

The bridges that are lifelines for many in Jammu and Kashmir

By Dianne Nongrum

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As deputy commissioner of Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi district, Dr Shahid Iqbal Choudhary found constructing bridges on rivulets and streams can save lives of children as well as domestic animals and facilitate easy access to schools. So, he built 70 of them, mostly wooden, in 2013.

He saw people from Udhampur district's remote regions struggling with the same problems when he was transferred there. Thousands of students were unable to reach school in the monsoon as rainwater turned otherwise dry nullahs into gushing rivulets and streams.

Parents were scared of sending their children to school whenever clouds covered the sky. Their fears were not unfounded. In the past two years, 30 people have lost their lives while crossing streams and rivulets in the district.

Bridging the gap

According to Choudhary, three people were washed away a few years ago in the Jungle Gali area. Now a bridge has come up there. A nomad lost two sons last year while crossing a rivulet at Bajeen, another far-flung part of the district. A bridge has been erected here too.

Choudhary started the project in 2015, calling it Rahat.

Bridges under the drive, spanning up to 40 metres, have been initiated near schools in hilly terrains, remote hamlets, traditional paths, livestock movement routes, nomadic migration passages, ration carriage accesses and approaches to sources of water.

Community asset

The project was conceived and planned by the district administration and executed through the rural development department after public meetings and consultations.

Authorities did not push the government for financial aid.

Instead, a unique model of funding was used for the project with available resources under various plans being converged for construction of foot-bridges as community asset.

Choudhary said the scheme was launched in two phases with the target of 114 bridges. However, after public demand and successful implementation on the ground, an additional 56 bridges have been planned.

The 170 bridges will be built by July 2016. As many as 103 bridges are nearing completion and 56 are ready. According to officials, the bridges have been designed with technology developed by the Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) and provided through the Dehradun-based HESCO.

Sources say the project has helped 327 schools with 27,465 students, reducing the travel distance by 349 km in the district. Apart from this, more than 1.30 lakh people are getting easy access to 183 ration depots.

India, Oman sign four MoUs on defence cooperation

Muscat: Defence minister Manohar Parrikar, accompanied by a high level delegation, visited Oman from May 20-22 at the invitation of minister responsible for Defence Affairs of Oman Badr Bin Saud Bin Harib Al Busaidi, during which four memorandums of understanding (MoUs) and a protocol were signed between the two nations.

Raksha Mantri was accompanied by a high-level official delegation comprising Ashok Gupta, secretary in defence production; Dr S Christopher, secretary in Research and Development, and director general of the Defence Research and Development Organisation; Lieutenant General MMS Rai, Vice Chief of Army Staff; Vice Admiral Sunil Lanba, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief Western Command; and Air Marshal BS Dhanoa, Vice Chief of Air Staff, as well as other senior defence ministry officials.

A defence industry delegation comprising SC Bajpai, additional director general, Ordnance Factory Board, and SK Sharma, CMD, Bharat Electronics Limited also accompanied the minister.

During his visit, Parrikar met deputy prime minister for the council of ministers Sayyid Fahd bin Mahmoud al Said and minister of Royal Office lieutenant general Sultan bin Mohammed al-Numani, and held bilateral talks with Al Busaidion on all aspects of bilateral defence cooperation, including enhanced military to military exchanges. Both sides also exchanged views on regional developments of mutual interest.

Parrikar reiterated the high importance that India attaches to its strategic partnership with Oman and also conveyed his appreciation at the continued support rendered by Oman for the Operational Turnaround (OTR) of Indian Navy ships for anti-piracy patrols as well as technical support for landing and over flight of Indian Air Force aircraft.

Parrikar also visited the Military Technology College and the Sultan's Armed Forces Museum in Muscat.

He also attended a reception at Sultan Qaboos Port to mark the goodwill visit to Oman of INS Delhi, INS Deepak and INS Tarkash.

During the defence minister's visit, four MoUs were signed, including an MOU on defence cooperation between the ministry of defence of Sultanate of Oman and Ministry of Defence of Republic of India; an MoU was signed between the Royal Oman Police (Coast Guard) and the Indian Coast Guard in the field of marine crime prevention at sea. Another MoU was signed on maritime issues and a protocol between Oman represented by Royal Air Force of Oman and India represented by the Indian Air Force was signed on flight safety information exchange.

Both sides noted that defence cooperation is a key facet of their bilateral strategic partnership, which is based on historical ties as well as mutual trust and shared interests.

