

FREEDOMS REDEFINED

The return of Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasreen to Koplkata after nearly two decades signifies the restoration of freedom. After her forced exile from Bangladesh where extremists protested against her Novel Lajja and ban on it, Narseen was lapped by the western world. She was showered with prizes, awards and offered citizenship and residence rights across many countries. Though she briefly lived in the US and Norway, her heart pinned for her home. Since there was no let up her opposition to her return, she chose her second home Kolkata because it resembled her own. However, while she was thrown under the bus by a woman ruler Shaikh Hasina who wanted to appease the Islamic hardliners, Nasreen faced the same demon in Kolkata, ironically, under the ruler of a Bengali woman mamata Banerjee , who banished her from West Bengal to appease the Islamic hardliners. It’s sheer karma that both the women lost the battles - Hsina to hardliners and Banerjee to popular mood. Taslima Narseen’s is a case study on freedom of speech. Her Novel Lajja was rather reportage of the series of actions of hardliner Islamists in Bangladesh unleashing atrocities on their Hindu compatriots. It was for her writing that this young doctor was banished from her country and her adopted home.

However, in India, a democracy, such punishment to Nasreen could have been avoided. It raises a big question mark on our democratic set up. A Book is an idea and it must be discussed, debated, opposed but never banished. This was always done to please the hardliners and it began with a ban on satanic verses of Salman Rushdie when it was even a non issue. No government should ever ban a creative product just because some people do not think much of it. The Taslima Nasreen’s case should serve as a lesson for upholders of Indian democracy.

India's Silent Force Against Terrorism

Col Shiv Choudhary (Retd)

Terrorism has changed dramatically over the past three decades. Today's terrorist seldom wears a uniform, occupies identifiable territory or confronts security forces in conventional battle. Instead, he infiltrates quietly, blends into civilian populations, exploits local support networks, communicates through encrypted technologies and disappears before conventional responses can fully mobilise. Modern terrorism thrives on anonymity, surprise and the ability to exploit gaps in surveillance rather than superior military strength.

India has responded by steadily strengthening its armed forces, intelligence agencies, CAPF and state police organisations. Significant investments in border fencing, drones, satellites, surveillance technologies and joint command systems have considerably enhanced the country's counter-terrorism capability. Yet one strategic resource remains largely untapped, not because it does not exist, but because it has never been systematically organised.

Across India, particularly in border districts, insurgency affected regions and sensitive coastal areas, lives an extraordinary reservoir of disciplined, experienced and patriotic citizens. They include retired personnel from the armed forces, CAPF, intelligence agencies and state police, alongside thousands of ordinary citizens who have spent decades living in border regions. Together, they constitute an immense reservoir of experience, local knowledge and commitment that could significantly strengthen India's counter-terrorism mechanism.

These men and women are already verified through years of public service. They understand discipline, confidentiality, observation, terrain, local customs and the psychology of conflict. Many have spent their careers tracking infiltration routes, protecting strategic assets, analysing intelligence or responding to security threats. Retirement may have taken them out of uniform, but it has not diminished their commitment to the nation. Alongside them stand villagers, farmers, shepherds, fishermen, transport operators, shopkeepers and community leaders who know every path, stream, orchard, mountain trail and settlement in their locality. They instinctively notice unfamiliar faces, un-

usual movement and deviations from daily routine long before sophisticated technology identify them..

India's professional security forces will always remain the spearhead of counter-terrorism operations. The objective is neither to replace them nor to create parallel organisations. Rather, it is to organise this vast reservoir of experienced veterans and vigilant citizens into a lawful, disciplined and structured force multiplier that strengthens existing institutions while fully respecting the rule of law. This concept is rooted in the realities of life across India's border districts and terrorism-affected regions.

Consider a farmer living near the IB in Jammu who notices fresh footprints across his fields where none existed the previous evening. Instead of investigating or creating panic, he quietly informs the nearest security post. Patrols verify the information, infiltration routes are checked and a possible terrorist movement is intercepted before reaching populated areas. In another village in Poonch, a milk man notices an unfamiliar young man asking for directions to an isolated forest track. His accent appears inconsistent with the region and his behaviour unusually cautious. Rather than confront him, the blacksmith discreetly informs the local police. Surveillance is intensified and a potential infiltration route comes under observation.

Similar examples occur throughout Jammu and Kashmir and other sensitive regions. Shepherds identify disturbed stones concealing improvised explosive devices. Fishermen notice unfamiliar boats operating outside normal fishing patterns. Shopkeepers become suspicious when strangers purchase dry rations. School bus drivers repeatedly notice vehicles conducting apparent reconnaissance. Individually these observations may appear insignificant; collectively they often become valuable operational intelligence.

