

## 5 Indians among 68 dead in Nepal plane crash

The crash happened around 20 minutes after the take-off, suggesting the aircraft might have been on the descent

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
NEW DELHI/KATHMANDU, JANUARY 15

**F**ive Indians were among the 68 people killed in Nepal after a plane carrying about 72 people from capital Kathmandu crashed in Pokhara on Sunday morning. It is yet to be ascertained if there are any survivors.

According to reports, there were 68 passengers and four crew members on board the plane that crashed between the old and new airports in the city, located in western Nepal. The twin-engine ATR 72 aircraft was operated by Yeti Airlines and caught fire as it crashed.

Fifteen foreign nationals, including six children, were on board the plane. There were 53 Nepali, 5 Indian, 4 Russian, 2 Koreans, 1 Argentinian, and one person each from Ireland, Australia, and France in the plane, the airlines said in a statement.

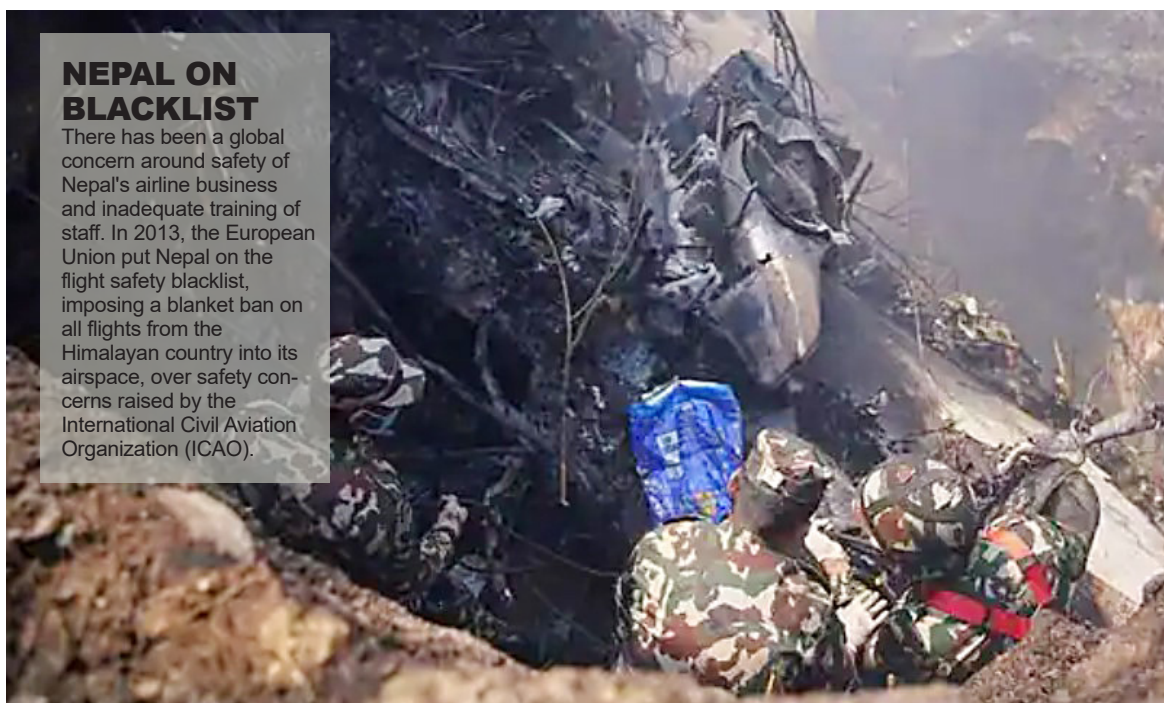
"Thirty-one (bodies) have been taken to hospitals," police official AK Chhetri told AFP, adding that 36 other bodies were found in the gorge where the aircraft crashed.

A raging fire at the wreckage site made rescue operations difficult.

