

I have a few secrets up my sleeve that have really worked for me, to ensure we keep our spirits upbeat, enriching our own life and the lives of those around us.

Find your passion

With all these other roles you occupy in your day-to-day existence, it is important to step back and remember who you really are and what makes you tick from the inside. You might be a busy professional working unearthly hours each day, or a new bride or groom, or a new parent or grandparent… but you need to take at least 30 minutes every day just for yourself, to discover what gives you happiness and feeds your soul. It could be singing or dancing (record yourself if that is the case!), or it could be painting or writing, or even the most favoured gardening. In fact, 80-85 per cent people have said gardening is one of the most therapeutic activities! Put your heart into something you enjoy doing, and see what a difference it makes to your mood, self-esteem and the way you perceive life!

Put a smile on someone's face

Nothing gives your life meaning and purpose like sparking joy in others. It could be as simple as a visit to an old aunt that you've been putting off, cooking your spouse his or her favourite snack, or volunteering for a larger cause that is close to your heart. Either way, you'll be secure in the knowledge that you've brightened up someone's day with your actions, and that in turn can be extremely rewarding for you as well.

Connect with friends

An Irish proverb says, *"A good friend is like a four-leaf clover; hard to find and lucky to have"*. If you have even one or two such friends, you're truly blessed. Whenever you feel like you need a good laugh, or a break from the daily rigmarole of life, call up your friends or make plans to visit. Messaging apps are great – but they can't substitute the fondness in a person's voice, or the warmth you feel in their hug. The easy thing to do is to lose touch with friends simply because you're caught up with other things. Don't do that – make a conscious and frequent effort to connect with them, and observe all the negativity and self-doubt in your heart melting away.

Don't neglect your appearance

This isn't just about looking good for the outside world. It is about feeling good for yourself, inside out. Take care of your skin, nails and hair on a regular basis. You might decide to walk around with uncombed hair at home when there's no one to see you, or leave that big zit unattended to – but these are all big no-nos. Keep an emphasis on good hygiene, and especially on dental health, which are underrated aspects of feeling good and staying healthy. Studies have shown that when you know you look your best, you're naturally more confident, happier, lighter and even ready to embrace your physical imperfections. Make exercise a part of your daily routine, and follow a basic grooming session to make sure you look and feel neat and clean. Dress well as far as you can help it, even if you are alone at home. There's no one more important than yourself to dress up for, and you deserve to feel special all the time!

Get your master health check-ups in place

Knowing that you're in good physical health can automatically make you feel better, more empowered, and motivated to be the best you can. Take your bi-annual master health check-up without fail, and address any concerns you have – no matter how small they may seem – with your doctor. If you're a male above 60, take the PSA (Prostate specific antigen) test to rule out prostate cancer, while women should include a pap smear and mammogram in their roster of tests. There should also be a regular stool examination for occult blood examination and periodic colonoscopy for the early detection of colon cancer.

Value your family and job

At the end of the day, even though it might be tiring to be a parent or a professional, to spend 14 hours a day on video calls, or be swamped with household chores, remember to be grateful for your family and work. Family is the constant backbone that makes life special; they are the people who love, accept and support you unconditionally. A busy day at work is the sign of a successful career, enabling financial security and professional fulfilment. Don't neglect these two aspects in the quest to find yourself – balance is the key. Remember that, and always practice gratitude every time you feel overwhelmed.



Photo credit. vivek-kumar unsplash.com

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Dr.Renuka David

A REWIND
to my command tenures in Assam-Arunachal and Kashmir

Not many readers would be aware of the turbulent conditions prevailing in Kashmir and in the North-East in the mid and late 90s, stretching into the first few years of this century. Lieutenant General Johnny Mukherjee, who led operations in these areas at that time recalls.

THE NORTH EAST – UPPER AND SOUTH ASSAM AND ARUNACHAL

In the period 1996 to 1999, Assam, Arunachal and the Nagaland border were badly affected by insurgency with the presence of a large number of insurgent groups. In the 2 Mountain Division area of responsibility, I had four Brigades/Sectors with 14 battalions including Assam Rifles deployed to handle the problem – consequently very thin on ground with posts being as much as 50 kms apart. We depended on good intelligence to execute effective operations. Most operations were left totally to the battalions who performed superbly.