Technology can detect movement, but local communities often detect abnormality. Satellites identify changes in terrain, whereas experienced citizens recognise behavioural changes that no electronic sensor can interpret. Both capabilities complement each other. Equally valuable is India's vast community of retired security professionals. A retired JCO, police investigator and intelligence officer jointly understand terrain, infiltration routes, operational patterns, criminal networks, local

dynamics and invaluable expertise in analysing fragmented information and recognising suspicious behaviour that may otherwise be overlooked.

Their contribution is not operational deployment. They should never neither be operationally deployed, replace serving personnel nor become parallel security organisations. Their value lies in mentoring communities, interpreting local inputs, assisting awareness programmes and helping bridge the gap between sophisticated intelligence systems and ground realities. Properly organised, they become genuine force multipliers, extending the eyes and ears of forces.

Several democratic nations have long recognised that national security cannot rest exclusively upon professional security forces. Israel supplements its standing military through an extensive reserve system. Finland maintains one of Europe's strongest reserve structures, while Singapore's National Service framework keeps trained personnel connected with national preparedness. Switzerland has successfully followed a citizen-soldier concept for decades, and countries such as the UK and the USA encourage structured neighbourhood vigilance and community reporting to complement professional policing. India's security challenges are unique and demand an indigenous model. These examples demonstrate that experienced citizens contribute within defined legal frameworks.

While India possesses this extraordinary human capital, what remains missing is institutional integration. The country needs a National Security Partnership Framework that formally connects professional security agencies, retired security professionals and vigilant citizens without either creating parallel organisations or replace them active forces.

The framework should begin with the establishment of District Veteran and Community Security Cells (DVCSC) in border, coastal and terrorism-prone districts. Functioning under the supervision of district administrations, this body could include veterans from the said categories with proven records of integrity and competence. Their role should remain advisory, informative, assisting and coordinative, never the operational. The framework should also actively involve selective border villagers, coastal communities, transport operators, shepherds, fishermen, remote dhaba wala, shopkeepers, orchard owners,

school staff, volunteer youth and women, whose understanding of local communities is often exceptional.

Equally important is the creation of secure and accessible reporting mechanisms. A district wise toll-free counter terrorism helpline and integrated digital reporting platform would enable citizens to communicate suspicious observations quickly, safely and confidentially. Anonymous reporting, wherever appropriate, would encourage wider participation while protecting those acting in good faith.

Awareness and training should form another important pillar. Citizens are often willing to contribute but remain uncertain about what constitutes useful information or how to report it responsibly. Periodic awareness programmes conducted jointly by security agencies and experienced veterans can educate communities on recognising suspicious behaviour, observing without confrontation, protecting personal safety and avoiding rumours or misinformation. Practical contribution lies in observation, guidance, mentoring and sharing experience, while intelligence operations, investigations and enforcement remain exclusively with authorised agencies.

Unlike raising additional manpower, this approach builds upon an already available reservoir of trained and experienced human capital. It represents one of the most cost-effective ways of strengthening national security. The nation would simply be organising resource that already exists. Every infiltration prevented, every terrorist hideout detected, every explosive recovered and every innocent life saved would justify the investment many times over. This entire framework should remain volunteer based upon successful partnership and trust. To inspire confidence and motivation, some value based incentive could be introduced.

Beyond its operational value, such a partnership would also strengthen India's social resilience. Terrorism seeks not only to inflict casualties but also to spread fear, mistrust and isolation. When citizens become informed partners rather than passive spectators, communities grow more confident, rumours lose credibility and hostile propaganda finds less takers. History repeatedly demonstrates that terrorism flourishes where fear silences communities and anonymity protects those who seek to do harm. Security becomes a shared responsibility rather than the exclusive burden of those in uniform.

THREE HABITS THAT HAPPY PEOPLE PRACTISE

Nishant Garg

After 13 years of working with individuals in business, academia and government, I have identified three important habits of people who tend to be happier at work.

These habits — deliberate practice, appreciation and equanimity — are not philosophical constructs but practical tools for becoming a little happier each day.

Being deliberate makes a big difference. It's easy to assume that I will be happy only when I get what I want, but it takes deliberate decision-making to be happy most of the time and sad only when things go extremely wrong.

This is what I call your proactive tendency. Are you taking small steps every day to become more open to change (if things don't happen your way), or are you becoming more rigid?

This brings us to the next habit:



appreciating what you have. Appreciation is not about waiting for something great before you value it; rather, it is your ability to

savour the process as well. Research in neuroscience suggests that the brain systems driving 'wanting' are separate from those

producing 'liking'. That is why people who do not appreciate the process tend to chase after things they think will make them happy,

but once they have them, it feels like nothing. It gives happiness only momentarily.

The last and most important pillar that will help you practise both of the above is equanimity. Things will not always go your way; there are no linear pathways in life. Your plans will fail, people will change, and you might lose things you value. That is what Buddha meant when he said that life is suffering because we don't understand that things are anicca (impermanent).

