

I N T R O D U C T I O N

It is indeed a great privilege to have been asked to deliver the inaugural late Lt Gen Hanut Singh Memorial Lecture, in honour of this iconic Cavalry General and battle field leader, who remains a role model for many across the Indian Armed Forces.

- I thank Lt Gen Vinod Bhatia, Director, Centre of Joint Warfare Studies and also Lt Gen Ashok Shivane, DGMF, for having given me this opportunity.
- The subject I am covering today is vital to all of us assembled here: “Military Leadership in the 21st Century”. But it is even more vital to the Nation, for the Indian Armed Forces are the ultimate guarantors of our Nation’s Security and well being, and how this instrument of ‘Last Resort’ performs will be largely determined by the leadership that steers this organization in peace and leads it in war.
- Seated here today amongst the audience are some of the iconic leaders of yesteryears, some of whom have rubbed shoulders with the legendary Gen Hanut. The presence of our Hon’ble Raksha Mantri is greatly motivating for all of us. Having interacted with him on a number of occasions, I can say with conviction that the operational preparedness and well being of the Armed Forces are in very steady and capable hands and very close to his heart. Thank you, Sir, for being here with us today.

- Before starting let me just recount my meeting with Gen Hanut in 2012 at Dehradun, when I was Southern Army Commander. We had a long session including on the role of Strike Corps and I found the General very alert and keen to share his deep operations insights.
- A word also about his remarkable Regiment, Poona Horse also named “Fakh-re-Hind” by the Pakistanis, the only Recipients of 2 PVCs (Both Posthumous). One has known many Officers of this Regiment, and also had the honour to serve under two: was a GSO -3 (Ops) under Lt Gen Ajai Singh when he was commanding the Black Charger Armoured Brigade. I have seen him on numerous occasions, put his arm around an officer considered no good and turn him into a race horse. He remains an icon for the Cavalry and for those fortunate to serve under him.
- Also had the honour of serving as the Col GS (Ops) in the White Tiger Division and also in Military Operations Directorate under Lt Gen Balli Takhar - and have yet to see anyone having as broad shoulders and large heart. One thing common to the two was that they were Hanut’s boys, and had earned their spurs under him in the 1971 War.
- Whilst working on my script, I had to guard against a tendency to become over critical / negative or may be even cynical, for it’s so easy to fall into that trap. So let me start by very candidly and forcefully stating that the Indian Armed Forces are the most professional, capable, credible and well-led organization, in fact, the “pride of our Nation”. Being so important to the Nation’s well being, there is no scope for

any complacency. Others may have this luxury, we don't. We need to constantly look within to remain dynamic and relevant, always one step ahead of the challenges and threats. And in this wonderful organization, Leadership plays the most crucial role and, hence, the criticality of the subject we are discussing today.

P R E V I E W

- What I intend to do today is to go over the **challenges** we face as we progress through the 21st Century, some critical issues that affect us today and may well threaten our future, and then see how we **respond, overcome & move forward**.
- I will cover the talk under three heads:
 - Role of the Armed Forces – Remaining Relevant.
 - Challenges for Military Leadership in the 21st Century.
 - The Way Forward.

Will take any questions towards the end, and also look forward to your views and suggestions.

ROLE OF THE ARMED FORCES **– REMAINING RELEVANT**

- We have a **primary role** to protect and secure our Nation from external threats and a **secondary role** to aid the civil authority when called upon to do so. Whilst the primary role is our raison d'être, the secondary role is gaining prominence with a variety of requests/tasks which clearly lie in the civil domain. Moreover, the armed forces are steadily being dragged in as 'First

Responders' because of the non-performance of other agencies and lack of confidence of the people in them. We have also seen the severe consequences of delayed call up of the armed forces as witnessed in 'Uttarakhand' in 2013 & J&K floods in 2014. So what do we do? Await a formal call up and see the problem magnify, or take the initiative when you see things going beyond a point. The answer is not easy: in law & order situations, it may be prudent to await a call, whereas, in a disaster situation, local/operational commanders must step in at the earliest. The bottom line is that we need to remain relevant whenever the Nation needs us, and therefore, the Senior Military Leadership needs a good **politico-military understanding** and rapport in difficult situations.

- Beyond the primary and secondary roles, the armed forces also have a '**Derived Role**', which is gaining prominence:-
 - The very presence of the Army has a salutary affect on the environment, and therefore, in marginal areas, the Army needs to mark its presence in some form. Increasing our foot print in/around Naxal areas is desirable.
 - Our professionalism and conduct is a great morale booster for the Nation – here's one organisation that works and has the confidence of the citizens across the length and breadth of the country.
 - Contribution in sports, environment protection etc is becoming more significant, by the day.

