

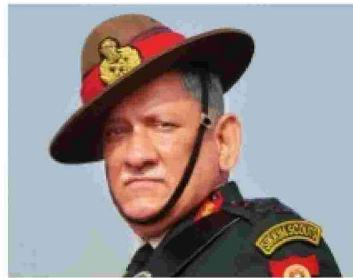
# 'ARMY CAN NOW TACKLE A 26/11'

**'Seen some terrorist movement in north Punjab, we're alert'**

**EXCLUSIVE  
INTERVIEW**

By **Sandeep Unnithan**  
in New Delhi

*Ten years after the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, Army chief **General Bipin Rawat**, speaking to **India Today Magazine**, assesses the changing nature of Pakistan's proxy war, the possibility of the threat spreading to Punjab and how the Indian Army's response to such atrocity needn't only be 'Surgical Strikes II'.*



**Q.** On Monday, it will be the tenth anniversary of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks. I believe the Army then was asked for options and it said that it was not prepared. If there is another attack like Mumbai today, what will be the Indian Army's response?

**BR:** We've come a long way from those days. You  
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saw the attacks in Uri, prior to this you saw the attacks in Manipur, we responded... when we responded in Uri, it was messaging... it could have been more. So, it was just signaling... and, therefore, the Indian Army today is much more prepared to take action based on the directions given by the government. I'm not trying to say that we are war-mongering, but if we are told to take some action, we are capable and ready for it. So, there is never going to be a situation where you will not have options to tackle something like a big terrorist attack.

**Q. What are the kinds of options you have as response to a major attack like this?**

**BR:** We have options. We have numerous options. Everybody is talking 'Surgical Strikes 2', but you don't have to use the same formula time and again, because an action taken once puts the adversary on the alert because he knows what's going to happen. So you have to look at options, look at the way forward and action will depend on the kind of acts that are perpetrated by the adversary. And finally if you feel now that water is flowing over the brim and the political hierarchy feels it is now time to take action and we are tasked for taking any action, we will do so.

**Q. How has the nature of the proxy war that you are fighting with Pakistan changed in the last couple of years? Do you detect a change at all or is it more of the same?**

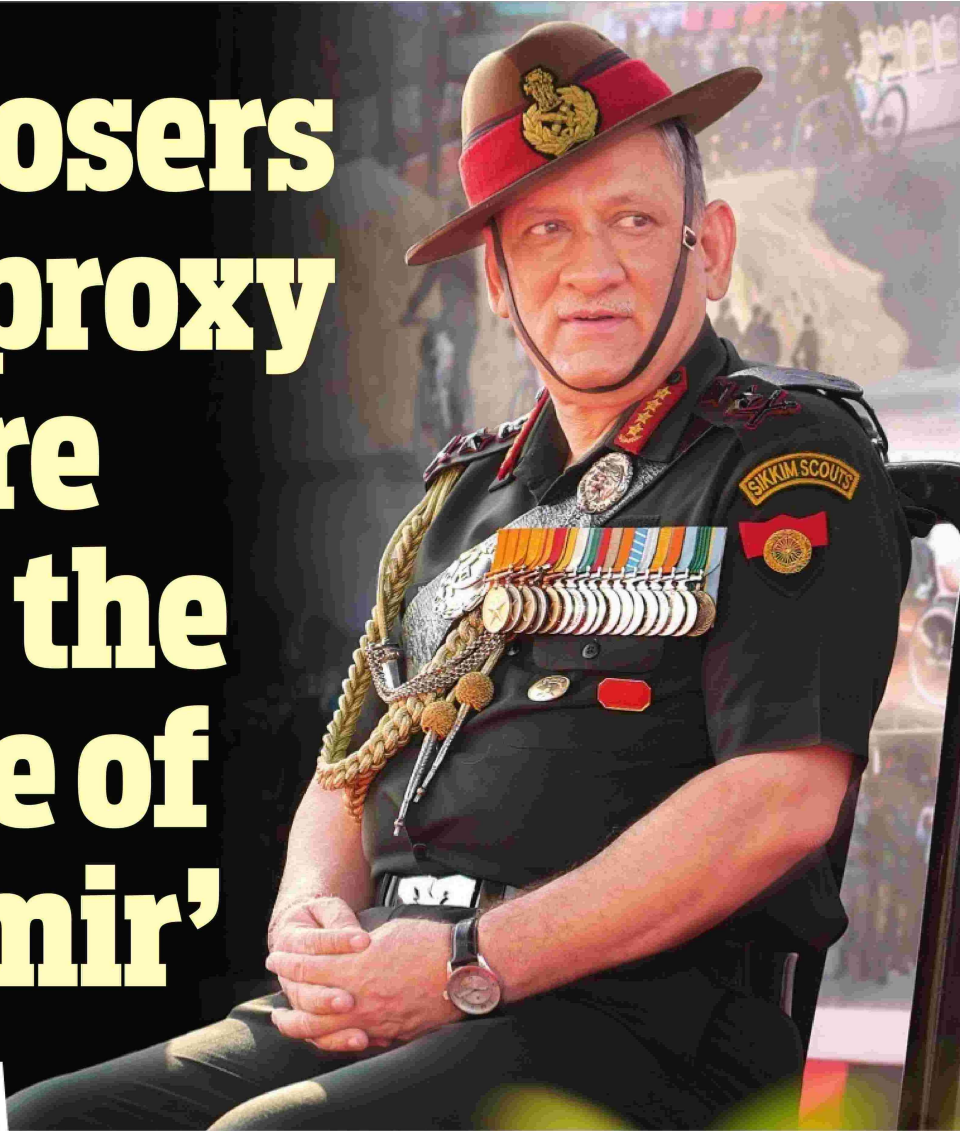
**BR:** Yes, there is a change. From across the borders now Pakistan is trying to give this (proxy war) an indigenous flavour. Our political hierarchy and diplomats have done a great job with the international community in isolating Pakistan. Pakistan has now been identified as a nation which is sponsoring terror not just in India but in many other parts of the region and the world. They've been nailed. So they've now realised they are on the radar of the international community, they are trying to give the uprising in the Valley an indigenous flavour. They're getting their terrorist conglomerate to recruit local youth. But I don't think they can befool us and the international community. Everybody understands that terrorism (in the Valley) is being sponsored from across the borders.

