

Civil - Military Relations: Opportunities and Challenges*

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I am very happy to have been asked to deliver the USI National Security Lecture 2013 and to speak on "Civil - Military Relations: Opportunities and Challenges".

Before I proceed to reflect on the theme of today's lecture, I think it would be useful to have reasonable clarity about what exactly do we have in mind when we use the term "civil - military relations". I say this because earlier this year, at a seminar held in a Defence think tank at Delhi, a statement was made that "unsatisfactory civil - military relations are having an adverse impact on the functioning of the military in India". While all those who may be involved in studying military matters would understand that this statement refers to the functioning of the Defence apparatus I feel that a free use of the term "civil and military relations" should be best avoided as it has the potential of causing altogether unfounded doubts and suspicions in the minds of millions of people in India.

Our Armed Forces, comprising the Army, Navy and Air Force, have a strength of about 14 lakh personnel and we have over 27 lakh ex-Servicemen. If the families of our serving and retired officers and men are also taken into account we have more than two crore people who enjoy the trust and affection of all the people of our Country. I would, therefore, stress the importance of ensuring against there being any doubt whatsoever that over a billion people of our Country have a very warm relationship with all our men in uniform. To ensure against any unfounded misgivings being created about this important relationship I feel that our strategic analysts and commentators may, instead of using the term "civil - military

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relations", comment directly on the functioning of the Defence management apparatus and say whatever they wish to say.

I shall now speak briefly about yet another facet of civil - military interface which relates to the duty which the Army has been discharging, ever since 1947, of providing aid to the civil authority and supporting the affected States in combating insurgency and terrorism. Experience in the past over six decades has shown that whenever any State Government faces difficulty in dealing with an existing or emerging serious law and order situation it approaches the Union Home Ministry for seeking the deployment of Central Police Forces (CPFs) to assist the State Police in restoring normalcy in the disturbed area. Experience has also shown that, in many cases, when it is found that even the Police and the CPFs together would not be able to handle a given disorder, the Army has been invariably called upon to provide the required support.

A consequence of the situation which I have just described is that the Army has continued to be deployed in several parts of the Country in considerable strength, and for prolonged periods, to carry out counter-insurgency and anti-terrorism operations. On many occasions, the operations carried out by the Army, in conjunction with the State Police and the CPFs, have led to complaints and allegations from the local population about the violation of their rights. In this context, it would be recalled that for the past several years there has been a continuing debate on whether or not the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) should continue to apply to the disturbed areas where the Army has been carrying out sustained operations for combating insurgency and terrorism.

While every uniformed force, in whichever area it is called upon to operate, is duty bound to ensure that the people's civil rights are protected, it is equally necessary for the Centre and the affected States to collectively evolve an acceptable approach which ensures that the personnel of the military formations which are involved in carrying out counter-insurgency or anti-terrorism operations are provided the requisite legal protection.

As law and order situations shall continue to arise in the future, in one or the other part of the Country, it would be useful in the longer term perspective, if well planned and time bound

steps are implemented for enlarging the strength and the logistical resources of the State Police organisations and upgrading their professional capabilities for meeting future challenges. The development of the Police into a more effective force should, hopefully, lead to a progressive reduction in the recurring need for seeking the Army's support. I would also add that the requisite training and professional upgradation of the Police, as also of the CPFs, can be most usefully assisted by the Army, which has well equipped and competent training centres all over the Country. I would also add that Internal Security management would become far more effective, if the Army were to develop operational interoperability with the Police and identified CPFs.

I now come to the specifics of civil - military relations on which the USI has asked me to speak this morning. The theme on which I am required to comment actually relates to the civil - military balance and, therefore, essentially concerns the functioning of the Defence apparatus and the varied issues which may arise from the professional interface between the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the military leadership of the three Armed Forces. The various elements which comprise this theme fall within the arena of Higher Defence Management (HDM). I shall try to speak on some of the more important aspects of this theme.

