

Bitter truth behind India's diminishing defence capabilities - **PART-II.**

While the UPA government was very liberal in wasting the country's financial resources on illogical schemes like NREGS and loan-waiver package, it failed to allocate adequate funds to meet the genuine requirements of the defence forces despite the extremely grave security situation prevailing in the country. Senior military officers and defence analysts have since long been demanding a minimum budget allocation of 3% of the GDP for defence. The 16th report of the Parliamentary Committee on Defence had also strongly recommended in 2007 that there should be a permanent provision in the annual budget for allocation of at least 3% of the GDP for defence expenditure. And yet India's defence allocation for 2008-09 had fallen below 2% of the GDP for the first time since 1962. The allocation for defence since then continues to be less than 2% of GDP. The Union budget for 2012-13, presented by the finance minister on March 16, 2012, had earmarked Rs 1,93,407 crore for defence. The figure accounts for only 1.9 per cent of the GDP. Wasting exchequer's money on unproductive and undesirable schemes like NREGS and loan-waiver for farmers and denying adequate funds for important sectors like atomic energy, defence and infrastructure development demonstrates the UPA government's style of good governance.

General V.K.Singh takes over as the new chief of Army staff

General V.K.Singh took charge as the 26th chief of staff of the Indian Army on March 31, 2010. His tenure as the chief of Indian Army can be considered as the darkest chapter in the history of Indian Army because of his erratic ways and behavior and the controversies he created.

Controversy over V.K.Singh's DoB

Six months after becoming the Army chief, General V.K.Singh raked up a controversy over his date of birth which was already settled in the past to his satisfaction. The controversy first arose in 2002, when General Singh brought his differing age records maintained by Military Secretary's branch and Adjutant General's branch to the notice of his superiors and sought for a correction. While the Military Secretary's branch showed May 10, 1950 as his DoB, the Adjutant General's branch showed his DoB as May 10, 1951. Singh's NDA records showed his DoB as May 10, 1950, where as his matriculation certificate showed it as May, 10, 1951. Singh's attempts to change his DoB to 1951 was however rejected by successive military secretaries, mainly because of the well-laid out procedures in the Army for any such correction/change in the date of birth. Army rules mandate that any request for correction in the DoB has to come from the concerned individual before completion of two years of service in the Army. V.K.Singh raked up the issue for the first time only in 2002, i.e. 32 years after joining the Army. However,

one omission on the part of Army was that it did not remove the anomaly of two differing DoBs maintained by its own two branches.

When General Singh was promoted as Lieutenant General in 2006, he had to give an undertaking accepting 1950 as his year of birth. In 2008, when General Singh was promoted as Army Commander, he again gave an undertaking to maintain 1950 as his year of birth. In 2010, just before his appointment as the Army chief in April, Gen.Singh yet again gave a written undertaking accepting May 10, 1950 as his date of birth and describing the issue as a closed chapter. And despite all such written commitments in the past, six months after becoming the Army chief, General Singh racked up the age row again by writing to the MoD about the discrepancy in his age records and seeking restoration of his DoB as May 10, 1951. General Singh's stand has been that his year of birth had been incorrectly mentioned as 1950 in the UPSC form for admission to NDA, based on the information given by his school clerk. But this claim of V.K.Singh was conclusively contradicted by Singh's UPSC form, filled in his own handwriting in July 1965 for admission to NDA listing his date of birth as May 10, 1950, as reproduced in Hindustan Times, dated 29th August, 2011. The said report in the Hindustan Times also contained copy of a letter written by General Singh on November 12, 2009 to the then army chief reiterating his commitment to accepting May 10, 1950 as his date of birth. When his request for a correction in his DoB was turned down by the MoD, he filed a statutory complaint under the Army Act with defence Minister A.K.Antony, seeking restoration of his DoB as May 10, 1950. This was also rejected by the MoD in December 2011.

A defiant General Singh On 16th January, 2012 filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court of India challenging the government's order rejecting his claim over the age row. He thus became the first serving general to move the Supreme Court to challenge a government order. Justifying his action, V.K.Singh had given a statement that he was constrained to approach the highest court in the country to protect his honour and integrity. His moral posturing on the issue is quite amusing, to say the least. The chief of Army staff (COAS) is the top most position in the Army that any soldier can aspire for. Gen.V.K.Singh has achieved everything in his career. As far as the age controversy is concerned, General Singh himself was responsible for the discrepancy in his age records. His NDA application form showing his date of birth as May 10, 1950 was filled up in his own handwriting. In 2006, when he was promoted as Lieutenant General, and in 2008 when he was posted as an Army Commander and again in 2010, prior to his appointment as the chief of the Army staff, he had given written commitment accepting May 10, 1950 as his date of birth. Despite all such commitments, General Singh raked up his age row again, knowing fully well that any correction in his age records was not possible at this stage. And not only that, with just four months left for his retirement, he had no hesitation in dragging the Union government to the Supreme Court on his age row to become the first serving Army chief in the history of independent India to commit such a heinous act to the shock and bewilderment of all nationalist Indians and amusement of the entire world.

Attorney General G.E. Vahanvati and many senior army officials have cited the relevant army rules that debar any correction in the date of birth after two years of joining the service. Singh joined the service in 1970, but the two conflicting records existed in his records until 2006. Since no correction in his age was sought by General Singh before the expiry of the time bar, he had to accept the officially accepted date of May 30, 1950 as his DoB. The AG had stated that acceptance of the DoB showing Singh younger by an year could open the floodgates of litigations by many senior officials whose careers would be affected. He had cited several Supreme Court judgments to back his opinion and had strongly pleaded against creation of any such awkward situation within the top hierarchy of the army. For instance, if V.K.Singh had succeeded in establishing his DoB as May 10 1951, it would have given him an extension of ten months in his tenure as army chief and it would have also scuttled the chances of Gen Bikram Singh to become the next army chief and instead the top job then would have gone to Lt. General Parnaik. In a chain reaction, it would have also affected the seniority positions of many other top officials.

Strangely the law ministry had accepted V.K.Singh's argument that 1951 should be considered as his year of birth in clear violation of the army rules and vital documents..
(<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2012/20120130/main3.htm>)

The Supreme Court while dealing with his petition and assessing the merits of his case observed that the Army had not committed anything wrong by accepting May 10, 1950 as V.K.Singh's date of birth (DoB) and advised General Singh to withdraw the petition or else it will have to rule in the matter. Left with no option, the Army chief withdrew his petition and the matter was finally disposed off by the Supreme Court on February 10, 2012.

V.K.Singh was not an ordinary soldier. He was the chief of the Indian army and that way he was a symbol the Army's honour and image. The post he held carries a lot of responsibilities and obligations. Under the circumstances his act of moving the court to challenge the government's decision on his age raw, which was already settled earlier to his satisfaction, was highly inappropriate and unjustified. His action has caused irreparable damage to the image of Indian army, making this disciplined and sacred institution look like a laughing stock before the world at large. If at all he wanted to challenge the government's decision on his age raw, the ideal course left for him would have been to quit his post as the Army chief and then move the court. It was not the best option available to him, but at least it would have helped him to retain his honour and reputation to a great extent and saved the army and the government from a lot of avoidable embarrassment. Even after he was rebuffed by the Supreme Court, he did not think it necessary to resign from his post. What more needs to be said about his honesty and integrity.

After his petition on the age row was rejected by the Supreme Court, many of V.K.Singh's supporters who had earlier argued in his favour in TV debates, etc, had suggested that the best course left for him now was to tender his resignation and make an honourable exit from the Army. But General V.K.Singh, who had other ideas, was in no mood to resign. He had to inflict the maximum damage to the Army before his retirement on May 31, 2012, as has been proved by the subsequent events.

Misdeeds of General V.K.Singh

The media cell of the Army in a press release issued on March 5, 2012, had raised an allegation that a retired senior officer of the rank of Lt.General, had offered a bribe of Rs 14 crore to Army Chief General V.K.Singh, on behalf of Tetra and Vectra Ltd, for clearing the purchase of 600 substandard vehicles for the Army. The press release had also accused Lt General Tejinder Singh, a former chief of the Defence Intelligence Agency and some other disgruntled serving officers of the Military Intelligence of planting stories in the media about the alleged tapping of some sensitive phones of certain senior politicians and bureaucrats in the capital.

