

Bitter truth behind India's diminishing defence capabilities. Part-I

India, as per its geographical location, lies sandwiched between two nuclear neighbours whose animosity and threatening postures against India are well known to the entire world. Besides the two troublesome neighbours, India is also faced with some grave internal threats targeted at its unity and integrity, like the insurgency movements in the North-East, separatist movement in Kashmir, Tamil nationalist movement in Tamil Nadu, Khalistani movement in Punjab, threat posed by illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, Pak-sponsored jihadi terror attacks and the NGO-sponsored Maoist menace. India and Pakistan had fought three wars in the past, two over Kashmir, and one border war after the Kargil intrusion. Yet, the Kashmir issue still remains a burning problem with no solution in sight. India had a border conflict with China too following the Chinese invasion into Indian territory in 1962. After inflicting a humiliating defeat on India, China withdrew its troops from the eastern sector (NEFA), but it continues to occupy a huge chunk of Indian territory (Aksai Chin) in the Ladakh sector.

Infrastructural development on the Chinese side

China's state-run media reported on September 24, 2010, that China has begun building a 253 km extension of the 1956 km Qinghai-Tibet railway, the world's highest. This new extension will connect the capital Lhasa to Tibet's second largest city Xigaze, that neighbours India, Nepal and Bhutan, in four years. It will pass through five countries and over the 90 km canyon of the Yarlung Tsangpo river that flows into India as the Brahmaputra. Tibet and northwest Xinjiang are the two centres critical for transport infrastructure to improve links between these two remote regions with major Chinese cities and to ensure speedy mobilization of troops and equipments to these border regions in future. The work on Lhasa-Xigaze rail link taken up in September, 2010 at an estimated cost of two billion dollars, was scheduled to be completed by 2015. However, the latest reports indicate that this project will be completed in 2014 itself, one year ahead of schedule.

There is grave concern among India's defence and strategic community over the work being undertaken by China for bringing its rail link right up to Nyangtri located on the border with Arunachal Pradesh, an area claimed by China as its own territory. Nyangtri is also the site where the Brahmaputra is proposed to be diverted northwards by the Chinese. The building of the railway line to Nyangtri or Nyingchi is strategically very significant, as it will strengthen China's rapid military deployment capability in the Arunachal sector. China has also unveiled its plans to construct world's largest dam in the region, which will be twice as big as the Three Gorges Dam (presently the world's largest). China's focus on expanding its rail network south of Lhasa is a matter of grave concern to India as China can now rapidly move forces to launch an attack on India.

According to a 2010 US Department of Defence Report, China has replaced its old liquid-fuelled , nuclear capable CSS-3 international ballistic missiles with more advanced CSS-5 MRBMs and has also vastly improved its border roads in the eastern

sector bordering India. International missiles such as the DF-31 and DF-31A have also been deployed by China at Delingha, north of Tibet. On the border with India, China has deployed 13 Border Defence Regiments totaling around 300000 troops. Airfields have also been established at Hoping, Pangta and Kong Ka which are in addition to the existing six airfields in the Tibetan Autonomous Region. (<http://www.idsa.in/node/8392/3400>)

Speaking on the sidelines of an NCC function in New Delhi, Minister of State for Defence M.M.Pallam Raju said on April 12, 2012 that the Chinese build-up in Tibet included five fully operational air bases, extensive rail network and over 58000 km of roads.

