

Bike-ambulances to special shoes, DRDO arms CRPF

By Deeptiman Tiwary

In January 2013, when an IAF chopper entered Bastar to rescue injured CRPF and Chhattisgarh Police personnel in Timmilwada area of Sukma district, it came under heavy gunfire. Its fuel tank and hydraulic system were hit, and a Chhattisgarh Police constable flying in the chopper was shot. As the chopper went down, the injured constable was left behind at the spot as he could not have walked to the nearest camp. The constable bled for three hours, before he could be evacuated.

Rescuing injured security personnel is always fraught with danger in the Left Wing Extremism-hit areas of the country. And, as seen in the Sukma attack on March 13 this year in which nine CRPF personnel were killed, even mine-protected vehicles are not safe, as Maoists are reported to use over 50-kg explosives to target them.

In an attempt to solve this problem, the CRPF, with the help of the Defence Research and Development Organisation's (DRDO) Institute of Nuclear Medicine & Allied Sciences (INMAS), has developed a motorcycle-ambulance which has been tailored to its needs.

It comes with a special pillion seat that has support for the spine and neck, and even has a saline stand along with provision for carrying medicines and injections. CRPF sources said a dozen such motorcycle-ambulances would initially be deployed in camps across LWE-hit areas, with preference being given to remote and inaccessible locations.

"In such areas, like South Bastar, medical contingencies have greater frequency but evacuation is challenging due to terrain constraints. Either roads are completely absent or there are non-metalled roads which have the danger of mines. Bikes have always been the CRPF's favoured mode of travel, as they greatly eliminate the risk of being caught in an IED explosion and also provide a modicum of stealth. Even during normal patrolling, our soldiers either move on foot or on bikes. So the bike-ambulances are going to be of great help," CRPF DG RR Bhatnagar told The Sunday Express. He said the bike-ambulance would be equipped like a regular ambulance, to help an injured person reach the nearest camp or medical facility.

"This is a new concept in India. It was very popular in World War I and II, when side cars were attached with motorcycles which acted as medical stretchers for injured soldiers. The CRPF is also looking to utilise these bikes for civic action programmes, like ferrying sick tribals to the nearest medical facility in Chhattisgarh," said an official involved with the development of the motorcycle-ambulance.

"A trial run of these bikes, called Rakshita Ambulance Bike, was carried out in Chhattisgarh and some modifications, based on our operational requirements, have been suggested. A fresh prototype is now being developed by INMAS and it will be available soon. These will first be tried in Bastar," said Bhatnagar.

Apart from this, the CRPF is also getting special shoes developed, which can withstand iron spikes. Sources said that to prevent CRPF personnel from conducting cross-country patrolling and combing operations, the Maoists plant iron spikes in the foliage which pierce through the feet. The security personnel had begun reinforcing their shoes with metal plates, but these made them very heavy, and thus, slowed their movement.

“We are developing special shoes that will withstand iron spikes, despite being very light and without any reinforcement of metal,” said a senior CRPF officer.

The agency is also in the process of acquiring new technology to supplement their combat capabilities. These, sources said, include the Long Range Observation System, generally used by border guarding forces to monitor movement near and across the border. The CRPF plans to station these at vantage points near its camps.

It is also acquiring more UAVs to augment its monitoring capabilities, apart from new Ground Penetrating Radars which are expected to work better than metal detectors and detect mines buried deep in the ground.

“Because of high iron content in the soil in Chhattisgarh, metal detectors often give false alarm. They also can’t detect mines deep underground, which penetrating radars can. The idea is that we should be able to dominate at least a two-kilometre radius of our camps and make sure we don’t come under attack in our area of influence,” said a senior CRPF officer.