

ARMY CHIEF IS RIGHT - OBJECTIVE VIEW ON THE NORTH-EAST

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Of late, it has become a fashion to nit-pick selective words / phrase from the speeches of current Army Chief General Bipin Rawat and criticize him without even correlating with the context or the background in which they were spoken. Obviously, the objective is different for different people: media personnel to sensitize the issue and enhance the TRP of their channels; opposition parties to target the government; and anti-national elements to create divisions in the secular fabric of our society. But one fact has emerged very clearly – the Government, rather the political leadership’s support to the Military leader is rock-solid. With a view to visualize India as a ‘Great Power’ or in the words of Prime Minister Modi’s “New India”, political executives, military leaders and bureaucracy are moving in tandem – to evolve a holistic national security strategy.

Centre for Joint Warfare Studies (CENJOWS), a defence ministry think-tank and the HQ Integrated Defence Staff Net Assessment had organized a seminar on “North-East Region of India: Bridging Gaps and Securing Borders”, where the Army chief was invited for giving a concluding address. In this seminar, two very pertinent issues of strategic relevance were discussed – border management with Myanmar and Bangladesh and the security of the Siliguri Corridor.

Interestingly, when the Chief was moving towards the podium to address the audience, his ADC approached him with the written script, which he declined and he spoke extempore. Admiringly, in a short and crisp elocution of exact 450 seconds, choosing each word with finesse and quoting his own personal experiences of the region, he laid down a recipe for amalgamating the North-East with the entire country. In a masterly stroke, he gave a message to the whole world that Arunachal Pradesh is an integral part of India, where people understand Hindi more than any other language – talking of his tenure as Commanding Officer at ‘Kibithu’, when he tried to communicate with the “*Gaon Burra*” in a sign language (because of his scanty tribal attire), the latter responded “*Saab Hindi aata hai ki Nahi*” “*To phir Hindi main bolo naa*” (Sir, if you know Hindi, speak in Hindi). He informed the audience that state language of Arunachal Pradesh is Hindi, which most people don’t know and for that matter Arunachalis speak “*Shudh Hindi*” than anyone else.

The address of the Army Chief can easily be assimilated by grasping it in four distinct parts:

First, he said that we ought to identify whether it was a problem of identity, development, security or demography, perhaps it was all encompassing and we should consider it holistically.

Second, he illustrated the 'Act East Policy' of the government, under which the government was seriously contemplating to develop the North-East from the central perspective that would take care off plenty of problems.

Third, the migration taking place from Bangladesh was due to two reasons: one, the 'lebensraum' as they are running short of space due to frequent flooding and two, the planned immigration, which is happening at the behest of our Western neighbour, who is playing the proxy dimension of warfare as he does not want to confront us conventionally. In this proxy game, he is also supported by our Northern neighbour to keep the area disturbed.

Fourth, The solution lies in first identifying the problem and then adopting a step-by-step approach. The government is now looking at the North-East in a correct perspective and if that happens then time will not be far when we will be able to amalgamate this region, ensure development and with development will come the control of the people, who reside in this area. We can't change the population dynamics of this region irrespective of whichever government is in power. Population inversion has taken place in Assam and he cited the example of AIUDF, which has grown much faster than BJP. But at the same time, the Chief emphasized that we got to live together irrespective of caste, creed, religion or sex. He said that we got to amalgamate first and then start identifying the people creating trouble and are illegal immigrants. He closed his speech by giving an illustrative example of how easily Arunachal Pradesh has been amalgamated.

Over the last seven decades, there has been an extremely tenuous internal security situation in the North-East, which has adversely affected the socio-economic development of the region and nobody knows it better than the Army. Rather, it is credible that the Army Chief, in a very lucid and crystal-clear manner, not only identified the root causes of the problem but also defined the step-by-step approach to resolve the same. By knowing fully well that illegal immigrants

are the source of trouble in Assam and that too as part of the proxy game being played by our adversaries, the Army Chief, who is privy to the intelligence at national level, is duty bound to inform the audience, who were all security practitioners and have to face the ground reality. He did not discriminate against the Muslims, rather he elucidated that they were the early arrivals in Assam along with Ahoms, somewhere between 1218 and 1226 AD and all need to be integrated. If AIUDF happens to be the implied supporter of illegal immigrants or vice-a-versa then the nation must know it. Indian Army as an institution is apolitical but it has to be politically aware of the situation when operating in insurgency environment and for that the credit goes to General Bipin Rawat for his honest, forthright and remarkable assessment.

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