

Indian Army on a modernization drive

The Indian Army Day is celebrated on January 15 every year in recognition of Lieutenant General (later Field Marshal) K. M. Cariappa's becoming the first Indian Commander-in-Chief in 1948. It is also the day to celebrate the many achievements of the land force, which continues to guard the nation from external and internal threats. *International Aerospace* salutes the Indian martyrs and heroes for their courage and dedication to fight for the country. But mere will is not enough; the Army has to be well equipped with modern equipment to fight the terror. With focused attention on modernization and challenges ahead, Army Chief General J.J. Singh speaks to media on the eve of Army Day. A report

The Indian Army is on a drive to modernise and take on the challenges it faces. The chief of the Army Staff General J J Singh on the eve of the Army Day spoke on number of issues relating to the army's functioning, including its presence on the Indo-Pak border, Jammu and Kashmir and Assam.

The modernisation drive, which has been on for the past two years, includes induction of night fighting capabilities and an increase in firepower through the purchase of the long-range SMERSH rocket systems and more T-90 main battle tanks. The army is also in the process of acquiring 197 light helicopters, 100 advanced light helicopters, many of which would carry weapons, and strategic heavy lift helicopters, he said.

"Final trials are also underway to purchase of upgraded 155mm /52 caliber guns," said Singh. The army had also begun to receive Russian-made 130mm guns that had been upgraded to 155mm with Israeli help.

According to Singh, the army's operational preparedness was currently at its peak the force was now equipped with 30 per cent of frontline technology weapons and more acquisitions were in the pipeline. The force is also in the process of acquiring high mobility vehicles for specialised units.

Rebutting reports that T-90 tanks were facing problems, Singh said the Russian-made tanks were in a state of full battle worthiness and the government had been approached for the purchase of 300 more T-90 tanks with new fire control systems and night visions.



J. J. Singh

The army was also carrying out the modernisation of its medium and short-range air defence systems, including missile systems. Stress has been laid on networking to ensure rapid progress had in integrating systems to enable information from ground sensors to be conveyed to troops on the ground in a short time.

On its current activities like after "Operation Clear," he said the troops had launched an "all out" operation against the ULFA in Assam and its neighbouring states to wipe out the banned group's potential to carry out attacks. Three days after the operation was launched against the ULFA, a number of militants had been killed and sophisticated arms like universal machine guns and assault rifles had been seized, he said.

"Security forces are carrying out surgical strikes. It is a joint operation along with paramilitary and state police forces aimed to put the ULFA cadres on the back foot," Singh said as he shared the organisation's new set of guidelines for sub-conventional warfare.

He contended that ULFA's trouble-making potential would be destroyed and the operation would be taken to its "logical conclusion", though he refused to confirm whether operations would be halted as in the past.

Cautioning that there is a possibility of 'transnational signatures' in future terrorist campaigns, the Army's new sub-conventional warfare doctrine prescribes hitting all foreign mercenary groups hard. "Transnational signatures are likely in future terrorist attacks," says the 45-page doctrine, made public by Gen Singh. He also warned that the number of groups operating in India have internal equations and nexus.

Though the doctrine does not elaborate on transnational collaborations, it apparently implies that groups trained in different countries could be making a common cause. It also warns of weapons of mass destruction falling into "non-state players and terrorist groups" and likelihood of terrorist organisations targeting the country's financial nerve centres and banking services along with command and control systems. The army launched its operation against the ULFA after the group gunned down about 70 migrant workers in Assam few days back.

As part of a synergised strategy to bring down violence, army has been used to restore confidence among people and allow the state administration to function normally. For Singh, "the army has been assigned a job. We are doing it". The current operations in Assam are multi-pronged, covering both urban and rural areas especially jungle terrain, he added.

Acting on reports that ULFA cadres were sheltering in Bangladesh and Myanmar, the government had taken up the issue through diplomatic channels in Dhaka and Yangon, said Singh

The situation in Jammu and Kashmir was being under constant reviewed by the army along with redeployment of forces. On equations with Pakistan, he said external affairs minister Pranab Mukherjee is in Pakistan and expressed optimism over the outcome of talks there over troop withdrawals on the Siachen glacier.

While the Army chief noted the cases of suicides and fratricidal killings in the army, he said the level of such incidents in the Indian army was much less than when compared to other armies engaged in anti-insurgency operations. "Tackling stress in the Army is being done on a war footing," he said, revealing that in depth studies and analysis was being carried out. "We are in the middle of making a fresh profile of the force and bringing in new personnel management techniques," he said.

Refuting moves to repeal the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, he quoted Defence Minister A K Antony's remarks that the anti-terror law was needed to protect armed forces personnel conducting operations. However he agreed that amendments were being made to the act to make it more humane. He attributed the sharp fall in complaints of human rights violations to his policy of an "iron fist in a velvet glove," which was the guiding principle for forces carrying out counter-insurgency operations during his tenure. Other armies had appreciated the approach and sought details from us, he said.

At a time when security forces the world over are under scrutiny for alleged excesses in battling terrorists, the



Indian Army has announced a set of guiding principles for conducting military operations among civil society. Lessons learnt in five decades of scrapping with a clandestine enemy have been compressed into a counter-terrorist doctrine. With this first-of-its-kind doctrine, the Army has declared that it's ready to change the way it does its business among India's own people. The promise of the use of minimum force is at the heart of this doctrine.

"The principle is minimum adequate force. That is the thread that runs through this doctrine," says former Kashmir commander, Lt Gen (Retd) VG Patankar. The message to troops is that high-handedness will not be acceptable. The emphasis on causing minimum collateral damage and winning hearts and minds has been cast in stone.

The earlier stress on kills has been discarded. So, does the doctrine suggest a gentler army? Not really, for the enemy who must expect no mercy. Under the Army's velvet glove, an iron fist is clearly showing.

"It is taaqat (might) and tehzeeb (etiquette). Taaqat with the enemy and tehzeeb with your own people," says Patankar. "Sanctity of religious places like mosques and idgahs need to be treated with deference. Many times, the terrorists would go and hide themselves in mosques, and we would take the help of the local people," said Patankar. The change in ap-

proach continues, with the General now laying down the templates for the way the Army must do its business among its own people.

Saddled with tackling one internal security problem after another, the Indian Army has decided that it's time for some plain speak: that it can't keep on indefinitely taking up additional challenges unrelated to its primary task, which is, guarding the nation's frontiers.

Displaying rare candour for an Indian service chief, the Army made it clear that taking on Naxalites is a job he would rather do without. Singh made the blunt declaration that he does not have resources to open up another front. "As far as the Naxalite issue is concerned, we have all along advised the Ministry of Home Affairs that we would like to be helpful in every other way except active deployment in handling these problems," he said.

With about half of the 1.2-million-strong Army already bogged down in tackling insurgencies, the General suggested that ex-servicemen be tapped by states whose writ has been challenged by Left extremists - a reminder that policy makers need to recognise the limitations of military action against insurgents.

There was an acknowledgement that terrorism will continue to be the principal military challenge for India in the foreseeable future. But while adapting itself to counter a menace that won't go away soon, the Army is now beginning to publicly say that it can only take on so much and no more. This must surely rank as a first. He also said that the armed forces had made considerable strides in countering the threat of nuclear weapons.

Is the army headed for a transformation? Given the multi-pronged approach it is taking, that may well be the order of the day.