The plane took off from Tribhuvan International Airport, Kathmandu, at 10:33

### NEPAL ON BLACKLIST

There has been a global concern around safety of Nepal's airline business and inadequate training of staff. In 2013, the European Union put Nepal on the flight safety blacklist, imposing a blanket ban on all flights from the Himalayan country into its airspace, over safety concerns raised by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).



am and was about to land at Pokhara airport, before it crashed into a river gorge on the bank of the Seti River, said the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN).

The crash happened around 20 minutes

after the take-off, suggesting the aircraft might have been on the descent. The flight time between the two cities is 25 minutes.

Union Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia condoled the loss of

lives in the plane crash.

"The loss of lives in a tragic plane crash in Nepal is extremely unfortunate. My thoughts and prayers are with the families of the bereaved. Om Shanti," he tweeted.

### PLAGUED BY PLANE CRASHES

Hundreds of people have earlier died in horrific plane crashes in Nepal, as per an AFP report.

In May 2022, all 22 people on board a plane operated by Nepali carrier Tara Air died when it crashed. There were 16 Nepalis, four Indians, and two Germans on board.

In March 2018, a US-Bangla Airlines plane crash-landed near Kathmandu's international airport, killing 51 people.

In 1992, Nepal witnessed its deadliest crash when all 167 people aboard a Pakistan International Airlines aircraft died near Kathmandu.

Just two months earlier, a Thai Airways aircraft had crashed near the same airport, killing 113 people.

Meanwhile, Nepal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' called an emergency cabinet meeting soon after the crash and set up a five-member inquiry commission to investigate the crash.

## Every Indian proud of our army: PM Modi

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 15

**O**n the occasion of Army Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday conveyed his wishes to army personnel and veterans and said that the countrymen are proud and grateful to the soldiers.

Taking to Twitter, PM Modi said, "On Army Day, I convey my best wishes to all army personnel, veterans and their families. Every Indian is proud of our Army and will

always be grateful to our soldiers. They have always kept our nation safe and are widely admired for their service during times of crisis."

President Droupadi Murmu also paid tributes to the sacrifice of the army personnel. "On Army Day, let us recall countless stories of Indian Army soldiers' sacrifices! They have always pushed the frontiers of valour and courage and also acted as saviours in times of calamities. I salute all brave soldiers of Indian Army and their families on

this occasion," tweeted Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Chief of Army Staff General Manoj Pande conveyed felicitations and warm wishes to all ranks of the Indian Army,

### ARMY DAY

veterans and their families on the occasion of 75th Army Day.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh saluted the indomitable courage, bravery, sacrifices and service of army personnel.

"Greetings to all Indian Army personnel and their families on #ArmyDay. The nation salutes their indomitable courage, valour, sacrifices and service. We are proud of the Indian Army's efforts to keep India safe and secure," he tweeted.

Army Day is celebrated every year on January 15 to commemorate the jawans and the Indian Army, who have set the greatest example of selfless service and brotherhood and more than anything the love for the country.

In celebration of Army Day, the parade

is organised every year at the Cariappa Parade Ground of Delhi Cantonment.

On January 15, 1949, Field Marshal Kodandera M Cariappa, who was then a Lieutenant General, took over as the first Indian Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army from General Sir Francis Butcher, the last British person to hold that post.

This year, for the first time, the Army Day parade is being held outside the national capital. The 75th Army Day celebrations were held in Bengaluru on Sunday.



### Ready for any situation on China border: Army Chief

Army Chief General Manoj Pande said on Sunday a 'strong defence posture' was being maintained along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and added, "We are ready to tackle any contingency"

Page 2



### AI starts direct flights from Amritsar to London

Air India has started additional direct flights between Amritsar and London and one to Birmingham, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MP Raghav Chadha informed on Sunday.

Page 3



### Response to Rahul in Punjab should concern BJP

The BJP can no longer be dismissive about the Bharat Jodo Yatra being currently led by the Congress leader Rahul Gandhi. Not at least in Punjab, where it has drawn very good crowds.

