

## India and the Great War Centenary Commemoration Project Update and Connected Activities

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During the period under review (January - May 2016) a two-day symposium titled 'Meeting of the Minds' was held on 25th and 26th May in Brighton, the UK. The symposium was organised jointly by the USI Centre for Armed Forces Historical Research (CAFHR) along with the Imperial War Museum (IWM), the Royal Pavilion and Museums, Brighton and Hove, and the Golden Tours Foundation (GTF). The symposium brought together like-minded individuals and organisations to discuss their work on the role of Indian soldiers in WWI and WWII. Speakers came from a wide spectrum with varied interests and backgrounds and included academicians, museums, archivists and cultural groups. The keynote address was delivered by Professor Sir Hew Strachan, till recently Chichele Professor of the History of War at All Souls College, Oxford, and member of both the United Kingdom's and Scotland's national advisory panels for the centenary of the First World War. Professor Strachan ended his address by pointing out that the centenary commemorations of the Great War had also served as a catalyst for reconciliation and improved relations between countries.

All symposium participants provided an insight into various projects as well as the work of their organisations and, got an opportunity to interact and collaborate for future projects as well. This was the first international symposium of its kind which focussed on the role played by India and its armed forces in the two world wars and reflected the growing interest in the military history and culture of the Indian Armed Forces. The Indian High Commission in London was represented by Brigadier Rajesh Jha, the Defence Adviser who was present throughout the proceedings on both days.

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The symposium concluded with a reception organised in the House of Commons where a message was read out on behalf of Prime Minister David Cameron who was unable to personally attend since he was out of the Country on that day.

In addition to its work on various aspects of Indian military history, the USI CAFHR has also proposed the 'India Remembers' project in order to institutionalise a national culture of remembrance. The intent is to generate awareness across a broad spectrum of society about the valour and sacrifice of personnel of the Indian Armed Forces in the service of the Nation, both before and after Independence. The project will have as its symbol the marigold flower and will work towards institutionalising a National Day of Remembrance or Sainik Smriti Diwas, which can coincide with the Armed Forces Flag day held annually on 7th December. In order to achieve its objectives, the Centre will be working closely with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC). The CWGC is responsible for maintaining various memorials and cemeteries around the world where Indian soldiers, sailors and airmen are commemorated or buried. In addition, the Centre is collaborating with the Bengaluru-based Flags of Honour Foundation, which has done yeoman service under its founder, Mr Rajeev Chandrashekhar, Member of Parliament (MP), towards commemorating and honouring the sacrifice of personnel of the Indian Armed Forces in the various conflicts fought since Independence.

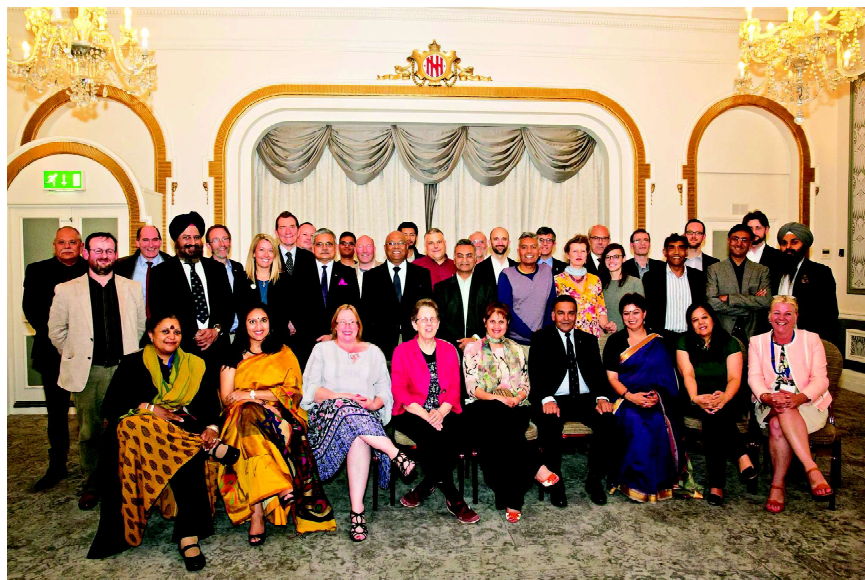
A concerted action programme for community engagement is being developed through the development of education modules which can be used by schools, colleges, the National Cadet Corps, etc. On that particular day, citizens will be encouraged to identify a serving or retired serviceman or servicewoman and present them with a marigold flower and thank them for their service and sacrifice for the Nation, as is the custom prevalent in the United States. This will inculcate greater respect for the values and ethos of the armed forces. It will also work towards a transformation in society by highlighting a national duty of remembrance and commemoration of the sacrifice of those who died so that others may live.

The project also seeks to highlight the valour and sacrifice of Indian soldiers before a global audience and for this, the CWGC

will integrate their commemorative activities into the larger Indian Remembrance Project. The CWGC looks after memorials the world over and works extensively to commemorate all Commonwealth soldiers (including Indians) who died during the First and Second World Wars. The project will be officially launched on 14th July 2016 at a formal event being organised at the USI. The project is functioning under the guidance of a project advisory panel comprising Major General Ian Cardozo, AVSM, SM, (Retd), Brigadier KP Singh Deo, AVSM (Retd) and Mr Rajeev Chandrashekhar, MP.



**Participants at the 'Meeting of the Minds'  
symposium in discussion.**



**Group photograph from 'Meeting of the Minds' symposium.**