

THE BULLETIN

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AFINDEX 2023: Second Africa-India Joint Military Exercise

By Brig Hemant Mahajan, YSM

Author is M Sc, M Phil in Defence Studies. He joined IMA Dehradun in July 1973 and passed out as a Commissioned Officer on 15 June 1975. He commanded his battalion 7 MARATHA LIGHT INFANTRY in Operation Rakshak in the most difficult areas of Poonch and Rajouri.

The second Africa-India joint military exercise from 21-29 March is a key element to India's diplomatic ties with African countries. 24 African militaries were represented by their contingents or teams of observers. The inaugural event of the second edition of the Africa-India Field Training Exercise (AFINDEX 2023) began at the Foreign Training Node of the Indian Army located at the Aundh Military Station in Pune on March 21. The tenday exercise focused on Humanitarian Mine Assistance and United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKF). The multinational military drill will promote the idea of Africa-India Militaries for Regional Unity (AMRUT) and will focus on incorporating the current dynamics of UNPKF through comprehensive discussions and tactical exercises.

The collective effort will also focus on achieving the desired interoperability and cohesive operational ability of the troops from all participating nations.

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (Sanskrit: वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्) or "The World Is One Family" or all living beings on the earth are a family has been the favourite theme of Prime Minster Shri Narendra Modi all along. The theme and the logo for India's G20 Presidency are "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" or "One Earth-One Future". The Bhagvad Gita, calls the Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam the "Loftiest Vedantic Thought." This is what is expected to be achieved through the Second Africa-India joint military exercise.

India-Africa Army Chiefs Conclave on March 28 And 29 Pune will also host the strategically significant India-Africa Army Chiefs Conclave, on March 28 and 29. The conclave will include talks by renowned speakers on the IndiaAfrica Defense partnership, the Indian defence industry's potential and contribution towards regional security.

India has been one of the biggest contributors of troops to UN Peacekeeping Operations all over the world and the country's Army is considered to be among the expert agencies in the world in mine removal operations.

Some war-torn countries in Africa face the problem of landmines and Unexploded Ordnance, often referred to as UXO. The joint exercise with India will benefit the participating countries greatly. The exercise is also being looked at as a key element of India's diplomatic ties with African countries.

War-torn countries in Africa facing the problem of landmines and Unexploded Ordnance.

Humanitarian Mine Action (HMA) missions are carried out to address the problem of landmines and Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) in war-torn countries in Africa. These missions involve the clearance of explosive remnants of war (ERW) and the provision of education and awareness programs to reduce the risk of accidents and injuries.

To carry out HMA missions more effectively, the following steps need to be taken:

- Conducting Needs Assessments: The first step in HMA missions is to conduct needs assessments to determine the extent of the problem and the areas that require clearance.
- Developing a Comprehensive Strategy: Based on the needs assessment, a comprehensive strategy will be developed, which includes a prioritization of areas for clearance and the selection of appropriate clearance methods and techniques.
- Conducting Clearance Operations: Clearance operations will be conducted using appropriate methods and techniques, such as manual or mechanical demining, depending on the specific conditions on the ground.
- Education and Awareness Programs: Education and awareness programs will be provided to local communities to reduce the risk of accidents and injuries. This includes educating people about the dangers of ERW, how to identify and report ERW, and how to stay safe in areas affected by landmines and UXO.
- Ensuring Quality Assurance: Clearance operations should be subject to quality assurance measures to ensure that they are carried out safely and effectively.
- Developing Partnerships: HMA missions require partnerships with local communities, governments, and other stakeholders to ensure that the clearance of landmines and UXO is sustainable and effective.
- Monitoring and Evaluation: HMA missions should be subject to monitoring and evaluation to measure their effectiveness and identify areas for improvement.

HMA missions require a comprehensive and coordinated approach that involves needs assessments, strategy development, clearance operations, education and awareness programs, quality assurance, partnerships, and monitoring and evaluation.

Narcotics terrorism a significant challenge

Narcotics terrorism is a significant challenge that Africa faces, particularly in the West and Central African regions. This phenomenon involves the convergence of drug trafficking with terrorist activities, where terrorist organizations are involved in the production, transit, and distribution of illicit drugs to fund their operations.