Gen V.K. Singh, in a media interview with a national daily on March 26, 2012, directly raised the same allegation that a senior retired Lt General of the Indian Army, acting on behalf of an equipment lobby, had offered him a bribe of Rs.14 crore in order to have a tranche of 600 sub-standard Tatra trucks cleared for purchase. He further charged that the vehicles, 7000 of which were already in use in Army, had been sold over the years at exorbitant prices with no questions asked. He said that there was no proper facility where they could be serviced and maintained and yet they continued to be sold to the Army. He said that he had promptly reported the matter to Defence Minister A.K.Antony.

Following an uproar over the allegations raised by General V.K.Singh, Defence Minister A.K.Antony informed the Parliament on March 27, 2012 that General V.K.Singh had brought the reported bribe offer made by retired Lt General Tejinder Singh to his notice more than a year ago, but when asked to proceed against the man who offered the bribe, the Army Chief said that he did not want to pursue the matter further. However, in the light of fresh disclosures over the issue, the defence ministry had recommended a CBI probe into the allegation.

Enraged by the charges leveled against him by General V.K.Singh, Lt General (retd) Tejinder Singh filed a criminal defamation case against General V.K.Singh and four other senior Army officials in a Magistrate court in Delhi on March 27, 2012 for misusing their power and positions by making false allegations against him with the sole intention of tarnishing his name. He charged that V.K.Singh raised such allegations against him only to get his own name cleared from the controversy over the illegal air-monitoring/tapping of cell phones in Delhi which was done at his behest. Besides General V.K.Singh, the other four officers named in the defamatory

suit are vice Chief of Army Staff Lt Gen. S.K.Singh, Lt.General B.S.Thakur (DGMI), Major General S.L.Narashiman (Additional Director General of Public Information) and Lt Col. Hitten Sawney, Staff Officer, Directorate General of Public Information.

The court, while hearing the case, noted that the complicity of the former Army Chief in the publication of the March 5 press release was 'prima facie' deducible from the fact that he alone had knowledge about the offer of bribe made by the complainant. The court also said that it was 'prima facie' satisfied that the March 5 press release was defamatory as serious allegation of bribery was made against Tejinder Singh, who had a long and distinguished career in the Army. The metropolitan magistrate on June 8 issued summons to all the five accused to appear in the court on July 20, 2012. Accordingly all the five officers, including General Singh, presented themselves before the metropolitan magistrate Jay Thareja on July 20, 2012 and all of them were granted bail on a personal bond of Rs.20000 each.

As advised by the defence ministry, General V.K.Singh formally lodged a written complaint with the CBI on April 10, 2012, alleging the bribery offer made by Lt.General (retd)Tejinder Singh on September 22, 2010, for clearing the purchase of 600 substandard Tetra trucks for the Army. After conducting a preliminary enquiry into the bribe offer, the CBI on October 20, 2012, registered FIRs under section 12 of the Prevention of Corruption Act against Tejinder Singh and Vectra chief Ravi Rishi and also raided their residences in Delhi. DRDO chief V.K.Saraswat on March 31,2012 contradicted the adverse comments made by General V.K.Singh about the quality and effectiveness of the Tatra trucks and asserted that the Tatra trucks which were also used as base for launching important missiles like Prithvi and Agni were outstanding vehicles.<http://sevensisterspost.com/tag/drdo-head/>

General V.K.Singh becomes a champion of ex-servicemen's grievances

After losing his age row writ in the Supreme Court, General Singh had become suddenly very active in taking up various grievances of the ex-servicemen and addressing their rallies at different locations, especially in the northern parts of the country, like Jhajjar, Ludhiana, Pathankot and Gurgaon. General Singh's close relations were also associated with organizing some of these rallies. Though there is nothing wrong with a serving Army chief in extending a helping hand to the cause of the ex-servicemen community in India, the way he started organizing and addressing the ex-servicemen's rallies during the months of March, April and may, 2012, only after losing his age battle in the Supreme Court, naturally gives enough grounds for suspicion about his motives. For instance a rally of ex-servicemen addressed by General Singh at Jhajjar on May 16, 2012 was attended by about 12000 ex-servicemen. As in the case of a political rally, ex-servicemen were mobilized and brought from five districts of Haryana for the rally. Lt General Gyan Bhushan, GOC-in-Charge, Sapta Shakti Command and Lt General Ashok Singh, GOC 1 Corp were also present at the unction.

http://zeenews.india.com/news/haryana/pay-anomalies-concerning-ex-servicemen-sent-to-def-min_775737.html).

Army Chief addresses ex-servicemen's rally

Addressing a rally of the Himachal chapter of ex-servicemen at Dharmasala on May 25, 2012, Gen.V.K.Singh accused Lt Gen. Dalbir Singh of making public the show-cause notice issued to him and said that such things are not approved of in the forces. The 9 Corps of Army organized the rally in association with former Congress leader Major (ret'd) Vijay Singh Mankotia. Mankotia in his speech charged that while the foreign rulers had invaded India earlier, our own governments and politicians are now robbing India, like never before. While Mankotia was making such a tirade against the government and the politicians, Gen. Singh, who was still in service, was sitting on the dais and enjoying his speech. (Indian Express, dated 26-5-2012).

General Singh unveils statue of former prime minister Chandrasekhar.

General V.K.Singh on April 22, 2012 unveiled a statue of former prime minister Chandrasekhar, erected on the premises of Devstali Vidyapeeth in Ballia. General Singh was the chief guest at a function organized in this connection by Neeraj Sekhar, Samajwadi Party MP and son of former prime minister Chandrasekhar. An Army chief attending such a function organized by a political outfit and unveiling the statue of a political leader was not only strange and unusual, but downright scandalous.

Gen.Singh releases book alleging nepotism in Army

Army Chief Gen V.K.Singh was the chief guest at a book-release function organized by author of the book and senior criminal advocate R.K.Anand in New Delhi on May 25, 2012. The book titled 'Assault on Merit', alleges political interference, a manipulative bureaucracy and vested interests of interfering with promotions of top officers in the Army. Alleging factionalism within the Army, it held some insiders responsible for the subversion of institutional integrity through political and bureaucratic interference. Releasing the book General Singh talked about the changes that he wanted to see in the promotion policy of the Army for evaluation of the officers. Speaking on the occasion, R.K. Anand, the author of the book, criticized the government for mixing politics in the promotion of senior officers, even going to the extent of naming officers who had been targeted.

The defence establishment was reportedly shocked by Gen. Singh's open association with a controversial lawyer like R.K.Anand, who had faced prosecution in court for unethical practices in the infamous BMW hit-and-run case of 1999. The Supreme Court had found Anand guilty of contempt of court for influencing a key witness in the BMW-hit-and-run case and had stripped off his designation as a senior advocate. During the last hearing in September 2012, the Bench had told Mr. Anand to choose between the prescribed six months of imprisonment for his offence or to donate Rs 21 lakh to the Bar Council of India for developing the library or

computer centre of a law college and undertake to provide free legal services for one year. Mr. Anand subsequently deposited Rs 21 lakh with the Bar Council of India and submitted an affidavit in the court undertaking to provide free legal services for one year and seeking leniency and discharge from the contempt punishment. The court is yet to give its verdict on his application

The function was attended by discredited politicians like former Congress MP Sajjan Kumar, who is being prosecuted for his alleged role in the anti-Sikh riots in 1984. The fact that R.K.Anand used the occasion to launch a tirade against the government for alleged interference in promotion of senior officers in the army, that too in the presence of a serving chief of staff, brought further embarrassment to the defence establishment and the government. However, the government did not feel that there was any need for any action against the general.

