

USI Gold Medal Essay Competition 2008 - Group B

Stress Management in the Armed Forces*

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Introduction

India as a Nation, has defied stereotyped definitions due to its inherent diversity and complexities. Colourful experiences and paradoxes have filled the gaps to present a whole picture. Another such paradox is inescapable today. Conventional world history always correlates economic and intellectual progress with increased military prowess and pride. But today, while the description of the Nation varies between an 'Emerging India' to a 'Surging India', its Armed Forces do not seem to share these optimistic evaluations. Au contraire, they are depicted as having numerous man-management problems, ranging from suicide cases to shortage of officers. Among these problems, the most alarming is the manifestation of stress in the form of suicides, fratricide and other such aberrations. It is true that these issues are over hyped but it would be incorrect to blame the media. Changed socio-economic conditions and an indifferent politico-bureaucratic establishment have accentuated the problem but they have not created it. Finally, akin to other forms of stress, the real solution lies within.

Over the years, we have taken battlefields to the barracks, exacting operational standards to normal administrative requirements, and ironically, bureaucracy to the battlefields, while constantly ignoring a rapidly changing world around us. The procedure has to be reversed, for the resilience of the organisation is strained from stress.

THE CHANGING TIMES

Historical Perspective

Traditionally, the Indian soldier came from a very hardy stock. Even great hardships and natural calamities did not make much of a difference on his professionalism. In yesteryears, stress was unheard of. Edmund Candler notes a telling incident in his book 'The Sepoy' wherein during the devastating Dharamsala earthquake of 1905, when half the regiment had been killed, maimed or buried alive, the quarter guard of a battalion turned out and saluted with the same clockwork precision¹. The Indian military history is replete with such incidents and descriptions of steadfastness in the face of seemingly insurmountable adversity. In the British era, the Army was the most respected and coveted organisation. To join its ranks was not only a source of financial security but a matter of distinct pride. In fact, there were certain communities who knew no other profession other than farming and soldiering. In reciprocation of unquestioning loyalty, due importance was given to the soldier by the Government machinery. Records at the National Archives show that in the period before 1857, more than half of the correspondence, between the Governor General's office in Calcutta and the Court of Directors in London, consisted of letters referring to action taken on petitions by common soldiers which were sent to respective commissioners and collectors for action. Progress reports were sent to London till the issue was resolved. Thus, the Indian soldier was convinced that as long as he did his best on the battlefield, the rest would be taken care of.

After the 1857 revolt, the British went out of their way to create an impression of justice and fair play particularly in meeting the administrative needs of the Indian soldiers. Consequently, this concern for the well being of soldiers enabled them to govern India with a handful of British military and Indian Civil Service (ICS) officers. Philip Mason in 'The Men Who Ruled India' chronicles many professional and administrative efforts of these ICS officers being directed towards the welfare of the Indian soldier, especially during their tours of the countryside. Where this administrative support to the soldier was lacking, the British found it difficult to recruit soldiers, as in case of Pathans (or Pashtuns) from the tribal areas across the Durand Line in present day Afghanistan. Edmund Candler, notes the hesitation of Pathans to enlist; 'The interests of the Indian sepoy are protected by the magistrate and the police, but across the border the property of a man who goes away and fights may become the property of the man who stays at home.'

Later, as the National freedom movement grew, this carefully cultivated image of British fair play and reciprocal generosity faded away, it even scorched the military. Over 40,000 Indian soldiers joined the Indian National Army (INA) to fight against their former comrades while Bombay erupted in flames in the form of the Royal Indian Navy Mutiny in 1946. Thereafter, it did not take long for the sun to set on the British Empire.

Turbulent Decades

The nineties are often marked as a watershed decade when consumerism began to rapidly creep into India. On the other hand, the eighties and the nineties were turbulent decades for the Indian Armed Forces, engaging them in prolonged low intensity conflicts (LIC) and spiralling events which demanded damage control. These sequences of events were not co-related ab initio. But together, they had a profound impact on the Armed Forces and have been collectively responsible for the current cauldron. The Punjab militancy in the mid-eighties was the first of these conflicts. Soon an uninterrupted cycle began in 1987 with the innocuous induction of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) into Sri Lanka. Before long, it was drawn into a war; which it neither intended nor was structured to fight. As the IPKF returned home in 1989, on the other end of a restive Indian subcontinent, a young medical intern named Rubaiya Sayeed was making headlines. Soon the vale of Kashmir erupted in flames. The