Page 4

# Ready for any situation on China border: Army Chief

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 15

Army Chief General Manoj Pande said on Sunday a 'strong defence posture' was being maintained along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and added, "We are ready to tackle any contingency".

The LAC is the un-demarcated default boundary with China along the Himalayan ridgeline.

Gen Manoj Pande was speaking on the occasion of the 75th Army Day celebrations in Bengaluru. It is the first time that the Army Day parade is being conducted outside the national capital.

"In the northern border areas, the situation has been normal and through established protocols and existing mechanisms, necessary steps have been taken to maintain peace," he said.

Speaking about the year gone by, Gen



**GEN MANOJ PANDE WAS SPEAKING ON THE OCCASION OF THE 75TH ARMY DAY CELEBRATIONS IN BENGALURU.**

Pande said: "Last year, the Army firmly faced security-related challenges and ensured security of borders actively and strongly. Army took steps to improve

capability development, force restructuring and training. It also further strengthened its preparations for future wars."

The Chief also emphasised that with efforts of local admin, other agencies and military there have been improvements in infrastructure development. "Despite difficult area and rough weather, our brave jawans are deployed there. All kinds of arms, equipment and facilities are being given to them in adequate quantity," he added.

On the western front, he said the ceasefire continues at the Line of Control (LoC) and ceasefire violations have been brought down. "But across the border, terror infrastructure still remains. The counter-infiltration grid is continuously foiling the infiltration from the Pakistan side," the Army Chief said.

About the recent spike in killings in J&K sector, the Chief said: "Although there has been a decline in violence with the efforts of security forces, several proxy

terrorist outfits have resorted to the technique of targeted killings to gain visibility."

"Army, along with other security forces, is determined to foil all such attempts," Gen Pande added. He cited the attempts to smuggle weapons and drugs through drones in the international boundary sector in J&K and Punjab.

Counter-drone jammers and other equipment have been brought into use against such activities, the Army Chief said. The local population in J&K has rejected violence and have enthusiastically participated in all initiatives of the government, he added.

On the north-east, he said there have been definite improvements in security situation in north-eastern regions. Indian Army has played an important role in bringing down level of violence and making insurgents leave the path of violence, he said.

## Cong MP Santokh Singh cremated; Rahul attends last rites

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
JALANDHAR, JANUARY 15

The funeral of Congress MP Chaudhary Santokh Singh was held on Sunday with state honours at his native village Dhaliwal Kandian in Jalandhar, Punjab. His son Vikramjit Singh Chaudhary, who is an MLA from the Phillaur Assembly segment, lit the pyre as hundreds of his supporters participated in the last rites.

Rahul Gandhi and leaders from across party lines, including senior BJP leader and chairman, National Commission for Scheduled Caste Vijay Sampla, along with other local leaders attended Singh's last rites.

Also present were several Congress leaders, including former chief minister Charanjit Singh Channi, Congress MLAs Rana Gurjit Singh (Kapurthala), Pargat Singh (Jalandhar Cantt), and Hardev Singh Laddi Sherowalia (Shahkot), Lok Sabha MP from Faridkot Mohammed Sadiq, former MLAs Rajinder Beri and Sushil Rinku.

Earlier in the day, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Rajya Sabha member Baba Balbir Singh Seechewal visited Singh's residence to offer his condolences to the bereaved family.



Rahul Gandhi consoles Chaudhary Santokh Singh's wife.

## Army evacuates 172 workers of Zojila Tunnel after major avalanche

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
SRINAGAR, JANUARY 15

The Indian Army evacuated 172 workers stranded at the Zojila Tunnel construction site in J&K's Ganderbal district.

"Yesterday in a major avalanche occurrence near Sarbal Nilagr workers of the construction company got stuck. Avalanche rescue teams of Army and Ganderbal police got into action and after hours of gruelling effort finally all 172 workers were brought to safety," a statement from Indian Army said on Sunday.

A senior official said, "Army pressed into effect not only avalanche rescue equipment but also avalanche rescue dogs. No effort would be spared to save the lives of the brave hearts working in the Zojila tunnel tirelessly."