Read complete article on website organiser.org

Xi Has Set Tone For Third Term, With A Message For US, And For India

By Srikanth Kondapalli

Author is Dean of School of International Studies and Professor in Chinese studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University.

Apart from the expected third term for President Xi Jinping and the installation of his protégé Li Qiang as Premier of the State Council, the ongoing 'two sessions' signals an intensification of China's "decoupling" process with the United States, the strengthening of the Communist Party's domination of the State, especially its finance and S&T establishments, and a boost to China's armed forces with a rising defence allocation despite a slowing economy.

China began its annual 'two sessions' on March 4 with its advisory body, the Chinese People's

Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), and parliament, the National People's Congress (NPC) meeting at Beijing. This is the first full-fledged session of these two bodies after Covid lockdowns were lifted in December. The previous sessions were truncated due to the Covid restrictions since its outbreak three years ago.

At the 2018 session of the NPC, following the 19th Communist Party Congress the previous year, the two-term limit was lifted to pave the way for Xi to stay on for another term at the current session. Deng Xiaoping had suggested and implemented two-term limits so as to promote youngsters in the party as well as curb excesses as witnessed during the Gang of Four rule in the 1970s. Xi has thus jettisoned Deng's reform.

Also, soon after the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, the Communist Party vowed to strengthen its control over all walks of life in China. As a result, the Company Law of 1993 ordered all companies – both domestic and foreign – to allow Communist Party cells to operate within them. As the "leading" organ of the party-state, the Communist Party gradually began not only to penetrate the enterprises but also into various State organs.

With the intensification of reforms and China becoming the second largest economy, mainly reflected by its burgeoning exports, Xi began sensing that the party's influence over tech companies was decreasing. Alibaba chief Jack Ma's October 2020 criticism of the country's banking system deepened Xi's suspicion of his political faction's diminishing control over the society and economy.

Thus, to strengthen the party's control, on March 8, the State Council released an "institutional reform plan" of various ministries, bureaus and commissions and in "science and technology, financial supervision, data management, rural revitalisation, intellectual property rights, and elderly care."

Such reforms have been implemented before. One of the major reforms was the one instituted by then-Premier Zhu Rongji in the late 1990s, which slashed several bureaucratic structures. However, the aim of that structural reform was to strengthen the market economy and enhance productivity. The 2018 reform mainly aimed at slashing the bureaucracy.

However, the March 8 reform measure is to reinstate and expand Xi's factional leaders in the bureaucracy and remove Communist Youth League and other factions. Previously, Xi began the "comprehensively deepening reforms" committees, but their effectiveness for his political control remained doubtful.

Among the current measures, apart from slashing about 5 per cent of the bureaucracy, two new commissions would be proposed for finance and science and technology sectors, as these are seen as growth sectors, but also as crucial for the future economic growth of China. The stakes for political control of these two rising sectors is obvious, given the increasing geopolitical differences with the United States and as a domestic balancing measure.

On the military (PLA) front, the outgoing Premier announced an increase of 7.2 per cent in defence allocations for 2023, over and above the national economic growth target "of around 5 per cent". Last year, China failed to reach the set target of 5.5 per cent GDP growth (it hit less than 3 per cent) but the growth in defence budget continued at 7.1 per cent. The increase in allocations is said to strengthen the move to build the PLA into a "world-class military" and strengthen its ability to regain "lost territories."

Read complete article on website deccanherald.com

Punjab In Turmoil

By Lt Gen V A Bhat

Gen Bhat served as the Director-General of Quality Assurance (DGQA) at the Department of Defence Production (Ministry of Defence) affairs.

Avid news watchers were dumbfounded or shocked on 22/23 February to see hundreds of Sikh Youths armed with swords and other weapons broke the police barricade in Ajnala and enter the Police Station and held the personnel in the PS in captivity. It may have brought back images of the Punjab during its day of militancy for about a decade from (1980-1992). Their main demand was the release of an individual named Love Preet Singh alias Toofan. The leader of these pro Khalistan supporters was one Amritpal Singh who had recently returned from Dubai and proclaimed himself the head of an organisation called WARIS PUNJAB DE meaning heirs of Punjab.