On one occasion, while visiting a unit at Lekhapani in Upper Assam, I asked the Commanding Officer (CO) if any patrol or sub unit had gone to Lakhipather, a notorious village of insurgent sympathisers in the centre of dense forests – he

(Editor's Add-On: Years later, I was having a cup of tea with one of my sources in Chhota Chinar, an Annexe attached to Chinar House (The Corps Commander's Residence), when the source told me that Abdul Majeed Dar had stayed in this very Annexe, during Lt Gen Mukherjee's time. Having seen the devious designs in Valley politics and CT operations therein, I am fully cognizant of the stellar role played by the author in the counter proxy war campaign at that time).



Troops reacting to a fidayeen attack (representational image). Photo credit Kashmir Narrator

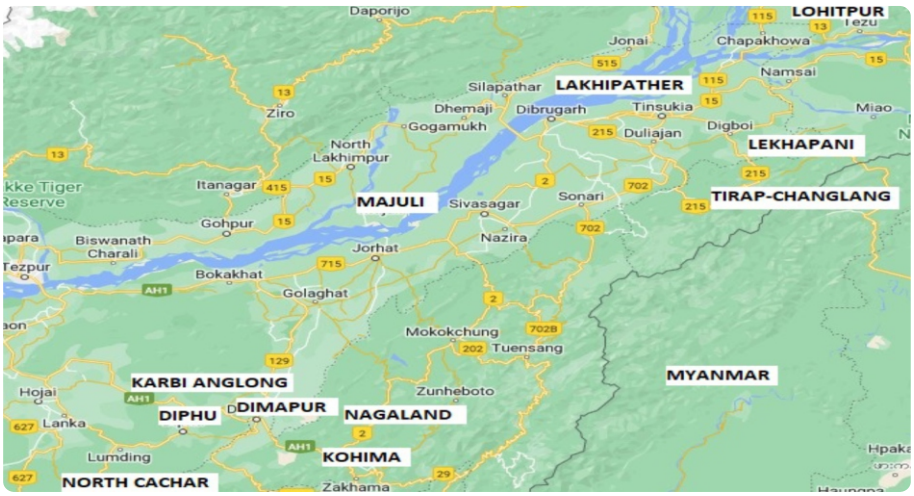
confirmed they had. I told him to warn them immediately to be careful, as I had a sixth sense that they may be ambushed. He radioed to them immediately. A short while later, the patrol was ambushed by United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) cadres and suffered some casualties, but they fought their way out safely carrying their dead and wounded with them. I was sad, but also gratified that my warning had been of some use. Sixth sense develops from intelligence, detailed knowledge of the ground, the people and the insurgents and knowledge of history of the area.

Raid on Lal Pahar

One day two suspicious looking men were spotted on a motor cycle by a check point – when called upon to stop they tried to speed away. They were then fired upon and killed. On being searched, some weapons and incriminating documents were found and a roll of unprocessed film. On processing the film, these two men were seen posing with their weapons at a camp site which had a huge distinctive cliff in the background. We tried to locate the camp. Two months passed with no luck. Finally, one fine day when I was visiting one of my brigades by helicopter I saw the cliff - it was a few kms away from Lohitpur which was the Brigade Headquarters (HQ) I had just visited. The camp was raided – it was a very large ULFA camp and extremely well sited on high ground, with excellent fields of fire, and covered by forests. The Brigade managed to bust the camp (Lal Pahar camp) but unfortunately the insurgents escaped.

Raid on National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isaac & Muivah) (NSCN (IM)) Council HQ

Havildar Ngamneithang of 3 Assam who had been my driver when I was the CO came to meet me. He had information of a very large NSCN (IM) camp deep in the forest at the junction of Karbi Anglong, North Cachar Hills and Nagaland. At that time the Nagas and Kukis were engaged in bitter feuding and a lot of people in both groups had been killed, including my former driver's brother – he wanted revenge on them for killing his brother.



Assam and Arunachal area. Credit Google Maps

Other sources confirmed the information. Ngamneithang had promised Kuki guides to take us cross country through the dense forest surrounding the camp through detours of well over 200 kms through Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills. I therefore nominated 181 Mountain Brigade who were based at Diphu to undertake the task, with four battalions. They were to travel manpack through the forest on designated routes. I advised them to carry at least two 81 mm mortars per battalion and adequate ammunition.

