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The State of the Chinese Economy - Part 2 By Brig. Hemant Mahajan	01
Will Terrorists Copy Israel's Technical Prowess? By Vappala Balachandran	03
Revival of Nuclear Posturing: By Gp. Capt. TP Srivastava (retd.)	04
Diplomatic Shockwaves: By Dr. Santhosh Mathew	06
Varanasi - Divine Chaos By Uday Kumar Varma	07
The Pager Blast: Israel's Lethal Gambit By Bisal Biswas	08
India is Proud of: Baburao Shedmake	09

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The State of the Chinese Economy - Part 2

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.

China's Strategic Intentions

Despite China's apparent desire for normalized economic relations, its underlying strategic goals remain unchanged. Beijing is keen on maintaining access to India's market while simultaneously exerting pressure on the border. The recent protests against economic assistance to Arunachal Pradesh and other border regions underscore China's expansionist ambitions.

The Border Standoff

The ongoing border dispute, marked by the deployment of significant troops and infrastructure development along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), continues to be a major source of tension. China's military buildup and territorial claims pose a serious challenge to India's sovereignty.

India's Stance and Challenges

India has adopted a firm stance against China's aggressive actions, including building defenses along the border and reducing economic dependence. However, the country faces the dilemma of balancing economic interests with national security concerns.

China's Pressure Tactics

China has employed various tactics to influence India's stance. These include diplomatic pressure, economic coercion, and attempts to sow discord within India. Beijing has also leveraged international platforms to advance its narrative and undermine India's image.

The Road Ahead

The prospects for improved India-China relations in the near future appear bleak. Given China's persistent aggressive behavior, India must adopt a realistic approach, prioritizing national security and sovereignty. While maintaining economic engagement, India should also diversify its trade partnerships to reduce dependence on China.

Ambani vs. Tata: A Battle for Fast Fashion Dominance & The Chinese Hand

The Stakes Are High

In the cutthroat world of Indian retail, a fierce battle is brewing between two of the country's most powerful conglomerates: the Tata Group and Reliance Industries. The stakes are high, as the dominance of the fast-fashion market in India could significantly impact the future of these giants.

Ambani's Strategic Move

Mukesh Ambani, the chairman of Reliance Industries, is reportedly seeking the assistance of Chinese fast-fashion giant Shein to bolster his position in the Indian market. Recognizing the threat posed by Tata's Trent Ltd and its in-house brand Zudio, Ambani is looking to leverage Shein's expertise and supply chain capabilities to gain a competitive edge.

Tata's Strong Foothold

The Tata Group's retail arm, Trent Ltd, has experienced phenomenal growth in recent years. Sales have tripled and net profit has surged 12 times compared to pre-pandemic levels. Zudio, the group's fast-fashion brand, has resonated with a young demographic, offering trendy clothing at affordable prices.

The Battle for Market Share

The battle between Ambani and Tata is essentially a contest for market share. Both conglomerates are vying to capture the hearts and wallets of India's growing consumer base. The outcome will depend on several factors, including:

- **Product Quality and Variety:** Both Reliance and Tata will need to continuously innovate and offer products that meet the evolving tastes and preferences of Indian consumers.
- **Pricing Strategy:** Competitive pricing will be crucial in attracting customers. However, it is essential to maintain profitability.
- **Supply Chain Efficiency:** A robust and efficient supply chain can help ensure timely delivery of products and reduce costs.
- **Brand Image and Marketing:** Building a strong brand image and effective marketing campaigns will be essential to differentiate products and attract customers.

China's Gains

Shein's involvement in the Ambani-Tata battle could provide significant benefits to China. By partnering with Reliance, Shein can gain deeper access to the Indian market, one of the world's largest and fastest-growing consumer markets. This could lead to increased sales, brand recognition, and market share for Shein.

China's Divide and Conquer: A Threat to India's Economic Sovereignty

India's persistent trade deficit with China, despite concerted efforts to reduce it, is a pressing concern. The imbalance, with China's exports to India exceeding imports by a factor of five, underscores the need for a strategic approach to counter China's economic influence.