This organisation was a creation of Deep Singh Sidhu. Deep Sidhu founded this outfit in 2021 as a social organisation just before the elections in Punjab in 2022. The aim of this social organisation was to raise its voice when there was an attack on the Culture, language and rights of Punjab. Deep Sidhu was active in the Farmers movement against the newly implemented Farm Laws (now withdrawn). Deep Sidhu achieved instant recognition when he tried to cross the Punjab Haryana border to reach out to the agitating farmers for giving aid/ help to them. He was not allowed to come into Haryana and a video of him asking the Haryana police went viral. It was during this agitation that Amritpal Singh also came back to India from Dubai and lent his support to the dharna and siege of the border by many farmers. Amritpal Singh returned to Dubai when the Government repealed the Farm Laws and the hartal was called off. Though Deep Sidhu said his aim was to stay away from politics and not to support any Political Party, he announced his support to the Political Party founded by Simranjit Singh Mann and actively campaigned for this party. Deep Sidhu was murdered as his security cover was withdrawn immediately AAP won the election in a spectacular fashion.

This incident put the newly formed AAP party government on its back foot as it was widely seen to be soft on the hardliners in Punjab. There were violent clashes between the Pro Khalistan supporters and so-called right-wing Hindus. A young man was killed by Nihang Sikhs in Amritsar for chewing tobacco and being drunk in the vicinity of the Golden Temple. The hard liners used social media effectively to keep the Khalistan issue alive in the minds of the disgruntled elements of the Sikh citizens namely the Sacrilege of the holy Guru Granth Sahib in 2015.

Smuggling of drugs into Punjab has been a big factor in the recent years and a lot of youth have taken to drugs and may have ruined their life. Amritpal Singh took up this menace and called it a conspiracy to eliminate or make Sikhs slaves. The AAP government which took office in 2022 had high promises of change and break from the old party cultures (Akali and Congress party) which have been in power for decades in Punjab. The high promises made raised the people's expectations, which have been very difficult to meet leading to resentment. In fact, Mr Simranjit Singh Mann, a radical, won the Lok Sabha seat vacated by Bhagwant Singh Mann within a few months of the spectacular AAP victory. The so-called Hindu Rastra narrative has had a negative effect. Amritpal Singh is on record to say that "if Hindu Rashtra ki baat chalegi toh Khalistan ki baat kyon Nahin?"

Punjab, a sensitive border State is facing stagnant agriculture, drugs menace, very less employment opportunities and so is a recipe which can be used to ferment trouble by Sikhs like Amritpal Singh. To add fuel to the fire is the support received from Sikhs who have immigrated and become citizens of countries like Canada, UK, USA, Australia. For the ever-ready ISI of Pakistan this is an opportunity not to be missed. The present situation in Punjab is very precarious and needs to be handled with an iron hand in a velvet glove. The buckling of the Police at Ajnala was a sorry spectacle but the mob moved behind the Guru Granth Sahib, effectively tying the hands of the Police behind their backs. Both the Central Government and Punjab AAP government which are at loggerheads with each other constantly, need to tackle this extremely volatile situation with maturity and total cooperation with each other. There were calls for the centre to intervene but fortunately this was not done.

Amritpal Singh has been on the radar of the central agencies ever since he returned from Dubai where he was working and started voicing his opinion and making efforts to help the farmers who were agitating against the newly introduced Farm Laws.

Maybe the new AAP government of Punjab took the threat of the radicals lightly. But the storming of the Police station by Amritpal Singh forced the AAP government to seriously ensure that such incidents do not reoccur. The opposition was making all out efforts to put the AAP government on its back foot, stating the law-and-order situation had deteriorated.

Amritpal Singh, encouraged by the events as they unfolded, announced a Vaheer across the Punjab States. Vaheer is an old tradition of Sikhism, as part of which Dharam Prachar is done in the sacred presence of Maharaj (Guru Granth Sahib). The vaheer will stop at various places where hymns will be sung and stories will be told from lives of the Gurus. Intelligence Agencies who were now monitoring the activities of Amritpal Singh gathered disturbing info. Rehabilitation Centres opened by Amritpal Singh for treatment of Drug addicted Punjab youth were being utilised for storing Arms, Ammunition and funds being received from various dubious sources. Amritpal Singh was raising a private Army called Anand Khalistan Force (AKF). Youth being recruited in AKF were being trained for use of Arms and how to handle sophisticated weapons. In the light of these serious reports the Home Ministry called a conference of all stakeholders, and a decision was taken to arrest Amritpal Singh before the Vaheer commenced.

