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Valley on the boil: Army braces for a 'hot summer' in Kashmir

By Rajat Pandit

DIG Probing Rashtriya Rifles Act In Budgam

The Jammu & Kashmir police have registered a case against the Army unit reportedly involved in tying up a man to an Army vehicle and using him as a “human shield“ during an operation to rescue security personnel and civil officials on election duty trapped by a mob of about 500 stone-pelters on April 9. General, NSA meet, P 9 Ex-prosecutor shot, P 9 Police said it has registered an FIR under sections 342 149506 and 367 of the Ranbir Penal Code against the Army's 53 RR unit in Budgam district. “The investigation is being conducted by the sub-divisional police officer, Magam,“ DIG (Central Kashmir) Ghulam Hassan Bhat said. The incident had come to the fore after former chief minister Omar Abdullah tweeted a photo and a video. Bracing for a “hot summer“ in Jammu & Kashmir, the Army is taking several steps ranging from a stronger counter-infiltration grid along the Line of Control and coordinated anti-terror operations in the hinterland to better crowd-control measures and induction of advanced mine-protected vehicles and other specialised equipment in trouble spots.

'ARMY BEING MADE POLITICAL TARGET'

- ▶ Defence minister Jaitley likely to address issue in meeting with Army commanders on Monday
- ▶ Army brass feels the unfortunate incident was unavoidable as unit was surrounded by hundreds of protesters bent on violence
- ▶ Govt feels Army being made a political target. MoS (PMO)



Jitendra Singh says 'apologetic' Kashmir politicians guilty of encouraging terror in Valley

Army chief General Bipin Rawat has also appealed to “misguided“ youth in the Kashmir Valley to join the mainstream by shunning violence, which comes amid the raging controversy over soldiers trussing up a civilian on their jeep's bonnet as a “human shield“ while rescuing over a dozen policemen and election officials from a stone-pelting mob in Budgam on April 9.

“The local youth should understand the security forces are showing restraint, which should not be

misconstrued as weakness. Instead, the security forces are showing patience and are giving them an opportunity to shun violence,“ Gen Rawat told TOI on Sunday evening after meeting national security adviser Ajit Doval to review the overall situation in J&K and the strategy to be adopted in the months ahead.

The Army brass contends the company commander of Rashtriya Rifles at Budgam showed “quick-thinking, presence of mind and initiative“ to prevent bloodshed in an “explosive situation“ on April 9, even though J&K chief minister Mehbooba Mufti demanded action against the soldiers involved in the episode during her meeting with Gen Rawat on Saturday .

But there is also growing concern over the deteriorating situation in the Kashmir Valley in the absence of any well-crafted political outreach to the alienated youth, even as the Pakistan army/ISI combine is back to helping terrorists infiltrate into J&K after activating “launch pads“ along the LoC.

“All the indicators point to a hot summer in the offing. If the summer of 2016 was volatile, with Burhan Wani's killing in July acting as the trigger after relative normalcy for four-five years, the situation could worsen this year. Around 20 terrorist-initiated incidents have already been recorded since January ,“ said a senior officer.

“Infiltration attempts from across the border have gone up. There are already an estimated 300 terrorists active in Kashmir. Pakistan will try to push in many more as summer begins. We are on our guard,“ he added.

The Army is now even seeking women security personnel from the CRPF Mahila battalions and other police forces to keep women protesters at bay during counter-insurgency operations.

Another worry is the emboldened nature of military-style terror attacks on convoys and camps. Towards this end, among other equipment, the Army had ordered 244 additional Yuktirath mine-protected vehicles, with improvements in the firing bays and better power-to-weight ratio engines, for Rashtriya Rifles from the Ordnance Factory Board last year.