China's Divide and Conquer Strategy

China has employed a sophisticated strategy of "divide and conquer" to gain a foothold in the Indian market. This involves:

1. **Leveraging Economic Relationships:** China often offers favorable trade terms or investments to Indian companies, creating a sense of dependency.
2. **Exploiting Internal Divisions:** By fostering relationships with specific Indian corporate groups or political factions, China can sow discord and weaken India's negotiating power.
3. **Pressure on the Government:** China may use its economic leverage to exert pressure on the Indian government, influencing policy decisions in its favor.

Countering China's Divide and Conquer Tactics

To protect itself from China's economic influence, India must adopt a multi-faceted approach:

1. **Diversification of Trade Partners:** India should actively seek to diversify its trade relationships, reducing its dependence on China. This can involve exploring new markets and promoting exports to countries such as the United States, the European Union, and Southeast Asia.
2. **Promotion of Domestic Manufacturing:** India should focus on promoting domestic manufacturing and reducing its reliance on imports. This can be achieved through policies that support local industries, such as tax incentives, subsidies, and infrastructure development.
3. **Strengthening Intellectual Property Rights:** Protecting intellectual property rights is crucial to preventing Chinese companies from unfairly benefiting from Indian innovation. India should implement robust measures to safeguard its intellectual property and encourage domestic research and development.

4. **Strategic Alliances:** India should forge strategic alliances with other countries to counter China's economic influence. This can involve collaborating with like-minded nations to negotiate better trade deals and address shared concerns.

5. **Building Domestic Capabilities:** Investing in education and training to develop a skilled workforce is essential for India to become more competitive and reduce its reliance on foreign technology. By building domestic capabilities, India can reduce its vulnerability to external pressures.

By adopting these strategies, India can mitigate the risks posed by China's divide and conquer tactics and protect its economic sovereignty.

Will Terrorists Copy Israel's Technical Prowess?

By Vappala Balachandran

The author is Former Special Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat

Two important developments took place on Israel-Palestine-Lebanon theatre recently, indicating that there is no possibility of Anthony Blinken's shuttle diplomacy succeeding and bringing a modicum of peace in the Middle East.

One was the declaration of Israeli defence minister Yoav Gallant on September 18 that Israel was "entering a new phase of war". This was followed by Israeli army chief Herzi Halevi's challenge: "We still have many capabilities; at every stage we operate we are already 2 stages ahead. At every stage the price in Hezbollah should be high".

Both these were immediately after two waves of massive explosions of pagers and walkie talkie sets in Lebanon starting on September 17, killing at least 15 and injuring more than 450. AP News reported that by September 19, the death toll in the second wave was 20 killed, including children and 450 wounded.

The other important development was Saudi Arabia's powerful Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's (MBS) categorical statement on September 19 that "the kingdom would not establish diplomatic relations with Israel without the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. MBS was addressing the "Shura Council", which is the formal advisory body.

Mohammed bin Salman's categorical statement rules out any possibility of Saudi Arabia joining the "Abraham" accords signed by Israel with UAE and Bahrain in September 2020, as well as with Sudan and Morocco. Also, the Gaza War with humongous civilian casualties has caused serious strains even among those who have signed, as revealed by a 14 June 2024 assessment by the International Crisis Group.

It said that a January 2024 poll by the Arab Center Washington DC found that 67 per cent of respondents in sixteen Arabic-speaking countries regarded the Emirati approach to the Gaza war as bad or very bad. This is causing concern to UAE which is "an image-conscious state".

Parallely, fears are expressed, even in US conservative circles, that Israel's technological prowess in hiding explosives in pagers and walkie talkie sets might be copied by terrorists by blowing up passenger aircraft. On September 17 Michael Rubin, Senior Fellow of the conservative think tank "American Enterprise Institute" (AEI) wondered whether Israel's "Operation Below The belt" presumably carried out against Hezbollah pagers, could be replicated on American or European cell phones or other electronic equipment.

He asks: "Who needs box cutters or an underwear bomb to bring down an aircraft if a signal could overheat, if not detonate a couple hundred tablets or phones at 30,000 feet above the Atlantic?"

A historical analysis by well-known military historian Caleb Carr reveals that terrorists often imitate excesses on civilians by organised armies. In his book “The Lessons of Terror” (2002), which I often quote to my students pursuing journalists’ career in a local institution, Carr says that “international terrorism is part of a military tradition, albeit a savagely violent one”.