Indian Army further said that this incident happened immediately after January 12 when due to a major avalanche two workers lost their lives in the Ganderbal district of Jammu and Kashmir.

Earlier on Saturday, a landslide and an avalanche struck Dachan Marwah road in the Kishtwar region of Jammu and Kashmir and a village in the Gurez sector of the state's Bandipora district, respectively.

No loss of lives was reported and search operations were executed while the administration deployed teams to clean the debris.

## Intense cold wave sweeps north India

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
CHANDIGARH, JANUARY 15

Cold wave conditions and fog prevailed over Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, parts of Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan on Sunday.

Punjab's Faridkot was the coldest in the region at -1 degree, according to a report issued by the Meteorological Department.

Severe cold persisted over Amritsar which recorded its minimum temperature at 1.6 degrees Celsius.

Ludhiana, Patiala, Pathankot, Bathinda and Gurdaspur experienced temperature cold weather conditions at

4.9, 4.2, 8, 1 and 3.7 degrees Celsius respectively.

Chandigarh, the common capital of Punjab and Haryana, recorded 6.7 degrees Celsius.

In neighbouring Haryana, Ambala's temperature minimum was 5.6 degrees Celsius while Hisar's low was 4.3 degrees Celsius.

Narnaul, Rohtak, Bhiwani and Sirsa registered their respective minimum temperatures at 4, 5.2, 4.7 and 1.8 degrees Celsius.

Meanwhile, after a brief respite, Delhi woke up to a chilly morning today, with the weather office predicting a steep fall in temperature in the coming days.

The minimum temperature in the national capital was recorded 4.7 degrees Celsius this morning - a big drop from yesterday's 10.2 degree Celsius. The visibility in Palam area was about 200 meters.

Some flights scheduled to depart from the national capital were delayed due to a low visibility in the region. Northern Railway officials said at least 20 trains were running late.

The weather office has issued an alert for intense cold wave conditions and fog between January 16 and 18 in national capital region, adding the minimum temperature at Ayanagar and Ridge in Delhi may settle around 3 degrees Celsius.

## PM flags off Vande Bharat Express

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 15

On the occasion of Pongal on Sunday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi virtually flagged off the Vande Bharat Express train connecting Secunderabad with Vishakhapatnam.

Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and Union Tourism Minister G Krishna Reddy were also present during the event.

"In this festive environment, today Telangana and Andhra Pradesh are receiving a grand present. Vande Bharat Express, in a way, will connect the shared culture and heritage of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh," said the prime minister.

"Vande Bharat Train is the symbol of



PM flags off Vande Bharat Express train connecting Secunderabad with Vishakhapatnam via video conferencing on Sunday.

the resolutions and capability of New India. It is a symbol of that India which has started on the path of rapid change - India which is restless for its dreams and

aspirations, India which wants to reach its goal swiftly," Modi said.

"Glad to flag off Vande Bharat Express between Secunderabad and Visakha-

patnam. It will enhance 'Ease of Living', boost tourism and benefit the economy," PM Modi tweeted.

Automatic doors, a GPS-based audio-visual passenger information system, onboard hotspot Wi-Fi for entertainment, and plush seating are just a few of the amenities the Vande Bharat Express train offers.

The train will cover a distance of 700 kilometres and will have stoppages at Visakhapatnam, Rajahmundry and Vijayawada stations in Andhra Pradesh and at Khammam, Warangal and Secunderabad stations in Telangana.

With this, the total number of Vande Bharat Express trains introduced by Indian Railways has reached eight, while being the first one to connect the two Telugu speaking states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

# PUNJAB

## Moosewala's father joins Bharat Jodo Yatra

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
JALANDHAR, JANUARY 15

Slain Punjabi singer Sidhu Moosewala's father Balkaur Singh joined Congress MP Rahul Gandhi on his Bharat Jodo Yatra as it resumed its journey from Khalsa College Ground in Jalandhar on Sunday after remaining suspended for 30 hours in view of the death of Congress MP Chaudhary Santokh Singh.