Army chief puts Lt Gen's promotion on hold

The Army has imposed a Discipline and Vigilance (DV) ban against senior Lt Gen. Dalbir Singh, who is tipped to be the Army Chief in two years. The DV ban bars any promotion or posting of the officer until he is cleared by the Army Headquarters, thus effectively blocking his elevation as Army Commander. The ban comes one week after Army Chief General V.K.Singh had personally issued a show-cause notice to Lt Gen. Dalbir Singh, asking him to explain as to why a censure should not be recorded against him for his alleged unprofessional and lackadaisical manner in handling an intelligence unit accused of botching up an operation. While Lt Gen. Dalbir Singh was given time up to May 26 to respond to the notice, Army HQ has gone ahead and imposed the DV ban, a stringent clause which is generally invoked in cases of serious indiscipline or suspected corruption. If a censure is recorded against Lt Gen Dalbir Singh, his appointment as Army Commander, an essential requirement to become the Army Chief, will be in jeopardy. According to the show-cause notice, Dalbir Singh did not take adequate action against troops accused of irregularities during an anti-insurgency raid in Assam. This is not the first time that V.K.Singh has shown his ire against Dalbir Singh. In March, 2012 Gen.V.K.Singh had forwarded a written complaint sent by a Trinamool Congress MP, with a covering letter to the CBI, seeking a thorough probe into the charges raised in the complaint. The written complaint was actually sent by Trinamool Congress MP Ambica Banerjee eight months back, raising allegations of corruption against Dalbir Singh in procurement of night vision devices, parachutes, etc, for the Special Frontier Force(SFF), when he was serving the SFF, on deputation, as its Inspector General. The SFF is a covert Tibet-oriented paramilitary unit supervised by R&AW, India's external intelligence agency, functioning under the Cabinet Secretariat. The SFF is also known as 'Establishment-22' and was raised after the 1962 border war with China. V.K.Singh's revelation may have caused acute embarrassment to the government and the R&AW, given that it came during Chinese president Hu Jintao's state visit to India. If V.K.Singh wanted to take some action on the allegations raised by the Trinamool Congress MP, he could have done it in a more discreet manner without disclosing all the

sensitive details to the whole world. Obviously, our national interests and security concerns were clearly outweighed by his narrow personal prejudices. After the disclosure of the allegations against Dalbir Singh, an internal inquiry sanctioned by the cabinet secretariat had cleared Dalbir Singh of all the charges. But General V.K.Singh was not deterred. Displaying his continued hostility and vindictiveness against Dalbir Singh, days before his retirement, he issued a show-cause notice and imposed a discipline and vigilance ban on him, in a last-minute effort to block Dalbir's elevation as the next chief of Army staff. Gen Singh was least bothered about the consequences his most deplorable action will have on the image of the Army and the morale of its loyal and disciplined troops.

Overturing the decision of his predecessor General V.K.Singh, the new Army chief General Bikram Singh on June 7, 2012 lifted the ban on promotion of Lt. General Dalbir Singh Suhag, clearing his way for appointment as Eastern Army Commander.

V.K.Singh's interaction with T.V. channels

Less than a week before his controversial 26-month tenure came to an end, Gen V.K.Singh gave a series of interviews to various TV channels, like Times Now and CNN-IBN, making all sorts of allegations against the government, Defence Ministry and even against the Supreme Court. He criticized the Defence ministry for selectively leaking information to fix him. In an apparent reference to a remark made by Justice R.M.Lodha, one of the two judges on the Supreme Court Bench who heard the case on his age row and who had advised him to blow with the wind, he said that if all are going to blow with the wind, all will then become muggers and will become corrupt. He told the CNN-IBN that he had withdrawn his petition on the age issue as the Supreme Court gave no decision, but tried to arbitrate. He described the leakage of his letter written to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh about serious deficiencies and shortages in the army as a treasonable act. He told the Times Now channel that vested interests and coteries operating within the government and Army were responsible for leaking confidential letters, pushing corrupt deals and manufacturing lines of succession in force.

New Army chief takes over command

Lt. Gen Bikram Singh, who was the Eastern Army Commander, took over as the 27th chief of Indian army on May 31st, 2012 from the outgoing chief Gen. V.K.Singh. The new chief, Gen Bikram Singh, really has a tough job on hand to restore the prestige, honour and credibility of the Indian army, which has taken a severe beating lately due the maverick ways and treacherous deeds of Gen V.K.Singh.

New chief closes down clandestine snooping unit

A clandestine military intelligence unit set by former Army chief General V.K.Singh, which was allegedly accused of tapping the phones of top political leaders was ordered to be closed down by the new Army chief Bikram Singh. The controversial unit called the Technical Support Division (TSD) was directly controlled by V.K.Singh. The unit set up with a budget of Rs.18 crore and 30 staff members was essentially meant for border surveillance. There were however allegations that the snoop unit was misused by General Singh to listen in on mobile phone conversations of senior politicians and bureaucrats in the wake of his date of birth row. The snoop unit reportedly had illegally deployed two sets of mobile phone interception equipment. Army chief General Bikram Singh appointed a board of officers to probe the unit's mandate, tasks executed by it and its financial records so as to fix responsibility before disbanding it. The probe unit was headed by Lt Gen Vinod Bhatia.

The army subsequently submitted a report to the government confirming the destruction of the two interceptors in TSD's custody. The report further said that the two interceptors, illegally deployed in New Delhi, were taken to Jammu by TSD personnel and were later destroyed and dumped in Chenab river.

Ex-army chief joins anti-N-plant stir.

Ex-army chief Gen. (retd) V.K.Singh joined a group of protesters on July 31, 2012 against a nuclear plant in Gorakhpur in Haryana. It was the first time that he was seen in participating in a public campaign. He spoke to the farmers in Gorakhpur and extended his support to their agitation against acquisition of land for the upcoming nuclear power project, as it will make about 1500 farmers landless. In a press release issued on the occasion Gen.Singh quoted Japan's Fukushima tragedy to describe nuclear power as destructive and stressed the need for finding alternative resources for getting electricity.

The press release also carried the signatures of retired IAS officer M.G.Devasahayam, Achin Vanaik of the coalition for Nuclear Disarmament and Peace and P.K.Sundaram, a social activist. Devasahayam, a former army officer, was one of the petitioners in the PIL filed in the Supreme Court against the appointment of General Bikram Singh as the new Army chief.

Ex-Army chief demands immediate dissolution of Parliament

Addressing a joint press conference along with anti-corruption crusader Anna Hazare in Mumbai on October 29, 2012, former Army chief V.K.Singh demanded the immediate dissolution of the Parliament and holding of fresh elections, as the people were fed up with corruption, unemployment, mega scams and other anti-people policies of the government.

Ex-Army chief addresses political rally

Addressing a political rally organized by INLD to pay tribute to late deputy prime minister Devi Lal on his birth anniversary, former Army chief V.K.Singh lamented about the leadership crisis in the country. He alleged that efforts were being made to weaken important institutions like CAG, CVC, judiciary and even the armed forces. He said that the time has come to have participatory democracy and remove all those not following the spirit of the Constitution. Those who shared the stage with him included INLD leader Om Prakash Choutala, JDU leader Sharad Rao, Akali Dal leader Prakash Singh Badal and RPI leader Ramdas Athawale.

Ex-Army chief threatens to join Parliament-gherao programme

Former Army chief V.K.Singh on November 2, 2012 announced that he may participate in the proposed Parliament-gherao programme planned by the sugarcane farmers to protest against the move to decontrol the sugar sector as suggested by a panel appointed by the Prime Minister. Earlier addressing a press conference, Rashtriya Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan (RKMS) convener V.M.Singh demanded the rejection of the Rangarajan committee report to decontrol the sugar sector and threatened that sugarcane farmers from the northern states would gherao the Parliament on December 4 if their demand was not accepted.

Gen.Singh's role in raking up Adarsh Housing Society Scam

The Adarsh Co-operative Housing Society filed an affidavit in the Bombay High Court on July 31, 2012 stating that the former Chief of Army Staff Gen.V.K.Singh had raked up the Adarsh scam only to defame his predecessor General Deepak Kapur. The affidavit filed by retired Lieutenant Commander Gurmukh Singh Grewal, Adarsh Society's representative, stated that the alleged Adarsh scam was in fact a plot initiated by the then Army Chief Gen.V.K.Singh who took over as the chief on April 1, 2010 from his predecessor General Deepak Kapur. It said that the plot was doctored by General V.K.Singh in order to settle his scores with his predecessor and also to defame the Adarsh Society and its members. The affidavit further said that Singh had deputed an officer from the headquarters in Delhi to conduct a confidential inquiry into the Adarsh Society scam. It also pointed out that the confidential report submitted to the headquarters in Delhi stated that the land on which the controversial building stood belonged to the state government

Blacklisting of ordnance firms

Over the last few years, the Ministry of Defence has black-listed so many foreign arms corporations that it has virtually stalled the military's modernization programme. The hit list includes some prominent global weapons suppliers with good record of delivering arms and equipments to India. Starting with Bofors in 1980s, the list includes Israel Military Industries (IMI), Denel of South Africa, Singapore Technologies Kinetic (STK) and Rheinmetall Air defence (RAD). Corruption in arms purchase is a world-wide phenomenon. Agents of almost all arms corporations routinely bribe political leaders, bureaucrats and senior military officers to

clinch a particular arms deal. It is an open secret that almost all arms companies maintain and use millions of dollars of slush funds to clinch their mega defence deals. Though it is always desirable to avoid any kind of irregularity in the arms contract, including availing the services of an arms broker, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) has to study the existing patterns, availability and urgency of the items required and such other practical aspects of the deal before rejecting a deal. The MOD's decision in such matters should not be guided by any fanatic commitment to a false notion of self-righteousness and moral convictions, if such a decision leads to a weakening of our defence preparedness endangering the country's security interests.