- Approximately 60,000 soldiers retire and join the society every year, enriching it with their discipline, commitment and nationalistic approach.
- Last but not the least, the armed forces have come to signify the true spirit of our constitution, by adhering scrupulously to its core values.

Thus, remaining relevant to the Nation and its security needs is becoming more and more significant in the 21st century.

CHALLENGES FOR MILITARY LEADERSHIP IN THE 21ST CENTURY

- **Hybrid Nature of Combat.** The nature of combat has changed steadily over the years, but the most dramatic change occurred in the nineties at the end of the cold war. To the hithertofore mix of 2nd & 3rd Generation Warfare, got added a new dimension of the 4th Generation and now the 5th Generation, aptly being termed as 'Hybrid Warfare'. This has been to the fore in recent conflicts in the Middle-East and Afghanistan. Whilst the Indian Army has seen both conventional combat, as well as engaged in long periods of counter-insurgency, we are yet to experience the full dimensions of hybrid warfare in a full scale conflict. The question that arises is - what type of military leaders do we need to combat Hybrid Warfare, and more importantly, are we training and grooming our leaders, specially at the higher levels appropriately. This in itself is a separate subject of study, but some qualities that have become most essential are – **wider education base as distinct from training, innovation and adaptability, boldness and risk taking abilities.** More important is the ability and willingness to look

over the horizon, thus being prepared for newer threats & challenges before they hit us. The Army Training Command would be well advised to review its approach to training with a great focus on **'why'** rather than **'how'**, an appropriate mix of training and education.

- **Harmonizing Technology & Human Resource.** We have largely been overwhelmed by the power point. With slick presentations prepared by smart staff officers, everyone seems to be on top of the situation, whereas in reality there are considerable issues. Yes, technology needs to be harnessed to our operational advantage, but optimum value will only be achieved when this is harmonized with human resource, certainly not at the cost of it. Star wars is slick, but the reality has recently been witnessed in Afghanistan. Robust military leadership can be optimized through technology, not substituted by it. **Recent bias towards science & technology at the cost of art & humanities needs a rebalance.** The art of warfare, specially at the operational level cannot as yet, be substituted by the science of it. A recent initiative to turn NDA, totally science oriented and technical, was shelved when I was Southern Army Commander.

- **Decision Making in a Complex Environment.** A complex matrix of factors is making 'decision making' very challenging in the 21st Century. The information overload is clouding minds and it requires true leadership qualities to distinguish wheat from the chaff. Good communications are tempting commanders to reach down many levels, thus local conditions are having a disproportionate influence on higher level decision making. Consequences of decision making are turning more and more

military leaders, specially at the senior level – “**Risk Averse**”. If a leader is to pursue an ethos of “**Risk Avoidance**”, he will seldom be able to exploit opportunities that come his way, and this ethos is infectious, leading to an army of conformists, with a tendency to look over their shoulders. We have seen glimpses of this in earlier encounters on the line of control (LC), where local commanders hesitated to react, awaiting instructions from Higher HQs.

- **Mediocrity to the Fore.** Meritocracy in the armed forces is still sufficiently valued, but mediocrity is creeping up. Among many factors, reservation introduced at the colonel to brigadier level is now beginning to push up mediocrity in larger proportions than is desirable in senior ranks. A concerted effort to introduce it at ‘Two Star’ rank was thwarted with great difficulty by some of us on the high table. Had it succeeded, the results would have been disastrous for the well being, efficiency and morale of the Indian Army. Mediocrity/mediocre performance cannot be allowed to prosper in the armed forces, where lives are at stake; where decisions by military commanders can mean the difference between life and death.

- **Transparency: Power of the Social Media.** This is a hard truth of the 21st Century that has to be recognized by all leaders, especially those in high places. Incidents even of a trivial nature become viral over social media and tend to be blown out of proportion. The electronic media also tends to favour negative portrayal. Therefore, recognizing this reality, military leaders need to be not only **ethical** and **correct**, but also **transparent**. At the same time, the organization needs to look within and also educate and discuss this issue, so that its own don’t start

spreading this malaise. In-house mechanisms should be vibrant to offer redressal of grievances, even against the hierarchy.

