



# Don't tinker with time-tested combat systems



**LT GEN SR GHOSH (RETD)**  
FORMER GOC-IN-C, WESTERN COMMAND

OVER 12 years after the then Vice Chief of the Army fired the first salvo, the present Army Chief carried out 'carpet-bombing' last month when he spoke his mind on the problems of inducting women into combat. In 2006, the Vice Chief had remarked that the comfort levels with women officers in the Army were low and that we could do without them. Right or wrong, he was pressured into making a public apology. Gen Bipin Rawat, in a recent interview to a news channel, reopened the debate when he stated that women in combat areas would have to be kept cocooned from prying eyes and that the Army could not have Commanding Officers of operational units getting pregnant and proceeding on long maternity leave.

The Army Chief's views may not have been couched in diplomatese, but there definitely was merit in what he implied. Unfortunately, this has reignited an avoidable debate with indignant protests from women's rights activists, IPS officers and even some military veterans. The arguments given by most of these people are based on superficial knowledge or experience of our combat arms and of warfare. Their reactions are based more on social issues of equal rights and feminism rather than on pragmatism, ranging from an absurd compar-

ison with Jhansi ki Rani who "could even fight with her adopted son strapped to her back", to the modern era where women succeeded in becoming airline pilots, Everest summiteers and champions in boxing and wrestling. One veteran commentator even suggested that the Army should induct women into combat roles quickly before the judiciary forced it to do so.

At the outset, it must be clarified that the capability of women in any field, be it politics, banking, civil services, business or sports, to name a few, has never been doubted. In the military, women doctors and nurses have served with distinction since time immemorial. Since 1992, women have also been commissioned into other branches of the Armed Forces, even though issues of their management and logistics keep cropping up from time to time. In 2015, the Indian Air Force inducted the first women as fighter pilots, while the Navy will probably soon allow them to be deployed on battleships.

The fresh debate has unfortunately missed the woods for the trees. The central focus here is the ability of women to cope with the difficulties of frontline infantry combat rather than it being a gender issue. Before the uninitiated start glamorising warfare, they must understand the harsh realities of being in actual combat, which is a far cry from the soft operating environments of other jobs.

Combat means violence of the extreme kind where men are required to kill others at the cost of getting killed or wounded themselves. Combat means large-scale destruction and death all around from repeated barrages of artillery rockets, missiles and shells. The horrors and violence of combat are too many and can neither be sufficiently explained to nor understood by armchair specialists.

Let alone women, even many men find



**TOUGH JOB:** Let alone women, even many men find it difficult to cope with the rigours that a combat soldier has to face.

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it difficult to cope with the rigours that a combat soldier has to face. The physical and physiological capabilities of a woman to handle the difficulties and hazards that infantry soldiers encounter during operations and when involved in physical combat with an enemy, terrorist or insurgent have, therefore, to be understood in the correct perspective and not seen as a gender equality issue. The dangers and horrors of women officers being taken prisoner by the enemy and being violated, tortured and mutilated are too real to be brushed aside. Are we as a society prepared to see young girls, wives and mothers coming home in coffins or to live with their faces and bodies disfigured from gunshot wounds or with amputated arms and legs?

The Army would only get increasingly embroiled in conducting courts of inquiry and court martials in cases where privacy and authority of female officers were allegedly encroached upon, at the cost of carrying out critical opera-

tions against terrorists and insurgents.

In the overall context, is there really a compelling necessity to induct women into infantry or armoured units? Is the nation so short of physically and mentally fit male volunteers for combat units? The Army is in the serious business of protecting our borders and citizens from our enemies and violent terrorists. Warfare and combat are, therefore, best conducted by trained, hardy men led by tough commanders who live together, train together and fight together, at times to their last breath. This has nothing to do with gender bias or masculinity.

In case there really is such a strong demand of women wanting to be involved in some sort of physical combat, let us first use the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) such as the BSF, CRPF and ITBP as a test bed. The pan-India strength of women police personnel is just above seven per cent, whereas the share of women in the CAPF is an abysmal three per cent or less. Only a

minuscule percentage of these are women officers. In fact, the BSF inducted its first direct-entry woman officer only in 2017, while the CRPF did so just a year before that. It would also be of interest to check how many IPS officers, male or female, are manning posts in CAPF battalions located in any operational area. The answer is probably zero.