Oliver Cromwell’s excesses during the English Civil Wars (1642-1651) and his pursuit of rebels to Ireland created the later Irish rebellion and the IRA. The British suppression of American colonies in 1812 was brutal. He says: “The British assaults were astonishingly savage: women and children were mutilated and murdered along with civilian men and soldiers in a deliberate attempt to break the American peoples’ will to fight”.

Carr says that American military leaders were no better. He quotes the legendary General William T. Sherman, “father and philosopher” of “Total war” saying during the American Civil war (1861-1865), “you cannot qualify war in harsher terms than I will”. He believed himself to “be at war with every man, woman and child in the south.... I shall then feel justified in resorting to the harshest measures and shall make little effort to restrain my army”.

Are we seeing a remake of this principle in Gaza which, according to UNICEF, quoted by Le Monde Diplomatique (September) has killed 39,965 persons including 14,100 children and 9,000 women?

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Revival of Nuclear Posturing: Isnt it Time for India to Review its No-First-Use Policy?

By Gp Capt TP Srivastava (retd.)

Author is a former Director, India's Ministry of Defence, retired fighter pilot, author and columnist on national security, geostrategic and military issues

China, Pakistan and Russia have clearly and unequivocally declared that they will exercise ‘FIRST USE OF NUKES’ option under certain circumstances. For China and Pakistan, India is the target. Yet our Chief of Defence Staff and premier think tank viz Centre for Air Power Studies, IDSA, USI and many others continue to ‘sing’ the outdated NFU policy.

Cold War was at its peak. Gary Powers, USAF U-2 pilot, was in custody of the USSR after his U-2 was shot down on 1st May 1960 about the same time when the May Day parade in Moscow’s Red Square was unfolding. The JFK presidency was one of the most testing times for the entire world. The Bay of Pigs crisis in 1963 brought the world on the precipice of a nuclear holocaust.

While JFK was deliberating the available options with his advisors, nearly unanimous advice to JFK was to exercise the USA's nuclear option. Kennedy declined and resolved the crisis through dialogue with Nikita Khrushchev. The USSR pulled out its nuclear missiles from Cuba and the USA pulled out from Turkey. The world started breathing again.

But the nuclear proliferation reappeared in 1964 when China exploded its first nuclear device. The world has never been the same again notwithstanding various treaties viz NPT, CTBT, SALT, START etc. From three nuclear nations in 1964, the world has nearly a dozen recognized and so-called ‘unrecognised’ nuclear powers.

Devastation caused by two nuclear devices in Japan ‘forced’ the superpowers to start advocating NO FIRST USE POLICY (NFU) of nukes, while continuing to produce megaton nukes and developing ICBMs of over 10,000 km range.

NFU; A phrase with ulterior motive?

The phrase NFU clearly indicates that the option of use of nukes was open after having absorbed the pre-emptive strike. Hence global outpouring by leaders of all nations that nukes must not be used is a hoax. The campaign that started after Hiroshima and Nagasaki were destroyed was to BAN USE OF NUKES. But the superpowers adopted a hypocritical approach and have been the catalyst for proliferation of nukes. While they continued to amass thousands of nuclear warheads, hundreds of delivery systems and called it TRIAD, which consisted of Manned Bombers, Surface Based Ballistic Missiles and Submarine Launched Ballistic Missiles.

Revival of Cold War nuclear posturing

Nuclear-capable and fully armed nuclear bombers were on 24-hour alert in the US. President George Bush issued a presidential decree on 27th September 1991, which discontinued the Manned Nuclear Bomber Alert, which had continued for 12,414 days (nearly 34 years) without a break. During a recently held seminar at the USAF Strategic Command, it was proposed to reconsider commencing 24-hour alert. Evolving global instability resulting in formation of the China-Russia-North Korea axis has forced the US to reconsider its rapid response capability (RRC), which would enable it to launch limited nuclear strikes in future.

The USAF nuclear-capable bomber fleet has shrunk. Presently, the USAF has only 46 nuclear-capable B-52s and 19 B-2s. In the present 'non-alert' status USAF bombers will require a few days, maybe longer, to reach 24-hour alert status. Two remaining part of TRIAD can be brought to operational readiness within hours. The US is reviewing its decision to remove manned bombers from 24-hour alert.