Army chief, NSA Doval discuss J&K situation

THE ARMY IN J&K

Over 3.3 lakh soldiers of 13-lakh strong Army deployed in J&K, along borders with Pakistan & China as well as for counter-insurgency operations in hinterland

UDHAMPUR-BASED NORTHERN ARMY COMMAND INCLUDES:

<p>1 14 Corps: Leh (8 Mountain Division at Kargil-Drass & 3 Infantry Division at Karu)</p>	<p>4 Rashtriya Rifles: Specialised counter-insurgency force with 63 battalions (around 70,000 soldiers). It has 5 division-like HQs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Delta Force: Doda district ➤ Kilo Force: Kupwara & Baramulla districts ➤ Romeo Force: Rajouri & 	<p>Poonch districts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Victor Force: Anantnag, Pulwama & Budgam districts ➤ Uniform Force: Udhampur & Reasi districts ➤ Also, 26 Infantry Division in Jammu, which comes under the Chandimandir-based Western Army Command)
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Army chief General Bipin Rawat apprised national security adviser Ajit Doval on Sunday of the security situation in Kashmir, amid growing outrage in the Valley over the controversial “human shield” video. Rawat's meeting with Doval comes a day after he had separate deliberations with J&K CM Mehbooba Mufti and governor NN Vohra over the law and order situation in Kashmir. Government sources said

the Army chief called on Doval at his residence and briefed him about the overall state of security in the Valley. In her meeting with Gen Rawat, the J&K CM had raised the issue of the video that has now gone viral on social media. Gen Rawat has assured the J&K CM of timely action against the personnel who were responsible for the act. PTI

BSF SI booked for J&K youth's 'killing' in firing

Police registered an FIR on Sunday against a BSF sub inspector a day after a youth was killed in firing in Batamaloo area of the city. Parts of the city witnessed a partial shutdown called by separatists.

19-year-old Sajad Hussan of Baramulla was killed when the Border Security Force opened fire on stone pelters on Saturday. On Sunday an FIR was registered against BSF sub inspector Rajinder Baghdi for Hussan's murder. “An internal inquiry into the allegations of firing, which led to the death of Sajad Hussan has prima-facie revealed that our men fired at him leading to his death,” a BSF spokesman said. The spokesman said a BSF convoy came under heavy stone pelting in Batamaloo. Some of the stone pelters tried to snatch a service rifle prompting the jawans to fire in the air. However one of the shots hit Hassan. TNN



Mon, 17 Apr, 2017

Nepal, China hold first-ever joint military exercise

Nepal and China began their first-ever joint military exercise on Sunday with a special focus on combating terror, a move that could make India uneasy.

The 10-day-long military drill “Sagarmatha Friendship 2017“ was being organised by the two countries as part of their preparedness against terrorism and disaster response, Nepal army said. Sagarmatha is the Nepali name of Mt Everest. The People's Liberation Army's squad has already arrived in the capital. The joint training with

China marks Nepal's extension of military diplomacy. Till now, Nepal army had been conducting joint military drills with Indian and American troops.

“A small Chinese troop will be participating in the first-ever drill with an equal number of Nepali army personnel,” said military spokesman Jhankar Bahadur Kadayat. The army said that the joint military exercise with China was a step towards preparations against the possible threat from terrorism. It maintained that the drill was a part of its regular bilateral and multilateral military exercises aimed at sharing experiences, skills and professional knowledge that it had been doing regularly with nations Nepal shared diplomatic ties with.

Experts said the military exercise could make India uneasy as China attempts to exert influence in the region. Nepal is dependent on India for its imports.



Mon, 17 Apr, 2017

China-Nepal exercises don't worry us: India

*Kathmandu-New Delhi ties have their own logic ... the ties are time-tested, unique and very, very close:
MEA official*

The relationship between Kathmandu and New Delhi has its “own logic”, India said on Sunday. The enduring ties between the two sides are not concerned with the ongoing military exercises between China and Nepal, the External Affairs Ministry said.

Officials hinted that Nepal's pending constitutional amendments were likely to be discussed during this week's visit of President Bidya Devi Bhandari to Delhi. “India-Nepal ties have their own logic and as far as we are concerned, the ties are time-tested, unique and very, very close,” said Sudhakar Dalela, Joint Secretary in charge of Nepal in the Ministry. He said India-Nepal ties were people-centric.