China's belligerency

There is no let up in the China's belligerency towards India even now. China is now claiming the entire Arunachal Pradesh as its territory. It has recently launched an online mapping service called the Map World to rival the Google Earth. It shows Arunachal Pradesh as a part of China, claiming it as Southern Tibet. It also shows Aksai Chin, which was a part of Ladakh, as a part of China's Xinjiang province. China does not issue visa to any person hailing from Arunachal Pradesh to visit China as it considers Arunachal Pradesh as a part of China. A proposed visit by a group of 107 officers of Indian Administrative Service (IAS) for a management training programme in China had to be cancelled in 2007 after China refused to issue visa to one of the officers, Ganesh Koyu, who belonged to Arunachal Pradesh. Clarifying on this issue, a Chinese embassy spokesman had pointed out that Ganesh Koyu who belonged to Arunachal Pradesh is a Chinese citizen and as such he did not require a visa to visit China. In January, 2012, a 30-member military delegation from India which had planned a four-day trip to Beijing under a bilateral defence exchange programme had to suspend its scheduled visit, as one of the team members, Group Captain M.Panging, was refused a visa as he hailed from Arunachal Pradesh. Later on, a truncated military delegation comprising of only 15 members, without Group Captain M.Panging, visited China as per the defence exchange programme. In 2009, India had to drop its efforts to get a \$60 million loan from Asia Development Bank for a development project in Arunachal Pradesh, because of strong objection conveyed to ADB by China against such a proposal claiming Arunachal Pradesh as a disputed territory and the world bank's reluctance to sanction the loan. In November, 2006, Chinese Ambassador to India Sun Yuxi, in an exclusive interview with CNN/IBN, had laid claim on the entire state of Arunachal Pradesh as Chinese territory. Coming just a week ahead of the scheduled state visit of China's President Hu Jintao to India from November 20, the statement of Sun Yuxi had created an unpleasant diplomatic row between the two countries.

In another instance of its hawkish stance, China had taken objection to Indian Defence Minister A.K.Antony's visit to Arunachal Pradesh on February 20, 2012, to participate in its statehood celebrations. Reacting to Antony's visit, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei had said on February 25 that India should refrain from any action that could complicate the border issue. But this is not a new development. China

had taken objection to the visit of even Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to Arunachal Pradesh earlier in 2009 for an electioneering campaign.

Jammu & Kashmir, a disputed territory

China now considers the Sino-India border as only 2000-km long by not recognizing nearly 1600-km long boundary line which separates Jammu & Kashmir from China as Indian border. The Xinhua, a Beijing-based multilingual newspaper, had reported this in December, 2010 by quoting an official briefing by Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister, Hu Zhengyue, ahead of Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao's visit to India. This was further reiterated by Hu Shisheng, a strategic analyst at the China Institute for Contemporary International Relations, who said in a media interview that it had always been the Chinese stand that its border with India was only 2000-km long as it did not include its border with the disputed territory of Jammu & Kashmir or Azad Kashmir. He further said that China's position was consistent since its 1963 treaty with Pakistan, holding that it would remap its border after the Kashmir dispute is settled by India and Pakistan. (<http://www.allvoices.com/contributed-news/7670695-china-considers-jammu-and-kashmir-as-disputed-territory>).

India had taken strong objection to China's practice of issuing stapled visas to residents of J&K since 2008. India had in 2008 called off all defence exchange programmes with China following China's refusal to issue a regular visa to Northern Area Commander Lt General B.S.Jaswal, based in J&K, who was scheduled to lead a defence delegation to China. However, China is reported to have stopped issuing stapled visa to residents of Jammu & Kashmir since October, 2011.

Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao had come to India on an official three-day visit from 15th. December, 2010. Two days prior to his arrival in India, Major General Luo Yuan of China's People's Liberation Army had called upon the Chinese government to adopt an aggressive line in its foreign policy and recover all the territory looted by its neighbours, an obvious reference to India. Major General Luo Yuan, who is also the deputy secretary-general of the Chinese Academy of Military Sciences, gave his call through an essay he wrote in the official publication, Global Times, a newspaper known for its nationalist views. He pointed out that though China's gross domestic product is close to the second in the world, it has not even solved the issue of national unification. The PLA enjoys significant influence in formulating foreign policy decisions in China. Another publication, "South China Morning Post" had also published similar comments made by Major General Luo about China not having recovered its land looted by its neighbours.

The Global Times, had again come out with a provocative editorial on 16 September, 2011 asking the Chinese Government to use "every means possible" to stop the Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) Videsh of India from going ahead with its exploration projects in the South China Sea, warning India that any deal with Vietnam would amount to a "serial political provocation" that would "push China to the limit." The editorial said that reasoning may be used first, but if India is persistent in this, China should try every means possible to stop this misadventure by India. It pointed out that the Chinese society has already been indignant about India's intervention in the Dalai Lama

problem. Such an editorial cannot be published without the approval of the Communist Party's Propaganda Department.

