

Arunachal Pradesh moots supplementary force to aid army

The strategic northeastern Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, large parts of which China claims, hopes to raise a 5,000-strong force comprising local people to supplement the efforts of the Indian Army during war or war like situations, says its governor.

'It will be an indigenous force modelled after the Ladakh Scouts. It will be an advantage to the defence forces in case of emergencies,' Governor J.J. Singh, a former Indian Army chief, told IANS in an interview [here](#).

'The force will be around 5,000-strong. The Ladakh Scouts had helped us immensely during the (1999) Kargil war (with Pakistan) and the proposed force will be of similar help,' Singh said, adding that during war or war-like situations, the force can 'help the army in understanding the local language, intricate nuances of geography and other details'.

The governor, who is here to attend the ongoing Singapore International Water Week, was optimistic of getting the central government's nod to raise the new force.

'We are in talks with the defence ministry and the response is really positive so far. though they will be in the Ladakh Scouts' grade, they will get their salary from the central government. The army will take care of the training. The people of the state are really looking forward to it as it will generate employment for them,' Singh said.

The Indian Army's Ladakh Scouts are a 4,000-man force largely made up of local Buddhists. Nicknamed the 'Snow Tigers' they are one of the army's most decorated units, with more than 300 gallantry awards to their credit.

Singh said that as an army officer, he had seen first hand the benefits of such a force and now, as the governor of Arunachal Pradesh, he would like to replicate the force in the state.

Earlier this month, IANS had reported that India was ramping up its military deployment along the border with China in Arunachal Pradesh, positioning two army divisions, each comprising around 25,000 to 30,000 personnel, as also a squadron of frontline Sukhoi Su-30 MKI combat jets at a key airbase in the northeast.

'To develop India's capability to effectively meet the future security challenges, deployment of more troops along the India-China border is necessary,' Singh had told reporters in the Arunachal Pradesh capital Itanagar.

He said two army divisions, each comprising around 25,000 to 30,000 personnel, along with artillery, medical, signals and engineering support, would be positioned along the border.

'The exercise would be completed in a phased manner in the next few years along with development of roads and other infrastructure along the borders,' Singh said.

'Increase of the force level, and improvement of weapons, fighting platforms, intelligence acquiring and other equipment are aimed at enhancing the capabilities of the Army troopers to effectively meet any sort of challenges,' he added.

This apart, an initial squadron of four Su-30MKIs have become operational at the Tezpur air base in Assam. This will be gradually raised to 18-20 aircraft.

The Tezpur base is within striking distance of the Chinese border along Arunachal Pradesh.

Beijing had in 2003 given up its territorial claim over the Indian state of Sikkim but was still holding on to its old stand that a vast stretch of Arunachal Pradesh belongs to them.

The India-China border along Arunachal Pradesh is marked by the McMahon Line, a notional border which is now known as the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

India and China fought a bitter border war in 1962, with Chinese troops advancing deep into Arunachal Pradesh and inflicting heavy casualties on Indian troops.

Prashant K. Nanda (© IANS / India eNews)