Let us use this opportunity to blood our women IPS officers as company and battalion commanders in the BSF, ITBP and CRPF, where they will be able to lead troops in hostile operational areas, including anti-terrorist and insurgency operations.

Considering that the IPS cadre is short of about 1,000 officers, the government must seriously consider lateral induction of trained and experienced short-service women Army officers into the IPS. This will not only result in huge budgetary savings on induction and training, but also go a long way in filling critical vacancies in state police cadres.

Let not the focus of our military commanders be distracted from their primary job of destroying inimical forces from across the border. Let us also not tinker with the Army's tried-and-tested combat systems or organisations at such critical times. Women officers are already posted in the Army's combat and combat support arms such as the Engineers, Army Air Defence, Corps of Signals and Intelligence Corps. Add to these the fresh opportunities in language skills and military police now being offered by the Army Chief. These will provide more than sufficient avenues for women to showcase their organisational, intellectual and analytical skills in the Army without having to get into physical contact with an unpredictable enemy.

# BJP searching desperately for new allies



**SUNIL GATADE**  
SENIOR JOURNALIST

Months before the Lok Sabha elections, the BJP is looking weak and exasperated, while its allies, which were ignored, humiliated or harassed, are now fighting back with a vengeance as they know that their worth has suddenly grown. It is time for them to demand their pound of flesh.

HEAD of the fast-approaching Lok Sabha elections, the BJP-led NDA is in the news for the wrong reasons, with doubts being cast upon a second term for Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The fog-end of 2018 delivered a body blow to the BJP in the form of loss of power in the key states of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan.

The shock defeat has set in motion its own dynamics. The ruling alliance is showing never-before cracks in dealing with key issues arising out of 'non-communication' between the 'strong leader' and the allies, which were left in a 'take it or leave it' situation till not long ago.

The problem with the BJP is that it has repeatedly believed in its own slogans and come to grief because of that. Before the 2004 Lok Sabha polls, when Atal Bihari Vajpayee was at the helm, the then ruling party sincerely believed in 'India Shining'. Sonia Gandhi pricked the bubble easily by playing the alliance card deftly.

Now, Modi's pet project of 'Congress-mukt Bharat' has not only boomeranged, but also given rise to a resurgent Congress, whose leader Rahul Gandhi is making all the right noises.

Paradoxically, the NDA's woes appear to be never-ending. What can one say about the health of a coalition in which the second largest constituent (Shiv Sena) insists that it is not bothered about whether the tie-up happens or not unless issues close to its heart, such as the construction of the Ram temple and a fair deal to



**ALL'S NOT WELL:** Modi and Shah have their hands full in the election year.

farmers, are addressed well in time? Some of its allies in Bihar have cautioned the leadership that it should stick to the path of development, as laid down by the alliance, and refrain from taking up any other issue which is not on its agenda, a clear reference to the vexed Ayodhya matter.

Modi and BJP chief Amit Shah, the two-man army that overran many 'enemy territories' in the past five years, is suddenly finding itself running out of steam. The irony is that having tom-tommed itself as the world's largest political party till some time ago, the BJP is desperately searching for allies.

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time for them to demand their pound of flesh. How else can one interpret the letter from young Lok Janshakti Party leader Chirag Paswan to Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, wondering why he is not listing out the 'benefits' of demonetisation for the allies to tell the people ahead of the Lok Sabha elections? No one in the ruling dispensation could have dared such a veiled dig at the PM.

In the changed scenario, Modi and Shah are projecting that 'people are most precious' as they seek to keep the flock together. Earlier, the view appeared to be that the allies are like the 'extras' of Bollywood who are needed to be around like showpieces so that the 'hero' is depicted in a brighter light and runs the show singlehandedly.

"Modi is a people's leader, dynamic, dedicated and determined, who

reflects the aspirations and hopes of over a billion Indians" was the projection, signalling that others play second fiddle, remain low profile, be content with what is offered and remain in the silent mode.

All that is changing painfully for the BJP as it is attempting to grapple with the challenges brought in by the 'tsunami' of defeat in the recent Assembly polls.

The BJP, which secured 22 Lok Sabha seats in Bihar in 2014, has finalised seat-sharing in the state, agreeing to contest just 17 seats while leaving an equal number for Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's JD-U. The development makes it crystal clear that Modi and Shah are bending over backwards in the wake of the resurgent 'mahagathabandhan' of the RJD-Congress-RLSP and other parties. The recent bypoll verdict in adjacent Jharkhand, where the Congress won convincingly, is a wake-up call for the ruling BJP, which lost two byelections earlier in the year.

