

### By Sidharth Mishra



A very fruitful Monsoon session of Parliament has come to a close. The record books this session is marked by the passage of the momentous Good and Service Tax (GST) Bill. There were several academically sound and politically significant addresses made during the debate. There were certain other good discussions especially the one on Jammu and Kashmir and on the atrocities on Dalits. It gave ample opportunity to the leaders on the both sides of the well to showcase their oratorical skills. But there are two images of the session that have made a lasting impression on me and are not necessarily positive. The first image is that of the exhibition put up by the Ministry of Defence inside the premises of Parliament, and second BJP lawmaker Anurag Thakur moving around in the olive green uniform in hallowed corridors of the temple of democracy, soon after his commissioning as an officer in the Territorial Army.

A three-day exhibition was organised by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), which was inaugurated by Lok Sabha Speaker Sumitra Mahajan. On display were the BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles, the Arjun main battle tank, the Airborne Early Warning and Control System and other equipment indigenously produced by the DRDO. The DRDO claimed that the aim of the exhibition was to provide the members of Parliament with a “firsthand account of the mammoth amount of work” undertaken by the research organisation.

Members of Parliament must have knowledge of the functioning of a government undertaking like the DRDO, especially when tonnes of investment go into this organisation. However, how the display of some of these equipment inside the Parliament premises make the members more aware of the functioning of the DRDO fails my understanding. To be honest, I shivered at the very thought of the tanks rolling inside the Parliament holding our democracy to ransom with its nozzle!

The other instance was of BJP Member of Parliament from Himachal Pradesh Anurag Thakur marching inside the Parliament premises in his uniform after he was commissioned into the Territorial Army (TA) by the Chief of Army Staff Gen DS Suhag. Territorial Army is a volunteer force, consisting of personnel who receive military training for a few days in a year so that in case of an emergency, they can be mobilised for the defence of the country.

It is a second line of defence after the regular army and certainly not a profession, occupation, or a source of employment. It is only meant for those people who are already in mainstay

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Written by Administrator

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civilian professions; in fact, gainful employment or self-employment in a civil profession is a prerequisite for joining the Territorial Army. In the recent times to create brand ambassadors for the armed forces, the TA units have taken initiatives of commission some of the sports icons.

India cricket captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni was commissioned in 2011 in the 106 INF Bn (TA) PARA and Olympics gold medalist Abhinav Bindra in 124 INF Bn (TA) Sikh LI in the rank of Lt Colonel for their respective contributions in the field of sports. Before them, cricket icon Kapil Dev was commissioned as a Lieutenant Colonel in 2008. Even Sachin Tendulkar holds an honorary commission in the Indian Air Force. But never saw these gentlemen move around in the uniform but for a ceremonial function.

Then what made Thakur walk the corridors of Parliament wearing that uniform. Certainly, he was not there on any official assignment from his TA unit which necessitated his presence in uniform. He probably wanted to flaunt the olive green to the bevy of media persons present in the Parliament House whenever a session is in progress. His commissioning was done inside a closed room with only the official media being present. Thus, the publicity-hungry leader thought lest some people miss out, better to take a walk inside the Parliament premises, where he was toasted by the shutterbugs.

A question may arise: why am I resenting wearing the uniform to the Parliament. As mentioned earlier, a TA appointment is an honorary appointment and we would resent even Sachin Tendulkar and Mahendra Singh Dhoni wearing their uniform to the cricket oval. Second, the lawmaker's whole motive was selfish as it was to attract the attention of media persons. Under cloud for being the head of one of the most controversial organisations – the Board of Cricket Control in India (BCCI), Thakur probably thought wearing the olive green uniform could win him some credibility in the public eye.

Defence forces in our country so far have survived the tag of being a partisan force. It has been one of the mainstays of the Indian nation, grappling with several crises in diverse situations. This has largely been possible because the military leadership of the country has been professional and their head honchos thoroughbred democrats. They have been the true inheritors of the legacy of the British Army, which has always upheld the civilian control and command. They have not messed around with politics and the politicians too have not much messed around with them.

However, by displaying our armoury at the Parliament, we are sending out a wrong message and nor is (Honorary) Lieutenant Anurag Thakur winning any accolades by marching up and down the Parliament in uniform. There are greater issues at hand than the display of military power which need to be addressed in the Parliament. Let the display of military might be restricted to Rajpath and in the lawns on its sides. What happened as this session concluded, one hopes was an aberration and does not become a trend. We need to respect our armed

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forces and not make unnecessary spectacle out of it.

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