China's sinister dreams

The China International Institute for Strategic Studies (CISS), a military think tank that advises Beijing on global and strategic issues, had posted an article titled "If China takes little action, the so called Great Indian Federation can be broken up" in its website on August 9, 2009. Zhong Guo Zhan Lue Gang, a Chinese strategist, who wrote the article wants the break up of India into 20-30 independent states with the help of friendly countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. The article written in Chinese asserts that the so-called Indian nation cannot be considered as one having existed in history as it relies primarily on Hindu religion for unity. The author further suggests that China in its own interest and for the progress of all of Asia should join forces with different nationalities like Assamese, Tamils, Kashmiris and Bengalis and support them in establishing independent nation states of their own. The author insists that China should also recover the 90000 sq km territory in Southern Tibet (Arunachal Pradesh).

Border violations

There had also been numerous instances of border violations by the Chinese army both in the eastern and northern sectors in the past, with occasional violation of air space too. In an incident on 25th August, 2011, two Chinese helicopters, along with seven to eight troopers on board, had crossed into the Indian territory along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Chumur area of Ladakh in J&K and dismantled about 17 unused Indian bunkers before flying back. This Chinese intrusion into Ladakh was confirmed by an inquiry report submitted in this regard by the sub-divisional magistrate of Nyoma to the deputy commissioner, Leh, which was forwarded to the Jammu and Kashmir government. (The Hindustan Times, dated September 14, 2011).

In the latest instance of border violation, on April 15, 2013, about 40 Chinese personnel from the People's Liberation Army had intruded 19 km into the Indian territory across the line of actual control (LAC) and set up tents in the Daulat Beg Oldi sector in Eastern Ladakh. Subsequently an equal number of ITBP personnel also put up tents 300 metres away facing the Chinese troops. The stand-off continued for three weeks before both sides agreed on May 5th to dismantle the tents and go back to their original positions.

Thus we can see that Pakistan is not the only country posing a security threat to India, but our border with China is also equally tense and disturbed. This being the security scenario in India, it must be obvious to all that there is no other country in the world which faces a greater threat to its unity and territorial integrity than India. But no, our present-day rulers do not seem to have realized the gravity of the situation. What else could explain the present sorry state of India's defence preparedness. Despite our humiliating defeat in the 1962-border war with China, we do not seem to have learnt any lesson.

Infrastructure on the Indian side

Construction of the 73 all-weather roads measuring about a total of 3808 km, was approved by the government over 4 years ago in a belated effort to match with China's spectacular infrastructure development work in the Tibetan Autonomous region. However the latest status report on the progress of the project reveals that only 17 of the 73 roads earmarked for construction along the unresolved 4056 km line of actual control with China have actually been completed till now. This is the situation in 2012 which is the deadline for the completion of this project. These shocking and unpardonable delays have been caused by lack of necessary environmental clearances, bureaucratic hurdles and delays in allocation of funds. These things are happenings when the senior military officials and defence analysts have been repeatedly seeking necessary measures to bolster road connectivity and telecommunication links along the LAC to ensure faster movement of troops, artillery and other equipments to forward areas in case of an emergency.

The 73 roads under construction cover all the three sectors of LAC, i.e. western (Ladak), middle (Uttarakhand and Himachal) and eastern sector (Sikkim and Arunachal). 27 of them fall in Arunachal, 19 in Uttarakhand, 14 in J&K, seven in Himachal and six in Sikkim. It is most unfortunate that Indian troops have to trek long distances to reach their border posts. At many places, even our kaccha (temporary) roads stop at 60 to 70 km short of the LAC with closest rail link being 100 km away. China on the other hand has highway and metal roads coming right up to the LAC. China has built several air, road and rail links all along the LAC, and can mobilize large columns of troops at their launch pads at short notice. China, for instance, has now can boast of a 40000-km road network in Tibet, apart from rail links like the 1118-km one from Lhasa to Gormo in Qinghai province of mainland China. It has also built huge air-lift capabilities.

India's diminishing defence capabilities

India's much talked about military modernization programme has not yielded any positive results so far. It has been reported that close to 100 army procurement projects are currently stuck up at different stages amid bureaucratic bottle necks, cumbersome procedures and suspected sabotage. Under the prevailing scenario, it will take more than 15 years to achieve its optimum level of operational readiness to defend our borders.