**Q. In that sense, how is your messaging to GHQ Rawalpindi — which is pushing this proxy war — changed?**

**BR:** The messaging is very clear. It has been going on from 1989—30 years—and it can continue for another 30 years. But that is not the way forward. We've gone with this proxy war for 30 years, don't test our patience... someday the government will decide that enough is enough and that we've crossed the brim. The message to Pakistan is this: The losers from this proxy war have been Pakistan and the people of Kashmir. And within Kashmir, it's only the Valley which has been affected. The only people who have suffered is Pakistan. See where they stand today—they stand isolated, their forex reserves are down, development is not taking place. A similar thing has happened in the Kashmir Valley. People are saying there are no jobs, no investments coming in. How will investment happen in a climate of violence?

It's important for people to understand that if you want jobs, please do not resort to violence. Both we (the Army) and government have been asking the people to support Panchayati Raj and participate in local self-governance. Terrorists are aiming their actions against the

# 'The losers from proxy war are Pak & the people of Kashmir'



There is nothing untoward that is happening in Doklam... Troops on both sides are being briefed well

Warning the Army to be alert as there might be a possible terrorist attack on our cantonments in Punjab

— GEN BIPIN RAWAT, ARMY CHIEF

The Indian Army now has 'options' to tackle a major terror attack like Mumbai 26/11, says General Rawat

people of Kashmir who will rise against them.

**Q. Are you referring to the recent beheading incident in the Valley?**

**BR:** Everything that has happened in the last year and a half. They (terrorists) have burnt homes of panchayat members and school buildings. They've targeted policemen. Now, they are targeting the unemployed, alleging that they are police informers. Locals now feel (terrorists) aren't acting in the best interests of the people of Kashmir. What we are seeing are acts of frustration in the final stages of an insurgency. It will lead to an uprising from the people who will then shun militants.

**Q. Something like what happened in Punjab in the early 1990s?**

**BR:** Perpetrating this kind of barbaric act is something which the ISIS was doing in Syria and Iraq... this is not what Kashmiris are for. This is not Kashmiriyat, this is not Kashmiri Sufism, and this is not Islamiyat.

**Q. When will the situation be ripe for the political process to begin? Can it ever take place in this kind of a violent situation?**

**BR:** The first stage has begun with the panchayat elections. Let's see how successful they are. People of Kashmir need to take a cue from the Maoist-affected areas where people came out to vote in large numbers despite threats of violence by the Maoists. You can't be held hostage to a couple of gun-wielding terrorists.

**Q. Your statement on 'external linkages' in Punjab seemed eerily prescient given the fact that there was a grenade attack a few days later. Do you see a deliberate ploy to restart insurgency in Punjab?**

**BR:** I made the statement based on recent intelligence inputs. We saw a terrorist act in Pathankot in 2016. We've seen some movement by terrorists taking place in areas bordering Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab, especially the northern part of Punjab. I was only reading the writing on the wall and warning the Army to be alert because there might be a possible terrorist attack on our cantonments in Punjab.

Across the border, frustration is setting in. After Burhan Wani's death, they expected Kashmir to go out of control and 'liberation' would happen. It didn't happen. They know people aren't going to indefinitely support this kind of violence. So they want to expand the scope of the insurgency into neighbouring states. The people of Punjab are not going to let this happen. How do you think we brought the situation to normalcy in such a short time in Punjab? It was because of the people of the state.

**Q. Recent satellite photos suggest that the Chinese have built an almost permanent establishment on the Doklam plateau. Does that alter your security perception there?**

**BR:** There is nothing untoward that is happening in Doklam. After the standoff, the Chinese troops that have remained in the area have built structures for themselves. This is because they have to stay where they were earlier. The agreement was that we will carry out a separation of our troops so that there is no scope for a confrontation. They've only done some billeting for their troops to stay in winter. I don't think there is a very sig-

nificant change we are witnessing and there should be no cause for concern. I think at our leadership level, between the Prime Minister and President Xi Jinping, politically, they have been able to resolve issues. At the military level also, right at the grassroots levels, at the local formation commander levels, we've got good understanding and mechanism to ensure that things do not escalate. Troops on both sides are being briefed well to see that while we may have differing perceptions of the LAC, there should be no confrontations when we attempt to reach those perceptions. Confrontations are being amicably resolved. Whenever we see a situation escalating out of control, we quickly call for a flag meeting at the Brigade commander level and now I think we are also upgrading it to the Division Commanders level.

**Q. The hotlines that are being set up?**

**BR:** The hotlines are being set up, but these are at a different level. Whether you call it a hotline, there are communication channels existing at the local level but now we are talking of getting those (hotlines) at the level of the government.

"I think at our leadership level, between the PM and President Xi, politically, they have been able to resolve issues."