militancy then spread to other parts of the state and so did the commitment of the Army in counter-terrorism (CT) operations. As of now, there are about 250,000 troops in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) 3, most of them engaged in CT operations in remote and difficult areas. In the North East, Assam saw intermittent peaks of insurgency in the nineties, which the Army fought hard to contain with varying success. The commitments in Nagaland, Tripura and Manipur also increased, and till date the soldiers in the North-East continue to fight bitter but forgotten wars in obscure places. In 1999, there was a brief focus on a conventional conflict in Kargil. It was India's first televised war, briefly transforming the soldier into a saviour and a hero. But the euphoria of victory was soon over. This bloody interlude did not alter the reality of continued commitment in CT operations across the country. In these endless operations, soldiers are seldom considered saviours, and face occupational hazards ranging from uncertainty to monotony and from bullets to bad press.

Advent of Consumerism

The Nation was meanwhile weaving a different destiny. Around the time, when the IPKF was packing its bags to go to Sri Lanka, a flamboyant technocrat called Sam Pitroda, alongwith his mentor Rajiv Gandhi, were simultaneously inaugurating a TV station a day and setting up a network of ubiquitous, yellow-signed Public Call Offices (PCOs). Unknowingly, they were paving way for a booming electronic media and a telecommunications revolution a decade later. Simultaneously, Dr Manmohan Singh began the process of liberalising the economy in 1991. It began to pay rich dividends by early years of the new millennium, changing Indian landscapes and priorities in an unprecedented manner. A booming economy created many and varied jobs, increasing disposable incomes and easier ways to climb the social ladder. The media played its part. It beamed the world with all its gloss to the Indian homes, raising expectations and aspirations. In the Indian movies, which are a reflection of changing times, the angry young man went out of fashion and was replaced by a swank hero, with either inherited or earned riches, who pursued his Indian love interests in Europe. Those unfortunate to be left behind, plotted their escape from sleepy towns of the interior to Bombay and beyond. As a Nation we created new heroes. These new heroes were middle class boys who played exciting cricket, Indian writers who wrote fabulous books in English, fetching millions, and humble engineers who went on to create trail-blazing Information Technology (IT) companies.

The society placed money as the dominant, if not the sole criteria of success in life. These socio-economic changes were profound and affected the men in uniform in ways more than one. Soldier was no longer the hero, with his stories of courage and untold risks, when he returned to his village during leave. The place was taken up by neighbour's son who had made a fast buck in the town. To add to his worries, the joint family system virtually broke down in practice. This traditional support system of extended family had degenerated into a source of family feuds and constant bickering. Therefore, the little piece of agricultural land he inherited required his frequent presence to make it economically viable. Concurrently, genuine demands of his nuclear family also required him to often visit home and resolve their problems. Being sole bread winner of his family, he was also burdened with responsibilities of securing good education and housing facilities for his children within his limited resources.

To compound these problems, he became increasingly insignificant for the police and the district administration – that now could only be influenced by money or political power. The soldier had none of these. To this picture, was added fatigue from unending insurgencies, in alternate tenures. He, alongwith his family, also discerned a visible contrast in values and priorities of a consumerist society. Stress was thus waiting to happen. The soldier felt truly cornered because his well being was of no concern to anybody, either in the Government or in the society.

LOOKING WITHIN

Symptoms and Causes

In Dec 2006 the BBC News highlighted that the Indian Army is losing more soldiers to suicide than to enemy action. The news was ominous, but not wrong. On an average, the Army is losing about 100 soldiers per year to suicides. There were 96 suicide cases in 2003, 100 in 2004, 77 in 2005, 120 in 2006 and over 100 in 2007. In addition, there are a significant number of fratricide cases, particularly in the last two years with 32 cases in 2006 and 23 cases in 2007 4. As of August this year, counting since 2001, there have been 70 incidences of fratricidal killings. Statistics covering the period from 2004 to mid last year reveal that while 282 soldiers have been killed in militant attacks, a greater number i.e. 408 soldiers have taken their own lives, killed colleagues or died after colleagues ran amok. Among them, 333 were suicides. Clearly we have an enemy within.