My National Defence Academy course mate was the Air Force Station Commander at Jorhat. I requested him for an AN 32 training sortie, so that I could fly over the area in the aircraft and photograph it. After locating the camp, we then set off on the raid – I was flying overhead in a helicopter with a Global Positioning System (GPS) device and radio set on the Brigade net to guide them onto the camp. The Brigade approached the camp from all directions bypassing the early warning satellite camps with the help of the Kuki guides and hit the main camp just after first light – I was overhead guiding them. As the raid was in progress the foot columns were detected by the Nagas and firing commenced. My helicopter was also shot at with a .50 mm anti-aircraft machine gun. The pilot was unfortunately wounded and we had to divert to and land at Dimapur which was not too far away.

The NSCN (IM) insurgents suffered very heavy casualties – my troops had fired mortars too as the engagement between our men and the insurgents was intense. We learnt later that the Special Task Force Battalion of NSCN (IM) was protecting the camp

with about 600 men and had managed to smuggle out the leadership just as the raid commenced. Consequent to this raid the NSCN (IM) called for peace and a ceasefire and talks, which remains in place even today!

River Raid on Majuli Island

A large number of ULFA cadres including their leadership had taken shelter on the main Majuli Island. We launched a major raid involving elements of three brigades on the known locations using Army Inland Water Transport and civil requisitioned boats during the hours of darkness. By blocking civil tele-communications at the last moment from civil exchanges and using jammers extensively, we ensured total secrecy and the operation was a great success. Our engineers constructed an overland route across the North stream of the River Brahmaputra to the island to facilitate maintenance of the men and military civic action in a sustained manner.

Counter Infiltration (CI) on the Arunachal and Myanmar Border

A newly raised Rashtriya Rifles (RR) sector was deployed for border sealing and operations in Tirap and Changlang Districts of Arunachal Pradesh as several insurgent groups had camps just across the border in Myanmar and they used to transit into India frequently. The border sealing was done effectively using area and linear ambushes. Small scale cross border raids into Myanmar were executed when necessary.

Importance of Intelligence in Counter Insurgency Operations

The main lessons I learnt from the counter insurgency operations in the North East where we were so sparsely deployed was that one must launch operations only based on hard intelligence – there are lesser casualties and there is less harassment to the local population. The other lesson was that one must know the terrain, the local population and the insurgent characteristics backwards. I also learnt that in order to earn the trust of the local population one must be fair and simply not permit atrocities. We came down very heavily on men indulging in serious violations of human rights including rape and so on. During my tenure, we conducted six General Court Martials and convicted persons found guilty of the same and publicized such events to show credibility.

Reasons for Success in Assam and Arunachal

The Army's operations in Assam and Arunachal were successful due to a clear Government mandate, concentration on intelligence for conduct of operations and effective conduct of small scale operations by companies and battalions. The Army brought the situation in Assam under control twice during my tenures as a Brigadier in the North East. The Army reverted to barracks at the end of Operations Bajrang and Rhino One. On both occasions the state governments were unable to keep the situation under control and consequently the Army again came in. Even now the Army remains deployed in pockets due the insistence of the State Government. The insurgency in Assam has now become an industry assisted by vested interests with extortion remaining the income generation medium. Unless this is stopped the region will not have any material development in spite of tons of central aid.

THE PROXY WAR IN JAMMU & KASHMIR (J&K)

While our troops were engaged at Kargil in 1999, Pakistan infiltrated maximum possible foreign mujaheddin into J&K, to reactivate terrorism that was dying out in these regions. Pakistan's new strategy saw the start of suicide attacks and attacks on Army's bases and government installations. The violence reached its peak by 2000/2001 which included the killing of Sikhs to force their migration; killing of anti-terrorism / anti-Pakistan / pro-India civilians to coerce the local population into supporting the foreign mujaheddin.