Defence Minister A.K. Antony's paranoia against corruption and the resultant blacklisting spree of all major arms corporations is wholly unjustifiable. Reputed arms companies are blacklisted on unproved corruption charges. These blacklists have started choking our defence procurement. The Indian Army's artillery fire power is grossly inadequate today as we have not purchased a single artillery gun ever since the Bofors scam that broke out in the eighties. The South African company Denel was to fit a gun turret on the Arjun tank chassis. That was scuttled in 2005 when Denel was unofficially blacklisted over bribery allegations in another sale, which was never proved. That also blocked a crucial ammunition factory being built in Nalanda, for which Denel was providing technology. In 2007, Israel Military Industries (IMI) replaced Denel as technology provider. But after the arrest of former Ordnance Factories Board Chairman Sudipta Ghosh in a corruption scandal, the IMI also came to be included in the prohibited list. Also blacklisted after the arrest of Ghosh was Singapore Technologies Kinetic (STK), whose Pegasus ultra-light howitzer was the long gun being evaluated for the army's mountain divisions. Despite strong protests from the army, the said crucial procurement remains blocked. (Business Standard, 18th July, 2009).

The CBI that probed the scam involving former Ordnance Factories Board (OFB) chairman Sudipto Ghosh had recommended that the firms named in the scam be black-listed. These include Singapore Technologies Kinetics (STK), Israel Military Industries Ltd and Rheinmetall Air defence (RAD), three of the largest military manufacturers in their field. The IMI Ltd manufactures well-known small arms like Uzi submachine gun, the Tavor assault rifle and the Desert Eagle revolver and India has been a regular customer of this company. The Singapore Technology manufactures all kinds of small arms and artillery systems and had a joint venture with OFB to jointly develop carbine, the SAR 21 MMS, for sale to Indian defence and paramilitary forces. It is also one of the prime global artillery manufacturers and was the frontrunner in a Rs.5000-crore tender to provide 155 mm light howitzers for the Army. Rheinmetall Air Defence (RAD) based out of Zurich is world's leading producer of air defence equipment and is the manufacturer of most weapons in this category in service in the Indian Army.

The army's fresh trials for 155mm towed artillery guns which has been a part of its long-delayed artillery modernization programme was scrapped again and the entire process now will have to start afresh. The defence ministry clarified on July 24, 2010 that the trials had been scrapped as the gun of only one contender, that of BAE Systems, was left in the field after the other firm, Singapore Technology Kinetics (STK) was found black-listed for its role in the alleged Ordnance Factory (OFB) Scam. Since the Defence Procurement Rules do not allow a single vendor situation, it has now been reported that, a fresh request for information (RFI) has been issued to different global vendors. The CBI had earlier recommended the blacklisting of four foreign firms, including STK and two domestic arms companies for their alleged involvement in the OFB scam. The guns of STK and BAE Systems were the only ones which were short-listed after the necessary technical evaluation by committees of the defence ministry and the army for the over 12000 crore project to buy 400 155mm artillery guns and also indigenous manufacture of another 1180 howitzers after transfer of technology. However sabotage and scandals continue to block the much-delayed artillery modernization programme worth over 20000 crore.

The Task Force of National Security Systems headed by retired bureaucrat Naresh Chandra in its report submitted to the prime minister on 23d May, 2012, had suggested concrete guidelines that need to be followed while initiating any punitive action against an erring defence firm. It pointed out that the current practice of imposing a blanket ban on firms that come under the scanner has held up procurement for the armed forces, especially in procuring world class artillery systems for the Army. The committee suggested a structured process in dealing with tainted firms and recommended that the ministry should resort to a complete banning of firms only as a last resort in extreme cases. It said that proper norms should be followed to determine the acts of commission and omission by the firms in question and suggested a graded approach recommending that individuals be barred from deals instead of a blanket ban on firms. Other measures suggested include stringent fines on firms violating the norms. The Task Force was set up in July, 2011, in the wake of rising criticism aired by many senior defence officials and analysts against the government policy of imposing a blanket ban on all defence firms found involved in any kind of malpractices, despite its adverse effect on India's arms procurement process. (<http://www.indianexpress.com/news/defence-deals-ban-firms-only-as-last-measure-says-panel/953631/0>)

Ministry turns down proposal to set up Mountain Strike Corps

The finance wing of the defence ministry in consultation with the ministry of finance rejected a proposal in 2011 to spend Rs12,000 crore to set up a Mountain Strike Corps, even as a plan to create an alternate, all-weather route from Siliguri to North Sikkim to rush troops to the Indo-China border was turned down by the ministry of environment and forests on the grounds that the alignment passes through eco-sensitive areas. The proposal to beef up army's force level on the Indo-China border was mooted by the former Army Chief Gen.N.C.Vij after a

comprehensive review of the situation was undertaken by a special study team. The study group led by the then Western Army Commander J.J.Singh had recommended the creation of a mountain strike corps to maintain a strong deterrent against China. While the finance ministry shot down the proposal pointing out the huge financial implications, the environment ministry rejected it on the ground of possible harm to the biodiversity and eco-system of the region.

http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report_babus-block-indian-armys-plans-to-counter-chinas-pla_1587622

Indiscipline in the Army

A scuffle between the officers and a soldier at the Tibri-based 45 Cavalry in Punjab had escalated into a full-blown standoff at the unit between men and the officers in June, 2011. Though no arms were used in the scuffle, the situation got defused only after the commanding officer rushed to the spot and calmed the two sides.

The clash was triggered after a soldier was pulled up by an officer after a training session at Tibri. An exchange of words between the two had turned into a physical scuffle in which the jawan had assaulted the officer. The jawan was later allegedly beaten up by the other officers who had rushed to the spot. All of a sudden a rumour had spread that a jawan was badly beaten up and that he may lose his life, causing the situation to escalate. Then the commanding officer himself had to rush to the spot to pacify the agitated soldiers by assuring them that the jawan was safe. A court of inquiry was ordered against 16 soldiers and three officers in connection with the incident. The CO of the unit was subsequently posted out to 2 Corps.

Nyoma clash

In a serious case indiscipline in the Army, a mutinous situation had developed in the 226 Field Regiment deployed at Nyoma, Ladakh, close to the Sino-India border on May 10, 2012. Reportedly, on May 10 evening after the field firing exercise by the regiment at the Mahe Field Firing Range, Suman Ghosh, an orderly attached to Major A.K.Sharma, was dragged to the Beacon ground near the range and beaten up by Maj.Sharma and four other officers. It is learnt that Maj.Sharma's wife had complained to him earlier that sepoy Suman Ghosh had entered her room without knocking while she was changing her dress. Major Sharma and his colleagues, after a discussion about the incident, apparently wanted to teach Suman Ghosh a lesson. Initially there was not much reaction to this incident from the other army men. But when the word spread that his injuries were very serious requiring immediate medical attention, they rushed to the spot and wanted to take him to a hospital. However they were prevented from doing so by Major Kanade and other officers who probably feared that it will lead to an internal inquiry and action against all those involved in the incident. This was followed by a heated argument which later led to a minor clash between the two sides. On hearing about the fracas, the Commanding Officer of the unit, Col Prasad Kadam, rushed to the spot and after sensing the mood of the soldiers, he reprimanded the officers for their conduct. Offended by the insulting behavior of the

CO, the officers then assaulted the CO causing injuries to his face and legs. By then more soldiers also reached the spot, who after rescuing the CO went on a rampage and attacked the officers. Two Majors, including A.K.Sharma, were mercilessly beaten up. Three other Majors who fled from the scene took asylum in nearby Chushul Army Camp. The mutinous soldiers set fire to part of an office building, destroyed some defence structures and ransacked the Border Road Organization Guest House where the officers were staying. Some of them even took over the armoury for a while. However no arms were brandished or used. The agitated soldiers, armed with rods and knives, later marched through the streets of Nyoma town condemning the officers and raising slogans like 'Bharat Mata ki jai' etc.

Major Gen. A.L.Chavan, Commander of 3 Division arrived at the spot on May 11th morning and interacted with the jawans to diffuse tension. A court of inquiry (CoI) was ordered into the incident to establish the chain of events and the complicity of the officers and jawans involved. Commanding Officer of the unit Col. Prasad Kadam was relieved of his charge with immediate effect. The 226 Field Regiment was moved back from Mahe to its permanent location at Durbuk. It is also reported that the 226 Regiment may be disbanded at a later stage. As many as 168 personnel of the 226 Field Regiment who were reportedly involved in the Nyoma clash will now face disciplinary action and court-martial proceedings.