(<http://defenceforumindia.com/indian-army/71-indian-army-thread-74.html>)

Despite all talks about the modernization of Indian army, the capacity of Indian artillery regiments to play any crucial role in a war remains extremely poor. The last major acquisition of towed gun-howitzers was of about 400 pieces of 39-calibre 155 mm FH-77B howitzers with a range of 30 km from Bofors of Sweden in the mid-1980s. Every effort in the past to make fresh acquisition of guns has been thwarted by unforeseen moves with strong possibility of sabotage.

Shortage of tank ammunition

Army vice-chief Lt Gen S.K.Singh on April 9, 2012 told the parliamentary standing committee on defence that there was a shortfall in certain types of tank ammunition due to blacklisting of an Israeli firm. The reserve stock of specialized tank ammunition, like the 'armour-piercing fin-stabilized discarding sabot' in particular, was down to just four days.

Speaking ahead of the 78th anniversary of the air force on October 8, 2010, Air force chief Air Chief Marshal P.V.Naik had stated that 50% of IAF equipments, including fighters, radars, transport aircraft and air defence weapons, were either obsolete or obsolescent. This kind of a situation emerges in India, when, as per some international defence review reports, Pakistan has already overtaken India in possession of number of nuclear war-heads and long-range missiles. It is also reportedly catching up fast with India in its superiority in fighting a conventional war, with the massive military aid it was getting from the US in the name of its war against terror. Thus, when the army top brass is debating about the worst-case scenario of India being forced to face a two-front war, the ground reality appears to be frighteningly grim.

Just ahead of the 79th anniversary of the Air Force Day on 8th October, 2011, Air Chief Marshal N.A.K.Browne said on October 3d, that the IAF has now 34 squadrons of fighter planes and it would reach its sanctioned strength of 42 squadrons by 2022. So, we are presently 8 squadrons short of the sanctioned strength and we will have to wait till 2022 to reach even the sanctioned strength. This is a very tragic situation, as air superiority is the key to win the modern wars.

India's Light Combat Aircraft Programme

It has been reported that India's light combat aircraft, named 'Tejas', which was scheduled to be inducted into the Indian Air Force in 2012 is further delayed by another three years. The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) had started development of this aircraft way back in 1983 with the aim of replacing the ageing MIG-21 fighter jets of IAF with the locally made Tejas attack aircrafts. At the time when the project was taken up, it was widely expected that the new combat aircraft would become operational by the year 1995. However a series of technical snags and mishaps forced the DRDO and the HAL to delay its induction several times in the past. The single-engine Tejas will become fully combat ready only after getting the final operational clearance. So far the Tejas has received only the initial operational clearance-1 (IOC-I), granted in January 2011, to certify its airworthiness. It is reported that the IOC-II (or the final operational clearance) for the fighter, which includes integration of some weapons like laser-guided bombs, initially pushed back to December 2012, will now come only by mid-2015. India is reported to have already spent more than Rs.25000 crore on Tejas project, including its naval variant, trainer and the failed Kaveri engine. The Indian Air Force is already faced with a serious shortage of fighter aircraft, as induction of new aircraft was not keeping pace with the retirement of old and ageing aircraft for quite some time. Any further delay in induction of Tejas aircraft will seriously hamper the overall efficiency and operational capabilities of the IAF. The design of Tejas MarkII, with more powerful engines, is reportedly still not finalized due to weight management issues. (http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-07-18/india/32729834_1_light-weight-fighter-naval-variant-and-trainer-tejas-light-combat-aircraft).

Former Chairman of Chiefs of Staff Committee and Navy chief Admiral Suresh Mehta had admitted that India has neither the capability nor the intention to match China's military strength, force for force and therefore our strategy to deal with China would need to be in consonance with these realities. He further said that whether in terms of GDP, defence spending or any other social, economic or development parameter, the gap between the two is wide to bridge and getting wider by the day. He lamented that India's defence expenditure has been hovering around a low two percent of GDP and warned that unless there is a substantial hike in the defence expenditure, the gap in the military capability between us and our potential adversaries could further widen and dilute our operational edge. Admiral Mehta was speaking on the topic of National Security Challenges at a function organized by the National Maritime Foundation at New Delhi on 10th.August, 2009.

