

MILITARY LITERARY FESTIVAL

CHANDIMANDIR – 26 JUNE 2016

1. Respected Gen VP Malik, Lt Gen KJ Singh, GOC-in-C Western Army, Distinguished Veterans, serving officers including those on video link, members of the larger defence family, friends from Media, ladies & gentlemen.

2. All of us present here today for this pioneering initiative are connected by One Thread – Our love for the Indian Army (includes IAF & IN too). An Organisation that has given so much to so many & above all given us all a unique Identity, which we all so cherish. (Own Example). All of us, both in uniform & those out of it, ARE & WILL always remain stake-holders for in the Army's well being.

3. Let me start by complimenting Gen KJ Singh, on having taken this very innovative initiative to First establish 'Gyan Chakra', the strategic Think Tank & now this first of its kind Mil – Literary Festival which will celebrate our rich legacy, the abundant talent in diverse fields and the rich contribution of the larger defence fraternity in every sphere of the Nation's progress. All in all a breadth of Fresh Air. Having been colleagues in many crucial assignments, it has been a pleasure to admire the Army Cdr's innovative approach & fresh ideas.

4. Whilst working on my script, I had to guard against a tendency to become over critical/negative or may be even cynical, for its so easy to fall into that trap. So let me start by very candidly & forcefully stating that the Indian Armed Forces are the most professional, capable, credible & well led organisation, in fact the "pride of our Nation". Being so important to the Nation's well being there is no scope for complacency. Others may have this luxury – we don't. We

need to constantly look within to remain dynamic & relevant, always one step ahead of the challenges & threats that lurk on the horizon.

5. 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.**

ROLE OF THE ARMED FORCES

- REMAINING RELEVANT

6. 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.

7. 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.

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

CHALLENGES THE INDIAN ARMY FACES **IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

9. **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.

10. **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 optimised 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.

11. **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.

12. **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. Mediocrity/mediocre performance cannot be allowed to prosper in the armed forces beyond a point, where lives are at stake; where decisions by military commanders can mean the difference between life and death.

13. **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".

14. **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.

15. **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.

16. **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.

17. **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.

18. 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.

19. 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.

20. 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**. Therefore, motivation and incentive has to be on a Higher Plain.
- You are the **last resort** and therefore, do not have the luxury of being runners up even once.

Professional Aspects and Core Values.

21. 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.

22. 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 upto 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.

23. **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.

24. **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.

25. 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 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.

26. 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.

27. 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.

28. 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

29. **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.

30. **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.
- **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.
- 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 effect.

31. **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.

32. 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.

33. Yes we are the Best – the whole country admires us and takes pride in us. But we need to be circumspect when we talk of others. Let us look a little within before we deride others. The lighter side of life and humour in uniform must always remain in our repertoire.

I commend the organisers for including this in today's deliberations.

34. And last – but most importantly; the contribution of the large Military Fraternity needs our appreciation and recognition, be it the Army wives; our children or those who left early to chart a new course – they are a great success story we can all be proud of – I salute you all.

35. I end by saluting the Indian Soldier who stands guard to protect us in the most difficult environment. To all of you I say:

“ Tez Hawaon se na ghabra tu Aquib, Woh toh chalti hain
Tujhko aur uncha uthane ke liye”

Also

“ Fanoos Ban jiski hifazat Hawa Kare woh shama kya bujhe jise
Roshan Khud Khuda Kare”

Thank You
Jai Hind