In the past two decades and more a growing number of former senior officers of the Armed Forces have been writing on issues relating to HDM. These commentators broadly fall into two main groups: one, which largely focuses on the 'failings of the MoD' and the other which also speaks about the 'deficiencies in the internal functioning of the Armed Forces'. I shall rapidly go over the more significant dissatisfactions voiced by both these groups.

A criticism which has been recurrently raised alleges that impediments arise in the functioning of the MoD because the civilian officers posted in the Ministry exercise authority which far exceeds their mandate. I shall examine the basis of this misperception and try to explain the true position in simple terms.

First and foremost, in any discussion on Defence Management it is extremely important to bear in mind that in our democratic parliamentary framework the power lies with the elected representatives of the people, from among whom Cabinet Ministers are appointed. The Ministers have the responsibility of managing

the affairs of the departments under their charge and decide all important matters except those which are required to be submitted to the Cabinet, Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), Prime Minister, President or other specified authorities. The civil servants working in the various departments of the Government of India (GoI) are the tools or the instruments for assisting the Ministers in finalising policies and then ensuring that the same are effectively executed.

The Constitution of India lays down the framework within which the Union, i.e. the GoI, and the States are required to carry out their respective responsibilities. List 1 of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India enumerates the subjects which are to be dealt with by the GoI. In this List, the GoI has been, inter alia, assigned responsibility for ensuring the "Defence of India and every part thereof". The Supreme Command of the Armed Forces rests in the President. The responsibility for national defence vests with the Cabinet. This responsibility is discharged through the MoD, which provides the policy framework and wherewithal to the Armed Forces to discharge their responsibilities in the context of the defence of the Country. The Raksha Mantri is the head of the MoD. The principal task of the MoD is to obtain policy directions of the Government on all defence and security related matters and see that these are implemented by the Services Headquarters, Inter-Service Organisations, Production Establishments and Research and Development Organisations.

As provided by the Constitution, the various subjects in List 1 are distributed among the different departments in accordance with the GoI (Allocation of Business) Rules 1961. Under these Rules the various matters relating to the Defence of India have been allocated to the MoD which comprises the Department of Defence (DoD), Department of Defence Production (DDP), Department of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and the Department of Ex-Servicemen Welfare. Further, under the GoI (Transaction of Business) Rules 1961, it is laid down that "all business allotted to a department specified under the GoI (Allocation of Business) Rules 1961, shall be disposed off by, or under the general or special directions of, the Minister-in-Charge" of the Department (Rule 3), subject to the provision of these Rules i.e. the Raksha Mantri.

The Transaction of Business Rules further provide that "In each department, the Secretary (which term includes the Special Secretary or Additional Secretary or Joint Secretary in independent charge) shall be the administrative head thereof, and shall be responsible for the proper transaction of business and the careful observance of these rules in that department" (Rule 11).

Thus, as per the constitutional framework, the overall responsibility for the functioning of the MoD rests entirely on the Raksha Mantri and the responsibility for ensuring that the business of the DoD is transacted strictly in conformity with the Gol (Transaction of Business) Rules 1961 is vested in the Defence Secretary.

From my own experience of working in the MoD for many years I can state, without an iota of doubt, that officers working in the MoD discharge their duties with great care and all important matters relating to the four departments of the MoD are decided by the Raksha Mantri, except those cases which are required to be submitted to the other designated authorities.

In the context of what I have just explained, the MoD is clearly responsible to the Gol for dealing with all matters relating to the Defence of India and the Armed Forces of the Union and, further, as provided under the Defence Services Regulations, the Chiefs of the Services are responsible to the President, through the MoD, for the command, discipline, recruitment, training, organisation, administration and preparation of war of their respective Services.