Shortages faced by the IAF

The IAF and defence officials had informed the Standing Committee on Defence on April 15, 2012 that the Indian Air Force was facing critical deficiency of trainer aircraft and simulators and the fighter squadrons were depleting fast and that some airfields did not have certain kind of landing facilities. The IAF has 34 fighter squadrons presently against the sanctioned strength of 42 squadrons and this number was likely to reduce further to 31 squadrons during the 12th plan period. The number of fighter aircraft due for retirement after completion of their technical life far exceeds the rate at which their replacements can be inducted. Apparently, the induction process has not been commensurate with the de-induction process. With regards to the trainer planes, the IAF requires 181 Basic Trainer Aircraft, 85 Intermediate Jet Trainers and 106 Advanced Jet Trainers. But the IAF does not have a Basic Trainer Aircraft as the HPT-32 fleet has been grounded after a fatal accident on July 31, 2009. There is critical deficiency of trainer aircraft and simulators. Out of 46 simulators, 16 are not operational due to grounding or phasing-out process. The panel was also told that the critical deficiency of trainer aircraft and simulators to some extent was responsible for not giving adequate emphasis on training, leading to accidents of aircraft in the Air Force. (<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-in-school/air-force-facing-critical-shortages/article3318580.ece>)

Considering the depleting strength and fast-eroding combat edge of the Indian Air Force, the government of India had finally decided to buy 126 'Rafale' fighter jets from the French firm Dassault Aviation in January 2012. India had floated the request for proposals for the purchase of 126 fighter jets in August 2007. It took four and half years to finalize Rafale as the preferred choice. Under the terms of purchase, the first 18 aircraft will arrive in fly-away condition, while the remaining 108 aircraft will be manufactured at Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) under a technology transfer process. The IAF was originally set to receive these jets from 2015. However, due to the complex negotiations, even the contract for this \$12 billion deal is yet to be inked.

India's indigenous aircraft carrier

At a time when the US has already announced its plan to relocate 60 per cent of its formidable naval fleet towards the Asia-Pacific region, and China having already commissioned its first ever aircraft carrier in September 2012, India's long-standing aim of being equipped with two full-blown carrier battle groups has suffered a huge set back with the reported delay in the construction schedule in the 40000 tonne indigenous aircraft carrier, being built at the Cochin shipyard. According to present indications, the new aircraft carrier (IAC-I) will not be battle ready anytime before 2017. This has severely hampered the Indian Navy's plan to have two carrier battle groups (CBGs) by 2015. India's first CBG is to be centred around the much-delayed 44570-tonne INS Vikramaditya (refitted Gorshkov) which was inducted into the Indian Navy in November 2013 under the revised \$2.33 billion deal inked with Russia. The second CBG was to be centred around the IAC-I, to be christened as INS Vikrant after the country's first carrier decommissioned in 1997. The Navy will now have to stretch the operational life of its present solitary carrier, the 28000-tonne INS Virat, beyond 2014. The 50 year-old INS Virat is relatively toothless with just 11 Sea Harrier jump jets left to operate from its deck. The 45 MIG 29K naval fighters, being procured from Russia for \$2 billion, can operate only from Vikramaditya and IAC-I. India also has a 65000-tonne IAC-II proposal on the drawing board. But, it has reportedly been derailed by the delay in the IAC-I. The 260-metre long IAC-I can carry 12 MIG-29Ks, eight Tejas Light Combat Aircraft and ten anti-submarine and reconnaissance helicopters.

All this is happening when the US has announced its plan to deploy at least six of its 11 CBGs in the Asia-Pacific region. Each of these carriers is of over 94000 tonnes and can operate 80-90 fighters. China's first ever aircraft carrier, the 67500-tonne Liaoning, was commissioned into the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) on September 25, 2012. It is a refurbished Soviet carrier purchased from Ukraine in 1998. China, as part of its ongoing robust programme, is reported to have plans to build up to five indigenously-built aircraft carriers in the decade ahead.

