ARBiT
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A Toast to Chai and Togetherness

National Chai Day, observed on September 21 annually, is a celebration of one of the world's most beloved beverages, chai. Known for its comforting aroma and blend of spices like cardamom, ginger, cinnamon, and cloves, chai is more than just a drink; it's a cultural experience that brings people together. In India, a steaming cup of chai is part of everyday life, whether shared with family, friends, or colleagues at roadside stalls and homes alike. The day encourages tea lovers everywhere to savor this timeless brew, appreciate its heritage, and enjoy the warmth and connection it inspires across communities.

राष्ट्रदूत
MONDAY
21 September 2026
A-B

#LAKSHMI

The Origin and Meaning of "Dhandha Paani"

From this perspective, "Dhandha" is sometimes interpreted in a philosophical sense as anything that generates or brings wealth or sustains livelihood...

In Indian cultural and linguistic traditions, many words evolve through a mix of Sanskrit roots, regional usage, and folk interpretation. One such phrase often discussed in symbolic or devotional contexts is "Dhandha Paani," especially in relation to Goddess Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth, prosperity, and fortune.

The Meaning of "Dhandha"

The word "Dhandha" is commonly linked to livelihood or occupation in modern Indian languages like Hindi. However, its deeper linguistic roots are often traced back to Sanskrit influence.

In Sanskrit-derived interpretation:

- "Dhan" refers to wealth or material prosperity.
- "Da" is associated with giving or bestowing.

From this perspective, "Dhandha" is sometimes interpreted in a philosophical sense as anything that generates or brings wealth or sustains livelihood. In everyday usage, however, it simply means business or occupation.

The Word "Paani" and Common Misunderstanding

The term "Paani" in Hindi normally means water. However, in this context, "Dhandha Paani" is not related to water at all. Instead, it is believed to be a misinterpretation or phonetic evolution of the word "paani" as "hand" in symbolic or colloquial explanation traditions. In proper iconographic interpretation, it refers to the hand of the goddess, not water. Thus, "Dhandha Paani" is often understood symbolically as: The hand that gives or governs livelihood and prosperity.

Iconography of Goddess Lakshmi

In Hindu iconography, Goddess Lakshmi is usually depicted seated or standing on a lotus flower, symbolizing purity and spiritual wealth.

One of her hands is often shown in the Abhaya Mudra, a gesture meaning protection, fearlessness, and blessing. From another hand, gold coins or wealth are shown flowing outward, symbolizing continuous prosperity and generosity.

This imagery represents the idea that wealth is not static but flows through divine grace.

Interpretation of "Dhandha Paani"

In devotional or symbolic explanations, the hand of Goddess Lakshmi that bestows blessings and wealth is sometimes referred to as "Dhandha Paani." It represents:

- The source of livelihood
- The flow of prosperity
- The divine power that supports human occupation and survival

In this sense, the phrase connects spiritual symbolism with everyday life and work.

Cultural Usage and Meaning of Livelihood

This symbolism is also reflected in everyday Indian language. When people ask, "How is your dhandha?," they are essentially asking: How is your livelihood or means of earning?

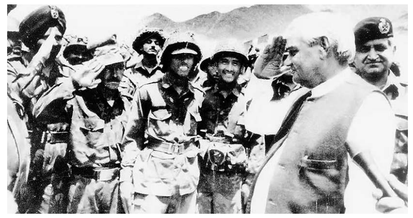
It reflects the deep cultural association between divine blessing and human work, where prosperity is seen as both effort and grace.

Conclusion

The phrase "Dhandha Paani," though not a classical Sanskrit term, represents a blend of linguistic evolution and devotional symbolism. Connected to the imagery of Goddess Lakshmi, it reflects the idea that livelihood and prosperity are sustained by both human effort and divine blessing.

Through her symbolic hand giving wealth, Lakshmi embodies the continuous flow of fortune, which in cultural interpretation is sometimes poetically referred to as "Dhandha Paani."