Prevailing situation in Indian Subcontinent

India's major adversaries China, Pakistan are nuclear weapon states having formidable and proven launch vehicles - missiles. While Pakistan has no nuclear bomber it has nuclear-capable fighters but China has dedicated nuclear bombers as well. However it is extremely unlikely that China will use manned bombers. Medium and long range ballistic missiles would be the most favoured option.

China, Pakistan and Russia have clearly and unequivocally declared that they will exercise the 'FIRST USE OF NUKES' option under certain circumstances. For China and Pakistan, India is the target. Yet our Chief of Defence Staff and premier think tank viz Centre for Air Power Studies, IDSA, USI and many others continue to 'sing' the outdated NFU policy.

China's advances in the field of nuclear weapons development and deployment is astonishing during the past decade. China is headed to possess nearly 1000 warheads before the end of this decade. Construction of hundreds of silos and acquisition of new nuclear submarines are being undertaken on priority. It might be construed that these developments are aimed to counter the US but does it prevent China from looking southward?

Instability in Bangladesh would almost certainly result in enhancement of Chinese investments and military presence. Increased Chinese military presence in Bangladesh will change the security matrix for India adversely. It can only be countered by muscle flexing by India.

Are our decision makers blind to these developments taking place with amazing regularity and speed? Without going into the details of how nuclear-tipped missiles are launched and how much time it takes to launch from the 'go-ahead', suffice to say that it does not happen in hours.

[Read complete article on website southasiamonitor.org](http://southasiamonitor.org)

Diplomatic Shockwaves

By Dr Santhosh Mathew

The Author is associate Professor in Centre for South Asian Studies, School of International Studies & Social Sciences Pondicherry Central University

In a stunning diplomatic upheaval, Israel has declared United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres persona non grata, igniting a firestorm of controversy and raising serious questions about the future of international relations. This unprecedented move comes after Guterres made remarks highlighting the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, which many Israeli officials interpreted as a blatant bias against Israel. The declaration effectively bars Guterres from entering Israeli territory, sending shockwaves through global diplomatic circles. As tensions in the region escalate, Guterres' comments were meant to advocate for peace, yet they struck a nerve in Israel, leading to a swift and decisive response from Prime Minister and other officials. They accused Guterres of undermining Israel's right to self-defence and contributing to a narrative that they argue misrepresents the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This diplomatic fallout isn't just a spat between a nation and a UN leader; it symbolizes a deeper schism in international diplomacy, where perceptions of bias can lead to the exclusion of voices meant to foster dialogue.

Historically, the term persona non grata has been wielded as a powerful diplomatic tool, signalling that a particular individual is unwelcome due to their actions or statements. Past instances, like the expulsion of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez by Colombia or the dismissal of Russian diplomats by European nations, illustrate how quickly relations can deteriorate over perceived slights. Now, Guterres joins this list, his exclusion representing not just a personal rebuke but a broader statement about Israel's stance toward international oversight and criticism. The international reaction has been swift and varied. Organizations like Amnesty International condemned Israel's decision, arguing that it undermines the very principles of diplomacy and dialogue. Critics contend that Guterres' remarks were consistent with his role as a neutral party advocating for human rights and humanitarian aid, rather than an affront to Israel. The European Union also expressed concern, suggesting that such actions further complicate an already volatile situation. In contrast, supporters of the Israeli government argue that Guterres has consistently demonstrated a lack of understanding regarding the security challenges Israel faces. They contend that his comments exacerbate tensions rather than promote peace, and that declaring him persona non grata is a necessary step in protecting national interests. "We cannot allow external voices to dictate our security or undermine our sovereignty," stated Israel's Minister of Foreign Affairs. This incident marks a significant low point in the relationship between Israel and the United Nations, a partnership that has faced increasing scrutiny over the years. Accusations of anti-Israel bias have long haunted the UN, with many Israeli officials claiming that the organization has failed to hold other nations accountable while disproportionately targeting Israel. The expulsion of Guterres could further isolate Israel on the international stage, creating a rift that complicates future negotiations and peace efforts. The broader implications of this move stretch far beyond the immediate situation. If international leaders can be barred from entering a country for expressing views that challenge a nation's narrative, the landscape of diplomacy could shift dramatically. Experts warn that this sets a concerning precedent where countries may retaliate against international criticism, potentially stifling dialogue on pressing global issues like climate change and human rights.