Line Of Control (LC) and CI Operations

The LC formations of 15 Corps had to remain vigilant to ensure that the Pakistani Army did not get upto any mischief. This included defence of the territorial integrity and CI to stop the large number of terrorists coming in through the heavily forested slopes. After deliberating in the Corps HQ, we decided that the troops at the posts must not be saddled with CI tasks – their job was solely to defend their posts and ensure sanctity of the LC. Troops for CI were deployed slightly in depth in two tiers with reserves to deal with infiltrating terrorists. It was imperative that CI units institute an effective intelligence and surveillance grid. I recollect the case of 1 ASSAM. Within a week of 1 ASSAM's

arrival at Sonapindi Gali, I visited the unit and shared intelligence inputs of large scale infiltration of Lashkar E Toiba (LeT) cadres through their area shortly. I advised them of the routes being used, which had not been effectively covered by the earlier unit and how to handle such CI operations. My intelligence staff warned the unit two days before the expected infiltration. Needless to say, 1 ASSAM performed superbly – in those 14 days we received confirmed reports that no less than 42 terrorists had been killed in their ambushes. The word spread that if infiltration was attempted through 1 ASSAM area they would be eaten alive. 9 and 15 ASSAM also had great success and earned a similar reputation.

Counter Terrorist (CT) Operations

After Kargil, 18 units moved out from the Valley to Ladakh and we redeployed the entire CT grid to be primarily looked after by the RR battalions. Hot spots however were reinforced by normal infantry battalions. Interestingly on the CT Grid we started performing better with fewer resources – on analysis we found that with less units they were not intruding into each other's areas of responsibility which made intelligence gathering and pin point operations more effective.

Fidayeen Attacks

Shortly after I arrived at HQ 15 Corps in August 99, there was an LeT suicide raid during a press briefing in November 99 near the Batwara Gate of Badami Bagh Cantt in Srinagar. We managed to extricate the journalists safely in the midst of intense firing and grenade blasts. Investigations revealed that a television journalist had shared the details of the briefing with LeT to facilitate their raid, so as to indulge in spectacular reporting. We had collected the mobile phones of the journalists on their entry and were able to hone onto the culprit. We monitored the journalist very carefully thereafter. A week later, there was another fidayeen attack at a Brigade HQ near Anantnag – the journalist was there filming the entire raid – we again checked the mobile phone and found the journalist to be in touch with a LeT over ground worker. The journalist was arrested and escorted out of Kashmir – the journalist was not permitted in again during my tenure.

I vividly recollect an incident of an RR Battalion against whom there were allegations of misdemeanour and intelligence reports of terrorist activity in their area. I visited them immediately without warning by road in the evening. As I approached the Battalion HQ I heard the sound of heavy firing. I went into the HQ in the darkness, in the midst of the firing and was met by the Subedar Major. I was apprised that the LeT had launched a suicide attack and that the CO along with his protection was out raiding a nearby village. I found a lack of security and other major irregularities and acts unbecoming of an officer. I waited for the CO to return – after seeing and listening to him I placed him under arrest as I felt his actions were unbecoming of an officer and especially of a CO. Such action was the need of the hour. I have only related two incidents that may interest readers – there were several such incidents.

My Style of Functioning

I used to follow the pattern I had learnt from Counter Insurgency Operations in the North East. I would not tell anyone where I was going the following day – I would just land up at the unit or HQ I planned to visit - that ensured more effective security and ensured that people did not waste their time on laying out red carpets and lavish meals. Early one morning at first light I flew straight to a remote company post on the LC on the Pir Panjal Range. As I landed I learnt that the company commander was sleeping – I woke him up and gave him the works. That ensured people were alert and did their jobs sincerely.

God had earlier been kind to me while flying – I had two helicopter



Army personnel during an operation at Cherkote forest near Kupwara, September 2001. Photograph: Fayaz Kabli/Reuters



Soldiers stand guard, Dal Lake Srinagar in February 2001. Photograph: Reuters

accidents - one a crash due to the engine cutting off in Subansiri sector in Arunachal and in the second my helicopter was shot up while raiding the NSCN (IM) Council HQ. On both occasions the helicopters were written off due to the damages, whereas I was lucky to come out with minor injuries. In Kashmir, while on a visit to a battalion HQ near Wular Lake, the engine again suddenly cut off – we were quite high and I thought that my time had come. But the pilots managed to glide the helicopter and crash land onto a field close to the Battalion HQ. The pilots were safe; my staff officer had unfortunately broken his arm, while my nose and face were bleeding profusely. I had managed to bang and break my nose but otherwise all was well. Here again the helicopter was written off. God had again been kind.