The CoI report has recommended strict action against one-third of the personnel of the Regiment, including the commanding officer, three other officers and 17 junior commissioned officers, who were involved in the clash. As many as 220 witnesses were examined during the inquiry, including officers, other ranks as well as civilians who witnessed the clash.

Tension at Mahesar in J&K.

There was again serious breach of discipline and tension in one of the Army units in Jammu and Kashmir recently. The latest incident was provoked by the suicide of a jawan of 16 Cavalry Battalion, posted at Mahesar in Samba district of J&K. On August 8, 2012, V.Arun, a jawan of the said unit committed suicide by shooting himself with his service rifle. Reportedly Arun, who hails from Trivandrum, had received a phone call in the morning and thereafter he went to the guardroom and shot himself. He died on the spot.

It is reported that tension between the officers and jawans of the 16 Cavalry Battalion had been simmering for quite some time. Arun's suicide was just a tipping point. Emotionally charged over their colleague's suicide, the angry jawans then ganged up against the officers and gheraoed them for being responsible for Arun's suicide leading to a prolonged stand off. The total failure of the command and control created such a chaotic situation in the unit that senior officers, including Yol-based GOC Lt Gen.A.K.Bhalla had to rush to the spot to calm down the agitated jawans. All officers of the 16 Cavalry were subsequently moved out of their residences

and attached to different messes as a precautionary measure to diffuse tension. A court of inquiry has been ordered into the incident.

Army jawans desert the unit

About 10 Army jawans belonging to 56 Armoured Regiment stationed in Patiala deserted the unit in mid-October, 2012 and returned to their regimental centre in Ahmednagar, reportedly in protest against the orders of their superiors asking them to do some menial tasks. The Army has denied that the soldiers were asked to do menial tasks and clarified that they were asked to clean their personal weapons and undergo battle Physical Efficiency Test which has to be done by all combatants as part of their routine military duty. The Army on November 2, 2012 ordered a court of inquiry into the incident of some jawans of 56 Armoured Regiment deserting the unit.

Sukna Scam

The Sukna scam has been presented as a serious blot on the good name and reputation of the Indian army. But anyone who goes through the facts of the case is certain to get baffled by the merit of this so-called scam. Nobody in this alleged land scam is accused of financial misappropriation, cheating or taking bribe. The army did not own the disputed piece of land. The land in question is a 71-acre plot of land belonging to a private party. In March, 2009 the 33 Corps commander gave a no objection certificate to a realtor for transfer of the said plot of land to a private trust for construction of an educational institution. The entire area surrounding a military base is a restricted area and because of security implications, no construction can be undertaken in the said area without an NOC from the Army authorities. The Sukna scam is all about the NOC issued by Lt General P.K.Rath, Commander, 33 Corps to the private realtor Dilip Agarwal. At the most we can describe the entire case as an issue of propriety. And yet the issue was blown out of all proportions to tarnish the reputation of the Indian Army. The entire episode is terribly disturbing.

When LT General V.K.Singh, GOC-in-charge of Eastern Command, came to know about the NOC granted by the 33 Corps commander to a realtor, he took the matter so seriously that he ordered a court of inquiry against all those who facilitated this deal. Based on the COI report, he recommended disciplinary action against all officers involved in the deal and summary dismissal of Lt General Avadesh Prakash, who was posted at that time as the Military Secretary at Army headquarters, for influencing the 33 Corps commander in giving the NOC to the realtor. The then Army chief Deepak Kapoor however disagreed with the recommendations of V.K.Singh and as per his instructions, the Army headquarters issued show-cause notices for administrative action against Lt General Avadesh Prakash, Lt General Ramesh Halgali and Major General P.Sen and disciplinary proceedings against Lt General P.K.Rath. But the decision of the Army chief to opt for a milder course of punitive action against the guilty officials was resented by Lt General V.K.Singh. With the help of a top Congress leader he was able to put pressure on Defence Minister Antony to change his stand on the issue and order

tougher action against the officers found guilty. Army chief Deepak Kapoor who had ordered administrative action against military secretary Lt General Avadesh Prakash, was thus forced to issue a fresh order for disciplinary action against him. The chief's decision to switch from administrative to disciplinary action is reported to be a violation of military policy in operation since 1993. As per a directive issued by the additional directorate general (Discipline and Vigilance) to all army command headquarters, dated May 11, 1993, it was clearly stated that once the competent authority after having applied his mind to the full facts of the case decides to initiate and if that action has commenced, it is unjust and illegal at that stage to revert to disciplinary action. Gen. Deepak Kapoor in fact had a thorough discussion with Defence Minister A.K. Antony over this controversial case and he had also informed him about the intended course of action against the indicted generals. General Kapoor had admitted this much in an interview to Karan Thapar, which was broadcast on CNN-IBN's Devil's Advocate programme. Apparently the defence minister did not have any disagreement with the chief at that point of time. Which means that Antony's decision to take a tougher stand against the accused generals is an after- thought, influenced by a third person. Congress supremo Sonia Gandhi or Prime Minister Manmohan Singh are the only two persons who could have put pressure on Antony to change his stance on this sensitive issue against the wishes of his army chief. Manmohan Singh, known for his sober temper and soft nature, could not have gone against the discretion and decision of A.K. Antony and General Kapoor and pressed for tougher action against Lt General Avadesh Prakash. So, it is clear as to who put pressure on Defence Minister to revise his decision on Sukna scam accused. The defence Minister's advice to the army chief to order disciplinary action against Lt. Gen. Prakash, against the decision of the army chief, clearly amounted to gross interference with the set procedures in the army. It is for the army chief to decide whether there should be an administrative inquiry or disciplinary action against a particular officer. The aggrieved parties can always move the civilian court. But the civilian authorities must keep away from the internal trial and disciplinary proceedings within the army, as has been the practice so far. By breaking such conventions, Antony has challenged the authority and prerogatives of the army chief, that too publicly, allowing the whole thing to stink. Why was it done and what purpose did it serve? These are disturbing questions. Whoever may have been the real culprit behind attempts to defame the Indian army, Antony cannot wash off his responsibility as the person mainly responsible for creating a huge controversy over a minor issue of propriety or an error of judgment.

Sexual harassment charge against senior Army officer

The Army in 2010 had ordered a formal court of inquiry (CoI) into the sexual misconduct charges leveled against its engineer-in-chief Lt General A.K. Nanda by a Colonel's wife during an official trip to Israel in May, 2010. The wife of Lt General Nanda's aide, Col CPS Pasricha, had alleged that Lt General Nanda had molested her in a hotel room in Tel Aviv in the second week of May, 2010. On returning to India, she complained about the incident to Army chief General V.K. Singh's wife Bharati Singh, President of Army Wives Welfare Association. Lt

General Nanda, who headed the eight-member delegation to Israel, however strongly denied the charges. Nanda's wife Neerja Nanda, who accompanied Nanda during the five-day trip, had also rubbished the charges and vouched for her husband's character. Col. Pasricha had also lodged a separate complaint with General V.K.Singh in this regard. He alleged in his complaint that Nanda had entered his hotel room in Tel Aviv to ask for a technical paper and then tried to get intimate with his wife. He then escorted Nanda back to his room. The court of inquiry into the incident was headed by Lt General A.S.Lamba, the then C-in-C of Shimla-based Army Training Command.

During the investigation, it was noted that Pasricha and his wife had not filed any complaint immediately after the alleged incident in Tel Aviv. On the contrary, it was found that the couples had gone together to Egypt on vacation after their Israel trip. Pasricha had told the investigators that he and his wife decided not to raise the issue immediately as it would have sullied the image of the Army in a foreign country. He said that himself and his wife decided to go to Egypt with Nanda because he had already invested a lot of money in the holiday trip. It was also found that the complaints Lt General Nanda were filed only after Pasricha was posted out to Bhopal.

Both Lt General Nanda and Col. Pasricha were punished with administrative reprimand in connection with the incident. The Chief of Army Staff administered reproof to both the officers, to Nanda for inappropriate behavior and to Pasricha for misleading the Army authorities. Reproof in the Army parlance means an administrative action that ranges from warning to censure and puts a black mark spot on the service career of an officer. While Nanda will not be affected by the reproof, it will have some adverse impact on the career prospects of Pasricha.