India's submarine fleet

After the sinking of INS Sindhurakshak in a mishap in the naval dockyard in Mumbai on August 14, 2013, the Indian Navy presently operates only 13 submarines against the sanctioned strength of 24. This deplorable situation has been caused mainly due to delays in new acquisitions. Nine of these submarines are Kilo class Soviet-origin vessels and the rest are HDW German-origin vessels. This number is likely to dwindle further to half the present strength by 2015 as most of these vessels are ageing and would be decommissioned in next five years. India had signed a contract with the French firm DCNS in October 2005 for six Scorpene submarines to be built at Mazagon Docks Limited (MDL), Mumbai. First of these submarines was scheduled to be inducted into the Indian Navy by December 2012. But the latest on this front is that there will be a full three years delay in delivery of these submarines and the first vessel will not be ready for induction before 2015. The project to build Scorpenes, under Project 75, with borrowed technology from the French firm DCNS has already had a cost escalation of nearly Rs.5000 crore. The revised cost of the submarine contract is Rs.23,562 crore or \$4.6 billion. The originally approved cost was Rs.18,798 crore or \$3.6 billion. To shore up

Indian Navy's depleting submarine strength, the Union cabinet has already cleared a proposal for the purchase of six more next generation vessels, under Project 751. However, the acquisition process in this regard remains at a preliminary stage.

Nuclear-powered submarines

The nuclear-powered Akula-II class submarine K-152 Nerpa that India had taken on lease from Russia was handed over to India on January 23, 2012 at a function held in Russia. On reaching the Indian shores, it was renamed as INS Chakra and inducted into the Indian Navy at a ceremony held in the port town of Visakapatnam on April 4, 2012. This submarine will be on a ten-year lease with Indian Navy till 2022 as per a contract signed with Russia in 2004, worth over \$900 million. The 8140-tonne INS Chakra, based in Visakapatnam, however, is not armed with long-range nuclear missiles, like the Russian SS-N-21 cruise missiles with over 2500-km range due to international nonproliferation treaties like the Missile Technology Control Regime. The Indian nuclear triad's elusive underwater leg will become functional only when the home-grown nuclear submarine, the over 6000-tonne INS Arihant becomes fully operational in 2014 or 2015. Though the INS Chakra does not add to India's nuclear deterrence posture, it will give much-needed muscle to India's depleting underwater combat arm. The nuclear-powered submarines are stealthy since they can operate underwater at long ranges for months together unlike diesel-electric submarines that need to surface every few days to get oxygen to recharge their batteries. The INS Chakra will also be armed with the 300-km range Klub-S land-attack cruise missiles.

India had earlier operated another Soviet-origin Charlie class submarine between 1988 and 1991. It was also named Chakra. The said nuclear submarine was quietly returned to Russia after three years, without seeking any lease-extension, reportedly under pressure from the US. Not only that, the expertise gained from Chakra was steadily lost, since the Navy did not operate any other nuclear submarine thereafter. Why did we take a nuclear submarine on lease from Soviet Union and trained our personnel on it for more than three years if we did not have any programme to have a permanent arm of nuclear-powered vessels? The amount we spent on taking on lease a nuclear submarine from the Soviet Union (Russia) in the 1980s and training our naval personnel on it was obviously a sheer waste of taxpayers' money.

Indigenous nuclear-powered submarine

The Indian Navy's Advanced Technology Vessel (ATV) Project to design and construct nuclear submarines was first initiated in 1974, when Mrs. Indira Gandhi was the prime minister of India. After the initial ups and downs in acquiring the necessary technology, the matter was seriously pursued since 1985 to develop an indigenously constructed nuclear submarine based on the concept of the Soviet Charlie-II class design, detailed drawings of which were obtained from the Soviet Union in 1989. However the actual work on the first ATV started only in 1998. On completion, the first indigenously-built nuclear submarine named INS Arihant was symbolically launched from the Matsya dry dockyard in Vishakhapatnam on July 26, 2009. The INS Arihant is presently undergoing harbour acceptance trials. Its nuclear reactor went critical on August 10, 2013 and it is likely to be inducted into the Indian Navy by the end of 2014 or by early 2015

after the sea trials. The 6000-tonne INS Arihant submarine is powered by an 83-MW pressurized water reactor with highly enriched uranium. The submarine has four launch tubes in its hump. They can carry up to 12 K-15 Sagarika missiles with 8 multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles (MIRV) with a range of 750 km or 4 of the under-development K-4 missiles with a range of 3500 km.