As decided in the conference in Delhi the Punjab Police launched an operation to apprehend Amritpal Singh and his key aides on 18 March 2023. Internet was shut down in some parts of Punjab as a part of the crackdown. During this raid Amritpal Singh managed to slip out the dragnet, but his key aides were caught. Social media accounts of Punjab-based journalists, intellectuals and others seen to be sympathetic to this cause were blocked. A week later, these accounts remain suspended, and the net has been widened. Not only residents of Punjab but the social media platforms of lawmakers, journalists and news organisations based in Canada – where the Sikh diaspora is influential – have also been targeted over the past week. Lawyers representing Amritpal Singh approached Punjab High Court fearing that he was eliminated by the police. As he remains untraced, with Media reporting how he managed to escape and where he has been last seen. As per reports he reached a house of a Jullundur Priest and changed his clothes. This gentleman also told the Police he was unaware of the crackdown carried out by the police against this outfit headed by Amritpal Singh. On the morning of March 24, a Mansa-based woman named Harsharan Kaur's house was raided by the police. She was questioned by the police. After this crackdown a large number of Sikh organisations from abroad namely USA, UK, Canada created ruckus in front of Indian Embassies/ High Commission. Five top aides of Amritpal Singh who were arrested were flown to Assam in Eastern India and held in Captivity there. This move to Assam has been challenged in the Punjab High Court by the relatives of the persons taken to Assam. NSA has been slapped on these individuals. The five persons who have been booked by the Punjab Police are Gurmeet Singh Bukkanwala, Basant Singh, Bhagwant Singh alias Pardhan Mantri Bajeke, Daljit Singh Kalsi, and Harjit Singh. Slapping of the NSA means there is little chance of them getting bail. The period of preventive detention without charge under the NSA is 12 months, which can be extended if the government gathers fresh evidence.

There is relative calm in the State of Punjab as of now. Some actions by the supporters of Amritpal Singh have not gone down well with the common citizens of Punjab, namely making use of the Guru Granth Sahib as a protective shield in the Ajnala Police station storming, throwing of chairs meant to seat elders in a Gurudwara in Jallandhar. The state, which witnessed Militancy for a decade in the Eighties is now not at all prepared to undergo another similar situation. Nepal has also put Amritpal Singh under Surveillance after a request was made by India. It is possible he is hiding in Nepal and if he tries to flee then he will be arrested and brought to India.

The stage is now set for the Centre and AAP government in Punjab to really work hand in glove and fight the pitched battles and ensure their conviction in the Courts of Law. It will be a long road ahead and will require all the stakeholders to be extremely vigilant and take proper action against any miscreants who may pop up to upset the action taken against these individuals. Best Legal teams must be put together for arguments in the court.

The economic crisis in Nepal: Is it going to be the next Sri Lanka?

By Hari Bansh Jha

The Author is a former professor of economics at Nepal's Tribhuvan University. His areas of interest include, Nepal-China-India strategic affairs, border issues, conflict and peace, international migration, child labour, human trafficking, among others. He is a visiting fellow at ORF

For quite some time, the economy of Nepal is taking a downward turn. The previous government under Nepali Congress leader Sher Bahadur Deuba and the present government under Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' adopted certain measures to revitalise the economy. Despite that, the economic condition of the country continues to deteriorate. The government is receiving revenue that is hardly enough to meet the recurrent expenditures. Heavy loans with certain conditionalities could put Nepal in a debt trap. Fear is also looming large that Nepal could be greylisted by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), a global anti-money laundering watchdog, that could further negatively impact the growth of the country.

People's livelihood is largely affected due to inflation, which is 8 percent on-year basis. The government has zero control over inflation as the country is import-dependent. Due to the increase in prices in the international market, Nepal is forced to procure goods, including fuels, chemical fertilisers, food, etc. at a higher price. While the prices of goods, land, and shares are increasing at an exponential rate, there is no growth as such in the agricultural, industrial or even service sectors.