First-ever joint exercise - The issue of China's first-ever military exercise with Nepal forms the backdrop of the state visit of Ms. Bhandari between April 17 and 21.

The visit was expected last May but was cancelled at the last moment as Nepal recalled its Ambassador to Delhi because of political and diplomatic uncertainties in Kathmandu.

The China-Nepal exercise, “Sagarmatha Friendship – 2017” began on Sunday in Nepal Army's paratraining school in Maharajganj and will continue for 10 days. Though the official said that India was not concerned with the military exercise, he highlighted that India remained concerned about long-term peace, stability and the amendments to the Nepal Constitution of 2015. “India has an abiding interest in the stability and development of Nepal. The Government of India has been very supportive of efforts for building an inclusive agenda in its widest possible definition which will consolidate democracy in Nepal,” the official said when asked if the amendments would be discussed with President Bhandari.

The presidential visit is also important in view of the election process that has begun in Nepal with the announcement of local-level polls in March. The local-level elections to be held on May 14 will begin a year-long process which will culminate in the election of Parliament of Nepal.



Mon, 17 Apr, 2017

N Korean missile test fails

Provocative act, yet again: US NSA

- *White House National Security Adviser HR McMaster said on Sunday North Korea's missile test was provocative and that the US was working with its allies, including China, to develop a range of options*

- “This latest missile test just fits into a pattern of provocative and destabilising and threatening behaviour on the part of the North Korean regime,” McMaster said
- “There is an international consensus now, including Chinese leadership, that this situation just cannot continue,” he said

A North Korean missile “blew up almost immediately” on its test launch on Sunday, the US Pacific Command said, hours before US Vice President Mike Pence landed in South Korea for talks on the North’s increasingly defiant arms programme. “The launch of the ballistic missile occurred near Sinpo,” US Pacific Command spokesman CDR Dave Benham said. Sinpo, a port city in eastern North Korea, was also the site of a ballistic missile test earlier this month in which the projectile fell into the Sea of Japan, also known as the East Sea.

US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis said President Donald Trump and his military team are aware of the missile launch. The failed launch from North Korea’s east coast, ignoring repeated admonitions from major ally China, came a day after North Korea held a grand military parade in its capital, marking the birth anniversary of the state founder, displaying what appeared to be new long-range ballistic missiles.

China’s top diplomat, Yang Jiechi, and US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson exchanged views on the “situation on the Korean peninsula” by phone on Sunday, China’s official Xinhua News Agency said. Yang said the two sides should maintain dialogue. South Korea said the North’s combined show of force “threatened the whole world” but a US foreign policy adviser travelling with Pence on Air Force Two appeared to defuse some of the tension, saying the test of what was believed to be a medium-range missile had come as no surprise.

“We had good intelligence before the launch and good intelligence after the launch,” the adviser told reporters on condition of anonymity. “It’s a failed test. It follows another failed test. So really no need to reinforce their failure. We don’t need to expend any resources against that.” The adviser said the missile’s flight lasted four or five seconds. “It wasn’t a matter of if, it was a matter of when. The good news is that after five seconds it fizzled out.” Pence is in Seoul at the beginning of a 10-day trip to Asia in what his aides said was a sign of US commitment to its ally in the face of rising tension.

The US nuclear-powered USS Carl Vinson aircraft carrier strike group is also heading to the region, increasing the tension further. — Reuters



Mon, 17 Apr, 2017

The US, allies weigh options after North Korea’s missile test -Donald Trump adviser

The Trump administration is focusing its North Korea strategy on tougher economic sanctions, possibly including an oil embargo, a global ban on its airline, intercepting cargo ships and punishing Chinese banks doing business with Pyongyang.

The United States, its allies and China are working together on a range of responses to North Korea’s latest failed ballistic missile test, US President Donald Trump’s national security adviser said on Sunday, citing what he called an international consensus to act. H R McMaster indicated that Trump was not considering military action for now.