The civilian face of the MoD is represented by the Raksha Mantri, his junior Ministerial colleagues, Defence Secretary and the other three Administrative Secretaries in the Ministry; and, say, another about 15-20 officers of Joint Secretary level and above in all the four Departments of the Ministry. During my days in the MoD a dozen Joint Secretary level officers in the four Departments of the Ministry were dealing with all the matters which were received from the Army, Navy and Air Headquarters, commonly referred to as the Service Headquarters (SHQ), and from several inter-Service organisations.

The arrangements which obtained in my time have undergone very significant changes after the amendment of the Gol

(Transaction of Business Rules) and the establishment of the Integrated Army, Navy, Air and Defence Staff Headquarters of the Ministry of Defence. The Integrated Headquarters (IHQ) are involved with policy formulation in regard to the Defence of India and the Armed Forces of the Union and are responsible for providing the executive directions required in the implementation of policies laid down by the MoD.

Another frequently voiced dissatisfaction is that the civilians who are posted in the MoD do not have adequate past experience of working in this arena and also do not have long enough tenures to gain specialisation for effectively dealing with military matters. This perception is largely true. Perhaps, only a few among those who get posted in the MoD, particularly officers at the Joint Secretary and equivalent level, may have done previous stints in the Defence or Home Ministries. As regards tenures: while the Central Secretariat Services officers may serve for long periods, the deputationist officers appointed to Director and Joint Secretary level posts enjoy average tenures of five years. I strongly believe that it is necessary to remedy this situation and had made a definitive recommendation in this regard over a decade ago, about which I shall speak a little later.

Some commentators have alleged that the role of the political leaders has been hijacked by IAS officers and what obtains in the MoD today is "bureaucratic control and not civilian political control of the military". It has been further argued that the civil services have succeeded in having their own way essentially because the political leadership has little or no past experience or expertise in handling defence matters, have little or no interest, and lack the will to support reforms in the Defence Management apparatus. This line of thinking is carried forward to conclude that as the MoD does not have the confidence and capability to adjudicate on the competing claims and demands made by the individual Services, each Service largely follows its own course and enlarges its role as per the whims and fancies of successive Chiefs.

I have already explained at some length the constitutional framework within which the MoD and its officers are required to function. However, to eradicate any misperceptions it would be most useful if the curricula of the various military training institutions also contains a suitably designed course for enabling the officer

cadres to gain adequate awareness of the working of the Constitution of India and, side by side, to enhance their political awareness. Doing this would also provide a useful opportunity for appointing well qualified civilian teachers in the various military training academies with whom the trainee officers could have informal discussions on varied other matters in which they may be interested.

As regards the assertion that the individual Services largely follow their own volitions on account of the MoD's failure to enforce effective control, there cannot be any debate about the crucial need for the Integrated Defence Staff to work overtime for securing a level of jointness which will enable critical inter-se prioritisation of the varied demands projected by the individual Services and, based thereon, to evolve a closely integrated Defence Plan which has a 10-15 year perspective.

I now come to the views expressed by several former senior officers who are unhappy with the 'internal health, morale and discipline of the Services'. Some of them are of the view that issues about civilian control have arisen essentially because successive Raksha Mantris have chosen not to exercise the requisite influence and control and have been particularly amiss in never questioning the Chiefs about the logic and assumptions relating to the execution of military plans, as this vital responsibility has been left entirely to the Service Headquarters. Operation Blue Star, Exercise Brass Tacks, Exercise Checker Board, IPKF Operations in Sri Lanka and several other events are cited as examples of serious avoidable failures which happened because of the lack of clarity about the goals to be achieved; and, besides, on account of major gaps in the operational plans. It is asked why such failures have never been subjected to any questioning or audit, as should have been done in a well-run system.