As the march resumed around 3 pm, Balkaur Singh was seen walking hand-in-hand with Gandhi for some distance.

Punjab Congress chief Amrinder Singh Raja Warring, leader of Opposition in the assembly Partap Singh Bajwa, former chief minister Charanjit Singh Channi, MLA Pargat Singh and other party leaders also took part in the yatra.

Though it was stated by the Congress party that no songs or music will be played or slogans raised as the Yatra passes from Jalandhar today as a mark of respect to Singh and his bereaved family, supporters of late singer chanted "Sidhu Moosewala zindabad" slogans as they walked along the yatra holding a huge portrait of the singer-politician.

"Today #BharatJodoYatra Balkaur Singh Sidhu ji, father of famous Punjabi singer Late Sidhu Moose Wala, along with @RahulGandhi ji gave a befitting reply to the forces spreading hatred, fear and violence. Sidhu Moose Wala was murdered in broad daylight in Mansa, Punjab," the Congress tweeted along with a video of Balkaur Singh and Gandhi.

Shubhdeep Singh Sidhu, popularly known as Sidhu Moosewala, was shot dead in Punjab's Mansa district on May 29, 2022 when he was on his way to Jawahar Ke village in Mansa in a black Thar with his friend and cousin. His vehicle was waylaid and bullets were sprayed on him by six shooters. After the



**SUPPORTERS OF LATE SINGER CHANTED "SIDHU MOOSEWALA ZINDABAD" SLOGANS AS THEY WALKED ALONG THE YATRA HOLDING A HUGE PORTRAIT OF THE SINGER-POLITICIAN.**

killing, Goldy Brar, a member of the Lawrence Bishnoi gang, claimed responsibility for the murder.

Moosewala had joined Congress in 2021, right before the Punjab Assembly elections and unsuccessfully contested the polls from Mansa constituency. The

singer lost to Aam Aadmi Party's Dr Vijay Singla.

Navjot Singh Sidhu, who was Punjab Congress' chief during his induction in the state, had called Moosewala an icon for the youth and an international personality.

Earlier today, Gandhi offered prayers at Devi Talab temple in Jalandhar before the resumption of the march after Santokh Singh's cremation at his native Dhaliwal village in Jalandhar. Singh died on Saturday after suffering a cardiac arrest during the Bharat Jodo Yatra. Gandhi also attended the cremation.

The Bharat Jodo Yatra will halt for the night in Adampur.

## Air India starts direct flights from Amritsar to London

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
CHANDIGARH, JANUARY 15

Air India has started additional direct flights between Amritsar and London and one to Birmingham, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MP Raghav Chadha informed on Sunday.

Sharing the latest development on Twitter, Chadha said that he consistently raised Punjab's demand for international air connectivity over the last two parliamentary sessions.

"Good news, Punjabis. Air India has started additional direct flights btw Amritsar-London and one to Birmingham. I've tried to consistently raise Punjab's demand for international air connectivity over the last two parliamentary sessions. Will work to improve connectivity further," the Rajya Sabha MP said in a tweet.

Notably, on December 19, Chadha had raised the issue in the winter session of Parliament.

Earlier in August 2022, the AAP MP from Punjab had raised the issue with



Minister of Civil Aviation Jyotiraditya Scindia.

In his question, Chadha asked about the details of new international flights added to Mohali and Amritsar airports during the last five years.

Chadha also asked the reasons for flight services from Amritsar airport to Canada not being added despite a large number of passengers travelling between the two places every year.

## Two held with heroin worth Rs 30 cr

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
CHANDIGARH, JANUARY 15

The Border Security Force (BSF) arrested two Punjab-based drug smugglers from Sriganganagar in Rajasthan and recovered heroin worth about Rs 30 crore from their possession.

"Based upon intelligence inputs, BSF personnel carried out operations on the intervening night of January 14-15 near

the International Border and took into custody two smugglers, and seized three bags dropped on our side of the border by drones," a BSF officer said.

