

Letter to the Editor

IMAGE OF THE ARMED FORCES – ARRESTING NEGATIVE TRENDS

Sir,

The essay on the subject is a well articulated one and the officer has made an attempt to identify the factors, within the parameters of official etiquettes. However, the need of the hour is to look beyond these parameters and address the core issues that have brought disrepute to the Armed Forces.

The first step in the direction of arresting the negative image is to accept the fact that a problem exists within the organisation. Blaming the press, the public and ex-servicemen is a myopic approach to the problem. These agencies have only high-lighted the unwarranted incidents whose occurrences have increased in the recent past. Even though incidents had been occurring in the past, a fair and just handling of incidents had obliterated adverse comments from these agencies earlier.

Unfortunately, with the passage of time, the custodians of justice in the Armed Forces have sacrificed the aspect of fairness and natural justice while dealing with such aberrations and thus attracted negative publicity. Our own personnel seek the intervention of the media to highlight shortcomings. Therefore, to arrest further deterioration of the situation, it is crucial to do some introspective analysis of the situation within the organisation and search for permanent remedies.

As a first step, it will be worthwhile to examine and analyse as to how even after a fair and scientifically designed selection procedure, which ensures that the basic traits are at an accepted standard in all individuals, such aberrations occur. In some cases, tendency to deviate from the expected behaviour pattern is displayed from the basic training. Ironically, the pardoning approach adopted by the superiors in the hope of bringing in improvement without a negative impact on the career of the individual, is the start point of these aberrations, as it is misconstrued as approval of such behaviour.

Discipline, professionalism and fairness that the author speaks of as pillars of the organisation, have been weakened by such aberration and hence subjected to media attack. We cannot wish away the fact that deterioration in the values and ethos of the Armed Forces has taken place, which requires immediate corrective action. The major factors that have contributed significantly to this deterioration are:-

- (a) **Lack of self discipline.** All ranks have developed an uncanny art of throwing self discipline out of the window at the slightest indication that it will go unnoticed or unpunished for whatever reasons and compulsions. Discipline exists as long as the fear of punishment hangs over one's head.
- (b) **Lack of honesty and integrity.** There has been an increase in the cases of dishonesty in the recent past. The hard and indigestible truth is that many offenders get away with the connivance of those at the helm of affairs, while only cases where there has been a disagreement on the shares of booty get exposed and are subjected to media attention.
- (c) **Lack of professionalism.** Examples of personnel scaling the walls of success by means other than professionalism and personal competency have undermined the faith in the concept of professionalism. This is another subject that has been adversely projected by the media on many occasions.
- (d) **Lack of fairness in dealings.** The approach of using different yardsticks for different persons and occasions has eroded the faith by men in their superiors. With the Right to Information Act being actively employed, the Armed Forces can expect more negative publicity if this tendency is not curbed.
- (e) **Misplaced sense of pride.** The tendency to brush major violations under the carpet due to a misplaced sense of pride and reputation of the unit has led to unfair dispensation of justice, leading to loose talk amongst other ranks and a source of bad publicity causing undue embarrassment.

Restoring faith of our personnel in the system is important and this can be achieved by sending home a strong message that indiscipline will be dealt with severely.

I would like to reproduce a quote from the AT and T archives that says "It is easy to fool yourself, it is possible to fool the people you work for, it is more difficult to fool the people you work with, but is impossible to fool the people who work for you". The men we command see through us. The leaders must set good examples. Unless a serious attempt to curb negative traits that have crept into the Armed Forces is made, they will have serious ramifications.

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