MoD/PMO say no to second part of north-east trilogy

The government has turned down a proposal pushed by former army chief General V.K.Singh to publish the second part of a Northeast trilogy that would have cost the exchequer over Rs 30 crore. The three-volume work penned by author Kumar Verma on the Northeastern states was approved by General Singh when he was in service and the Army had spent Rs 93.15 lakh on the project. Kunal Verma's father Major General (retd) A.K.Verma was among those who filed a PIL in the Supreme Court against current Army Chief Bikram Singh's appointment along with retired Navy Chief L.Ramdas, former IAS officer M.G.Devasahayam and four others. Kunal Verma had reportedly claimed that under phase two of the plan, the trilogy would have been would have been translated into major vernacular languages and distributed in schools throughout the country at an estimated cost of Rs 30 crore. While the proposal was mooted by Gen V.K.Singh through a Demy Official letter, it was turned down by the Defence Ministry for want of budgetary provision. Subsequently had taken up the matter with the Prime Minister's Office, but the PMO also turned down the proposal on the same grounds. It may not be wrong to

assume that V.K.Singh had taken extra-ordinary interest in giving this project to Kunal Verma and that Kunal's father Major General (retd) A.K.Verma, who later became a party to the PIL challenging the appointment of Bikram Singh as the new Army chief, had the backing of V.K.Singh.

Former Assam Rifles DG gets clean chit

In February 2012, Lt General Rameshwar Roy, who was posted as the Director General of the Assam Rifles on deputation from the Army, was recalled by the Army following complaints of financial impropriety were received against him. The officer who is currently appointed as the chief of staff at the Southern Command, had been accused of using regimental funds of the Assam Rifles to the tune of Rs.23000 for expenses incurred by his wife during official tours. The officer was recalled from the paramilitary force following the allegations as the Army wanted to pursue the charges despite the fact that the Ministry of Home Affairs which controls the Assam Rifles, had found no proof of any misappropriation.

While the Army probe has cleared Roy of all charges, the case has now taken a serious turn as it was found that forged documents were used to initiate the case of financial impropriety against Roy. In one case, it is reported, that payments shown to frame the officer actually took place two days before he took charge of the paramilitary force in 2010. A Brigadier-level officer at the Assam Rifles is now under the scanner for forgery.

An antinational outfit of ex-servicemen

India Pakistan Soldiers Initiative for Peace (IPSI) is an organization formed in 1999 on the initiative of late Nirmala Deshpande, a fake Gandhian with pro-Pakistani leanings, and some retired defence personnel of India and Pakistan with the avowed objective of promoting peace and amity between India and Pakistan. Other founding members of this outfit included Admiral L.Ramdas, former chief of Indian Navy, Lt General Moti Dhar, Air Marshal Kuldip Rai, Major General K.S.Bajwa and Col.Virendra Sahai Verma of India and Air Marshal ZafarA.Choudhary, former chief of Pakistan Air Force, Lt General Nasir Akhtar, Lt General Hamayun Khan Bagash, Lt General Jahangir Nasrullah and Major General Uzair Mohammad Khan. Nirmala Deshpande announced the formation of this organization at a conference in Karachi in 1999. The organization preaches peace and harmony between the people of India and Pakistan, separated by an artificially created barrier. The leaders of the outfit assert that the common people in India and Pakistan do not want war and they are all pleading for an end of violence. They point out that more than 25% of population in border villages like Baramullah are maimed due to landmines and regular shelling. More than one-third of married women in Baramullah are widows due to insurgency and violence. Schools in the border villages are closed for months together for fear of shelling. Similar is the situation on the other side of the border. There is no employment opportunity for youngsters in the border areas. Young people of Kashmir are not getting jobs outside due to suspicion. The IPSI wants to change this situation by promoting peace and

friendship between the two countries by pressing the leaders of both the countries to take more confidence building measures.

Need for more confidence building measures between India and Pakistan is a pet theme of the USA. After the 26/11 terror attacks in Mumbai, the peace talks between India and Pakistan, initiated under US pressure, were stalled. Both the prime minister and Union home minister had then declared that peace talks with Pakistan will not be resumed unless and until all the culprits involved in the Mumbai terror attacks are brought to book. But they had to eat their words as the peace talks with Pakistan were resumed just a couple of months later, again under the US pressure. So, it is crystal clear as to who is behind the formation of the IPSI. The IPSI initially had only some disgruntled ex-servicemen on their roll. However now, not only they have succeeded in recruiting a sizable number of retired officers, but they have also successfully cultivated a strong lobby of serving officers, especially in the Army, who are involved in destabilization activities within the forces, like defaming the senior officers by raising character assassination, corruption charges, etc, promoting infighting and groupism among senior officers and inciting tension and clashes between officers and jawans. The recent incidents of clashes between officers and jawans in places like Nyoma, Tibri and Samba and corruption and other allegations being faced by senior officers could be traced to the efforts and activities of this lobby.

China on January 26, 2013 successfully tested an indigenously-built freight plane capable of airlifting tanks and combat troops to difficult and inaccessible mountainous areas like its Tibet border with India. The transporter Y-20, puts China in the exclusive club of countries having large air lifters like the US' C-17 and Russia's Il-76. It also gives a boost to the country's efforts to use home-grown technology to expand defence capacity. The Y-20 freight plane can carry 66 tonnes of load and soar up to 13000 metres is powered by 4 Russian-built Soloviev engines. Most of the parts and WS-20 turbofan engines are built in China. (<http://edition.cnn.com/2013/01/29/business/china-airfreighter>)

China on January 27, 2013 successfully carried out its second interceptor missile test as part of its efforts to build a missile shield to intercept incoming warheads.

Defence budget slashed

The government has announced the slashing of Rs 10000 crore from the projected defence budget for 2012-13. The finance ministry has justified the imposition of around 5% cut in the Rs 1.93 lakh crore defence budget for 2012-13 emphasizing the need for fiscal adjustment in view of the grim economic situation. Earlier in May 2012, while participating in a parliamentary discussion on India's defence preparedness, defence minister A.K. Antony had said that he would seek a hike in the defence outlay in the 2012-13 budget due to the new ground realities and changing security scenario. The cut in the defence budget will now lead to a major

slowdown in the ongoing acquisition drive for urgently needed aircraft, helicopters, howitzers and missiles. The armed forces had sought an outlay of Rs 2,39,123 crore for 2012-13, which would have amounted to 2.35% of the projected GDP for 2012-13. But what they got was only Rs1,93,408 crore, i.e. only 1.9% of the GDP. Now even this amount is slashed by Rs 10000 crore. China, on the other hand, is spending huge amounts of money in modernizing its armed forces. According to SIPRI, a research institute, China's annual defence spending rose from more than \$30 billion in 2000 to almost \$120 billion in 2010. As per the latest announcement from Beijing, China's total military spending in 2012 is about \$160 billion.

Chinese threat

According to a classified defence ministry document, an increasing number of Chinese submarines had ventured into Indian waters in 2012. In one such instance, the Chinese submarines had come as close to 90 km from the Indian coast. Citing subsurface contact data shared by the US forces, the document said that at least 22 contacts were recorded with vessels suspected to be Chinese attack submarines patrolling outside Chinese territorial waters in 2012. The document titled "Indian Navy: Perceived Threats to Subsurface Deterrent Capacity and Preparedness" was prepared by the Integrated Defence Staff whose mandate includes advising the government on developing force levels and capabilities. It has predicted intense rivalries between the two navies in the next three years as China ramps up its strategic manoeuvres. India is worried about the Gwadar port in Pakistan, which is seen as the latest example of China's String of Pearls, a suspected strategic attempt to surround India with facilities that can be upgraded to naval bases. The port located in south-west Pakistan is operated by China. The document pointed out that the Chinese navy's extended patrols may fully overlap with the Indian Navy's area of operation. It also warned that the Gwadar port would facilitate enormous command and control capability for prospective Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). The IOR stretches from the Horn of Africa to the Malacca Strait and southwards to the western shores of Australia. China has already set up a network of ports/facilities in Bangladesh (Chittagong), Myanmar (Sittwe and Coco Island), Sri Lanka (Hambantota), Pakistan (Gwadar) and also secured docking rights in Seychelles which is perceived by defence analysts as the culmination of China's 'String of Pearls' strategy.