Most 'experts' attribute the growing stress to low morale, bad service conditions, lack of adequate home leave, unattractive pay and a communication gap with superiors. The media also acknowledges that though the Army has not fought a full-blown war for decades, the force is bogged down in fighting domestic insurgencies, guarding restive borders and sometimes quelling civilian rioting .

In 2006, an extensive medical research on psychological effects of low intensity conflict operations (LICO) was jointly carried out by many agencies 6. The study characterised LIC by limitations of armaments, tactics and levels of force and acknowledged that the troops trained in conventional warfare experience significant stress in LICO. In these operations, the security forces end up fighting an elusive enemy (in the absence of any reliable intelligence) and have to face active resentment of the local population. Ambiguity of aim, lack of visible success and high casualty rates tend to erode morale among security forces.

Several unpredictable factors such as battle fatigue, unseen threats, extended field tenures, absence of recreational avenues, domestic feuds, irregular mail, problems related to leave and railway travel increase the level of frustration, leading to stress. These prolonged spells of stress punctuated by quantitatively and qualitatively inadequate opportunities for rest and relaxation impose immense and often unbearable demands on

even otherwise robust human beings. This results in anxiety, psychological distress, combat stress disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The overstaying of leave, desertion, abuse of alcohol or drugs, suicide, and cases of soldiers running 'amok', shooting at their superiors and colleagues are the symptoms of these stress related disorders.

Challenges and Changes

At a macro level, the challenge the country faces is that the society has changed very quickly for the military. The imprint that gave rise to the armies of the 20th Century, and the imprint around which they have become institutionalised, is no longer as connected as it once was to contemporary challenges. There is a need to have a good assessment of these new challenges and changes, and to ultimately align these internal structures with this environment; and at the same time overlay it with the notion that in this country, there is a pressing need for an effective military⁷. Our dreams of becoming a major global power can never be achieved without the corresponding development of a strong military muscle. Towards this aim, we as a Nation must overcome the existing hurdles which the Armed Forces are currently facing. On this very premise, we need to reiterate that the problems facing the Armed Forces are indeed the problems facing the country. Therefore, the Government machinery has to get involved to address them conscientiously.

Concurrently, it must be remembered that the changes in a society are a continuing phenomenon. The negative spin-offs of the recent socio-economic changes would have been quite manageable in the initial years, if corresponding changes were made within the organisation alongwith efforts to disengage the Armed Forces from less critical non-conventional operations. However, the gravity of the problem was not realised and incidences clearly attributable to stress were classified as minor deviations or isolated incidents.

The Armed Forces, with their time-tested man management mechanisms should have certainly checked this malaise themselves, but they did not. For once, there was similarity between the bureaucrats and the military leaders. Environs of Lutyens' Delhi were unaware that a top-down approach whose benefits scarcely reached the intended end-beneficiary was faltering. This yawning gap between the idea and the implementation must now be bridged by suitable requisite measures. Truly, the issue of mitigating stress fulcrums rests on one single factor - the realisation of the need to change the mindset of those at the helm and below.

MANAGING CHANGE

Institutional Reforms

It is well known that bottlenecks are always at the top. Thus, the process of change must be initiated by the Government and senior hierarchy of the Armed Forces. There is also a wide scope for changes at every level, and unless there is a common meeting ground between the perceptions of the top echelons of the Armed Forces and the lower levels of command, (actually engaged in operations), the efforts to reduce stress will remain academic and unresolved. A shared vision is the hallmark of reforms. For institutional reforms to be successful, the senior hierarchy must share the enthusiasm of the middle and junior leadership to affect changes. Once lower level leadership is convinced that senior leadership is aware of the ground realities, they will implement the changes in letter and spirit - as they have to directly bear the brunt of the stress related problems. The foremost among these realities is the realisation that there is a grave problem, which needs to be addressed at many levels simultaneously.

Once the problem is institutionally identified, there is a need to accept a few more ground realities. Unlike conventional operations, LICO involve planning and execution at a unit or sub-unit level. Therefore, a top-down conventional operations template must not be applied to these operations. It's a 'junior officers' and NCOs' war' and the junior leaders must be allowed to fight as per local conditions and requirements. There is a need for fewer HQs with less staff officers and reduced procedural work. This will correspondingly bring more officers on ground, who will take on the problems head-on rather than on paper only. Grant of leave should be decentralised and should not be an issue at all.