In the context of some of the cited failures, it is regrettable that the records relating to past operations, even of the wars fought by our Armed Forces, have continued to remain clothed in secrecy. This has had the adverse consequence of successive generations of military officers being denied the opportunity of learning from past mistakes. This important issue was taken note of by the Group of Ministers (GoM) on National Security (2001) and a Committee to Review the Publication of Military Histories

was set up by the Raksha Mantri in 2002. This Committee, which I was called upon to chair, gave a clear recommendation that the histories of the 1962, 1965 and 1971 Wars should be published without any further delay. This was in 2003. I gather that the History of the 1965 War has since been published.

Some commentators have gone to the extent of taking the position that difficulties arise in the functioning of the MoD because Raksha Mantris do not have past exposure to military matters. This is not a well-founded notion. The United States of America and various European countries faced two prolonged world wars and two to three generations of their youth were compelled to undergo conscriptions. Consequently, for many years in the post-World War periods, a number of Ministers in these countries were persons who had earlier served in the Armed Forces and had been directly exposed to military functioning. Today, however, even in these countries there may now be no elected persons who would have earlier exposure to serving in the military. In India, we have never had any conscription. Recruitments to all our Armed Forces are done on voluntary basis. It would, therefore, not be logical to suggest that our Raksha Mantris should necessarily have been exposed to military matters.

It is disturbing to hear angry statements that the MoD has not been devoting timely attention to dealing with its tasks. During my days in the Ministry I worked with eight Raksha Mantris, of whom five became the Prime Ministers of the Country; and can say, without any hesitation whatsoever, that even the Prime Ministers who held charge of MoD remained most seriously concerned about national security management issues while being overburdened with a horde of crisis situations on varied fronts. However, a factor which invariably came in the way of arriving at adequately prompt and satisfactory solutions, such as may have been possible in those troubled times, was our failure to present to the Raksha Mantri clear cut options based on the advice received from the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC). In this context it is relevant to recall the virtually established practice that the Chiefs would raise no significant matter in the Raksha Mantri's Monday Morning Meetings but seek to discuss substantive issues only in 'one-on-one meetings' with him; and, if possible, also with Prime Minister. I also recall that whenever the Chiefs met the Raksha Mantri together and presented him with even a broadly agreed approach,

there was no delay in the required decisions being promptly arrived at and speedily promulgated. While, after the establishment of the Integrated Defence Staff (IDS), the decision making processes would, hopefully, have improved very significantly, I would re-iterate the importance of ensuring that the MoD functions on the basis of dynamic coordination between the civilian and military elements. I would also stress that integrated approaches shall materialise if decision making is based on processes which are rooted in jointness.

My memory goes back to the late 1980s when the MoD's functioning was, among other factors, most adversely affected by a severe financial crisis in the Country. Reckoning the understandable worries and tensions within the MoD, Prime Minister VP Singh, who was also our Raksha Mantri at that time, set-up a Committee on Defence Expenditure (CDE), which was charged to review the existing Defence set-up and recommend practical solutions to rationalise military expenditures. I was the Defence Secretary at that time. Arun Singh, who was Chairman of this Committee, consulted me informally about the recommendations evolved by his group. I gave him my personal opinion that while the proposal to create the proposed Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) set-up, for advising Raksha Mantri on all military matters, would necessarily have to be processed for consideration at the political level; there appeared no difficulty whatsoever in implementing all the other recommendations for enforcing economy, closing redundant Ordnance factories, rationalising the Finance Wing functioning and enlarging the existing administrative and financial delegations. The COSC, after examining the CDE Report, communicated that none of the Committee's recommendations would be accepted if the Government did not accept the recommended restructuring of the COSC. To secure better resource management, the MoD went ahead and ordered financial delegations upto the Army Command and equivalent levels, placed an Internal Financial Adviser (IFA) in each Service Headquarters and directed several other useful changes.

