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US-IRAN CONFLICT: Impact on Indian Economy and Defence Budget



S S Deswal, IPS
DG ITBP



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**INTERVIEW OF
SH S S DESWAL, DG ITBP
WITH DEFENCE AND SECURITY ALERT
TEAM DSA**

04

**TOO MUCH OF THE
OLD PERSISTS**

LT GEN KAMAL DAVAR
PVSM, AVSM (RETD)

08

**SECURITY COMPLEXITIES
FOR INDIA**

AIR MSHL ANIL CHOPRA
PVSM, AVSM, VM, VSM (RETD)

13

INDIA CAN BE MEDIATOR

LT GEN DALIP BHARDWAJ
PVSM, VSM (RETD)

18

**USA V IRAN IN IRAQ:
IMPACT ON INDIA**

AIR MARSHAL DHIRAJ KUKREJA
PVSM, AVSM, VSM (RETD)

24

**US-IRAN CONFLICT-
IMPACT ON INDIA**

AMB ASHOK SAJJANHAR

28

**US-IRAN TENSIONS:
IMPLICATIONS ON INDIA'S BUDGET**

ANU SHARMA

33

TEHRAN-WASHINGTON: NEW AXIS

EVA J. KOULOURIOTIS

36

THE EXPANSE OF INDIAN OEUVRE

ROSS MACKAY

40

FLUCTUATING POWER

J.M. PHELPS
PHILIP B. HANEY

44

**INDIAN ECONOMY AND THE
DEFENCE BUDGET**

AMIT COWSHISH

48

INTERVIEW OF SH S S DESWAL, DG ITBP WITH DEFENCE AND SECURITY ALERT

Sh Surjeet Singh Deswal, IPS, is also a law graduate. Before taking over as DG, ITBP, he held the positions of Commissioner of Police & Director General in various departments of Police force. He has also headed SSB & BSF for some time. He has been awarded the Indian Police Medal for meritorious service in 2001 & President's Police Medal for Distinguished Service in 2012. As DG, ITBP, he has taken initiatives like maintaining physical fitness of the personnel and proposed tourism in the Himalayas and gave the message of clean Himalayas by visiting difficult border areas on foot and boosted the morale of Himveers.

Defence and Security Alert

Indo-Tibetan Border Police was operationalised in 1962 as a small force under the CRPF Act. Over the years, ITBP has evolved and grown into a multi-dimensional elite security force. Kindly shed light at the ITBP's eventful journey to its present preeminence.

DG ITBP: Indo-Tibetan Border Police was raised on 24 October 1962 in the wake of Chinese aggression for re-organising the frontier intelligence and security set up along the Indo-Tibetan border. Initially, the force was raised under I.B. as Guerrilla-cum-fighting force and only four Battalions were sanctioned to begin with. In view of the additional responsibilities and redefined task in 1976, the original role of the force changed to conventional force on the recommendations of Rustamji Committee. The force was restructured in 1978-1979 by sanctioning 09 service Battalions and 04 specialists Battalions and other

components for Border Guarding, Counter Insurgency and Internal Security duties. The force has gradually grown and now consisting of around 90,000 troops. Presently, ITBP is guarding the India-China Border from Karakoram Pass in Ladakh to Jechap La in Arunachal Pradesh covering 3,488 km of border. It is a very long and challenging task to guard high altitude and inhospitable border varying an altitude ranging from 3000' to 18850'. Besides border guarding, ITBP is actively involved in internal security duties, VIP protection, anti-naxal operations, and security of embassy and consulates in Afghanistan.