“It’s time for us to undertake all actions we can, short of a military option, to try to resolve this peacefully,” he said on ABC’s “This Week” program. “We are working together with our allies and partners and with the Chinese leadership to develop a range of options.” McMaster added: “There is an international consensus now, including the Chinese leadership, that this is a situation that just cannot continue.”

The Trump administration is focusing its North Korea strategy on tougher economic sanctions, possibly including an oil embargo, a global ban on its airline, intercepting cargo ships and punishing Chinese banks doing business with Pyongyang, Reuters reported last week, citing U.S. officials.

While Trump has employed tough rhetoric in response to North Korea's recent missile tests, the new U.S. president's options appear limited in dealing with a challenge that has vexed his Oval Office, predecessors. Most options fall into four categories: economic sanctions, covert action, diplomatic negotiations and military force. The North Korean missile blew up almost immediately after its test launch on Sunday, the U.S. Pacific Command said.

Hours later, U.S. Vice President Mike Pence landed in South Korea for talks on the North's increasingly defiant arms program. His visit came a day after North Korea held a military parade in its capital, Pyongyang, marking the 105th anniversary of the birth of founding father Kim Il Sung. What appeared to be new long-range ballistic missiles were on display in the parade.

Rising Tensions

Tensions have risen as Trump takes a hard rhetorical line with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, who has rebuffed admonitions from China and proceeded with nuclear and missile programs seen by Washington as a direct threat. Trump acknowledged on Sunday that the softer line he had taken on China's management of its currency was linked to China's help on the North Korea issue.

"Why would I call China a currency manipulator when they are working with us on the North Korean problem? We will see what happens!" Trump said on Twitter. Trump has backed away from a campaign promise to label China in that way. South Korea said the North's latest show of force "threatened the whole world."

But a U.S. foreign policy adviser travelling with Pence on Air Force Two sought to defuse some of the tension, saying the test of what was believed to be a medium-range missile had come as no surprise. "We had good intelligence before the launch and good intelligence after the launch," the adviser told reporters on condition of anonymity.

"It's a failed test. It follows another failed test. So really no need to reinforce their failure. We don't need to expend any resources against that." The adviser said the missile's flight lasted four or five seconds. Pence, addressing an Easter service with American troops in South Korea, said the U.S. commitment to South Korea was unwavering.

"Let me assure you under President Trump's leadership, our resolve has never been stronger. Our commitment to this historic alliance with the courageous people of South Korea has never been stronger." Pence was beginning a 10-day trip to Asia in what his aides said was a sign of U.S. commitment to its ally in the face of mounting tension.

The U.S. nuclear-powered Carl Vinson aircraft carrier strike group is also heading to the region. China, which Trump has urged to do more to rein in North Korea, has spoken out against its weapons tests and has supported U.N. sanctions. It has repeatedly called for talks while appearing increasingly frustrated with the North. Beijing banned imports of North Korean coal on Feb. 26, cutting off its most important export. China's customs department issued an order on April 7 telling traders to return North Korean coal cargoes, said trading sources with knowledge of the order.

'Hostile regime'

Trump's decision to order a cruise missile strike on a Syrian airfield this month, in response to what he said was Syria's use of chemical weapons, raised questions about his plans for reclusive North Korea. Pyongyang has conducted several missiles and nuclear tests in defiance of U.N. sanctions and regularly threatens to destroy South Korea and the United States.

"The president has made clear that he will not accept the United States and its allies and partners in the region being under threat from this hostile regime with nuclear weapons," McMaster told ABC. But McMaster, who was speaking from Kabul, Afghanistan, acknowledged the likelihood of North Korean retaliation if Washington uses military force in an attempt to stop its weapons programs. "What (is) particularly difficult about – about dealing with this regime, is that it is unpredictable," he said.

South Korea, which hosts 28,500 U.S. troops and holds a presidential election on May 9, warned of punitive action if the Sunday launch led to further provocation. Impoverished North Korea and the rich, democratic South are technically still at war because their 1950-1953 conflict ended in a truce, not a peace treaty.