The bags contained six packets of heroin, which collectively weighed 6 kgs and valued at about Rs 30 crore in the international market, he added.

BSF troops also fired at a drone during the operations along with using illumination bombs for better visibility.

## Goldy Brar's aide held in Himachal Pradesh

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
CHANDIGARH, JANUARY 15

The Punjab Police on Sunday arrested an active operative of Canada-based terrorist Goldy Brar from Sundar Nagar, Himachal Pradesh.

Director General of Police (DGP) Punjab Gaurav Yadav identified the arrested accused as Inderpreet Singh alias Parry (32), a resident of Chandigarh.

Parry, who came in contact with Goldy Brar and Lawrence Bishnoi during his college days at DAV College, Chandigarh in 2011, has a notorious past with more than a dozen cases pertaining to murder and attempt to murder registered against him in Punjab and Haryana, the DGP said.

The arrested accused also has involve-

**THE DGP SAID FOLLOWING SYSTEMATIC INVESTIGATIONS AND DEVELOPING AVAILABLE LEADS, POLICE TEAMS FROM SSOC MOHALI TRACED THE LOCATION OF PARRY IN HP AND ARRESTED HIM FROM A HOTEL AT SUNDAR NAGAR WITH THE HELP OF THE LOCAL POLICE.**



ment in the targeted killing of Pardeep Singh, who was killed by six-persons outside his shop in Kotkapura on November 10, 2022. He had also actively participated

when Lawrence Bishnoi fled from police custody.

The DGP said following systematic investigations and developing available leads,

police teams from SSOC Mohali traced the location of Parry in Himachal Pradesh and arrested him from a hotel at Sundar Nagar with the help of the local police.

Divulging the role of Parry in targeted killing of Pardeep Singh, the DGP said that on November 7, 2022, Parry on the directions of Goldy Brar gave Rs 20,000 in cash to Harshveer Singh Bajwa and directed him to deposit the amount in the account of Manpreet Singh alias Manni, an accused in Pardeep Singh murder case. Harshveer and Manni have already been arrested by the Punjab Police.

Notably, accused Parry was earlier arrested by Chandigarh police in March 2022 in an Arms Act case after recovering one Glock pistol and one .30 bore pistol from his possession. In this case he remained in Burial Jail for around 2 months before being bailed out in 2021.

Meanwhile, Parry has been arrested in a case dated October 28, 2022 registered under various sections of the IPC.

# EDITORIAL

The Express India NEWS

## Pakistan embassy officials' misbehaviour

Recently an Indian scholar from Punjab has complained of misbehaviour and sexual harassment against some officials in the Pakistan High Commission in India. This is something very serious and unacceptable. The Pakistan government claims to have "zero-tolerance" against such behaviour by its staff on the diplomatic missions. But it does not translate as such on the ground. The external affairs ministry of Pakistan government instead of taking any remedial and curative action has been sort of defending its staff.

No doubt the staff enjoys diplomatic immunity. But in some case of serious nature, like the sexual harassment, the home country of the staff should be more sensitive towards the complainants. After all, why should anyone complain of such behaviour if it did not take place? The victim does not stand to gain anything from such a complaint. Rather the complainant would be at a disadvantage since she will not be able to visit that country after making such a complaint.

The ministry of external affairs, government of India must take up the matter with the government of Pakistan to ensure that proper inquiry and action is taken against the accused. The seriousness and sensitivity of such complaints must be taken note of. It is a reciprocal process. People from both countries keep on visiting the other country. This builds up mutual trust and relationship. But such ugly incidents will obviously discourage any such exchange. This evil must be nipped in the bud.

## Toll plaza extortion

Various protesting farmers' organisations have been regularly staging dharmas at different toll plazas across the state. The protests have been finding resonance among the common people as they genuinely feel exploited with extortionist toll tax. Whenever there is a protest at the toll plazas, the vehicles are allowed to move without paying any toll. The toll plaza operators have approached the court against such protests as they claim that they have been suffering "huge" losses.