- **Trend towards Egalitarianism.** The 21st Century trend is towards a classless society in the socio-economic and political domains. There is increasing discomfort towards authority, specially perks that go with such authority. Recent debates in the country on many issues are reflective of this trend. Our men and young leaders come from the same stock, therefore, what are silent whispers today are bound to grow. We need to take cognizance and corrective action, before this issue spreads in the armed forces also. 'Share and Care' may be a good way to look at "Welfare Issues".

- **Officer's Shortage Impacting Operational Effectiveness and Efficiency.** For too long, we have tried to live with shortage of officers. Whilst managing in peace time, such shortages have a serious impact in operational situations. And I dare say, the next rung of JCOs and NCOs haven't been able to fill this void. World over, the trend in modern warfare is towards officer intensive roles; we are milking existing units/Formations to meet the requirement of new organisations, seriously impacting our functional efficiency. Whilst some steps have been taken, they are not bold enough. As DGPP, I had suggested some very bold and innovative measures to enhance intake, but my attempts were thwarted by a conformist, bureaucratic wall within Army HQ itself.
- **Ethics and Morals – The Difficulty of being Good.** We are living in the midst of the 21st Century society, where standards of ethics and morals have reached a low point. Whilst the society may learn to cope and live with this, we in the armed forces cannot afford any such dilution. On the other hand, maintaining the high levels of ethics has itself become very challenging. When we talk of integrity, we need to cover not only personal but also professional integrity. The Chetwode Motto has guided us for long, but is it adequate, or do we need a more detailed code to guide our leaders on this vital issue.
- **Battlefield Milieu.** Wars fought away from society will be fought through them and it will be challenging to distinguish the foe from the innocent. Collateral damage will weigh on the minds of planners and executors.

- **Politico – Military Interface.** The Armed Forces do not function in a vacuum and have to be alive to politico – strategic considerations. As Military leaders rise in the hierarchy they are often confronted with considerations other than operational, for which a large number are not prepared. This shortcoming needs to be corrected through requisite exposure and training / interaction of military leaders, before they step into the operational level of command. A similar exposure for the Civil hierarchy would be most desirable to achieve optimum level of civil-military synergy.

- **Jointness and Integration** has become a huge challenge, and to state bluntly, we are nowhere near the desired levels, despite lip service by all stakeholders.
 - To start with, integration between Ministry of Defence and the Service Headquarters needs greater focus and attention. Cross manning of select posts would be a good start point.
 - Even in the 21st century, the three services are stand alone, with less than optimum synergy. This also affects the attitude and functioning of senior military leaders and is not in sync with 21st century requirements. Within the Army itself, parochialism and turf considerations are not uncommon and mars the ‘Moral Authority’ of senior military leaders.

- **Notion of victory** itself is getting redefined in the 21st century as we have seen in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria. Victory at any cost may no longer be acceptable. The Nation will expect its military leaders to achieve success at least cost, specially in human lives.

- While the military campaign may be short and swift in our context, the post conflict period may be prolonged and stabilization operations will demand a comprehensive civil-military approach.

THE WAY FORWARD

- Having taken stock of the challenges, let me summarise what in my opinion is the state of 'Higher level Leadership' in our Army and the way forward will become clear:
 - A small percentage are outstanding military leaders, with clarity and conviction, well versed in higher direction of war.
 - A fewer still qualify to be role models like General Hanut was, based on his Integrity, Competence and Commitment.
 - A percentage of mediocrity manages to get in – not able to rise above tactical level.
 - Status Quo approach and turf considerations manage to retain hold on many at the cost of the organisation.
 - Shortfall in “Visionary Leadership” to measure upto 21st century challenges becomes apparent.
- With that as a backdrop, let's look at ways and means to set right, invigorate and move forward. In you, sirs, lie the Nation's expectations, confidence and assurance, that guarantees security and well being of the country and all its citizens. This necessitates exceptional and extraordinary standards of military leadership at all levels, specially at the senior level.

- Leadership is present in all walks of life, so how is military leadership different! In my view, three things distinguish a military leader:
 - **Unlimited liability contract** towards serving the Nation/ Organisation, without any caveats.
 - As military leaders you deal with **life and death** issues, **not profit and loss**.
 - You are the **last resort** and therefore, do not have the luxury of being runners up even once.

Professional Aspects and Core Values.

- There is reason to believe that there is a bias that is confusing event management for military leadership. Nothing could be further from the truth. We need to nurture and develop combat leaders as distinct from event managers: leaders who lead from the front, follow the Chetwode Motto, stand up when the chips are down and who can, through personal example and influence, both direct and indirect, make their men achieve the seemingly impossible.
- Do we have such leaders in our midst? The answer is a categorical 'Yes', but such leaders need to be recognised, nurtured and supported.
 - The most powerful tool any military leader carries is not his weapon but his mind. The Indian Armed Forces must reinforce with vigour – "**The Yodha Ethos**" and develop "Scholar Warriors", who have the character and

courage of conviction, combined with professional competence, mental agility and strength to measure up to the most challenging tasks.