We laid a great deal of emphasis on electronic intelligence. We placed our signal interception and direction finding equipment at important areas in the Kashmir Valley on heights so as to pick up terrorist linked radio transmissions. The Intelligence Bureau (IB) and the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) did their part by intercepting satellite and email communications of the terrorists. Based on this we had prepared a central electronics intelligence map in the operations room giving details of where the transmissions were from and their content. That clearly indicated the areas of terrorist concentrations. This intelligence was then passed on to the troops.

The electronic direction finding also helped us identify the main terrorist electronic hubs in the Valley which relayed all messages from Pakistan Army from across the LC – one was on the Pir Panjal Range and the other was in the mountains next to Tral – in fact on electronic mapping of the Valley we found that these were the only two places from where such actions could be conducted. We raided these repeatedly and neutralized them. We also concentrated on blocking funding to the terrorists and achieved success in our efforts. This was done through close cooperation between army intelligence agencies, the IB, R&AW and the Kashmir Police. The overground leadership including the All Party Hurriyat Conference was closely monitored.

I had befriended a large number of local people – they were a great source of intelligence and advice in handling of the Awaam. Incidentally they also fed me wonderful Kashmiri food. Farooq Abdullah, the Chief Minister and Omar, his son became friends – in my view he was actually a nationalist, but a victim of circumstances and of course an opportunist as all politicians are. I also worked in sync with the police, the bureaucracy, the intelligence agencies and the paramilitary forces leadership in Valley – we were a friendly composite team and functioned effectively together without allowing egos to come in our way.

People Friendly Operations

By 2001, we had broken the backbone of the proxy war in J&K. This was achieved by redeployment, preventing build-up of terrorists for infiltration, construction of operational tracks to speed up our movement and to provide logistic support, and use of modern surveillance devices and obstacles in increasing numbers on the LC, to reduce infiltration to a trickle. By launch of people friendly CT operations, coupled with military civic action to win over the people's hearts and minds, we were able to neutralize a number of terrorists.

After an incident wherein some civilians had unfortunately died during operations, there was a mass agitation in the Kashmir Valley, which continued for some days. My conscience dictated that I go public, apologize for our mistakes if any, mollify and request the public at large to desist from their agitation through the electronic and print media. This measure immediately stopped the agitation, only because we had appealed to the conscience of the people and apologized and the Kashmiri media (to their total credit) wholeheartedly supported us. Such an apology by a serving General was unheard of, but went a long way towards winning the confidence of the people, irrespective of the ire and criticism I subsequently drew from some in higher HQ in the Army. Notwithstanding, it was the people's cooperation and their disgust with

Pakistan, coupled with people friendly CT operations that resulted in our being able to bring the highest ever number of terrorists to book till date, from August 1999 to December 2001 – well over 3000 terrorists were neutralized and peace brought back to the Kashmir Valley. Besides operations to neutralize the terrorists, emphasis was on CI and LC operations, wherein we were quite successful and repeatedly gave the Pakistanis a bloody nose.

Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) Ceasefire

During this period, there were initiatives by Abdul Majeed Dar, the overall Commander of HM in the Kashmir Valley and his Divisional Commanders, to declare a ceasefire and start a peace initiative with the Government of India. The HM was the largest terrorist outfit, with about 50% Kashmiris in it and operating in Jammu & Kashmir. All other terrorist outfits had a preponderance of foreign terrorists.

With the approval of my Army Commander and the Army Chief, I got together with the IB and R&AW to try and take the deal with the HM forward. I agreed to keep Abdul Majeed Dar as my personal guest in my residence at the Chinar House at Badami Bagh (HQ 15 Corps location). This was unknown even to my staff including my Aide De Camps, Staff Officer, the Brigadier General Staff and my personal security staff. One of the gates to the HQ was manned by my guards who were sworn to secrecy, so that we could come and go into town surreptitiously at night for discussions with local leaders in conjunction with the heads of the IB and R&AW. I would go out around midnight with Abdul Majeed Dar armed only with a pistol dressed like the locals without escorts.