As the world watches this situation unfold, one must ponder the implications for the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The expulsion of Guterres, while symbolic, highlights the urgent need for renewed dialogue and understanding. Without open lines of communication, the prospects for peace remain grim, and the cycle of violence and retribution may continue unabated. In this turbulent landscape, the hope remains that such a dramatic moment can serve as a catalyst for change. By recognizing the importance of dialogue and the value of diverse perspectives, both sides may find a path forward in a conflict that has persisted for decades. The declaration of Guterres as persona non grata is not just a diplomatic incident; it represents the precarious balance of power in international relations and the challenges that lie ahead. As this unfolding story captures global attention, it serves as a stark reminder of the complexities of diplomacy in an interconnected world. The future of peace and security may well depend on the willingness of nations to engage, listen, and compromise—principles that are more crucial now than ever.

Varanasi – Divine Chaos

By Uday Kumar Varma

Author is a former Secretary, Information and Broadcasting, GOI

Varanasi, the city of Lord Shiva, stands as a place where chaos and divinity intertwine seamlessly. If ever a place defined chaos in its purest form, it is Varanasi — a chaos that has persisted through millennia, uninterrupted and unmitigated.

The origins of Varanasi, also called Benares or Kashi, stretch back to antiquity. It is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. Throughout its long history, two things have stood out: Varanasi has never been destroyed (earning the moniker of the eternal city) and it has never been planned.

The city has grown organically, not through the ambitions of a ruler or king, but as civilizations evolve — spontaneous and natural. Varanasi is a testament to the organic growth of human inquiry and insight, symbolizing wisdom accumulated over millennia, as well as the follies and frivolities inherent in human nature.

It is a city beyond time and space.

The Birthplace of Eternal Legends

Many believe Varanasi's history extends beyond the reach of discovery. Legends tell of its creation by Lord Shiva himself, who, upon witnessing the world's cycle of birth and rebirth, decided to establish an eternal abode on Earth. Varanasi was thus born — located on Shiva's trident, where the Ganges flows northward, defying the natural order as it seeks to cleanse the sins of humanity.

A City of Contrasts

Varanasi is difficult to love for many. Filthy, crowded, disorderly, and defiant of any system, it is chaos in its supreme form. Yet others are captivated by its unique energy — they sense a supernatural vibration in the air, lifting them to higher levels of consciousness. What, then, is the real Varanasi?

A city teeming with people and consumed by heat, squalor, and chaos, it has survived being engulfed by diseases and epidemics — a miracle defying explanation. The city's ability to absorb thousands of visitors daily without losing its inherent calm is another mystery. It reveals different aspects to different people. Some are overwhelmed by the sights and see only sweat, dust, and grime. Others feel the pulse of a rhythm felt only by them.

To me, Varanasi is a deeply layered city with profound depth, swathed in a timeless mystique and magic. If ever disorder was the order of a place, it must be Varanasi.

The Immortality of Kashi

Varanasi is often spoken of as an eternal city, alongside Rome and Jerusalem. But while these cities have faced destruction and rebirth, Varanasi has known a unique immortality. Its resilience is attributed to the belief that the city is located at the cosmic centre of the universe, where Shiva's trident marks the axis of creation.

This belief, though metaphorical, speaks to the city's spiritual significance—a place where the divine and the mundane coexist.

The Eternal Fire

Manikarnika and Harishchandra are the two cremation ghats of Varanasi. Here, the cycle of life and death can be most poignantly observed. The fires of the burning pyres at these ghats have never ceased to illuminate the surroundings, and more importantly, the human mind. Here, the reality of our physical world becomes starkly clear, offering a devastating realization of the ultimate end that awaits us all.

Yet, amid the smoke and ash, a strange serenity pervades, and a sense of detachment from the material world emerges, rekindling an inquiry into the larger meaning of life.

Modernisation of the Ancient

In recent years, Varanasi has undergone a physical transformation. Better and wider roads, flyovers, and new shopping malls have altered the cityscape. The Vishwanath temple premises have seen unprecedented expansion, with a newly created corridor connects the Ganges to the sanctum sanctorum, enabling thousands of devotees to collect Ganges water and offer it to the divine Shivalinga.