The role of higher HQs or senior officers should be to guide the fighting troops, particularly in relation to politically sensitive and human-rights related issues; and to look after their logistical requirements. They should engage themselves in improving communication and transit facilities for the troops, handling media and pressing the respective state governments to look into the problems of the soldiers from their areas. This relative freedom of action will give a sense of purpose and achievement to the fighting troops, who feel that they are fighting with one hand tied behind their back.

Creating Peace in Field Environment

It is an accepted fact that no soldier can be continuously kept engaged in battlefield environment. Even during World War II, the American GI's in Europe were sent to Paris to unwind. In this war, when the Allied Forces stormed their way up from Normandy, another 'army' followed the US Army Groups. This 'army' consisted of chaplains, bakers, cinema personnel, touring circuses, postal services and printing presses, wherein every combat unit was encouraged to take out their 'regimental Journal' even on the move. The contribution of this 'army' remained much understated in military history books but was very close to the hearts of millions of soldiers who were touched by their kind gestures and homely comfort. It can be said with certainty that it shall not be difficult to replicate some elements of this 'army' in our own difficult stations where the soldiers engaged in prolonged operations can take a well-deserved break.

Recently, the Army has come up with Rest and Recuperation Centres which have been set-up in J&K. Soldiers from different units undergo stress-busting therapies of one week. Some people sit back and watch films,

while others settle for meditation. We need not necessarily follow Western models of combating stress. Traditional Indian techniques like 'Yoga' and 'Meditation' are equally effective, if not more so. Here, the Armed Forces need to work on the pressure cooker concept – letting off steam through a valve, once it reaches a certain pressure. Another proved stress release is ensuring periodic and assured leave from difficult areas. We may also consider permitting families in certain operational areas, taking a cue from the Assam Rifles which has successfully managed this aspect without diluting operational efficiency.

Correcting Concept of Welfare

Welfare is a misunderstood term in the Armed Forces which needs clarification and enforcement at an institutional level. Welfare of troops and their families does not comprise organising barakhana for the troops and herding the families together for so-called family welfare meets. Welfare today means good medical, educational and housing facilities for the troops and ensuring that they get adequate time to spend with their families – either in the form of timely leave from field areas or by reducing commitments in peace stations.

Peace stations today are hard-won interludes between intense CT operations and border guarding tenures. They must not become 'battlefields' in other forms. The Armed Forces, particularly the Army, must pass strict instructions on 'activities' which may be permitted in peace stations to enable the troops to rejuvenate and not remain in a state of constant alert.

It is surprising that on one hand, the Army's doctrinal approach is shifting towards preparation for short, quick and decisive wars which will 'cold start' (on minimum notice); on the other hand, the units from defensive as well as strike formations spend many months every year in exercises, field firings, battle inoculations and similar activities. An equal time is spent in preparation and moving for these activities and other professional competitions, claiming the major part of the year. Training must not be allowed to become a 'holy cow', in garb of which the field-peace rotation of combat units itself becomes meaningless with dangerous long-term consequences. Training must be realistic, crisp and mission-oriented which will instil self-confidence in combatants. Once, this aspect is objectively monitored, non-training activities, must be drastically curtailed. The yardstick is to minimise the non core-competence activities of the Armed Forces. Stability of tenure, quality time with wife and children and resemblance of a regular family life are simple yet great healers which no mental health professionals or psychologists can substitute.

Enabling the Soldier

Similarly, the CT environment too needs some institutional introspection. It must be realised that in the light of overall politico-military developments at the international level and continued trouble in our neighbourhood, CT commitments for the Armed Forces are here to stay. Therefore, each engagement should not become a matter of life or death, as these are prolonged operations with psychological and political dimensions. Stephen R Covey, in his international bestseller 'The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People', underlines that effectiveness of people lies in maintaining balance – the P/PC balance, where P stands for 'production' of desired results and PC stands for 'production capability'⁸. Our quest for short-term returns or instant results should not ruin the PC which is much more important in the long-term. As an organisation, we must invest in PC. This involves due focus on the human resource development of a soldier with adequate promotional avenues and organisational support for his housing, health and educational needs.