After some time I brought the HM Division Commander North, South and Centre into my residence as guests. We were therefore able to discuss issues related to terrorism in the Valley in all its facets including the details of Pakistan's support. They stayed with me for a good two months. They frequently had to pass messages on their satellite phone to their men in the Valley / Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) – this was invariably picked up by my electronic intelligence team who would in turn galvanise the guard battalion (119 Territorial Army) into action to locate the terrorist intruders on the heights above my residence to no avail – little did they realise that the Corps Commanders 'guests' were making transmissions! The constant interaction with my *'Mehmaan'* helped me tremendously in achieving a very high degree of success in CT operations. These interactions facilitated an understanding of everything related to the terrorist activity both in J&K and in POK as also the pulse of the local people.

Unfortunately, the HM ceasefire was short lived, as Pakistan and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) panicked at the thought of a peace deal brokered by the HM in J&K. The Government of India dilly dallied and took their own sweet time in deciding whether to officially declare their support for Abdul Majeed Dar. The ISI attempted to sabotage the ceasefire, by having the Head of the HM in POK, Syed Salahuddin, who was under ISI control, withdraw the ceasefire offer, on grounds of India's refusal to include Pakistan in the talks. HM valley based cadres refused to comply with Syed Salahuddin's instructions. Consequently, an unofficial HM / security forces cease-fire continued on ground for quite some time.

The ISI got Syed Salahuddin to issue recall orders to all their operational commanders, which they refused to obey. Finally, the assassination of all these commanders by ISI sponsored hit squads took place



Abdul Majeed Dar (sitting left). Photo credit commons.wikimedia.org



Colonel Rajesh Kalia, PRO Srinagar and others paying homage to late Major P Purushottam and five others who died in Badami Bagh fidayeen attack November 1999. Photo credit devdiscourse.com

when they left my residence and went back into the field. Other pro Pakistan terrorists made all out efforts, through mass killing of Sikhs in the Valley and Hindu minorities and labourers in other places, to try and break the HM / security forces ceasefire.

Non-Initiation of Combat Operations (NICO)

In an attempt at goodwill, the Government tried out a ceasefire in the form of NICO during Ramzan, by the security forces, as part of efforts to bring about peace. Orders to the security forces were that unless fired at, they would not fire upon the terrorists and drastically reduce their activity levels – in other words withdraw to barracks. By this time the HM ceasefire had broken. The Government expected the security forces to observe a ceasefire, even though none of the terrorist groups had declared one. The measure was unfortunately ill conceived and I protested, as greater casualties to the security forces, our informers and pro India elements were inevitable – the authorities however insisted we do this. NICO did not succeed, in spite of our best efforts, as the terrorists were not party to the ceasefire. It only led to the terrorists getting a respite, being able to recoup, resuscitate, eliminate security forces sources and sympathizers and indulge in more unchallenged violence. There were much more security forces and civilian casualties in this period. NICO was cancelled within a month due to large scale civilian casualties. Notwithstanding, consequent to our sustained CT operations, we again brought the situation under control.

A Hot and Active LC

A great deal of effort was also put in to deploy troops more cost effectively along the LC to achieve better CI results and better defence of the borders – this was because of Pakistan's repeated threats to do another Kargil on us. The Kargil sector grew progressively more silent, but the LC in the Kashmir and Jammu Regions became more active with constant artillery shelling and small-scale operations. It was quite normal to strike at the Pakistani positions across the LC and at terrorist launch pads by raids across the LC and with heavy artillery fire in retaliation for their activities – no sanction was needed for such actions from higher HQ – we merely kept them informed. By early 2002 when I left 15 Corps for Eastern Command the situation in J & K was well under control.

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Lt Gen John Ranjan Mukherjee

National Spirit and Josh In Abundance



Gorkha Troops Perform the Khukri Dance
on a snow clad forward post in Kashmir on Republic Day 2022

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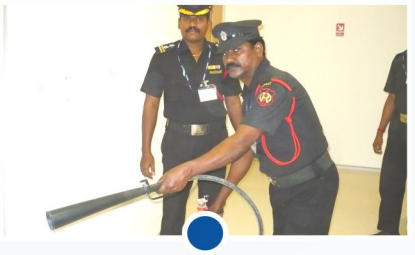

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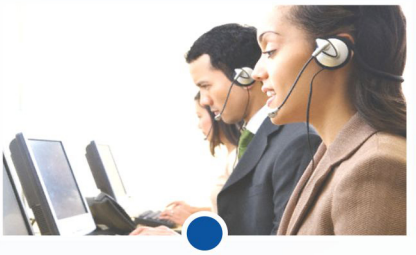

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