These developments have attracted even more visitors, though official data is scarce. The economic benefits are clear, with increased employment, especially in services catering to the influx of pilgrims. Every third establishment on a typical street is now a food joint, and the income of a significant portion of the population has risen.

However, these changes have brought challenges as well. The additional flow of humanity has further stressed an already fragile service infrastructure. Garbage accumulation, for instance, has increased, placing a strain on civic and conservancy services. The infrastructure surrounding the temple, despite the temple's expansion, remains inadequate to cope with the increased traffic. The roads are crowded with people, and traditional modes of transport still dominate, making navigation difficult.

Varanasi is bursting at its seams.

A Microcosm of the Divine

Lord Shiva is unique, and so is his abode, Varanasi, and so are His devotees. Varanasi is not merely a habitation; it is a microcosm of His creation, with all its beauties and idiosyncrasies. For a rational mind, the idea of millions coming to Varanasi, enduring discomfort on an extraordinary scale just to get a fleeting glimpse of Baba Vishwanath, may seem absurd. Such intense devotion defies all reason, yet millions continue to do so, drawn by a force beyond comprehension.

Varanasi is beyond description, a land of embodied chaos and eternal mystique. Perhaps the uniqueness of Varanasi is that despite all the inconveniences it would offer a casual traveller, a devout pilgrim or a permanent resident, its charm and appeal remain undiminished, a tribute to its abiding allure and magical spell.

The Pager Blast: Israel's Lethal Gambit

By Bisal Biswas

The author is pursuing master's in international relations & strategic studies from The University of Mumbai.

On October 7, 2023, Israel came into the headlines after Hamas launched a surprise attack on Israel. That event created a domino effect on the geopolitical situation in the Middle East. After around 11 months of giving a heavy blow to Hamas, now Israel shifted its focus on Hezbollah, a Lebanese Shia Islamist political party and militant group that is known to have strong support from the state of Iran.

"All warfare is based on deception", a quote from The Art of War by Sun Tzu, is still relevant today. Hezbollah didn't rely on smartphones as they could be misused by the renowned secret service of Israel, the Mossad. Thus, they used an age-old device popular in the 1980s, called pager. Simply a pager is a transmission device that cannot be manipulated externally, making it reliable for Hezbollah for standard communication. But 17th September 2024 marked an earth-shattering event for Hezbollah, where hundreds of pagers exploded in Lebanon killing at least 12 and injuring nearly 3000 people including Iran's ambassador to Lebanon, Mojtaba Amani. Then, in a follow-up attack, thousands of two-way radios used by the group exploded, killing nine people and wounding some 300. There were also reports of solar systems exploding in several areas of Lebanon.

This event got widespread attention from strategists and military experts around the world. "It's probably the most impressive kinetic intelligence operation I've ever seen." Marc Polymeropoulos, a former CIA counter-terrorism specialist commented. Even Indian army chief, General Upendra Dwivedi termed it as "Masterstroke". Reports suggest that Hezbollah used a shell company to obtain pagers, but that company was used by The Israelis. It shows the intervention in the supply chain to exploit the pagers by using a different chip that can be remotely detonated when required.

From the strategic perspective, it was a well-planned operation. Israel demonstrated that it not only possesses the technical expertise but also the ability to infiltrate the most sensitive echelons of the entire Axis of Resistance. The operation was certainly impressive, but it raises some ethical concerns. While strategically innovative, the action prompts critical questions about civilian casualties and the weaponization of everyday technology. The manipulation of supply chains through shell companies, while being tactically impressive, raises ethical questions about multidimensionality in warfare. While innovative approaches are inevitable in the geopolitical and strategic landscape, the international community must remain vigilant in upholding the principles of humanitarian law and the ethical conduct of warfare.

The operation demonstrates an exceptional level of strategic planning, technical and intelligence capabilities. Its execution demonstrates the ability to infiltrate and disrupt hostile communications and eliminate Hezbollah threats at a fundamental level. The operation's effectiveness in targeting specific militant groups while minimising broader civilian collateral damage is noteworthy. Future operations should strive to maintain a clear distinction between military and civilian targets. As military technology and tactics advance, ethical considerations must evolve.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of the FINS or its members.

