

# Vision for the Indian Army

## Interview with General V K Singh, Chief of Army Staff



**VAYU** : Congratulations on taking over as Chief of the Indian Army, regarded as the second largest in the world. Do you feel that size by itself embodies adequate deterrence, or else what are other military dimensions needed to deter India's adversaries in any future conflict? Your views, please.

**COAS**: Our National Security encompasses political stability, economic growth, societal development, environmental protection, diplomatic and military strength. Purely from the military point of view, deterrence entails maintaining strong and cohesive Armed Forces. The external threats facing India range from traditional land centric threats across disputed borders to sub-conventional threats, including its proxy war manifestations. Besides, there are other security concerns that arise from internal strife. To that extent I am confident that our Army is fully geared up and will undertake all challenges with utmost commitment and professionalism.

**VAYU**: In view of the continuing geopolitical situation which impacts on India's security (Pakistan's continuing support of terrorist activity, the Af-Pak imbroglio and ominous Chinese statements on Indian territories in the north and north-east), what are your priorities as the new Chief of Army Staff?

**COAS**: The fragile security environment in the subcontinent calls for the Indian Army to be prepared for challenges across the entire spectrum of conflict. It needs to be prepared to fight a conventional war, continue to guard borders, counter

proxy war, terrorism and hybrid threats. At the same time, we have to fulfil our UN Peace Keeping commitments, contribute to regional security, stability and undertake humanitarian assistance wherever called for.

Accordingly, I have laid down an all encompassing vision for the Indian Army which is to *"hone the Army into a well motivated, operationally prepared and well equipped force capable of meeting the security challenges faced by the Nation. Also initiate the transformation process to function in a networked joint services environment to leverage technology and the human resource capital in consonance with the rich values and traditions of the Indian Army"*.

I intend honing our core values, rich traditions and professionalism. This is one my main priorities.

Some areas of my focus would be to :

- \* Enhance operational preparedness.
- \* Consolidate and address hollowness and critical deficiencies.
- \* Modernise as per needs of the army.
- \* Train for all existing and emerging contingencies.
- \* Achieve greater synergy and enhance the level of integration with the two sister services in order to optimise our joint capability.
- \* Uphold the image of the Army, inculcate core values and ethos. Dignity of a soldier will be a priority area, besides providing a high quality of life and improvement of habitat, especially in the field areas.

**VAYU** : Exercise 'Yodha Shakti' was held in the desert areas to also validate new battle concepts. Would you please comment on their importance and impact on future conduct of operations?

**COAS** : Ex Yodha Shakti was a Corps level military exercise designed to rehearse rapid, synergised and integrated operations in a conventional scenario. Primary aim of this exercise was to remain operationally oriented for the spectrum of warfare and deliver a swift response to any arising contingency. The exercise further validated the lessons thrown up during earlier exercises.





The Tunguska anti-air weapon system: to engage low flying aircraft, helicopters and UAVs.

**VAYU** : The first batch of 155mm howitzers was acquired by the Army more than two decades back and there remains a vacuum for the 'balance' needed by the Regiment of Artillery. What is the status of acquiring the long-awaited 155mm howitzers of various calibres for the Army?

**COAS** : As part of the modernisation process of the Indian Artillery, the process of procurement of required variants of 155mm guns is underway. The procurement of 155mm calibre towed guns has progressed considerably and trials are likely to be held this summer. In order to upgrade/replace older gun systems, procurement of wheeled and tracked guns as also ultra light howitzers is also being pursued.

**VAYU** : The Army Aviation Corps performed commendably during the Kargil Operations in 1999, but still remains a rotary-winged force. Are there plans to expand this corps with fixed-wing aircraft for greater and more effective support to the land forces? HAL has just flown prototype of the Light Combat Helicopter (LCH). Is the Army to consider this type for meeting its attack helicopter requirements?

**COAS** : Army Aviation has embarked on a growth of its assets and capability to provide integral aviation support for full spectrum of operations of the Indian Army.

The envisaged growth of Army Aviation has been planned with the induction of the state of the art helicopters in all category viz reconnaissance and surveillance, utility and attack/armed helicopters to achieve capability to undertake all terrain, all weather day and night operations, thus, achieving full spectrum third dimensional capability. Advanced Light Helicopters (Weapon System Integrated) developed by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) will shortly be inducted into the Army Aviation fleet. We are looking at various means to enhance the capabilities of the Army Aviation to function more effectively in the tactical battle Area.

**VAYU** : Some military analysts have suggested that key field formations of the Army must have integral unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) under their command. Your views, please.