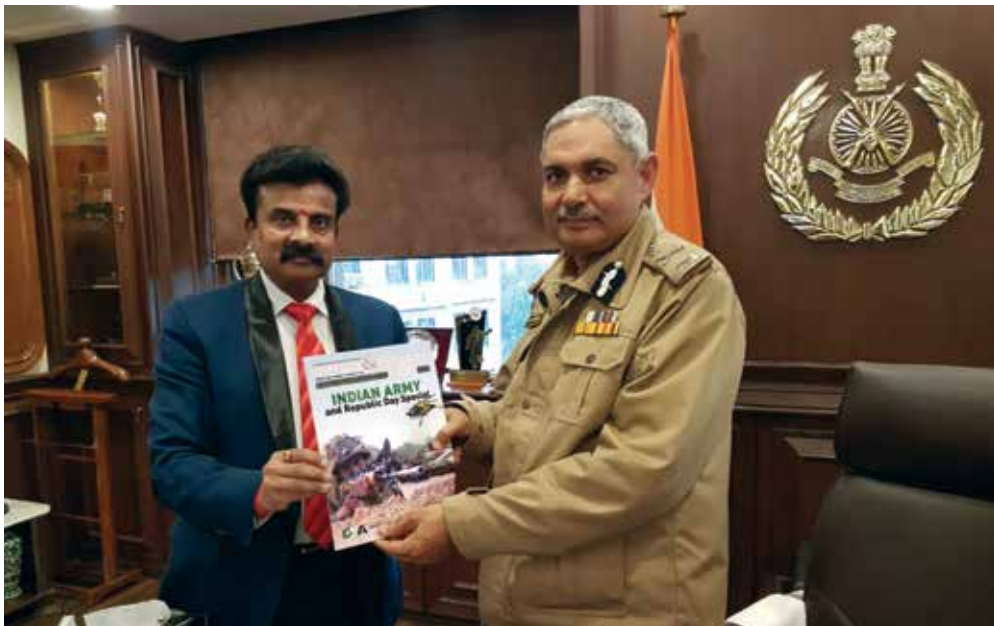
We have an excellent track record in sports and adventure sports. We are pioneers in adventure sports. The force has successfully completed more than 214 mountaineering expeditions globally including the Mt Everest four times. We are the national Ice Hockey Champions. We have distinguished Skiing and Rafting teams with us.



For notable achievements in the field of adventure, our mountaineers have been awarded with seven Padma Shree and 14 Tenzing Norgay National Adventure Awards.

DSA: ITBP guard India's international borders from Karakoram Pass in Ladakh to Jechap La in Arunachal Pradesh which are some of the world's most inhospitable terrains. Is the training - professional and mental - imparted to these personnel different as given to the other forces?

DG ITBP: Every ITBP personnel are a trained mountaineer for a defensive battle in high altitude area. Apart



Pawan Agrawal, Publisher and CEO, Ocean Media Pvt. Ltd. meets ITBP DG S S Deswal, IPS.

from undergoing strenuous basic training, ITBP personnel undergo periodic refresher courses to sharpen their fighting skills and improve their mental and physical toughness. To keep the troops updated with modern weapons and equipment available in the force, regular classes and on job training are conducted in units and forward posts on weapon handling and handling of modern equipment. The only one police training establishment for Mountaineering and Skiing is with ITBP in Auli. Most of the forward posts of the force remain cut off from surface route during winter season due to snow accumulation en route. The border posts are exposed to high velocity storms, snow blizzards, avalanches, and landslides, besides the effect of high altitude and extreme cold, where temperature dips down up to minus 45 degree Celsius. About 2/3 tenure of ITBP personnel is spent in such rigorous area. To prepare them for that ITBP personnel undergo basic and advance courses on mountaineering, skiing, survival, commando, unarmed combat, counter insurgency and jungle warfare, judo courses, medical first responder and disaster management within the organisation and outside the organisation. So, ITBP is indeed

special and a cut above being professionally trained in terms of physical and mental toughening of its personnel.

In order to boost the morale of troops, their rotation from high to low altitude is done as far as possible. On completion of tenure in extreme hard areas, troops are posted to plain area for rest and recuperation. Besides above, special allowances, medals and rewards are also given.

DSA: Recently, there was a proposal of merger of Assam Rifles with ITBP which was not welcomed by top brass of Assam Rifles. If this happens, would it make any difference in the operations of ITBP?