On 25th May, we received the code-word to commence offensive operations from the next day. But there was a caveat. Under no circumstance was the aircraft to go across the LOC. Given that the known intruded area was about 140 km along the LOC with depths varying between 1 to 8 km, the constraint of not crossing the LOC posed considerable problems, the most severe being the restrictions on attack profiles of fighter aircraft. A fighter aircraft must sight the target, get into a dive to achieve weapon release parameters, release the weapons and pullout of the dive while maintaining visual contact with other mission members.



Briefing the RM.

AIRBORNE OVER KARGIL

#INDIA-PAK

● **Air Mshl Narayan Menon** (Retd)
PVSM, UYSM, AVSM

On 08 May 99 at around 1500 h, I was on my way from HQ AOC J&K at AF Station Udhampur to HQ Northern Command at the request of the Chief of Staff (COS). Sitting beside me was the CO of a Mi-17 Sqn based at Udhampur. He had flown fighters earlier but had converted to helicopters on medical advice. He was coming along as the COS had 'something' to discuss on employment of helicopters.

Unlike other Army Command HQs where the IAF has established 'Advance HQ' of the concerned Air Command, HQ AOC J&K was different. Apart from being the representative of the AOC-in-C WAC at HQ NC, AOC J&K also had operational control over six air bases (Srinagar, Awantipur, Udhampur, Jammu, Leh and Thoise) and other IAF units north of Pathankot. The IAF's air logistics network covering the Indian Army and PMFs deployed in the J&K valley and Kargil/Siachen sectors was also controlled and coordinated by HQ AOC J&K in liaison with HQ WAC.

In the COS's presence, we were briefed about 'a few intruders' who had come across the Line of Control (LOC) and occupied some points located by our Army during the winter. These intruders were interfering with the vital Srinagar-Leh road and interdicting the supply lines. There was a need to airlift troops, ammunition and other essential supplies to augment the forces at Kargil. It was also briefed that the army had lost two long range patrols in the previous few days. There was urgency to build up force levels and evict the intruders. A request was also made for Mi-25/35 gunships to attack the points occupied by the intruders. This request was made with increased urgency on 10 May also. It was explained that these gunships had not till then crossed the Zoji La Pass due to their weight/altitude restrictions. (Well after the Kargil Ops, the IAF successfully flew a stripped down Mi-35 across the Zoji La Pass during winter, when temperature and air density conditions are favourable, and carried out firing practice.)

The additional Mi-17s required were immediately ordered to Thoise for the emergent tasks. On 11 May, the Army asked for armed Mi-17 helicopters to attack the occupied points. The extent of intrusions or the numbers involved from across the LOC continued to be a mystery. Employment of armed aircraft/helicopters within 10 km on either side of the IB/LOC is prohibited as per an air agreement signed between India and Pakistan in 1991. I transmitted Army's request upwards as it was outside my jurisdiction to say Yes or No.

Much has been written about the period between 12 May and the day that IAF went into action. Some have claimed that this alleged delay enabled Pakistani forces to expand and reinforce the occupied territory. This, to my mind, is a pure conjecture as news of the extent of intrusions was trickling in each day and the Army, till then, had only a hazy picture of what was going on. And anyone familiar with the topography of the region would be aware that movement on foot along those rugged inhospitable mountainous terrains, carrying warmaking equipment, would have been a slow and torturous process.

To have created the 'sangars,' stone and earth structures of the type from where our forces were fired at, in such a short time would have required resources far greater than what the enemy possessed. In all probability, the occupation was carried out immediately after our Army had vacated the points the previous winter, giving the intruders enough time to build strong defences and get acclimatized. The vacated posts are supposed to be regularly patrolled on foot as well as observed from the air. The task of observation from the air is with the Reconnaissance and Observation (R&O) Flights of the Army's aviation wing equipped with Cheetah helicopters based at vantage places in the J&K. That both the ground and air elements could not detect the presence of the intrusions is something that the Army has to ponder over. The IAF, apart from air logistics and casualty evacuation, has the added responsibility of providing special winter reconnaissance missions when requested by the Army. In the run up to Kargil, such requests were not made.