It was agreed that the two sides would further expand and consolidate their ongoing bilateral defence cooperation.

Oman, India sign four pacts to boost defence cooperation

Muscat - Oman and India on Sunday signed four pacts to boost cooperation in defence, crime prevention at sea, maritime issues and flight safety information exchange.

A press release stated that the pacts were signed during the visit of Indian Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar at the invitation of H E Sayyid Badr bin Saud al Busaidi, Oman's Minister Responsible for Defence Affairs.

During the visit, Parrikar met H E Gen Sultan bin Mohammed al Nuamani, Minister of Royal Office and held talks with H E Busaidi. During the meetings, all aspects of defence cooperation including enhanced military to military exchanges and cooperation were discussed.

THE AGREEMENTS

▶ MoU on defence cooperation between the ministries of Defence of Oman and India.

▶ MoU between the ROP Coast

Guard and the Indian Coast Guard in the field of crime prevention at sea.

▶ MoU between Oman and India on maritime issues.

▶ Protocol between Oman represented by the Royal Air Force of Oman and India represented by the Indian Air Force on flight safety information exchange.

Both the sides also exchanged views on regional developments of mutual interest.

Parrikar reiterated the high importance that India attaches to its strategic partnership with Oman. He also conveyed his appreciation at the continued support rendered by Oman for the Operational Turnaround (OTR) of Indian Navy ships for anti-piracy patrols as well as technical support for landing and overflight of Indian Air Force aircraft. He visited the Military Technology College and the Sultan's Armed Forces Museum in Muscat. He attended a reception at Port Sultan Qaboos to mark the goodwill visit to Oman of Indian naval ships INS Delhi, INS Deepak and INS Tarkash.

Parrikar was accompanied by a high-level delegation comprising Ashok Gupta, secretary (defence production), Dr S Christopher, secretary (R&D) & DG, DRDO, Lt Gen MMS Rai, vice chief of Army Staff, Vice Admiral Sunil Lanba, FoC-in-C Western Command, and Air Marshal B S Dhanoa, vice chief of Air Staff as well as other senior defence ministry officials. A defence industry delegation comprising S C Bajpai, additional DG, Ordnance Factories Board and S K Sharma, CMD, Bharat Electronics Limited also accompanied Parrikar during the visit.

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Manohar Parrikar visit: India and Oman sign four key defence agreements

India and Oman today vowed to deepen bilateral defence ties as the two countries signed four key agreements in the critical sector with focus on enhancing military cooperation.

India and Oman today vowed to deepen bilateral defence ties as the two countries signed four key agreements in the critical sector with focus on enhancing military cooperation.

The agreements on defence cooperation, marine crime prevention, maritime issues and flight safety information exchange was signed following the maiden visit of Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar to Oman, considered one of the closest country in the middle east.

Parrikar, who is on an official visit at the invitation of Bader Bin Saud Bin Harib Al Busaidi, Minister Responsible for Defense Affairs of Oman, today wrapped up his visit and left for UAE.

During his talks with the leadership there, all aspects of bilateral defence cooperation including enhanced military to military exchanges were discussed. Both sides also exchanged views on regional developments of mutual interest, a statement by the Defence Ministry said.

Both sides noted that defence cooperation is a key facet of their bilateral strategic partnership.

It was agreed that the two sides would further expand and consolidate their ongoing bilateral defence cooperation, the statement said.

Parrikar reiterated the high importance that India attaches to its strategic partnership with Oman and also conveyed his appreciation at the continued support rendered by Oman for the Operational Turnaround (OTR) of Indian Navy ships for anti-piracy patrols as well as technical support for landing and overflight of IAF planes.

He visited the Military Technology College and the Sultan's Armed Forces Museum in Muscat. He also attended a reception at Sultan Qaboos Port to mark the goodwill visit to Oman of naval ships INS Delhi, INS Deepak and INS Tarkash.

Parrikar was accompanied by a high-level official delegation comprising Secretary (Defence Production) Ashok Gupta, DRDO chief Dr S Christopher, Army Vice Chief Lt Gen MMS Rai, designated new Navy chief Vice Admiral Sunil Lanba, IAF Vice Chief Air Marshal B S Dhanoa besides other senior defence ministry officials.

A defence industry delegation comprising S C Bajpai, Additional DG, Ordnance Factory Board and S K Sharma, CMD, Bharat Electronics Limited also accompanied Parrikar.