The defence reforms process did not move much further till May 1998 when the successful underground nuclear tests at Pokhran catapulted India into the exclusive league of Nuclear power states. Needless to say, this sudden development cast very high responsibility on the Gol, particularly on the MoD. This led to the

establishment of various arrangements and structures for handling strategic issues and decisions. Thus, the National Security Council (NSC) was set up in November 1998 and a National Security Adviser (NSA) was appointed at about the same time. Then, in summer 1999, came the Kargil War, which took the Country entirely by surprise and generated grave misgivings about the failure of the defence apparatus and serious concerns about the Army's preparedness. The Kargil Review Committee (KRC) was set-up to undertake a thorough review of the events leading upto the Pakistani aggression in the Kargil district and to recommend measures for safeguarding National Security against such armed intrusions. The KRC Report (1999) was speedily examined by a GoM which was chaired by Home Minister LK Advani. For undertaking National Security reforms the GoM set-up four Task Forces, one of which was on HDM. Among the foremost recommendations made by this Task Force was the creation of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) who, supported by the Vice CDS, would head the IDS to improve the planning process, promote "jointness" among the Armed Forces and provide single point military advice to the Government.

While the GoM endorsed almost all the major recommendations of the Task Force on HDM the proposal regarding the creation of a CDS got involved in the lack of collective support by the three Services and failed to secure approval for want of political consensus.

I shall now briefly speak about certain issues which continue to affect the efficient functioning of the Defence apparatus :—

(a) There must be no further delay in finalising the National Security Doctrine, on the basis of which integrated threat assessments could be made.

(b) While some improvements have been achieved in the past years, the MoD must enforce strict measures to ensure that the Ordnance Factories, Defence PSUs, DRDO establishments and other concerned agencies function efficiently to deliver supplies and services as per the envisaged time and cost schedules; prolonged delays cause serious difficulties for the Armed Forces and large economic losses as the lack of certainty about supplies from indigenous sources compels expensive imports whenever any emergency arises.

(c) While there have been notable advances in the rationalisation of the procurement policies and procedures; there is still need to ensure against prolonged acquisition proceedings, as such delays altogether nullify the "make or buy" approaches.

(d) The individual Services enjoy the autonomy of taking decisions to make their own selections of weapons, equipments and systems; the Integrated Services Headquarters must take effective steps to establish a tri-Service approach in regard to such decisions as doing so will engender very significant financial savings.

(e) The Defence Planning Process has still to get established; the Xth and XIth Defence Plans were implemented without receiving formal approvals and while the Long Term Integrated Perspective Plan (LTIPP) has since been finalised, it is still viewed as a totalling up of the wish lists of the individual Services; the HQ IDS must devote urgent attention towards finalising a fully Integrated Defence Plan with at least a 10-15 year perspective.

(f) The Services enjoy the authority of virtually settling their own manpower policies; the pro-rata percentage representation of Arms and Services in the Army needs to be modified forthwith as it is virtually a "quota system" which breeds group loyalties and cuts at the very roots of jointness within the Service.

Over the years, continuing efforts have been made by the MoD to promote jointness through integration of the planning, training and other systems so that, progressively, a tri-Service approach could get fully established. Thus, in the 1980s two very important steps were taken: the establishment of the Army Training Command (ARTRAC) and the Directorate General of Defence Planning Staff (DG, DPS). It would be profitable, even at this stage, if the COSC were to set-up an expert group to review the functioning so far of these two institutions and identify the reasons why both these crucial organisations could not achieve their objectives which were, interalia, envisaged to promote the establishment of jointness and a tri-Service approach.

While functioning of the Defence apparatus has been getting

steadily refined I feel that the continuing lack of consensus among the three Services is thwarting the achievement of the vital objective of "jointness". A number of joint service institutions have come into existence in the post Kargil War period. Among the new institutions, frequent references are made to the HQ IDS, Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), Andaman & Nicobar Command (ANC) and the Strategic Forces Command (SFC). While it may be far too early to rejoice over these recently established inter-agency institutions it is disconcerting to learn that the individual Services are not doing all that is required to see that these new organisations get fully established without facing delays and difficulties. A former Army Chief is quoted to say that the HQ IDS is "a redundancy in military bureaucracy"; the founder Director of DIA is quoted to bring out that "the Defence Intelligence Agency cannot deliver as the Intelligence Agencies of the three Services feel threatened by it"; and about the HQ IDS it is stated that "the Services will never allow this body to function as they feel threatened that it will start examining the basis of their budgetary proposals, acquisition plans and force structures".