Of the 30 million population in Nepal, nearly 1,500 youth are leaving the country each day for jobs in overseas countries.

Because of the lack of meaningful job creation in the country, larger sections of the working population are forced to leave the country for jobs in foreign countries. Of the 30 million population in Nepal, nearly 1,500 youth are leaving the country each day for jobs in overseas countries.

There is no data about the youth leaving Nepal for jobs in the Indian market, but estimates are that some 8 million Nepalese live and work in India. It is not only the educated people but also the semi-skilled and unskilled people who leave the country. Of all these categories of labour migrants, the share of unskilled labour is 74.5 percent.

Nepal is one of the few countries in the world that supplies larger sections of its population to foreign countries for employment. By doing so, Nepal receives as much as US\$8 billion in the form of remittances which is almost one-fourth of the country's total Gross Domestic Production (GDP). But then it is largely consumed by the expenses of education, health, recreation, and tourism. There is not much use of remittance in the productive sector.

In the recent years, Nepal is also hardest hit by the liquidity crisis. To raise liquidity, the banks raised the interest rate on the deposits to as much as 12 percent. So, the lending rate by the banks shot up to 14 percent or even more. But then neither the bank deposits could grow adequately nor was there any investment growth. Considering the inflation of 8 percent, people are not so much interested in making deposits as they are getting merely 3 to 4 percent interest in real terms.

The expectation was that things would return to normal after three levels of elections in the country i.e., the local elections in May 2022 and the provincial and federal elections in November 2022. But unfortunately, the liquidity crisis continued. There is a slowdown in construction-related activities in the country, which has led to a decline in the demand for cement, steel, and other goods.

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The debt-to-GDP ratio increased from about 38 percent in 2017 to 42 percent in 2022, but there was no such increase in capital formation. Nepal's foreign exchange reserve of US\$9 billion is not enough to meet the imports for more than six months. Given this crisis, Nepal had to restrict the imports of luxury items like gold, cars, and cosmetic items for quite some time. The country's export-to-import ratio that was 50 percent in 1999 fell down perceptibly to 8 percent in 2019.

To add to Nepal's woes, the Asia-Pacific regional watchdog of FATF recently visited Kathmandu to assess how Nepal addresses issues related to money laundering and terror financing. The watchdog is likely to produce its report in February. Speculations are high that it could put Nepal on the greylist considering the deficiencies in its legislation enforcement of laws regarding money laundering and terror financing. Nepal was likely to be blacklisted in 2012 after it was grey listed in 2008, but somehow it was protected on account of diplomatic efforts. If Nepal is greylisted this time, it might seriously affect the economy of the country as it is overdependent on foreign aid, remittances, and imports. Grey listing of Pakistan between 2008 and 2019 resulted in cumulative losses of GDP to the extent of 38 billion affecting consumption, exports, and foreign direct investment.

It is also feared that the recently built Pokhara International Airport which was constructed with financial support from China's EXIM Bank could prove a white elephant, similar to that of Hambantota of Sri Lanka which was also built by China. The Nepalese rejected China when it claimed this airport as a BRI project. Work on this airport had started several years before Nepal signed an agreement with the EXIM Bank for this project in 2016. Since the airport was not designed to attract much traffic, chances are high for Nepal to incur huge economic losses due to this project. What if Nepal fails to repay the loan for this project? In that case, can it prove to be the Hambantota of Nepal?

It is, indeed, worrying that most of the sectors in the Nepalese economy are declining and the nation is almost forced to get more loans with conditionalities. Chances are high that certain leaders in command of the country could take loans without caring about how to repay. In such a case, the country could fall into a debt trap like Sri Lanka and would have to compromise its sovereignty. So, before the situation goes out of control, those in power must take urgent pragmatic measures to revamp the ailing economy by accepting only grants in the place of loans, discouraging any attempt at money laundering and terror financing if it exists and boosting up production and productivity for exports in its bid to resolve the present economic crisis.

The Indian Way For A Secure Earth

By Pradeep S Mehta and Purushendra Singh

The authors work for CUTS International, a 40 year old global public policy research and advocacy group which includes six overseas Centres, including in the US.