It also includes equipping a soldier with the latest weapons and equipment, ensuring hardware superiority over an adversary. A good P/PC balance will also involve moderating the demands on the troops in CT operations. This in turn requires in-house curbs on the personal aspirations which fuel the pressures. The emphasis must shift from counting kills or surrenders to environment management and own man-management. In the long run, our 'persistence and resilience', with the Nation's proven multi-ethnicity and respect for human-rights will frustrate and wear out most of the insurgencies. The Nation must not degrade its conventional military capabilities for non-conventional tasks, particularly when it is the intended 'strategy' of our adversaries.

Reducing Military Bureaucracy

In recent years, we have created bureaucracy within (military), which has severely impeded the smooth and seamless functioning of the organisation. This military bureaucracy is fairly well entrenched and has bred its own set of mandarins. Some of them masquerade as soldiers and present glossy Microsoft power-point presentations of which not even 15 per cent translate into ground realities, not unlike the famous comment by Late Rajiv Gandhi who lamented that not even 15 paise out of a Rupee spent by the Government reaches the people. These mandarins also dispense entitlements like housing and leave as if it was a personal favour and ensure that all practical suggestions are bogged down by endless paperwork. All this seems very baffling to a simple soldier and often disheartens him. There is an urgent need to cut down all but very essential paperwork and simplify the regulations. The office procedures must be demystified and made-time bound. There must be transparency in our actions and quick response to all the suggestions.

We must consider evolving a single-window clearance for all the needs of soldiers viz; leave certificates, withdrawals from provident fund, loans, transfer applications and publication of part two orders. Other simplified procedures like quick admission of children in central schools and smart cards enabling travel, hospital and canteen facilities without any unnecessary formalities will also contribute in reducing stress, besides enabling a soldier to focus on his assigned duties. This will also enable the officers and the junior leaders to spend more time in interacting with the men, rather than devoting their energies in unproductive paperwork.

Lastly, we must create an in-house and impartial system of addressing grievances / complaints of the soldiers which cuts down delays, frustration and stress. Armed Forces have long ceased to be the military arm of a colonial power. Thus, old procedures of military justice must be replaced with contemporary laws and simplified procedures.

Role of Senior Leadership

Stress is better prevented than cured. While treatment of stress may be assisted by medical professionals, prevention is a leadership responsibility at all levels of command. Effective leadership is the key to the present disconnect between the challenge and the response. At the outset, military leaders should comprehend that stress induced reactions are a normal response to abnormal circumstances. These circumstances are multiplying today. Stress is not a sign of weakness or a cause for shame. The senior leadership must manage unit assignments in a way that there is no prolonged exposure to battle-like situations. They need to be frank about operational commitments and likely hardships, and keep the troops informed. Our troops do not mind facing hardships, as long as they are not the only ones bearing the brunt of constraints. The openness, accessibility and awareness of the ground realities by senior leaders are sufficient to inspire them. At the lower combat level, it is critical for officers to understand the behaviour of personnel and select the right person for the right job, while helping others to adjust in the group. They must also train junior leaders who can effectively lead and boost up the morale of their fellowmen, and help in handling the difficult anxiety and panic related situations.

At the recent Passing-Out-Parade of the Indian Military Academy (IMA), Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh urged that the soldiers and the officers must be able to relate to each other as trained professionals⁹. This professional equation should be complemented by personal involvement of officers. The concept of individual difference needs to be respected while understanding the needs as well as fears of the soldiers. Every soldier is a unique human-being, each with his individuality and perceptions. The younger leaders also need to stand up and project the realities to the senior hierarchy courageously. They also need to ensure that the law prevails rather than any personality-oriented directions. It has been proved that negative factors contributing towards stress can be counter-balanced by positive factors such as regimental spirit and group cohesiveness. The feeling of organisational support contributes to high morale, despite the dangers and hardships endured in LICO. An effective leader needs to focus his energies on building these strengths of the organisation.

Junior Leadership

The pivotal role of junior leadership in minimising stress, remains much understated. In recent wars such as in Afghanistan, the crucial and in a way 'strategic' role of corporals and sergeants has already been recognised in the Special Forces. The Indian Army is no different. Here too, the mantle of execution falls on the junior leadership.

We have recently celebrated 150 years of the First War of Independence. There were no Indian officers then, but only JCO equivalent ranks. The British Indian Army was led by Subedars and Jemedars at junior levels. The lesson is that our Junior Commissioned Offices (JCOs) and Non Commissioned Officers (NCOs) are capable of performing, if given a chance. We need to bring about institutional changes in delegation of combat and administrative tasks to JCOs/NCOs¹⁰. They are the first ones to know the 'pulse of the men'. These junior leaders, if encouraged, will point out the deficiencies in the system and will suggest practical ways to overcome shortcomings. They must be given responsibilities and the organisation must make a public display of its faith in junior leaders by allowing them to independently handle responsibilities.