The time has come for the individual Services to close their ranks and get collectively concerned about the major threats and formidable challenges which we face in our close neighbourhood and beyond. The global security environment is continuing to become growingly complex and huge uncertainties loom large on various fronts.

Our military has to be also concerned about the arising consequences of the economic meltdown and the strong likelihood of the allocations for Defence facing a significant decline in the coming time. In this scenario, to prepare for successfully meeting future challenges, it is of the highest importance that the individual Services shed all reservations and establish meaningful jointness. The pursuit of a truly tri-Service approach will not only reduce functional overlaps but also contribute towards reducing wasteful duplications and redundancies. I learn that the HQ IDS have already promulgated a Joint Doctrine on the Indian Armed Forces which is presently undergoing revision because of the differing views of the Service Headquarters on several important issues. In this context, I would reiterate the crucial importance of ensuring the urgent finalisation of the Joint Doctrine which covers all aspects of Integrated Operations. Any delay in this regard would come in

the way of the Armed Forces preparing themselves fully for delivering an effective response when any emergency arises in the future.

In view of the serious economic problems being faced the world over, many countries are exploring various approaches for containing and restricting the large expenditures being incurred on maintaining their Armed Forces. In this context, our MoD must realise the need to keep a very close watch on the rising cost of maintaining the military apparatus and ensuring that the high cost of the longer term acquisitions can be met from within the future availability of resources. Side by side, urgent attention needs to be paid to reducing dependency on continuing imports of weapons and systems. This would require a very vigorous revving-up of the ongoing indigenisation programmes and DRDO and Defence Production units joining hands with the private sector to yield speedier results. In the years past, only the Navy initiated systematic steps to foster indigenisation of their major platforms and systems and deserve all praise for the wonderful outcomes which they have already been able to achieve.

It also needs being noted that India is not the only Country which is engaged in dealing with problems which relate to the functioning of the Defence Management apparatus. Many democracies have been facing such problems and, benefitting from their own past experiences, several important countries have established strong parliamentary oversight bodies to monitor all the important issues relating to the functioning of their Armed Forces. Some countries have even inducted external experts to monitor their ongoing defence reform processes.

India cannot and must not be left behind in doing all that needs to be done for strengthening and enhancing our National Security interests. I have long been of the view that we need to develop our own model of Defence Management which vigorously promotes and sustains military professionalism while being fully in tune with our constitutional framework and in harmony with our glorious traditions of soldiering. The model to be evolved should also not be excessively encumbered with varied hierarchical fixations which are rooted in our colonial past.

Considering the threats and challenges which loom on our horizon it is extremely important that our HDM structures are

founded in the need to maintain a sensitive balance between the civil and military components and, side by side, ensuring that the entire military apparatus functions strictly within the parameters of "jointness".

On the basis of my own past experience I would say that it would be an ideal situation if the Service Chiefs were to collaborate closely and for the COSC to itself take the various required decisions to pave the way for the future and establish jointness, brick upon brick. In the past over two decades many useful opportunities were lost because of the lack of convergence in the views of the Service Headquarters.

If jointness and a tri-Service approach cannot be achieved soon enough; then, perhaps, the only option left may be to proceed towards replacing the existing single Service Acts by an Armed Forces Act which would lay a statutory basis for achieving jointness and delineating the roles, duties and missions of the Armed Forces, as also the procedures and modalities relating to the functioning of the Defence apparatus. In this context, it may not be out of place to recall that the USA achieved its objectives by promulgating the Goldwater-Nichols Act in 1986, after nearly four decades of experimentation under the aegis of its National Security Act. And more recently, because of the serious budgetary problems faced by the country, the UK has been devoting high level attention to introducing reforms in its Defence Management apparatus. In this context, the Levene Report has sought to clarify the respective roles and responsibilities of ministers, civilian officers and the military at the policy, strategic and operational levels.