First underground naval base hits Green hurdle

India's first strategic underground naval base that was meant to house its nuclear-armed submarines has run into a tangle over green norms with the regional office of the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) opposing the diversion of over 600 hectares of reserved forest land citing a strong possibility that it may affect the water table and soil moisture content in the area. The proposed expansion of the base at Rambilli near Visakhapatnam, that will consist of underground pens to house nuclear submarines and protected harbours for warships, is currently under the scanner of MoEF's Forest Advisory Committee. The project for setting up of a Naval Alternate Operating Base (NAOB) involves diversion of 676.12 hectares of forest land in

Rambilli and Kalavalapalli reserved forests of Visakhapatnam division. The proposed base would be similar to China's base at Hainan Island that houses nuclear-armed submarines, which came to India's notice four years ago through satellite imagery. The project involves a number of strategic constructions of undisclosed cost and nature. India should have gone ahead with this secret and vital project at break-neck speed to ensure its early completion in view of the increasing threats from our northern neighbor. But the project is now stalled, as the MoEF's Southern Zone Site Inspection report has observed that the project may have an adverse effect on the water table and soil moisture content in the area.

The army's fresh trials for 155mm towed artillery guns which has been a part of its long-delayed artillery modernization programme has been scrapped again and the entire process now will have to start afresh again. The defence ministry clarified on July 24, 2010 that the trials had been scrapped as the gun of only one contender, that of BAE Systems, was left in the field after the other firm, Singapore Technology Kinetics (STK) was found black-listed for its role in the alleged Ordnance Factory (OFB) Scam. Since the Defence Procurement Rules do not allow a single vendor situation, it has now been reported that, a fresh request for information (RFI) has been issued to different global vendors. The CBI had earlier recommended the blacklisting of four foreign firms, including STK and two domestic arms companies for their alleged involvement in the OFB scam. The guns of STK and BAE Systems were the only ones which were short-listed after the necessary technical evaluation by committees of the defence ministry and the army for the over 12000 crore project to buy 400 155mm artillery guns and also indigenous manufacture of another 1180 howitzers after transfer of technology. However sabotage and scandals continue to block the much-delayed artillery modernization programme worth over 20000 crore.

Conspiracy to create dissensions within the armed forces

The sexual misconduct charges levelled against one of its senior-most generals, Lieutenant General A.K.Nanda, by a colonel's wife had caused a lot of embarrassment to the army top brass. The colonel's wife had accused Lt.Gen. A.K.Nanda, the Army's engineer-in-chief of sexual misconduct during an official visit to Israel in may, 2009. She had also travelled to Tel Aviv along with her husband, Nanda's then technical secretary. However initial investigation had found many loopholes in the allegations. A court of inquiry ordered into the incident later acquitted Nanda from all the charges leveled against him. However the wide publicity given to the incident by the media had caused a lot of harm to the reputation of the army.

UPA government bans six ordnance firms

Over the last few years, the Ministry of Defence has black-listed so many foreign arms corporations that it has virtually stalled the military's modernization programme. The hit list includes some prominent global weapons suppliers with good record of delivering arms and

equipments to India. Starting with Bofors in 1980s, the list includes Israel Military Industries (IMI), Denel of South Africa, Singapore Technologies Kinetic (STK), Lockheed Martin of USA and BAE Systems. Corruption in arms purchase is a world-wide phenomenon. Agents of almost all arms corporations routinely bribe political leaders, bureaucrats and senior military officers to clinch a particular arms deal. It is an open secret that almost all arms companies maintain and use millions of dollars of slush funds to clinch their mega defence deals. Though it is always desirable to avoid any kind of irregularity in the arms contract, including availing the services of an arms broker, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) has to study the existing patterns, availability and urgency of the items required and such other practical aspects of the deal before rejecting a deal. The MOD's decision in such matters should not be guided by any fanatic commitment to a false notion of self-righteousness and moral convictions, if such a decision leads to a weakening of our defence preparedness endangering the country's security interests.

Defence Minister A.K.Antony's paranoia against corruption and the resultant blacklisting spree of all major arms corporations is wholly unjustifiable. Reputed arms companies are blacklisted on unproved corruption charges. These blacklists have started choking our defence procurement. The Indian Army's artillery fire power is grossly inadequate today as we have not purchased a single artillery gun ever since the Bofors scam that broke out in the eighties. The South African company Denel was to fit a gun turret on the Arjun tank chassis. That was scuttled in 2005 when Denel was unofficially blacklisted over bribery allegations in another sale, which was never proved. That also blocked a crucial ammunition factory being built in Nalanda, for which Denel was providing technology. In 2007, the IMI replaced Denel as technology provider. But after the arrest of former Ordnance Factories Board Chairman Sudipta Ghosh in a corruption scandal, the IMI also came to be included in the prohibited list. Also blacklisted after the arrest of Ghosh was STK, whose Pegasus ultra-light howitzer was the long gun being evaluated for the army's mountain divisions. Despite strong protests from the army (Business Standard, 18th July, 2009), the said crucial procurement remains blocked.

The UPA government on March 3, 2012, barred six firms named in the Ordnance Factory Board (OFB) scam chargesheet from business dealings with the defence ministry for ten years. The CBI that probed the scam involving former OFB chairman Sudipto Ghosh had recommended that the firms named in the scam be black-listed. These include Singapore Technologies Kinetics (STK), Israel Military Industries Ltd and Rheinmetall Air defence (RAD), three of the largest military manufacturers in their field, and the Delhi-based T.S.Kisan and Company, Ludhiana's R.K.Machine Tools and Russian firm Corporation Defence. The Israeli manufacturer, the IMI, had won a Rs.1000-crore deal to set up an ammunition factory in Nalanda in partnership with Ordnance Factory Board to manufacture fuses for Bofors shells, that could now be cancelled. It manufactures well-known small arms like Uzi submachine gun, the Tavor assault rifle and the Desert Eagle revolver and India has been a regular customer of this company. The ban has come at a time when the Naresh Chandra committee on defence reforms

is already examining the issue of blacklisting of firms which has crippled India's arms procurement process. One option before the committee is penalizing the guilty individuals rather than the firm.

In June 2009, the Defence Ministry had issued a notice to seven companies after their names emerged in connection with corruption charges against Ghosh. The companies had approached the court against a ban, and the court had directed the ministry to issue the firms notices before taking a final decision. The firms were subsequently issued notice to show cause as to why action should not be taken against them in the case related to illegal gratification against former director general of Ordnance Factories Sudipto Ghosh and others. The decision to debar the firms was reportedly taken after taking into consideration their replies.

Singapore Technology manufactures all kinds of small arms and artillery systems and had a joint venture with OFB to jointly develop carbine, the SAR 21 MMS, for sale to Indian defence and paramilitary forces. It is also one of the prime global artillery manufacturers and was the frontrunner in a Rs.5000-crore tender to provide 155 mm light howitzers for the Army.

Rheinmetall Air Defence (RAD) based out of Zurich is world's leading producer of air defence equipment and is the manufacturer of most weapons in this category in service in the Indian Army.

War Within Army

The Army HQ on March 5, 2012 publicly accused a group of serving officers of the Military Intelligence (MI) of conspiring to create a rift between army chief General V.K.Singh and the government. Reacting angrily to all allegations about General Singh's alleged bid to eavesdrop on calls of the defence minister, it described all such accusations as fabricated fiction put out by a group of disgruntled officers of MI working in connivance with a retired Lt General who was a head of the Defence Intelligence Agency. The officer, Lt General Tejinder Singh, is reportedly an allottee in the Adarsh Society. The allegation that some of the serving officers had conspired against the army chief and the insinuation that officers loyal to Gen Singh had spied on MoD officials during the controversy over the Generals age marks a new low in the image and reputation of the army.

Meanwhile, retired Lt Gen Tejinder Singh, who was named in the alleged bribe offer, on April 10, 2012 recorded his statement before a trial court in a defamation case that he had filed against the army chief, describing the allegation of bribe against him for clearing 600 substandard vehicles as absolutely false.

Indiscipline in the Army

A scuffle between the officers and a soldier at the Tibri-based 45 Cavalry in Punjab had escalated into a full-blown standoff at the unit between men and the officers in June, 2011. Though no arms were used in the scuffle, the situation got defused only after the commanding officer rushed to the spot and calmed the two sides. A court of inquiry has been ordered and 16 soldiers and three officers are facing court martial.

The clash was triggered after a soldier was pulled up by an officer after a training session at Tibri. An exchange of words between the two had turned into a physical scuffle in which the jawan had assaulted the officer. The jawan was later allegedly beaten up by the other officers who had rushed to the spot. All of a sudden a rumour had spread that a jawan was badly beaten up and that he may lose his life, causing the situation to escalate. Then the commanding officer himself had to rush to the spot to pacify the agitated soldiers by assuring them that the jawan was safe. Disciplinary proceedings were initiated there upon and the CO was posted out to 2 Corps.