Maharashtra, the second most important state after Uttar Pradesh with 48 Lok Sabha seats, would remain the test case on the flexibility or otherwise of the beleaguered BJP.

The growing bargaining power of the allies has emboldened the Shiv Sena, which is seeking to extract the maximum from the BJP. Perceived as the 'most wronged' party in the alliance, the Shiv Sena is having a field day in attacking, targeting and humiliating the BJP and its top leader. In fact, Modi is the favourite punching bag of the Sena, which in recent times has

praised Rahul Gandhi in a manner not done by even most of the allies of the grand old party. Recently, Uddhav Thackeray used Rahul's pet phrase of 'chowkidar chor hai' to target the Prime Minister.

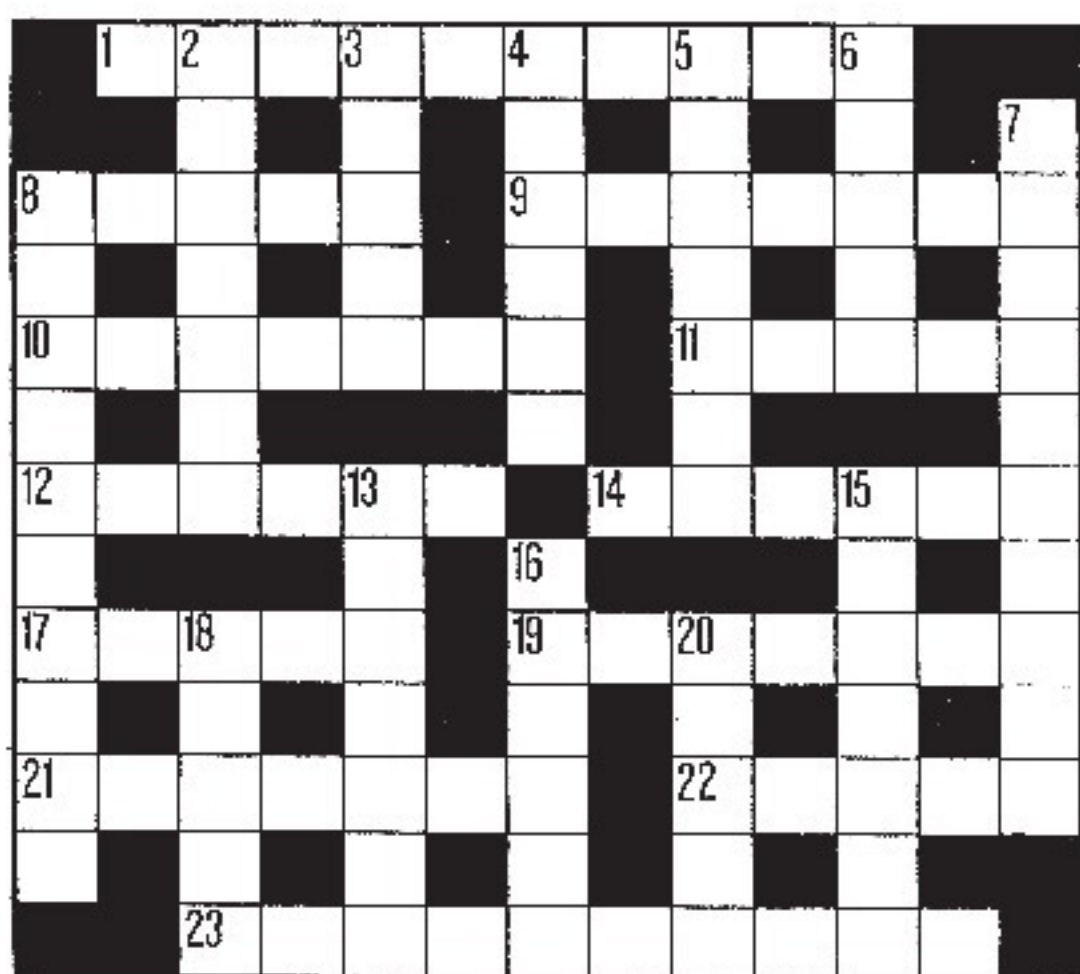
The Shiromani Akali Dal, another old ally of the BJP, made it plain by telling the ruling party that it is time it was 'generous' with the Sena and built the rainbow coalition of parties which were part of the Vajpayee-led NDA. "Bring the present, former as also estranged allies together on a war footing. Give the much-needed new deal to the farmer and work for the betterment of the youth", goes the prescription as time is running out fast.