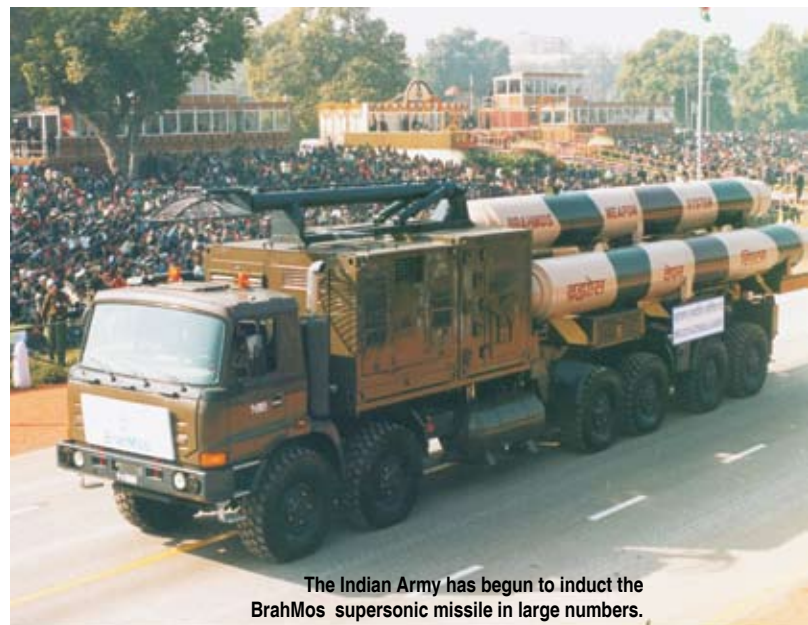
**COAS** : We have a comprehensive surveillance philosophy for the Army. For a tiered round the clock surveillance at various ranges, a mix of surveillance platforms are required. The UAV is one such platform, which has already been inducted into the Army and is being used on a regular basis for various surveillance tasks. These resources are already placed under command of field force commanders for their optimal utilisation.

**VAYU** : The uniform has always carried certain ethos and a definite sense of honour which translates itself into selfless service and spirit of sacrifice. Do you believe these attributes of those in uniform have been on the decline of late?

**COAS** : Military ethos, honour selfless service and spirit of sacrifice are prevalent in our Army. Indian Army has a glorious tradition, wherein soldiers and officers have upheld the dignity and sanctity of the uniform and have acquitted themselves in a commendable manner both in war and peace, despite grave personal danger. Armed forces personnel have also not hesitated in making supreme sacrifices in the line of duty. The same is evident even today from the number of heroic deeds by our valiant personnel. There has been no let up in the quality of men and women of the Army, who don the uniform today. The nation is proud of such brave soldiers, who have willingly sacrificed their today for the nation's tomorrow.

**VAYU** : Tradition is vital in maintaining esprit de corps, especially in infantry regiments whose origins go back many centuries. However, when the Mechanised Infantry Regiment was raised, some of the Army's finest battalions were incorporated in this new entity. Can this decision be reviewed in that the old battalions be reverted to their original Regiments and their place (in the Mech Regiment) assumed by newer battalions from the same Regiment?

**COAS** : I agree that tradition is vital in maintaining esprit de corps, but it is only one of the factors in a unit's operational effectiveness. The old Inf Bns that converted to Mech Inf, have over the few decades, built up a tremendous repository of fresh ideas and customs that they are equally proud of. They do maintain their linkages with their parent Infantry Regiments and even those traditions have in no way been diluted. These traditions and values have been the foundation for the Mechanised Infantry Regiment, which has imbibed these into its ethos. Reversion has to be viewed in larger context of organisational effectiveness. At the moment it will be a retrograde step if we reverse the earlier decision.



The Indian Army has begun to induct the BrahMos supersonic missile in large numbers.

**IAI Lahav**

**VAYU** : *'Woman power' is a fashionable phrase these days! Just as there is some demand for opening up the fighter pilot cadre to women in the IAF, is the matter of inducting women officers into combat arms under consideration by the Army?*

**COAS** : The employment in our Army is an evolutionary process. Employment of women officers is being carried out in a systematic manner and presently they are inducted in services like the ASC, EME, AOC, Int Corps, Corps of Engrs, Air Def, AEC and JAG. You will agree with me that induction of women in Armed Forces has to be guided and motivated solely by service requirements. Therefore, women officers at present are not being considered for combat role. This is also a trend the world over.

**VAYU** : *Defending the country against aggression is the main responsibility of the Army along with the Navy and the Air Force. However, the land forces are, if required, to fight anti-national elements and support para military forces in such internal security tasks. The Army has been performing such duties in the north – eastern region for decades. If directed to, would the Army stem the tide of erosion of civil authority in the Maoist-Naxal dominated areas of the country?*

**COAS** : Indian Armed Forces are the primary instrument at the disposal of the Indian Government, for defending its territory against any external aggression. When mandated, the armed forces also help in securing an internal environment, including tackling of insurgencies. We are assisting the State Police Forces and the CRPF to build their capabilities to fight the Naxals by providing training and advise. Overcoming such situations takes time and effort, which needs to be kept in mind before we commit the armed forces in situations of internal strife.



The BMP-II armoured personnel carrier.



T-72s lined up before a parade.



Army Aviation Dhruv ALH.