The North has warned of a nuclear strike against the United States if provoked. It has said it has developed and would launch a missile that can strike the mainland United States, but officials and experts believe it is some time away from mastering the necessary technology, including miniaturising a nuclear warhead. North Korea launched a ballistic missile from the same region this month, ahead of a summit between the United States and China in Florida to discuss the North's arms program.

That missile, which U.S. officials said appeared to be a liquid-fuelled, extended-range Scud, only flew about 60 km (40 miles), a fraction of its range, before spinning out of control. Tension had escalated sharply amid concern the North may conduct a sixth nuclear test or a ballistic missile test around Saturday's celebration of Kim Il Sung's birthday, which it calls the "Day of the Sun."

In Pyongyang, there was a festive atmosphere at a flower show, with families out, taking pictures with North Korean-made smartphones. There was no mention of the test failure by the KCNA state news agency. Company worker Rim Chung Ryol, 30, said he had not heard of the test.

"If it is a failure, then failure is the mother of success," he told Reuters. Factory worker Ri Gul Chol, 37, also had not heard about the missile test. "But whatever Kim Jong Un decides and instructs will succeed and all the citizens will support him," he said.



Mon, 17 Apr, 2017

US launches first test flights for upgraded nuclear bomb

Scientists at Sandia National Laboratories are claiming success with the first in a new series of test flights involving an upgraded version of a nuclear bomb that has been part of US arsenal for decades. Work on the B61-12 has been ongoing for years, and government officials say the latest tests using mock versions of the bomb will be vital to the refurbishing effort.

An F-16 from Nellis Air Force Base dropped an inert version of the weapon over the Nevada desert last month to test its non-nuclear functions as well as the plane's ability to carry the bomb. With a mere puff of dust, the mock bomb landed in a dry lake bed at the Tonopah Test Range. Daily Mail



Mon, 17 Apr, 2017

Meaning: Mother of all Bombs

By Sushant Singh

What is this weapon, and how does it work?

On Friday, the GBU-43 Massive Ordnance Air Blast (MOAB), popularly called the Mother of All Bombs, became the largest non-nuclear bomb ever to be dropped on a battlefield after the United States military used it against an ISIS target in Afghanistan's Nangarhar province. What is this weapon, and how does it work?

What is the MOAB?

Weighing roughly 10,000 kg, and measuring 10 metres in length and a metre in width, the MOAB is a very high yield conventional GPS-guided munition, which was designed in 2002 by the US Air Force Research Laboratory. It was developed by the Alabama-based aeronautics company Dynetics at a reported cost of \$ 16 million each for the Iraq War, and was first tested in 2003. But it had never been used in action until Friday.

How is the MOAB different?

For two reasons. One, it packs in 8,000 kg of explosives — in comparison, the average weight of most deployed conventional bombs is roughly 250 kg. Two, it is a thermobaric weapon, which uses oxygen from the surrounding air to generate an intense, high-temperature blast wave that packs an incredible amount of energy into a small, localised area. In comparison, most conventional bombs consist of a mix of fuel and oxygen-generating substances. Thermobaric weapons consist of almost entirely 100% fuel, and rely on atmospheric oxygen.

Does it work like other bombs?

No. Unlike a bomb designed to actually penetrate a building or the ground, the MOAB has a “proximity fuse” on its nose that ignites the warhead when it reaches a certain altitude above the ground. The height could vary between 50 feet and 1,000 feet. As the fuse blows, it blasts fuel into the air, which then atomises. It is followed by a secondary explosion which lights the fuel that has been atomised.

The US had dropped older-style fuel-air bombs during the Vietnam War in order to flatten large areas of forest for helicopter landing zones. It has also dropped at least one “daisy cutter” — an MOAB precursor — on al-Qaeda at the Tora Bora cave complex in Afghanistan at the start of NATO’s Afghanistan campaign.

How is the MOAB delivered?