The two major IAF bases in the Kashmir valley can support full-scale fighter operations and all bases support helicopters. I was ordered to 'activate' all the bases in the J&K and prepare them for operations. Additional Mig-21, Mig-27 and Mig-29 aircraft moved into Srinagar and Awantipur bases. Pilots began refreshing their high-altitude weapon delivery skills on both fighters and helicopters. To protect the airbases in case of enemy air strikes, Pechora Sqns equipped with medium range surface-to-air (SAM) missiles were deployed as were the quick reaction missiles (QRMs) in the OSA_AK combat vehicles. Shoulder fired IGLA-1M missiles and the mobile observation units moved into positions and radar vigilance was stepped up. Combat aircraft were armed and moved into hardened shelters. We had a problem of providing some protection to Mi-17 gunships in the open and the only option, apart from dispersing them, was to build sandbag walls in a semi-circular shape around them. This proved to be a slow and unwieldy task and the end result was less than satisfactory.

Along with 4 of my staff, I had relocated to Srinagar airbase, to be able to liaise directly with the Corps HQ there. With the Army Command HQ in Udhampur, the two Corps HQs in Srinagar and Jammu, the Divisional HQs in Leh and Kargil, I was almost continuously on the move during these operations so as to keep abreast of the events.

On 21st May, a Canberra aircraft on a photo reconnaissance mission lost its starboard engine and carried out a safe precautionary landing on Srinagar runway. Inspection revealed large scale damage to the engine caused either due to a hit by an anti-aircraft gun or by a missile. The Chief of Air Staff, who was visiting Srinagar, was convinced that it was a shoulder-fired SAM that had targeted the Canberra, and as later events revealed, his analysis was correct. By now, there were nearly 60 combat aircraft in the valley. Mig-21, Mig-27 and Mig-29 Sqns were at full war alert and eager to go into action. Mi-17, Cheetah and Chetak helicopter units were also chafing at their bits to get a move on. The Mi-17 and Cheetah helicopters also continued to carry out their air logistics missions as did the IL-76 and AN-32 aircraft operating out of Chandigarh to Leh and Thoise airfields. While a lot of focus generally attaches to fighter operations, the helicopter and transport aircrew are carrying out, what I believe is a magnificent job in delivering essential supplies to remote areas manned by our Army and PMFs. They operate their flying machines to the limits of the performance envelope while they drive their bodies to the extremes of human endurance.

On 25th May, we received the code-word to commence offensive operations from the next day. But there was a caveat. Under no circumstance was the aircraft to go across the LOC. Given that the known intruded area was about 140 km along the LOC with depths varying between 1 to 8 km, the constraint of not crossing the LOC posed considerable problems, the most severe being the restrictions on attack profiles of fighter aircraft. A fighter aircraft must sight the target, get into a dive to achieve weapon release parameters, release the weapons and pullout of the dive while maintaining visual contact with other mission members. Restricting attack direction, as this caveat of not crossing the LOC imposed would lead to suboptimal weapon delivery and our difficulties would be compounded by the irregular alignment of the LOC. Many of our mission plans had to be revised in consultation with Army representatives who provided target coordinates and exact location of our own troops in the targets' vicinity. On 26th May, strike missions commenced their attacks on designated targets. The fighter aircraft attacked a particular target and were immediately followed by the Mi-17 helicopter gunships. The targets were gun emplacements, enemy supply lines, firm bases and launch pads having igloo type or normal tents and 'sangars.' These 'sangars' proved to be very strong, and as we learnt later, almost immune to the impact of rockets or front gun ammunition delivered with pin-point accuracy, both by fighters and by helicopters. These target systems were not the conventional ones that air forces are trained to engage. There were no mobile forces, no armoured columns, bridges/dams or industrial targets. The biggest target engaged during this operation was a supply camp at Muntho Dhalo. This target system, in a normal all-out war, would have been among the smallest targets considered to be neutralised from air. Enemy radio intercepts on 26th May evening revealed that the Pakistani forces were quite unsettled by the air attacks and had suffered casualties and material losses during the strike missions.