The operators may have a case that they suffer losses if the vehicles are let to pass without paying the toll tax. At the same time those staging protests are equally justified as the toll tax is too "exploitative and extortionist". There is no defined and transparent policy about fixing the toll tax rates and these are increased regularly everywhere. Moreover, it is also not clear as to who pockets the money of the collection from the toll plazas. The toll plaza operators are supposed to maintain the roads, but the state of roads is self-explanatory as the roads remain in bad shape.

There needs to be a clear and transparent policy on the toll tax charged by the operators. Right now it is completely opaque. Nobody knows the criteria of charging the toll tax. The vehicle owners are made to pay through the nose even when they have already paid the road tax at the time of purchasing the vehicles. There must be an end to exploitation and extortion by the toll plaza operators.

# Response to Rahul in Punjab should concern BJP

BY VIMAL SUMBLY

The Bharatiya Janata Party can no longer be dismissive about the Bharat Jodo Yatra being currently led by the Congress leader Rahul Gandhi. Not at least in Punjab, where it has drawn very good crowds. The unfortunate demise of Jalandhar MP Chaudhary Santokh Singh was the tragic episode of the yatra in Punjab. The yatra was suspended for 24 hours as a mark of respect in memory of the departed leader. He suffered a heart attack after addressing a well attended public meeting in an area which fell in the assembly segment of his son and Phillaur MLA Chaudhary Vikramjit Singh and his own parliamentary constituency, Jalandhar.

The organisers of the yatra appear to have planned the route in a strategic manner along the Grand Trunk Road covering the cities like Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur, Dasuya, Mukerian and Pathankot, before it crosses to the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir. This entire route has a significant BJP presence. In fact, BJP till now has had a dominant presence along these areas only. Rahul Gandhi drawing a good response, if not a threat, should certainly be a challenge for the

**DESPITE RAHUL'S IMAGE THAT HE IS NOT A POPULAR LEADER AND NOT A CROWD PULLER, HE HAS MANAGED VERY GOOD CROWDS EVERYWHERE HE WENT, PARTICULARLY IN PUNJAB.**

party. The BJP is looking forward to playing a bigger role in Punjab politics and that too of its own. Its core strength till now remains in these areas only. Congress has strategically targeted these areas and the strategy appears to be working well.

The BJP's overflowing confidence of going it alone in Punjab notwithstanding, it has not been able to translate this sentiment on the ground. The party has not done any visible

activity involving masses since the assembly elections. Although it has managed to rope in quite a number of leaders from the Congress and the Shiromani Akali Dal, it has not been able to register any significant change on the ground. Coupled with it is the insistence of the state BJP leaders that the party will not have any alliance with the Akalis in future.

If the BJP plans to go it alone and expects to make any difference, it will be quite an exaggerated optimism and

over-ambition. Despite Rahul's image that he is not a popular leader and not a crowd puller, he has managed very good crowds everywhere he went, particularly in Punjab, where the party is yet to come out of the shock of the massive debacle of 2022 assembly elections. This was followed by the exodus of several senior leaders to BJP. Besides, it had already lost two towering leaders, former Chief Minister Capt Amarinder

Singh and a former Punjab Congress president, Sunil Jakhar, both of whom are now in the BJP.

This also reaffirms the fact that the Congress does have a strong grassroots base in Punjab that despite massive exodus of popular and powerful leaders, it still managed the crowds and that too when there are no elections round the corner and a government with more than two-third majority in the Vidhan Sabha is going to be there still for more than four years.

The success of Bharat Jodo Yatra in Punjab is also a challenge for other parties, including the ruling Aam Aadmi Party and another opposition party, the Shiromani Akali Dal-Badal. Ideally the politics and subsequently the elections get "ruling-party" centric. And when there are multiple opposition parties, three in Punjab, it gets a natural advantage. However, it may not hold true for Punjab, as the AAP has not managed to establish a strong grassroots presence across the state that would correspond with its strong numerical strength in the Vidhan Sabha. Given the strong presence the Congress has in the state, the elections in Punjab are likely to get Congress-centric. This will provide advantage to the party, as the fight can be the Congress versus the rest with the "anti-Congress" vote getting divided.