- Encourage creative thinking based on **operational logic** and professional education to enable growth of dynamic leaders. **Risk taking ability** needs to be nurtured at all levels, so that decisive operational moments are optimised.

- Empowerment and education of subordinates must remain a solemn responsibility of the military leadership at every level.

- **Work from Hope of Success rather than fear of failure.**

There are grounds for thinking that incompetent commanders tend to be those in whom the need to avoid failure exceeds the urge to succeed. We need to create an environment where leaders focus on success rather than failure avoidance.

- **Professional Dissent.** Genuine and constructive professional dissent needs to be encouraged in the armed forces, since its exclusion would only encourage mediocrity and predictability. Let's be clear that blind confirmation is not loyalty, nor independent thinking dissent.

- A leadership programme to train officers in **Operational Art** and **Higher Direction of War** has become imperative. ARTRAC may consider establishing a faculty of "Higher Leadership", with visiting faculty consisting of eminent, proven and charismatic military and civil leaders, both serving and retired. The selection

of faculty is critical and should be based on role model leaders, irrespective of rank/status.

- And lastly, the challenge remains, how to select, nurture and promote leaders in peace time, who will come good in war/crisis and not prove to be just paper tigers. My thesis on the subject is available at Higher Command, Mhow.
- As India tries to define its place on the high table, in this quest, there are obligations and expectations. This requires leadership of an exceptional calibre, not only at the cutting edge and directional level, but more important at the conceptual operational – strategic level of command and staff.
- So what are the expectations from leaders at this level?
 - Such leaders have to be **transformational** with high tolerance for ambiguity and professional dissent.
 - They should have **leadership vision** and a developed sense of **battlefield intuition**.
 - A **victorious will** combined with **calmness in crisis** has to be the hallmark of such leaders.
 - Strategic level leaders need to be able to co-relate the external influences with the internal environment and without compromising the core values, shape the environment to optimise the end state.
 - **The Army's Generals will be expected to expand, not constrain the Nation's range of strategic options.**

Organisation Aspects

- **Encourage Meritocracy.** The profession of arms is too serious to allow any space for mediocrity, specially in higher ranks. This needs the most serious attention from the high table of the Chief and Army Commanders. The time for reservations is long over and a review is necessary, as was planned, in addition to a host of other measures that can be undertaken.

- **Assessment and Selection System.** In all fairness, the assessment and selection system of the armed forces has been fair and objective. But it has not been dynamic enough to cater for various challenges that have appeared over time. It's also '**one man centric**', lacking consistency, with periodic flip flops, which open it to accusations of bias. Over assessment, of which most are guilty has overwhelmed the system, making it lose its discerning character. Similar is the case of appointments at senior levels, with square pegs being driven into round holes. So what recipe/change does one offer; a few suggestions are:-
 - **Consider 360° evaluation** – a trial may be ordered to evaluate and harmonise before introduction.
 - **Review assessment system** so that assessing/reviewing officers are able to offer a true representation of performance and potential; many steps can be taken.
 - **Assessment of integrity** has to be more detailed; today virtually everyone is getting a '9', thus permitting officers with questionable integrity to get through.
 - We are a **command oriented army**; yet everyone is not suited for it. Since it is a must for further promotion,

many unsuitable officers are given crucial command assignments. This is a real issue, needs a more dynamic solution.

- o Something also needs to be done to dissuade increasing trend of **complaints**, in fact repeated complaints against supersession. There are many officers who have risen to high levels by getting a redressal at every rank!! Once ADG CAB wanted to visit Germany to interact with his counterpart. As DDG MI (FD) when I sent this request, it was a surprise to learn that there was no such organisation in the German Army, as the need had not been felt.

- o **Senior appointments (Maj Gen/Lt Gen)** should be approved by an **appointment board**, composed of Chief, Vice Chief and Army Commanders. The Chief may retain a veto, based on a speaking order. Every other organisation in the country has such a collegiate system.

- o Time has come to move away from age related senior appointments. We are mature enough to pick up the most competent and suitable for the highest appointments, through a **credible system**. We cannot afford the luxury of **date of birth** as the **ultimate determinant**. Any such change should always be with prospective affect.