DG ITBP: See, the ITBP always stands with its commitment of serving the nation for every assigned task. We have proved ourselves in all security spheres in the last 58 years. Such proposals and decisions are in the preview of the government. I can only say that the ITBP is always ready to take on any responsibility. We are doing our job in a highest professional manner till date and will continue to do so. As far as difference in operations of ITBP in case of such duties assigned to us, is concerned,

I can tell you that we are trained and prepared to face any challenge in the security paraphernalia of the nation and that's our biggest strength. We can easily adapt to any situation or responsibility, if assigned to us, with great confidence and resilience of our men.

DSA: Border areas are also manned by the army and other paramilitary forces. How do you ensure close coordination, joint exercises and intelligence and resource sharing etc. with them for seamless security operations?

DG ITBP: A well prepared functional co-ordination guideline is available at field level. The ITBP officers posted at every level starting from BOP interact with army and other forces adjacent to their deployment regularly. Senior officers of ITBP also have regular interactions with officers of army and other sister organisations. Apart from above, structured functional co-ordination meetings are held regularly between ITBP and army. ITBP conducts Long Range and Short Range patrols at its own and Joint Patrols with army to maintain vigil in border area. ITBP do participate in tactical exercise with army for keeping them abreast for the wartime role. So, we have an excellent coordination with sister organisations at all levels.

DSA: Higher reaches of Himalayas are disaster prone and ITBP is the first responder for such natural calamities. How well equipped and competent is ITBP in disaster management and rescue and relief operations?

DG ITBP: ITBP is the first responder in case of Disaster in Himalaya Region. Accordingly Regional Response Centres (RRCs) have been established in HP, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh for carrying rescue and relief operations. Apart from the RRCs, regular units

of ITBP also do immediate disaster response. ITBP has carried out large numbers of rescue and relief operations in Himalayan Region. ITBP has a Centre For Training in Search, Rescue & Disaster Response – NITSRDR at Panchkula in Haryana for imparting training to ITBP and other police forces. In 2013, ITBP had rescued 33,009 pilgrims during flash floods in Uttarakhand. We regularly conduct rescue operations in the Himalayan regions as first responder and save precious lives of our citizens. You must have heard of the Nanda Devi rescue mission 'Daredevil' of ITBP where we were able to rescue four British nationals and retrieved seven dead bodies from an altitude of 20,000 feet in very difficult circumstances. This was said to be one of the difficult rescue operation of the world. Keeping in view of such disasters happening in the Himalayas, we have recently constituted five mountain rescue teams of ITBP that will swiftly respond in such situations in high altitude Himalayan ranges.

Also, since 1981, ITBP is providing

medical cover, security and logistic support to the pilgrims during Annual Kailash Mansarovar Yatra. We are also securing the Shri Amarnathji Yatra every year.

DSA: Due to the inhospitable working environment, many personal and professional reasons, there is a lot of stress among the force personnel. What remedial measures has ITBP taken to address and manage this growing affliction?

DG ITBP: It is true that the separation from family, environmental hazards and remoteness cause stress and strains in human body. ITBP is also not immune to it. To minimise stress, our Stress Counselors are posted at the ITBP Battalions who are being trained at The National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro-Sciences (NIMHAS), Bengaluru. Their job is to advice troops on how to cope up with stress. The Stress Management courses are also being run at field level. To keep personnel happy, spiritual activities, meditation, yoga, sports activities are also encouraged

further to that. These activities are in the day to day routine of Himveers of ITBP.

ITBP personnel are sent on leave three to four times in a year for rest and recuperation and meeting their families. Most of the BOPs have been connected with satellite telephones and internet so that personnel can keep in touch with their families. Library with sufficient books is available at all the BOPs, and books, periodicals and magazines are also sent to BOPs on monthly basis.