The sheer weight of the MOAB makes it impossible for it to be delivered using conventional bombers. The bomb must, therefore, be carried in a big transport plane, like the C-130 used by the US military on Friday. It is then sucked out of the back of the cabin hold on a pallet using a massive parachute, before being guided by the GPS through the satellite to its target.

Is MOAB the world’s largest conventional bomb?

No, the MOAB is still only the second largest conventional bomb in the US arsenal, after the Massive Ordnance Penetrator (MOP) which has nearly double the quantity of explosive. Unlike the MOAB, which detonates shortly before hitting the surface, making it capable of destroying buildings and networks just below the surface, such as tunnels and caves, the MOP is able to penetrate much deeper, and reportedly take out military bunkers. But the MOAB remains the biggest non-nuclear bomb to be used ever in combat.

Is MOAB primarily a military tool or psychological tool?

The way the US has chosen to deploy the bomb and publicise its use, it is clearly being used more as a psychological tool. Within hours of the bombing, the Pentagon had posted a press release describing the attack and its alleged effect on ISIS positions. But there are bound to be questions about the use of such a bomb in a counterinsurgency operation in areas with a civilian population — apparently one of the reasons the MOAB was never used in Iraq.

A day after the US MOAB strike, General Dawlat Waziri, a spokesman for the Afghan Defence Ministry, said initial information indicated that 36 militants had been killed and three large caves destroyed. However, Attaullah Khogyani, a spokesman for the provincial governor’s office, said 82 militants had been killed.

Business Standard

Mon, 17 Apr, 2017

What if we could upload books to our brains?

Human brain might interface directly with non-biological forms of intelligence

By Cathy O’Neil

What if humans could upload all the great classics of literature to their brains, without having to go through the arduous process of reading? Wonderful and levelling as that may seem, it’s a prospect that I’m not sure we should readily embrace.

A while ago, I listened to an interview with futurist Ray Kurzweil on astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson's radio show StarTalk. Kurzweil described how our brains might someday interface directly with non-biological forms of intelligence, possibly with the help of nano-bots that travel through our capillaries.

Given how much faster this interface would be than regular reading, he went on, we'd be able to consume novels like *The Brothers Karamazov* in moments, rather than the current rather clumsy form of ingestion known as reading, which, he said, "could take months".

At this point Tyson interjected: Are you saying we could just upload *War and Peace*? Yes, Kurzweil answered: "We will connect to neocortical hierarchies in cloud with pre-loaded knowledge."

This snippet of conversation has baffled and fascinated me ever since. I confess that I do not know a lick about neuroscience. But just knowing something about reading makes the above story implausible, if not alarming.

From my perspective, the learning that we do when we read a book has little to do with knowledge — what would a pre-loaded version of *The Brothers Karamazov* constitute? — and everything to do with responding emotionally and morally to the story. As I've become older, I forgive hypocrisies more quickly, and I identify with decay more readily. I understand spiritual conflict but I'm not alarmed by it. Thus the book itself is different each time it's read by a different version of me.

I'm not sure what Kurzweil thinks when he says our computer minds won't need to bother to read the book, and I want to give him and his other futurist computer-brain friends some credit. They surely mean more than having the text of the book itself available to us, or even memorised. That wouldn't represent knowledge. It must be something deeper, a representation of the book possibly as a narrative, or maybe a movie. But again, if we have access only to that movie, it doesn't represent the same learning that would come through reading and experiencing the book.

There are only two more possibilities left, at least in my limited biological brain. First, that the "true meaning" of the book is codified once and for all by a computer, and is inserted into our long-term memories. This would inevitably be unsatisfying, because it would mean that if I "read it again" I'd actually experience the same exact thing. Also, whose experience gets codified?

Finally, there's the possibility that the book's true meaning would change depending on the state of my brain — that the interface would look into my mind, see and understand my patience with hypocrisy and spiritual conflict, and then transform the story accordingly. In which case, every time I uploaded that book or any other, I'd experience a different story. I doubt this is possible, and in any case I would find the lack of active participation creepy. That said, I'd definitely pay a monthly subscription to try it out.