After parting of ways with TDP's Chandrababu Naidu, the BJP has become virtually non-existent in South India, barring pockets of influence in Karnataka. Biju Janata Dal-led Odisha and Mamata Banerjee-controlled West Bengal are being seen as the new greener pastures for the saffron party, which is facing resistance in parts of the Hindi heartland due to the Congress comeback.

With the Bahujan Samaj Party and Samajwadi Party set for an alliance in UP, it has dawned on the powers that be that only help from allies could ensure a second term for Modi. But the fact is that the alliance issue is turning out to be a hard nut to crack as regional parties realise that 2019 is a different cup of tea than 2014.

The BJP's desperation to find new allies shows that Modi magic alone won't work in the Lok Sabha polls.

## QUICK CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- Arbitrary (4-6)
  - To lead to a place (5)
  - Female singing voice (7)
  - Excess (7)
  - Killed (5)
  - Bear witness (6)
  - Narrow passage of water (6)
  - Exclude (5)
  - Hermit (7)
  - Jumpy (7)
  - Rowdy fight (5)
  - Inveterate (4-6)
- DOWN**
- Receive as legacy (7)
  - Multitude (5)
  - Realisable possessions (6)
  - Down payment (7)
  - Stage play (5)
  - Generally shabby (4,2,4)
  - Honest (10)
  - Dickensian miser (7)
  - Praise excessively (7)
  - Decisive moment (6)
  - Uninterested (5)
  - Venomous snake (5)

**YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION**  
**Across:** 1 Misuse, 4 Mascot, 9 Zambezi, 10 Exult, 11 Rapid, 12 In depth, 13 Storyteller, 18 Expiate, 20 Voter, 22 Loose, 23 Kibbutz, 24 Minute, 25 Heated.  
**Down:** 1 Mozart, 2 Sum up, 3 Slender, 5 Ahead, 6 Crumple, 7 Tetchy, 8 Pie in the sky, 14 Typhoon, 15 Lovable, 16 Vellum, 17 Prized, 19 Adept, 21 Taunt.

## SU DO KU

5		9			6
	4		2		8
	3	1			
			5	4	1
4					2
	5	8	1		
			7	2	
	9	3		8	
7			8		9

V. HARD

## CALENDAR

**JANUARY 2, 2019 WEDNESDAY**

- Vikrami Samvat 2075
- Shaka Samvat 1940
- Posh Shaka 12
- Posh Parvishte 18
- Hijari 1440
- Krishan Paksh Tithi 12, up to 2.11 am
- Shool Yoga up to 2.03 am
- Vishakha Nakshatra up to 9.39 am
- Moon in Scorpio sign

## YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

4	7	6	9	2	3	8	5	1
9	2	8	1	5	7	4	6	3
5	3	1	4	6	8	7	2	9
8	1	9	2	3	4	5	7	6
2	6	4	7	1	5	3	9	8
7	5	3	6	8	9	1	4	2
1	8	2	5	7	6	9	3	4
3	4	7	8	9	2	6	1	5
6	9	5	3	4	1	2	8	7

## FORECAST

**SUNSET: WEDNESDAY 17:32 HRS**  
**SUNRISE: THURSDAY 07:20 HRS**

Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Cloudy	Rainy	Foggy
<b>CITY</b>	<b>MAX</b>	<b>MIN</b>		
Chandigarh	18	05		
New Delhi	23	06		
<b>PUNJAB</b>				
Amritsar	18	05		
Bathinda	20	06		
Jalandhar	18	05		
Ludhiana	18	05		
<b>HARYANA</b>				
Bhiwani	21	06		
Hisar	21	04		
Sirsa	21	06		
<b>HIMACHAL PRADESH</b>				
Dharamsala	14	05		
Manali	11	-02		
Shimla	12	01		
<b>JAMMU &amp; KASHMIR</b>				
Jammu	17	07		
Leh	03	-12		
Srinagar	02	-01		
<b>UTTARAKHAND</b>				
Dehradun	21	06		
Mussoorie	18	05		

TEMPERATURE IN °C