Synopsis

Hopefully, India would be forming many headlines around the globe this year, as it hosts two of the major summits; the G20 (Group of twenty largest economies inclusive of the European Union) and SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation), a Eurasian political, economic and security forum. Both these groupings are of prime significance.

The world grapples with looming global stagflation, and India is among the handful of few who have the potential of thriving in this situation. This year further presses on geo-political, technological, economic and climate-related challenges. If India can overcome these challenges with a way forward for the world, then the prediction "this century belongs to Asia, and this year belongs to India" would certainly come true. For good work, India has been presented with two opportunities as platforms.

Hopefully, India would be forming many headlines around the globe this year, as it hosts two of the major summits; the G20 (Group of twenty largest economies inclusive of the European Union) and SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation), a Eurasian political, economic and security forum. Both these groupings are of prime significance and hold key relevance for India to host them and churn the geo-economic and geopolitical scenarios globally.

The G20 events are lined-up, taking shape and have attracted much fanfare. At the same time, the SCO seems to have been dealing with significant challenges faced by its members. This is the reason for this forum not garnering due attention. India's presidency of the SCO summit this year should be an opportune platform to address the challenges and aim towards achieving larger goals and paving the way forward towards a rules-based peaceful global order.

A good start would be taking measures to stop the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine which has inflicted huge losses. Not just in the erstwhile Soviet nations but has affected the world, especially in terms of energy, and food security. This war has to come to an end.

This year's SCO summit would be an ideal platform to nudge Russia to solve the issues through dialogue and come to a mutually agreed ceasefire immediately. The SCO has Russian-backed sympathisers and countries which have abstained from voting in the UNGA against Russia. Hence, the message of 'this era is not an era of war' could serve as a piece of friendly advice by its sympathisers without making Russia feel like a pariah.

The Inception of Hybrid Warfare

Another emerging challenge in this war is the usage of hybrid warfare or the use of new-age fire powers. Air drones, loiter munitions, cyber phishing and new-age bio-chemical weapons have all become a plebeian sight. This new style of warfare on the battlefield was first widely witnessed in the war between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Both these nations are dialogue partners of the SCO, and they hold the key to the future prosperity of this region and the forum.

The battle of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020 and the ongoing Ukraine-Russia war has put technology at the heart of geo-politics. This new style of warfare could be lethal for mankind if goes unregulated.

Read complete article on website ecomonictimes.indiatimes.com

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Nation is Indebted to:

Hirbai Ibrahim Lobi

Padma Shri for work on women's empowerment







Hirbai Ibrahim Lobi, a resident of Jambur village near Gir and belonging to the Siddi community, has been conferred with the Padma Shri award for her efforts in uplifting Siddi women and educating children.

For someone who was orphaned in her childhood, was brought up by her grandmother and was married as a minor at just 14 years of age, Hirabai's grit and determination to go on and on in life is worth emulating. Her un-quenching thirst for knowledge made her different from her contemporaries. She sought to make the women of her community educated and independent and helped them open bank accounts.

With the aim of providing basic education to Siddi children, she has set up multiple kindergartens. Furthermore, in 2004, she established the Mahila Vikas Foundation.

Her tireless efforts have positively impacted the lives of more than 700 women and countless children, making a significant difference to the Siddi community.

The Siddi community is a small ethnic group with African ancestry that resides primarily in India, particularly in the states of Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Andhra Pradesh. They are believed to have migrated from Africa to India as slaves, merchants, or sailors, and over time, they assimilated into the Indian culture while also preserving their distinct traditions and practices.

They follow a syncretic faith that combines elements of Islam, Christianity, and traditional African religions. Agriculture, manual labour, and small-scale businesses are the primary sources of livelihood for the Siddi people.

Despite facing discrimination and social exclusion, the Siddi community has made significant contributions to Indian society, particularly in sports and the military. Many notable Siddi individuals have achieved success in various fields, including track and field, cricket, and the armed forces, among others.

Hirbai has the courage and determination to work for upliftment of her community women and children particularly in the field of education.

We all are proud of her.

Write to us at: bulletin@finsindia.org

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