

Imported equipment, low morale are problems for army: former chief

Dependence on imported equipment and low morale of the officers was posing a serious problem for the Indian Army, its former chief Gen. V.P. Malik said here Saturday.

'Even today we are importing 70 percent of our equipment. As long as we have to depend on equipment from outside, we will be inconvenienced by any rise in prices,' he said.

To buttress his argument, Malik referred to how Russia suddenly escalated the cost of an aircraft carrier by \$1.2 billion last year.

Malik, the army chief during the 1999 Kargil war, said at that time, Indian troops were low on tangible assets, but high on morale and confidence.

'This asset is almost on the verge of extinction now. There is an acute shortage of officers. Young men and women with great leadership capabilities are not joining. Those in the army want to quit,' he said, while addressing a seminar on 'Indian Defence Forces' preparedness to deal with challenges of the 21st century.'

'The low morale of the forces is becoming visible. I couldn't dream of such a scenario when I joined the army,' he regretted.

He also criticised the political leadership for ignoring the recommendation to create the post of Chief of Defence Staff.

'That was a right recommendation made years ago. But the government chickened out. This was unfortunate.'

Malik expressed himself against using the army for internal security duties.

'You can't switch a soldier on and off from external to internal security. These two need completely different orientations,' he said.

Continuing with his hard-hitting speech, Malik said that the government made a mistake by neglecting the border states soon after independence. 'Unless we assimilate these people, our defence cannot be strong.'

Replying to a query as to why the strategic roads in border states like Arunachal Pradesh still lay in neglect, Malik said: 'In 1986, the government gave us huge resources to build infrastructure like airfields and roads. Work was on at a great pace. Then in 1988, (then prime minister) Rajiv Gandhi went to China. After that, the fund flow dried up.'

Malik highlighted the need for military might to sustain India's core values.

'Unless you are alert about the need for protecting your independence, how can you evolve as a great nation?' he asked at the seminar held on the eve of Syama Prasad Mookerjee's 107th birth anniversary and dedicated to the memory of Field Marshal S.H.F.J. Manekshaw.

'In order to protect your soft power - your cultural ethos - you can't do without adequate hard power. They need to compliment each other,' he added.

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