- **Establishing Accountability.** Let me state upfront, the Indian Armed Forces are **shy of enforcing professional accountability**. While personal misdemeanours are brought to book, how many have we removed from command assignments for **operational incompetence – few and far between**. The American Army lost its moorings when it stopped relieving incompetent officers from command assignments – resulting in

their poor performance in Vietnam. This needs a serious relook, with sufficient in-built checks to prevent misuse.

- **Embracing change.** The **culture of status quo** can no longer be allowed to impede our progress. An analysis of past studies undertaken, with great deliberation, shows **implementation ranging from Zero percent to 50 percent.** The last transformation study, I am afraid has met a similar fate. We need **'Visionary Leaders'**, who have a vision for tomorrow and who work with focus to leave a better organisation for the military leaders who will follow. The transformation that such a visionary leader will usher, may result in **short term turbulence.** He must stay the course and not be dissuaded by short-sighted vested interests.

- **Ethics & Priority.** The Army as an institution cannot allow any compromise in its own standards of ethics and probity. The **impeccable character and transparency** that is expected of military leaders should be **constantly reinforced.** Therefore, there is a requirement to lay down a code of conduct to ensure a culture of ethical standards and probity. Senior Officers should **lead by example** and **set the standards.** It will suffice to say that military leadership is **'leadership by deeds'**. There should be 'No double standards' and commanders should have an approach of **'top down - top first'** in this regard.

- For a healthy professional atmosphere, a clear distinction between **'On Parade'** and **'Off Parade'** should be observed. We should not carry our ranks too far in off parade activities.

Operational Aspects

- **Capability Development.** In the last 5-6 decades, there have been 25-30 major conflicts, and over a 100 in the Sub-conventional domain. In fact, open armed conflict waged by one state against another have become the exception rather than the rule. India has been subjected to both types of threats and that poses a dilemma for capability planners: **where should our focus lie?**

- In our case, where we still have two inimical neighbours, we can't afford to ignore the **"Most Dangerous"**, i.e., the conventional threat, but with an adaptability to tackle the **'Most likely'**, i.e., ongoing sub-conventional in various parts. This needs to be further quantified into specific and overlapping capabilities. The MoD should clearly lay down the capabilities required in consultation with the 'Defence Forces'.

- **Integrated Theatre Commands - The Way Forward**

Much has been written about creating a permanent Chairman of Chief of Staff Committee (COSC). In my view, the way forward is to define the desirable end state that should be achieved to give India Integrated and Synergised Armed Forces, which will measure upto the future challenges of the 21st century. A 5 Star CDS with Integrated Theatre Commands should be the desired goal, with the Western and Northern / Eastern Theatres under the Army, the Central Theatre under the Air Force and the Southern under the Navy. In the interim, to reach the goal, we may go in for a very focused effort to achieve jointness, have Functional Commands and a Permanent Chairman of COSC. I

am not dwelling into details since that is not the focus of today's talk.

- **Nuclear Deterrence** Nuclear Weapons are not for war fighting, but act mainly as a Deterrence against a nuclear capable likely adversary; in our case we have two, i.e. Pakistan & China. Whilst India's and China's nuclear doctrine is in the open domain, Pakistan has deliberately kept it opaque, thus hoping to deter India's conventional advantage.
- There is danger in falling to this bluff, for it will severely restrict our response to the ongoing sub-conventional threat. Most experts have extreme views on this subject and therefore, their advice needs to be balanced, and our response options kept open across the spectrum of conflict.

C O N C L U S I O N

“Whether a man is burdened by power or enjoys it; whether he is trapped by responsibility or made free by it; whether he is moved by other people and outer forces or moves them – this is the essence of Leadership”.

Theodore H White

- The Armed Forces **Have Been, Are** and **Will** remain crucial to the Nation's Security and well being. How they deliver will

depend mostly on the calibre of military leaders that lead and steer the organisation.

- We, therefore, need leaders who are steadfast, visionary and who measure up to the highest standards of military skills, who have a comprehensive understanding of challenges of modern warfare and who possess the endurance, strength of character and mental resilience and flexibility to carry the burdens that modern warfare conditions impose.

- How to measure good leadership is a natural question to ask – as also what distinguishes a great General from the Good Ones.

- The yardstick to measure great leadership should be the culture of enduring excellence which a leader leaves behind after he is long gone from the scene. Lt Gen Hanut Singh was one such Great Leader.

- I end by stating, my recipe for such a Military Leader of the 21st century:

“Humility in his persona and Arrogance in his uniform”

– based on his integrity, competence and commitment.

- I rest my case – thank you for your patience.

JAI HIND!