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Father Graham Staines Award	Nov 18, 2015

Honourable President of India, Honourable Prime Minister, and Heads of political parties,

I write this letter to highlight a matter of critical importance to the future of India - namely the morale, service conditions and fighting fitness of our armed forces, which in turn directly concerns our national security. In view of the increase in a series of terror attacks around the world, India needs to be alert. I am addressing my concerns to heads of political parties, in addition to the Honourable Prime Minister and the Honourable President of India who holds the all important Constitutional responsibility as Supreme Commander of the Indian Armed Forces.

I retired from the Indian Navy as Chief of Naval Staff in September 1993 after nearly 45 years in uniform. My experience in the service and in the theatre of battle, have directly influenced my decision to work in peace and public service related activities post retirement. In the year 2004, I was honoured by the Ramon Magsaysay Award for Peace in the region. My actions have always been dictated by my conscience, and for what I believe to be in the long term interests of our country and our people. It is in this spirit that I am addressing the senior leadership of the country today.

The immediate catalyst for this note is the vexed question of OROP – and the recent events surrounding the relay hunger fast at Jantar Mantar. I am well aware that there are varying views with regard to the definition and implications of OROP – both within Government and indeed among the community of veterans. The bottom line is that positions have become hardened and intractable, and have continued to simmer over a period of forty years. This is despite a directive from the honourable Supreme Court, two successive Parliaments and the Koshiyari Committee which clearly defined OROP and why it should be brought into force without delay.

While it is true that the current focus of discontent is the partial or non implementation of the OROP, I believe that this is an opportunity to bring to your attention some other issues affecting Civil Military relations within which one needs to understand the current impasse on OROP.

Briefly stated we need to examine the following concerns:

1. The steady and noticeable erosion of the Military vis a vis the civilian bureaucracy since Independence. Whether it is a perception or reality can only be determined when this is examined in some depth.

2. The need to establish cordial and harmonious working procedures to ensure co-operation and mutual consultation with regard to Civil Military relations in the country.
3. Building a consensus on the role and status of the Armed Forces of a Nation as distinct from that of the Police, and various other security forces under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
4. The critical need to ensure just, fair and adequate terms and conditions of service for the men and women who serve in the Armed Forces.
5. Political leadership to agree to a common strategy and position on the fundamental premise that civil control over military should not be equated or seen as civil service or bureaucratic control over the armed forces.
6. All the above points are inter-related and therefore need to be examined, viewed holistically and a way ahead crafted within a specific timeline - say by 1 April 2016.

The perception that it is officialdom which has intervened to destroy or vitiate the original spirit and intentions of OROP is now widely accepted. The fact that former service veterans have resorted to extreme measures such as we have seen over the past 150 plus days, is a powerful indicator of their frustration with the seeming unwillingness of the Government to discuss the issue across the table. This unfortunate standoff would never have happened had successive governments taken care of the armed forces and their needs by being accessible for regular and direct interaction and dialogue, and not only through the members of the civil service.

There has been no dearth of excellent and thoughtful articles and editorials both by veterans and civilian commentators, drawing attention to the serious risks of ignoring or worse, ridiculing, the issues being raised in a peaceful manner by the veterans. Seldom have we seen in our recent history the spectacle of so many former service chiefs from all three services writing letters to the President and the Prime Minister urging them to take action on this important matter .

The Hindu newspaper in an opinion piece dated November 16, 2015 has talked about the need to **“take charge of OROP”** – and I quote:

“The military has a core function in a democracy, and ensuring its apolitical nature is critical to the future of a maturing nation. Indeed, strained ties with the larger military community could have unintended fallouts in the long term. The widespread protests could contribute to disaffection against the government, going far beyond the cantonments.”

“The OROP agitation is not a mere episode involving some disgruntled retirees; it has already found significant resonance among the serving ranks as well. That is worrisome. The protests may be dispersed, but the fact is that its effects are felt across the country”

Let us not forget that today’s serving jawan and officer is tomorrow’s veteran.

There have also been systematic efforts by vested interests to constantly sow seeds of suspicion regarding the intentions and loyalty of the armed forces in the minds of the political leadership going back to the early days of post Independence India.

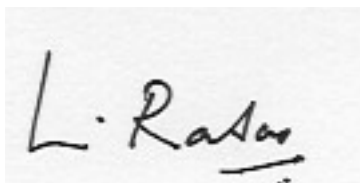
Regardless of the military takeovers in our neighbouring countries, it is to the credit of the Indian Armed Forces there has been no ambiguity regarding the supremacy of political power over the military. This has been one of the strengths of Indian democracy.

India aspires to be at the high table in the comity of nations. India is also among the small number of nuclear weapon states. It is therefore important that the Armed Forces are motivated and empowered to discharge their duties without fear or favour. By the same token it is the responsibility of the government of the day to ensure the dignity, honour and economic well being of the Armed Forces.

The current impasse over OROP, needs to be resolved as quickly as possible so that stability and morale of the Armed Forces can be restored. Any attempt by any political party to treat this as trivia and to claim that the Armed forces are playing politics is not only mischievous but dangerous. The recommendations of countless commissions of enquiry need to be implemented along with OROP.

I am confident that the President, the Prime Minister and all heads of political parties will deliberate and handle this critical concern in the spirit of non-partisanship. Please let me repeat, that settling OROP to the full satisfaction of the services is not merely a question of pay and pension alone, but of the honour, dignity and status of the men and women in uniform. This will be in the long term interests of the nation.

With highest regards

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature reads "L. Ramdas" in a cursive, slightly slanted script. The first letter "L" is large and prominent. The name "Ramdas" is written in a more fluid, connected style.

L Ramdas

Former Chief of Naval Staff [1990-1993]