Recognise that you can only change a few things every day (through deliberate practice), appreciate the process, and remain equanimous when the path is hard. A military veteran I once taught said, "Under extreme pressure, the calmest soldiers were not those who were the bravest but those who were the most accepting that things would not go their way." Hold your ground and change only what you can. Take the middle path.

The seas need rules, not just warships

Santhosh Mathew

US Coast Guard Day, observed on August 4, comes at a time when the world's attention is again focused on the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. Rising tensions in the region have once again shown how closely maritime security is connected with energy, trade and global peace.

The US Coast Guard has a long history of protecting American waters, rescuing people at sea, preventing smuggling and helping ships in distress. Its role also reflects a larger reality of the modern world: the oceans are too important to be governed solely by naval power. They need common rules accepted by countries.

The most important international framework for this purpose is the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, or UNCLOS. It is widely regarded as the basic legal framework for the world's oceans. It covers navigation, territorial waters, maritime boundaries, fishing, seabed resources, marine pollution

and the rights of coastal countries.

The United States signed UNCLOS in 1982 but has not ratified it. The US Senate has never approved the Convention. American objections have included the original provisions dealing with deep-seabed mining, international dispute settlement, military activities at sea and concerns about national sovereignty. The deep-seabed provisions were later revised through the 1994 Agreement.

America's position remains unusual. Although it is not a party to UNCLOS, the United States accepts many of its basic navigation rules as customary international law. Washington strongly supports freedom of navigation and regularly challenges maritime claims it considers excessive.

The continuing tension in the Persian Gulf makes this issue especially important. The Gulf is a narrow and crowded maritime region surrounded by several countries. It contains some of the world's most important oil and gas resources. The Strait of Hormuz connects the Gulf

with the Arabian Sea and the wider Indian Ocean. It is one of the world's most important energy routes.

Any disruption in the Strait can affect oil supplies, shipping costs, energy prices and economies far beyond West Asia. The impact can reach India, China, Japan, Europe and many other parts of the world.

UNCLOS provides a basic system for managing maritime spaces. A coastal country can claim a territorial sea of up to 12 nautical miles from its baselines. It exercises sovereignty in this area, subject to international law and the right of innocent passage for foreign ships. International Relations

Beyond the territorial sea lies the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), which can extend up to 200 nautical miles. The EEZ is not an extension of national territory. A coastal country has special rights over natural resources such as fish, oil and gas, while other countries retain important freedoms of navigation and overflight.

This distinction is particularly im-

portant in crowded maritime regions. A country cannot treat its entire 200-nautical-mile EEZ as territorial waters. International law balances the economic rights of coastal states with the navigation rights of other countries.

UNCLOS also provides rules for international straits, continental shelves, fisheries, marine environmental protection, scientific research and the peaceful settlement of maritime disputes. It has helped bring a degree of order to an ocean covering most of the planet.

India is a party to UNCLOS and has a strong interest in maintaining this rules-based maritime order. India's long coastline, island territories and vast EEZ make the law of the sea central to its national interests.

India's economic future is closely connected with the ocean. A large part of India's international trade moves by sea. Energy supplies from the Persian Gulf are particularly important. Millions of Indians live and work in Gulf countries, making stability in the region important not

only for India's economy but also for millions of families.

The Strait of Hormuz, therefore, has a direct connection with India. Any prolonged disturbance in the Strait can increase energy costs, affect shipping and put pressure on the Indian economy.

The issue also has a wider strategic dimension. The United States is one of the world's most powerful maritime countries. Its Navy protects important sea lanes, while its Coast Guard performs vital functions related to maritime law enforcement, rescue and security. American participation in the international law of the sea system would add greater weight to the rules that govern global maritime activity.

The United States is not alone among countries that have not ratified UNCLOS. Turkey, Israel, Colombia and Venezuela are also outside the Convention, for different reasons. The American case attracts greater attention because of the country's enormous economic, naval and global maritime influence.

The present Gulf tensions show the importance of a predictable maritime order. Ships carrying oil, food and other essential goods cannot depend solely on the goodwill of competing powers. They need internationally recognised rules. Water& Marine Sciences

The sea connects economies even when politics divides countries. A conflict in the Persian Gulf can affect fuel prices in India, shipping companies in Asia and consumers across the world.

US Coast Guard Day, therefore, carries significance beyond America's maritime service. It is also an opportunity to recognise the importance of safe seas, freedom of navigation and international maritime law.

The future of the oceans cannot be secured by warships alone. It requires countries to respect maritime law, protect freedom of navigation and settle disputes peacefully.

A peaceful sea keeps the global economy moving. A lawless sea can bring the whole world to a standstill.