Thus, it took more than 30 years for India to design and develop its first Advanced Technology Vessel (ATV). The ATV INS Arihant, which is yet to undergo sea trials, has not been formally inducted into the Indian Navy for any operational role. Such a criminal and painful delay in undertaking a prestigious project like the ATV does not augur well for the global aspirations of an emerging power like India.

Army chief's letters to Prime Minister and Defence Minister

Former Army Chief General V.K.Singh had written a letter to Defence Minister A.K.Antony in February 2012 seeking his urgent attention to certain pressing needs of the army to improve its operational efficiency. The letter was followed by a presentation by the Director General of Military Operations to the senior defence ministry officials. Some of the pressing issues raised by the army chief in his letter included the depleting ammunition reserves and the slow pace of modernization, especially in areas like artillery and air defence. It was pointed out that several cases of procurement of artillery and armoured ammunition have hit road blocks due to the blacklisting of firms. The letter said that there has been very little progress in the establishment of an institution to train and raise specialized troops to take on insurgents. While land had been earmarked in areas affected by the Naxal problem, there was no progress in setting up of the school that would train paramilitary forces as well as Army troops for counter insurgency operations. The project has been pending for last two years. According to the army chief, the slow procurement process to replace the barrel of the T72 fleet which is the backbone of the Army's armoured might has seriously hampered Army's combat capability. It was pointed out in the letter that the Army has been trying for the past decade to procure new 125 mm smoothbore barrels for its 1600 T72s without success. The procurement was initiated after several indigenously produced barrels burst during firing. An RFP for replacement stands outstanding. While the ministry has been pushing for the larger orders for the indigenous tank Arjun, the letter pointed out about the technical problems in the tank which are standing in the way of bulk orders. In 2011, the Army had shared with the defence ministry and the National Security Council its assessment that in case of a full-scale war on the western front, reserves of most critical ammunition would not last even two days.

Later on March 12, 2012, General V.K.Singh had written a confidential letter to the Prime Minister also informing him about the shortages and weaknesses of the army and urging him for immediate remedial action, which was leaked to the press by an unidentified miscreant in the Army headquarters or in the PMO. The contents of the letter got wide coverage in the international media, especially in Pakistan. The letter bemoans that the Indian armed forces are woefully short of arms and ammunitions because of faulty weapons procurement system, bureaucratic delays, corruption and lack of longtime planning. The letter pointed out that almost 70 per cent of our defence needs are met through imports, the army did not have sufficient ammunition for its tanks, the country's

air defence systems were obsolete and the infantry is riddled with deficiencies including inability to fight at night. He lamented that the 155 mm ammunition that was supposed to be produced at an Indian facility was delayed by more than a decade as the Ministry of Defence (MoD) banned the two international firms that were selected to provide equipment and technology for the project because of alleged bribery allegations against them. The letter made it clear that suspending procurement process pending investigation of bribery charges or blacklisting of firms does more harm to the country's defence preparedness than the economic woes inflicted on the firms.

There was a huge controversy and heated debates in the country over the leakage of Army chief's confidential letter to the Prime Minister and the embarrassment and humiliation that the contents of the letter brought to the government and the nation. Whoever be the culprit behind this unholy episode, what emerges from this shocking state of affairs is the bitter truth that our armed forces are ill-equipped and unprepared to fight a war even with Pakistan, when the ground situation warrants our eternal readiness to fight a war on two fronts.

Unrest among armed forces personnel

The sorry state of India's defence preparedness is further complicated by the low morale of the armed forces personnel. It has been widely reported that there is growing discontentment and resentment among the armed forces personnel over the perceived indifference of the government towards their various pay and pension-related grievances. Defence Minister A.K. Antony had reportedly written a letter to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on June 25, 2012, expressing grave concern and alarm over the growing discontentment among the armed forces personnel over their various grievances and the possibility of the situation taking a bad turn if no remedial action is not taken immediately. Angry ex-servicemen have been holding protest rallies in different parts of the country since 2008 due to various anomalies in the fixation of their pay and pension and demanding the one-rank, one-pension mechanism. They also returned their medals and even made a bonfire of their artificial limbs as a mark of protest. It was after receiving the frantic letter from the defence minister in this regard that the government on July 13 announced the setting up of a committee headed by cabinet secretary Ajit Kumar Seth, which would examine the raw deal given to the armed forces in the 6th Pay Commission and also the one-rank, one-pension demand of the armed forces personnel.