India is Proud of: Baburao Shedmake Tribal Hero of 1857 Freedom War



Baburao Shedmake, a tribal hero of the 1857 War of Independence was born in 12 March 1833 at Gadchiroli district and died at a young age of 25 on 21 October 1858. He made significant contribution in the War of Independence of 1857.

The sacrifice of Shaheed Baburao Shedmake is very important in the history of freedom struggle of Gadchiroli district. His mother's name was Jurja Kunwar and his father's name was Pulaisur Bapu. Baburao was trained in wrestling, tirakamatha, (bow and arrow), sword and spear at the age of 3 in Gotul. He used to go for hunting as well as to study weapons in the forest with his companions. After completing his primary education from British English Central School, Raipur (Madhya Pradesh - now Chhattisgarh) upto Class IV, he returned to his village.

He was informed of the persecution by the British after his arrival which further enhanced his understanding. Despite belonging to the dynasty, he did not have landed property but had a sense of appreciation for a society that had matured over time. He was married to the princess of Madavi dynasty in Adilabad district of Andhra Pradesh.

At that time the district and its environs had a large number of Gond, Pardhan, Halbi, Nagchi and Madia tribes. On 18 December 1854, R.S. Ellis was appointed Collector, and the British began to oppress the poor. Common masses were not happy with the missionaries. At that time, Gadchiroli area was full of vegetation, mineral wealth and the British needed these properties to run their property, so the tribal lands were forcibly occupied by the British. Baburao did not like this at all.

Tribals have a right to land and they should get it, he felt. He believed that tribals should live their lives and live a cultural life, not lose their true identity through conversion. Such things ignited the flames of rebellion in his mind and he was determined to save his people by fighting the British till death. On 24 September 1857, he formed the 'Movable Army' to carry out this revolution.

He trained an army of 500 adivasis and Rohils from Adapalli, Mollampalli, Ghot and adjoining areas. He declared war on the British. To teach the British a lesson, they chose Rajgad pargana adjacent to Gadchiroli, which was under the control of the British, the responsibility of which was handed over to Ramshah Gedam by the British.

On 7 March 1858, Baburao along with his allies attacked Rajgad and captured the whole of Rajgad. On 13 March 1858, Captain Crichton sent troops to recapture Rajgad and capture Baburao. This time too Baburao Shedmake won the battle. On 29 April 1858, Baburao attacked the English camp at Chichgudi of Aheri zamindari. Telegram operators Gartl and Hall were killed and several British soldiers were wounded. One of his companions, Peter managed to escape and was taken to Captain Krakton.

Baburao's movement overcame many obstacles. The British confiscated land belonging to him and his accomplices. Venkatrao hid in the forest; the movable army broke up and Baburao fell alone. After the defeat of Ghot, the British put more pressure on Rani Lakshmibai. As soon as Lakshmibai heard the news that Baburao had fallen, she sent Rohilon troops to Bhopalnatham to capture Baburao. Baburao stayed there for a few days. At that time Baburao did not oppose him, but Rohila caught him at night and explained the purpose of his work. Seeing the right time, he secretly left. Upon hearing the news that Baburao had fled the army, Captain got angry. Baburao came to Aheri.

When Rani Lakshmibai heard this, she invited Baburao to her house for dinner. He accepted the invitation and reached Lakshmibai's house; Lakshmibai informed the British. While eating, the British surrounded Lakshmibai's house and took Baburao as a prisoner. Baburao and his accomplices were tried in the Court of Crichton for the murder of Garteld and Hall by the British and for revolting against the British government. In his verdict, he gave the punishment of hanging Baburao and sentenced his accomplices to 14 years in prison. On 21 October 1858, Baburao was sentenced to death. At 4 pm on the 21st, he was hanged on a peepal tree in Gadchiroli castle which was converted into a prison.

Thus, at the age of 25, Baburao Shedmake showed his prowess and sacrificed for freedom. For his bravery and courage, the Government of India issued a stamp on his birthday on 12 March 2007. Every year on the day of Veer Baburao Shedmake's sacrifice, thousands of tribals gather near the Peepal tree in Gadchiroli jail to pay their respects.

An unsung hero of our great Bharat !!