However, it is too early to reach any conclusions. But one thing is certain that Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra has helped the Congress to reorganize itself and infuse fresh energy among the cadres who were otherwise feeling and lying low after a shocking defeat in February last. While the challenge is for all the parties, for the BJP it is quite immense as the core support base of the Congress and the BJP remains the same. Right now, it is advantage Congress over the BJP, thanks to the Bharat Jodo Yatra.

## GUTS AND GLORY ON FOREIGN SOILS – XI

# Indian Artillery stands tall and towering



BY MAJ GEN HARVIJAY SINGH (RETD, SM)

It is with artillery that war is made—Napoleon Bonaparte  
The decolonisation bug is not new. In 1954, all were ordered to change regimental mottos to Hindi/Sanskrit. Regiment of Artillery forcefully retained its Persian motto Sarvatra Izzat-o-Iqbal (Everywhere with Honour & Glory).

World War II – Western Theatre: Indian artillery units saw action in East and North Africa, the Middle East and Italy.

- East Africa, Syria - 1 (Jammu &

Kashmir) Mountain Battery - Now 23 Field Regiment.

- North Africa – 2 Indian Field Regiment – Now 2 Medium Regiment (Self Propelled). The regiment has the unique honour of having two Chiefs of Army Staff as its officers - General Paramasiva Prabhakar Kumaramangalam of the Indian Army and General Tikka Khan of the Pakistan Army.

- East Africa – 22 (Derajat) Mountain Battery – Now 22 Medium Regiment.

- Aden – 27 and 18 Indian Mountain Batteries.

- 2 Indian Field Regiment: Raised in May 1940 at Bangalore, moved to Persia and Iraq with 6 Indian Division in Nov 1941 and thereafter moved to Northern Syria in Feb 1942 to be part of 3 Indian Motor Brigade Group. Participated in the famous Battle of Bir Hacheim, awarded the Honour Title "Point 171" just within two years of its raising. Major (General and Chief of Army Staff) PP Kumaramangalam was awarded the DSO. Capt (Maj Gen

and Director Artillery) AS Naravane and 2/Lt (General and Chief of Pakistan Army) Tikka Khan were taken prisoners of war.

In Nov 1941, 3 Indian Motor Brigade Group formed part of Gazala—Bir Hacheim defences. On 26 May, the Brigade Group with 2 Field Regiment and 1 Indian Anti-Tank Regiment, moved to Point 171, south of Bir Hacheim in Libya.

On the morning of 27 May, 2 Field Regiment with its 25- pounder guns was ready to see its first action—and what an action it turned out to be!

Defences at Point 171 were incomplete, without mines, uncoordinated and without any tanks in the Brigade Box area, but were ready to face the might of Rommel's forces which had 15 Panzer Division, 21 Panzer Division, the Italian Ariete Division and 90 Light Division. The defenders were hopelessly outnumbered but determined to give a fight which ended up creating history.

Early morning of 27 May saw

Rommel's forces moving out of their harbour hardly 2 miles away. The Battle at Point 171 was so swift and bloody that in about two hours Rommel's forces had over-run the defences of the Brigade but not before facing the wrath of the Indian Gunners who kept firing till their positions were over-run. Maj PP Kumaramangalam returned to the battlefield a few days later to retrieve the Guns, they counted 56 enemy tanks destroyed in the Brigade Box Area. The regiment suffered heavy casualties in the battle.

The battle at Point 171 surprised Rommel who lost time and resources and his drive to the coast was checked. Sir Winston Churchill paid rich tributes to the Indian Artillery under 3 Indian Motor Brigade for their decisive role in the Battle of Bir Hacheim and for inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy and seriously delaying their advance.

The Indian Armed Forces stand tall among their global peers because of their rich battle-hardened heritage, high motivation and tough training.

To be continued