However the composition of the new committee has only further antagonized the armed forces personnel. The committee constituted to look into the pay and pension grievances of the serving and retired military personnel did not have single representative of the serving or retired military personnel. The committee headed by cabinet secretary Ajit Kumar Seth included five other top IAS officers, including principal secretary to the PM, Pulok Chatterji and defence secretary Shashikant Sharma. Reportedly, the Army Chief, General Vikram Singh, Air Chief Marshal N A K Browne and Navy Chief Admiral Nirmal Verma had written separate letters to defence minister A.K. Antony expressing their extreme unhappiness over the composition of the committee and insisting on the inclusion of a military representative in the panel. In fact a major grouse of the defence top brass is that all their career woes and systematic degradation in status

are the result of petty narrow-mindedness of a bunch of senior IAS officials who exploited their close working relationship with the rulers in matters of governance to indulge in manipulative tactics to deny the due status, pay and privileges, etc, to the armed forces personnel, causing grave anomalies in their status and pay structure that created functional parity problems. The present unrest among the forces is comparable to the turmoil and uncertainties that prevailed among the armed forces personnel in the wake of the 6th Pay Commission Report that gave a raw deal to the defence personnel. The appointment of the 6th Pay Commission had given a lot of hope to the defence personnel who vainly dreamt that the Commission would look into their grievances and propose some bold measures to boost up their morale and to make the military career more attractive. However nothing of that sort happened. The recommendations of the Commission were a total let down for the armed forces personnel. There was so much anger and resentment among the servicemen against the sixth Pay Commission report that for the first time in the history of Indian armed forces the three service chiefs had to make a joint representation to the defence minister apprising him of the growing resentment among the servicemen against the Pay Commission report and seeking immediate remedial measures to redress their grievances. The service chiefs had earlier repeatedly requested the government to include at least one representative of the military as a member of the Commission. But this request was turned down. The government had set up a four-member committee to go into the allegation of injustice done to the armed forces by the sixth pay commission and to suggest remedial measures. All the four members of this committee were senior secretary-level IAS officers, with no representative from the armed forces. As expected, the committee's report was not acceptable to the service chiefs. The matter was then referred to a three-member group of senior ministers headed by External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee, which only partially met the demands of the armed forces. Several anomalies in the pay and pension fixation remained unresolved. Under the circumstances, the three service chiefs naturally believed that they will not get justice from the newly appointed committee led by Ajit Kumar Seth, consisting of only IAS officers.

Relevance of Chanakyaniti

The Supreme Court had expressed its concern over growing discontent among serving and retired armed forces personnel as seen by the recent incidents of return of medals, burning of artificial limbs and fratricidal cases. The Court on September 8, 2010 asked the Centre to follow the Chanakyaniti and keep the armed forces happy. The court said that they have come to know that the armed forces have so many grievances which are not being properly addressed by the government. The court suggested setting up of an independent commission led by a retired Supreme Court judge whom the personnel could approach with their grievances. But finding no positive response from the government, a Supreme Court Bench comprising of Justices Markandey Katju and T.S.Thakur on October 18, 2010 expressed their strong displeasure and termed the bureaucracy in the ministry of defence as "insensitively effective". They remarked that the defence secretary who sits in his plush office in Delhi must be sent for ten days to the high altitude posts to get a first hand knowledge about the conditions in which those people serve the country. An apologetic solicitor general Gopal Subramaniam, who appeared for the Centre, sought time to respond to the proposal, which was reluctantly granted by the

Court. However, the latest developments indicate that the UPA government does not want to give any credence to the sane advice given by the Supreme Court about the need to keep the armed force personnel happy.

The government's belated action in appointing a committee comprising of only IAS officers to study the grievances of the armed forces personnel and the angry reaction to it from the three service chiefs is a matter of grave concern. Senior civil servants who are closely associated with their political masters in policy making often use their clout and influence with the ruling class in undermining the status of the military top brass, so as to project their own supremacy over them. The weakness of the political leadership in dealing with such prejudices and petty-mindedness of the senior bureaucrats is responsible for the present state of affairs, which if went unchecked, could endanger the national security.

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