

## **‘India Remembers’ Project and Other CAFHR Activities : An Update**

**Ms Bhanushali Gahlot®**

**D**uring the period under review (Apr-Jun 2017), the Centre for Armed Forces Historical Research (CAFHR) organised events as part of the ‘India Remembers’ project along with roundtable discussions and interactions with visiting scholars on themes pertaining to various aspects of Indian military history. In addition, the CAFHR on behalf of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Government of India collated material and curated an exhibition for the Bangladesh Liberation War Museum project.

A roundtable discussion with a serving United States Marine Corps officer, Lieutenant Ethan Dalton was held at the USI on 07 Apr 2017. The subject of the discussion was the evolution of the Indian Army post-1962. Furthermore, on 03 May 2017, an interaction was organised with the visiting team from the UK Centre for Historical Analysis and Conflict Research (CHACR). The team consisted of Major General Andrew RD Sharpe, CBE, PhD (Retd) (Cantab), Director, CHACR and Colonel Martin Todd, MBE, Assistant Head, CHACR. They were accompanied by Lieutenant Colonel Simon de Labillière MRAeS AAC, Military Adviser, British High Commission, New Delhi.

Briefs on USI, CAFHR, and Centre for Strategic Studies and Simulation (CS3) were given through the course of the interaction. In addition to this, two scholars made short presentations on aspects of historical research. The presentations brought together the two ends of the historical spectrum in the Indian context, with one highlighting extreme antiquity and its relevance to modern times and the other being rooted in India’s transition to a global strategic player.

During this period, the CAFHR was also tasked with collating material for the Bangladesh Liberation War Museum (BLWM), Dhaka on behalf of the MEA. The project focussed on the landmark political, diplomatic and military events that occurred through the

---

®Ms Bhanushali Gahlot is a Research Assistant with the USI Centre for Armed Forces Historical Research and is currently working on the India and the Great War centenary commemoration project. She is also the Project Manager for the ‘India Remembers’ project.

*Journal of the United Service Institution of India*, Vol. CXLVII, No. 608, April-June 2017.

course of the Indo-Pak war of 1971 with special reference to the role played by India in the liberation of Bangladesh. The collation of material included sourcing relevant images from archives and personal collections along with archival audio and video clippings of statements or speeches made at the time by political and military leaders of India and Bangladesh, etc. Interviews of a number of veterans who served in various operations during the war were also recorded.

On 08 Apr 2017, a ceremony was organised by MEA at Manekshaw Centre to honour the soldiers who laid down their lives in the 1971 war. It was attended by the Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India. At the ceremony, an exhibition curated by the CAFHR as part of the BLWM Project was showcased and a brief on the project and exhibition was provided by Squadron Leader Rana TS Chhina, MBE, (Retd), Secretary and Editor, CAFHR to the two Prime Ministers.

Last year, the CAFHR began its endeavor to inculcate a culture of remembrance in the country by launching the pilot of a community engagement project called 'India Remembers', which culminated on 07 Dec 2016. An event to formally mark the closure of the pilot project was organised at the USI on 18 Apr 2017. It was attended by project stakeholders, members of the community groups that engaged with the pilot project, scholars and USI members.

At the event, the project team, community group members, and project partners outlined the impact of the pilot project by sharing their experiences. In a presentation given by Ms Bhanushali Gahlot, Project Manager, India Remembers, the audience was briefed on the various commemorative activities undertaken by the participating groups through the course of the pilot. Squadron Leader Chhina shared the aims, objective and rationale behind the project and also shed light on the future course of action. Ms Gugu Haralu, India Remembers coordinator from Nagaland shared her experience of engaging with the pilot project. The highlight of the event was a cosplay performance by Ms Lavanya Chaudhary, a student of Ahlcon International School who came dressed as an 'Unknown Soldier' and delivered a monologue urging people to remember our fallen soldiers.

At the event, an evaluation report prepared to formally assess the impact of the pilot project was presented to Ms Victoria Wallace, Director General, Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) and Mrs Shivani Dasmahapatra, Program Director, Flags of Honour Foundation (FOH) who received the report on behalf of Mr Rajeev Chandrasekhar, Member of Parliament and Founder, FOH. The report contains details of each of the community groups the pilot project engaged with and outlines the various approaches the project team applied to raise awareness amongst the participating community groups.

The event ended with a release of CAFHR's first publication in the 1971 War Golden Jubilee series titled 'Battleground Chhamb' by Major General AJS Sandhu, VSM (Retd). The book was released by General VN Sharma, PVSM, AVSM (Retd), former Chief of the Army Staff.

Lastly, at the request of the Indian High Commission (IHC), UK, the centre organised a wreath laying ceremony at India Gate to commemorate the Indian Labour Corps that participated in WWI. The ceremony was organised as part of the 'India Remembers' and 'Unremembered' projects. The latter is a similar initiative undertaken by the IHC, UK

At the event, marigold wreaths were laid by Sir Dominic Asquith, KCMG, British High Commissioner to India, Squadron Leader Chhina, Professor KC Yadav and Mrs Alpana Dubey, Director, Europe West Division, MEA.

The CAFHR is now focussing on the joint USI-Belgium project initiated to mark the 70 years of bilateral relations between India and Belgium. Through publications and an exhibition, the project will highlight a century of Indo-Belgium relations commencing with the magnificent role played by soldiers of the Indian Army who fought and died for Belgian freedom during the First World War. The opening of the exhibition and launch of the publications are scheduled to coincide with the state visit of their Majesties the King and Queen of Belgium to India on 08 Nov 2017.



**Sqn Ldr Chhina, MBE, (Retd) with PM Narendra Modi and PM Sheikh Hasina at the ceremony held at Manekshaw Centre on 08 Apr 2017.**



**Ms Lavanya Chaudhary, a student of Ahlcon International School during her performance at the India Remembers closing event held at the USI on 18 Apr 2017.**



The book titled 'Battleground Chhamb' written by Maj Gen AJS Sandhu, VSM, (Retd) being released at the India Remembers closing event held at the USI on 18 Apr 2017. (L-R) Maj Gen AJS Sandhu, VSM, (Retd), General VN Sharma, PVSM, AVSM (Retd) and Lt Gen PK Singh, PVSM, AVSM, (Retd)



British High Commissioner to India, Sir Dominic Asquith, KCMG at the ceremony held at India Gate on 25 May 2017 with the 'India Remembers' team and other participants.