In so far as the tenures of civilians working in MoD are concerned, I have been urging, for many years now, the establishment of a dedicated Security Administration Cadre by drawing in the best available talent from the Civil Services, Defence Services, DRDO, Science & Technology, Information and Communication Technology, Broadcasting and Media, et al. I had proposed that officers of this dedicated cadre should enjoy open ended tenures and those found fit should be enabled to develop specialisation in dealing with security related matters and be deployed in the Home Ministry, Intelligence Bureau (IB), National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS), MoD, Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) and other security management related areas for

their entire careers. This recommendation is contained in the Report of the Task Force on Internal Security (2000), which I had chaired. It was accepted by the GoM (reference para 4.105, page 56, GoM Report). After hearing me the GoM had gone further and added that as "the assignments in these ministries/agencies are perceived as exacting and unattractive, the members of such a pool should, therefore, be appropriately compensated by provision of non-monetary incentives". It is time to resurrect and speedily implement this decision of the GoM.

Another factor which was noted by the GoM related to the marked difference in the perception of roles between the civil and military officers. I was asked to chair a Task Force to work out the curricula for organising a continuing Joint Civil and Military Training Programme on National Security which would be undergone by Brigadier and Major General and equivalent rank officers from the three Defence Services, IAS, IPS, IFS, CPFs and, as the training settled down, participants would also be drawn from the Media, Industry and other arenas. On the basis of my recommendations the first two-week Joint Civil and Military Training Programme on National Security commenced at the IAS Training Academy at Mussoorie, in February 2003. This programme has been successfully continuing for over a decade now and the 20th Course commenced at Mussoorie in November 2013. It would be beneficial if the MoD were to review this programme and suitably recast its contents to meet the existing and emerging scenarios.

Recurring media reports in the last two years about controversial interviews relating to personnel issues; the Raksha Mantri's decision being challenged in the Apex Court, and several other unseemly scandals have marred the Army's glorious image and dragged the Services into the cesspool of partisan and parochial politics. This has caused divisiveness and serious damage to the very fabric of our military. It is indeed most unfortunate that any questioning of the deviations from the well established norms is viewed as questioning the very loyalty of the entire Indian Army. Such incidents, which have a grave adverse affect on the morale of the Armed Forces, must not be allowed to recur under any circumstances. Time has perhaps come to review the entire existing basis of promotions and appointments to the higher echelons in the three Services.

The patriotism and professionalism of the men and women of our Armed Forces is second to none among the militaries the world over. Our fearless military personnel, who maintain an eternal vigil on our land, sea and air frontiers, have successfully thwarted successive aggressions and safeguarded the territorial integrity and sovereignty of our motherland in the past over six decades, laying down their lives for the Country.

I have a very long association of working with the military. For the past over five years I have been serving in Jammu & Kashmir where I have had the opportunity of observing from very close quarters the extremely difficult circumstances in which the men and women of our Army operate round the year, in severe weather conditions and harsh terrains. I take this opportunity of paying my humble tribute to our valiant soldiers and reiterate that there should be no doubt ever, of any kind, about the devotion and loyalty of our military. Let nothing be ever said or done which generates any kind of debate or controversy which mars the glorious image or affects the morale of the 14 lakh officers and men of our Armed Forces.

Our National Security concerns demand that all interests and all institutions of national power are brought to work most closely together to further the Country's interest and build a militarily and economically strong India which enjoys the trust and respect of all our neighbours.

In conclusion, I would say to all my friends in uniform and to all my civilian colleagues: "The country must come first, always and ever", and never forget: "Who lives if India dies".