DSA: Due to global warming, the Himalayan region is being conserved by many organisations. Is ITBP also playing its part in the conservation of environment as the personnel spend large chunk of their life in these high terrains?

DG ITBP: Look, the Himalayas possess beautiful mountainous range and ITBP is in the forefront for preserving Himalayan ecology there. It is in our mission statement that the force will preserve and restore the flora and fauna in the Himalayas. ITBP has taken itself the task of maintaining the delicate balance of flora and fauna. ITBP ensures that the flora and fauna of the area around BOPs is not disturbed or destroyed. ITBP organises plantation drives in its campus and BOPs and nurtures them as well. ITBP also observe special days of global importance such as World Environment Day, Earth Day, and contribute actively to government's initiatives such as Jal Shakti Mission, Swachhta Mission, etc. and motivate all personnel to preserve ecology and avoid any action which may degrade environment.

All units have been instructed to adhere to the motto of 'Say no to Plastic' in their campuses. ITBP has also made pioneering efforts in introducing the use of solar energy



ITBP personnel in Ladakh.

in border areas for the purpose of electrification, battery charging and telecommunications and we are heading towards 'Green Fuel Concept' in a phased manner. I, myself, visit the BOPs and we all organise Swachhta campaigns, plantations drives, etc. We have also requested the tourists coming to the Himalayas not to litter the area and to help us to preserve the environment in the mountains with the help of poster / banner campaigns.

DSA: Are there any plans or programmes planned by ITBP for the retired ITBP personnel?

DG ITBP: Yes indeed, we always consider welfare of our retired personnel as our priority. We organise Pension Adalat to address their grievances. We also invite them to our field formations on various regimental functions and in case of any help sought, we provide all possible assistance. Our canteens and hospitals are open for them. There is a post of DIG (Welfare) at the Force HQs who can be contacted for any help and welfare needs for which a dedicated phone number has been assigned. Amenity vehicles are also available for our retired personnel. They have been issued with the special Identity Cards, when proceed on retirement. In our welfare schemes, we do cater for our retirees. A special welfare fund has been created in which Rs 50,000 in the case of certain life threatening diseases, Rs 25,000 for the marriage of their daughters (2 times), and in case of destruction of House due to natural calamity, Rs 50,000 for its reconstruction is given, as assistance. Disabled child of any retired personnel is given an assistance of Rs 50,000 every year to study at certain reputed educational institution.

DSA: In December 2019, ITBP launched matrimonial portal for unmarried, widowed troops within the services. What is the



Women officers in combat role stand equally with men in ITBP.

purpose behind this?

DG ITBP: Yes. We have many unmarried personnel in the force out of which 1,000 are women. We had decided to develop an in-house secured portal for our personnel to facilitate the unmarried personnel to facilitate the choice of their life partners within the ITBP itself. This is first of its kind portal in the CAPFs. We have received very positive feedback.

DSA: As Head of India's elite border guarding force, what is your vision for ITBP's future tasks and the ideas and thoughts you would like to share with the people of India and DSA readers around the world?

DG ITBP: ITBP is elite force because of its tough training and professionalism. As the chief of the force, I can assure you that ITBP will not leave any stone unturned to secure the Indo-China border. I know that the call is very tall but, I am confident on the professional competency of my force.

At present, ITBP has again risen to the occasion when it has established a quarantine facility in its Chhawla Camp since 01 February 2020, New Delhi for the Indian nationals returning from Whuhan after Coronavirus outbreak in China. We are always at the service of our citizens.

As the leader of the force, my endeavor will be to uphold the highest standards set by this force and regularly reminding and motivating my officers and men to realize their responsibility and the confidence the nation has reposed on them and live up to that expectation. The service conditions demand a fit soldier and it's our endeavor that all our personnel are physically fit, belly less, dedicated and highly professional as a mission of fittest, smartest and professionally capable Force 2020. Our vision is to maintain the Force as 'Fittest of the Fit' for which I lead by example by leading my men during my visits to the field formations. **DSA**