Government Support

As enunciated earlier, the government or the 'sarkar' support to the 'sepoy' was the backbone of the British Indian Army. In the eyes of a soldier, the Government is still an omnipresent and ever-powerful entity. Measures for the welfare of the soldiers by the Government have a tremendous effect on the morale of the Armed Forces. Officially, the 'welfare and resettlement of ex-servicemen' is the joint responsibility of the Central government as well as the State governments. Similarly, grievances of serving soldiers need to be resolved by both the tiers of the government. Actually, they are being solved by none. Presently, there is an urgent need to make this a key result area of the Ministry of Defence as well of the newly created Department of Ex-Servicemen Welfare. The government must implement a time-bound system of addressing the civil grievances of the serving soldiers. This system should have legal sanctity and should be enforceable in a court of law, something on the lines of the Right to Information Act (RTI). Simultaneously, the government must sensitise the key functionaries in the district administration, officials dealing with land-records and police to be more sympathetic to the problems of the soldiers. A twin approach comprising a legal framework and environmental awareness would prove to be a prudent strategy.

The government needs to go beyond mere redressal of grievances. It requires minimising the stress causing conditions, due to societal factors. This involves strengthening of land-records and land-revenue documentation and administration down to village level to ensure that a soldier's rural and urban land and property are not encroached upon, while they are far away from their hearth and home. The police must respond positively to the letters sent by the soldiers or their superior officers. The soldiers should get priority in official and legal procedures due to limited duration of their leave. The Government may also consider granting such priority in seats for their wards in educational institutions, including vocational training and professional institutions.

Their voting rights should also be secured by making suitable changes in the postal ballot system. Government help is also needed for infrastructural development to create adequate facilities for soldiers in military stations and cantonments. This includes increasing the authorisation of married accommodation and its construction,

creation of schools, colleges, hostels, hospitals and other basic infrastructure. An effective support service providing timely repairs, good rations and other entitlements should be created or outsourced. The Government also needs to arrange for administrative staff and teachers for schools, and scholarships for deserving students. Similarly, the Government should be approached for construction of good transit facilities and provision of additional trains, special aircraft and comfortable buses for the troops as movement is a regular feature of the life in uniform. Many of these facilities can be easily outsourced.

The Government should also implement lateral movement of defence personnel in the Para-Military Forces (PMF), Central Police Organisations (CPO) and the Public Sector Undertakings (PSU) to ensure smooth transition in a second career.

The last issue is of compensation. For many, it is the first issue. Either way, the soldiers must get what they deserve, or in any case a pay package which reasonably satisfies the aspirations as well the domestic commitments of the troops. A neglect of this issue will negate many other strengths of the organisation.

Conclusion

Not much is lost. Our organisational ethos and mid-course corrections have ensured that Kashmir has not become India's Vietnam. Statistics also show that the Indian Army has a suicide rate much lower than India's national average - 10.8 per lakh population compared to the national average of 14 per lakh 11. Compared to many Western armies, the Indian Army too fares well. In 2007, it was reported that 108 troops committed suicide in the US Army while the Russian Army lost more than 300 servicemen 12. But there is no room for complacency. Today, the younger generation of soldiers and officers of the Indian Armed Forces are not much different from their counterparts in other professions. One shared commonality is the intense desire to have some control of their immediate surroundings and to shape their destinies. They are willing to make positive contributions to improve the system, but in the absence of the organisational willingness to change, they are confronted with a status quo quagmire. Meanwhile, the world is moving on, resulting in societal pressures but there is no reduction in their operational commitments. The end product is stress.

To mitigate the resultant stress at this belated stage, we may have to resort to reverse-engineering of these circumstances. We need to change faster than the world, capitalise on our inherent strengths and reduce the operational commitments to a manageable level. It's a mental and attitudinal battle whose result is not hostage to Government largesse but hinges on our own ability to swiftly reform the organisation. The events have overtaken us, but the race has only started. When our resilience will marry reform, and ethos join hands with efficiency, circumstances shall cease to matter.

*This is an edited version of the essay which won First Prize in Group B.

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