Nyoma clash

In a serious case indiscipline in the Army, a mutinous situation had developed in the 226 Field Regiment deployed at Nyoma, Ladakh, close to the Sino-India border on May 10, 2012. Reportedly, on May 10 evening after the field firing exercise by the regiment at the Mahe Field Firing Range, Suman Ghosh, an orderly attached to Major A.K.Sharma, was dragged to the Beacon ground near the range and beaten up by Maj.Sharma and four other officers. It is learnt that Maj.Sharma's wife had complained to him earlier that sepoy Suman Ghosh had entered her room without knocking while she was changing her dress. Major Sharma and his colleagues, after a discussion about the incident, apparently wanted to teach Suman Ghosh a lesson. Initially there was not much reaction from the other army men. But when the word spread that his injuries were serious requiring immediate medical attention, they rushed to the spot and wanted to take him to a hospital. However they were prevented from doing so by Major Kanade and other officers who probably feared that it will lead to an internal inquiry and action against all those involved in the incident. This was followed by a heated argument which later led to a minor clash between the two sides. On hearing about the fracas, the Commanding Officer of the unit, Col Prasad Kadam, rushed to the spot and after sensing the mood of the soldiers, reprimanded the officers for their conduct. Offended by the insulting behavior of the CO, the officers then assaulted the CO causing injuries to his face and legs. By then more soldiers also reached the spot, who after rescuing the CO went on a rampage and attacked the officers. Two Majors, including A.K.Sharma, were mercilessly beaten up. Three other Majors who fled from the scene took asylum in Chushul Army Camp. The mutinous soldiers set fire to part of an office building, destroyed some defence structures and ransacked the Border Road Organization Guest House where the officers were staying. Some of them even took over the armoury for a while. However no arms were brandished or used. The agitated soldiers, armed with rods and knives, later

marched through the streets of Nyoma town condemning the officers and raising slogans like 'Bharat Mata ki jai' etc.

Controversy over army chief's age

Two different dates of birth (DoB) in the official records of the army chief Gen.V.K.Singh has created an unnecessary and unwarranted controversy in the army threatening to cause a succession struggle. The controversy on whether Gen.Singh was born on May 10, 1950 or May 10, 1951 has to be settled now afresh. The issue arose in May 2006 when the Military Secretary's branch detected two different DoBs in Singh's official records. Gen.V.K.Singh had been maintaining his DoB as May 10, 1951 in his confidential records and service record, as against the DoB shown in other official documents. In case the year of birth is treated as 1950, Gen Singh should retire in 2011, but if the year of birth is accepted as 1951, the Army Chief will have an extended tenure of another ten months. As per the rules, the Chief of Army Staff can serve till the age of 62 or three years whichever is earlier. Gen Singh assumed charge as the Chief of Army Staff on April 1, 2010 from Gen Deepak Kumar.

In a letter dated May 3, 2006, the then military secretary, Lt Gen Richard Khare, had asked Singh to reflect the correct date of birth, which is May 10, 1950, in his records. In 2008, following a written commitment made by Singh accepting May 10, 1950 as the correct date of birth. But after he took over as the army chief, the issue was reopened again following a Right to Information query. On the army's reference, the defence ministry sought the law ministry's opinion. The law ministry confirmed Singh's birth date as May 10, 1951, in violation of the army rules that say that any change in DoB must be made within two years of joining service. This has now become a sensitive issue as any extended tenure to Gen Singh is bound to disrupt the chain of succession paving the way for Northern Army Commander K.T.Parnaik to become the Army Chief instead of Lt.Gen. Bikram Singh.

The finance wing of the defence ministry in consultation with the ministry of finance is not agreeable to spend Rs12,000 crore to set up a Mountain Strike Corps even as a plan to create an alternate, all-weather route from Siliguri to North Sikkim to rush troops to the Indo-China border has been rejected by the ministry of environment and forests on the grounds that the alignment passes through eco-sensitive areas. The proposal to beef up army's force level on the Indo-China border was mooted by the then army chief Gen.N.C.Vij after a comprehensive review of the situation was undertaken by a special study team. The study group led by the then Western Army Commander J.J.Singh had recommended the creation of a mountain strike corps to maintain a strong deterrent against China. While the finance ministry shot down the proposal pointing out the huge financial implications, the environment ministry rejected it on the ground of possible harm to the biodiversity and eco-system of the region.

http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report_babus-block-indian-armys-plans-to-counter-chinas-pla_1587622)

10000 sahayak jawans quit Army

Vested interests, including a section of the media, is spreading the rumour that there is growing rift between the officers and jawans in the Army because of corruption among the top echelons and archaic practices like the 'sahayak' system prevalent in the Army. Defence Minister A.K. Antony informed the Parliament on September that 10315 soldiers took pre-mature retirement in 2011, showing an upward trend from the previous years. He gave the corresponding figure for 2010 and 2009 as 7249 and 7499 respectively. The minister further informed the house that the Defence Ministry has taken a serious note of the recent incidents of scuffles between officers and jawans in Ladakh and Sambha sectors of J&K that reflected the growing discord between officers and jawans in a hierarchical system adopted from the British Army and not reflecting the aspirations of a changed India. The Army in April had recommended the abolition of 'sahayaks' or Batman and instead suggested recruitment of civilians for the job. But voluntary retirement of Army personnel after ten or fifteen years of service to hunt for greener pastures elsewhere is not a new trend. Those who opt for such pre-mature retirement include personnel from all ranks, including commissioned officers. The recent media reports about this trend give a misleading impression that only the jawans, disenchanted with the archaic traditions of the commissioned officers, leave the Army in large numbers.

<http://newindianexpress.com/nation/article600468.ece>

Environment ministry stalls defence project

Raising the bogie of threat to an endangered species of Narcondam Hornbill, the Environment Ministry has refused to clear a critical Ministry of Defence (MoD) project to install a surveillance radar along the coastline in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Narcondam Hornbill is an endemic species of bird found in Narcondam Island, 100 km to the east of the main Andaman Islands. It is listed in Schedule 1 Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) also lists the Narcondam Hornbill as an endangered species. The proposal to install the surveillance radar to secure the country's coastline had come from the Coast Guard. Only .7 hectares of the 7 sq km area of the Narcondam Island would be required for the radar project. But the strong anti-development lobby of environmental activists is opposing the project pointing out that the disturbances and damage caused to the habitat due to laying of road and functioning of the radar system could cause irreversible adverse impact on the unique bird and may wipe out the entire Hornbill population from the area. Endorsing the similar fears expressed by the standing committee of National Board of Wildlife, Environment Minister Jayanti Natarajan has recommended in September, 2012 that the MoD should look for alternative sites for the proposed radar project. Meanwhile the Coast Guard has reportedly informed the Environment Ministry its inability to shift the location elsewhere as the Narcondam Island was found the best location for the proposed radar project.

There are nine species of Hornbill found in different states of India, especially in the Western Ghats and in the Northeastern region. Poaching is the biggest threat faced by any rare

bird or animal in India. It is the most foolish argument put forward by the environmental lobby that the proposed radar project could wipe out the entire Hornbill population from the area. In fact, the installation of the radar will help to check poaching in the area. The opposition to the radar project has to be seen as part of the ongoing nation-wide sabotage drive by the enemies of the country to weaken and destabilize the country by stalling all our developmental projects, scientific ventures and defence projects.

[\(http://www.indianexpress.com/news/to-save-hornbills-environment-says-no-to-defence-project/998904/\)](http://www.indianexpress.com/news/to-save-hornbills-environment-says-no-to-defence-project/998904/)

Environment ministry shoots down missile testing range proposal

The Navy's proposal to set up a missile testing range at Tillanchong island in the Andaman and Nicobar islands was shot down by the environment ministry in October, 2012, as the said island was the habitat of an endangered bird Nicobar Megapode. Defence minister A.K.Antony on October 18 confirmed the rejection of the Tillanchong island for the missile range and added that a new site will be identified soon by the Navy chief and a fresh environment clearance will be sought for the new site. The Navy had reportedly sought permission for temporary use of forest land on the island for missile testing. It also wants to put up a temporary structure as a target for testing the accuracy of missiles fired from the submarines. The test firing is proposed to be carried out once every year for a duration of 7 to 10 days only. Now the Naval authorities will have to hunt for a new site and again seek environmental clearance for the same.