On May 27th, two Mig-27 aircraft armed with rockets attacked a target just two kilometers south of the LOC. The No 2's aircraft flamed out immediately after weapon release and the pilot had to eject prior to his aircraft impacting with a mountain side. During parachute descent, he drifted across the LOC, was taken as POW by the Pakistani forces and was returned to India on 03 June 99. The leader of a Mig-21 mission, on hearing of the ejection on his radio set, decided to carry out an airborne search for the Mig-27. While orbiting, his aircraft was engaged and struck by a shoulder-fired missile of the 'Stinger' class or its Chinese equivalent. The pilot ejected, but after two days, the Pakistanis handed over his body, bearing injury marks, to Indian Army personnel at a pre-arranged point.

On 28th May, a Mi-17 mission of four helicopters attacked a target from where our Army units were being engaged. During the attack, a large number of SAMs were fired at the mission as reported by the aircrew and confirmed later by the gun cameras. The No 3 in the mission was turning away after the attack when a missile hit its engine and the helicopter went down with the loss of all the four aircrew. It became clear that the Pakistani forces had a much larger number of these shoulder-fired heat seeking missiles than we had estimated. It had also been thought by many including me that there would be a reduction in the performance of these missiles when fired from the heights of 3 km and above. This turned out to be wrong as the performance envelope of the missile expands because of the increased temperature differential between the missile seeker head and the jet exhaust of aircraft. The numbers of missiles available with the enemy and their improved performance posed greater threat to our aircraft than envisaged earlier and a change in strategy was obviously necessary. Another aspect was that the counter measure dispensing system (CMDS) fitted on the helicopters, that ejected flare cartridges to lure away heat seeking missiles, had been rendered unreliable due to disuse and these slower gunships had become vulnerable. A decision was taken to suspend air operations temporarily. Subsequent brainstorming sessions threw up many options with a young Flight Lieutenant coming up with the idea of using the 'Global Positioning System' as an aid to carry out high level bombing. The aircraft were to fly at 9 km height, out of range of the missiles, and release the bombs at a predetermined GPS indicated point arrived at after having calculated for the forward trajectory of the bomb and wind pattern. It was indeed an innovative suggestion and trials were carried out on 29th May. On 30th May, fighters carried out the first of these high altitude release (HAR) missions. Initially, the effectiveness of HAR missions was low but within three to four sorties, our pilots had gained confidence and accuracy of weapon delivery improved considerably as evident from Army Intelligence reports and enemy radio intercepts. Performance limitations precluded helicopters from being utilised in these types of missions. HAR missions could be flown over clouds and at night. Under such conditions, weapon delivery could be from lower altitudes as the threat from SAMs was nearly eliminated. Lower altitude attacks improved accuracy. From 04 June onwards, night HAR missions were mounted.

The intruded areas now stretched from Mushkoh Valley to Muntho Dhalo and Jubar. The enemy soldiers received support from across the LOC from places like Gultari, Olthingthang and Skardu. On 06 June, Mirage-2000 aircraft and Jaguars operating out of Adampur were inducted into the operations. Armed with precision guided munitions (PGMs), these aircraft had a very high rate of success against targets that included enemy positions at Muntho Dhalo, Tiger Hill and Tololing.

All our strike missions were escorted by Mig-29, Mig-21Bis or Mirage-2000 aircraft. This had to be done as there was no radar cover for our strike aircraft in the areas they were operating in. The Mig-29s flew the escort mission in a manner that enabled them to 'look' through the strike aircraft to the airspace beyond, and on a few occasions, picked up airborne radar activity across the LOC. Our attempts to airlift and establish a ground radar west of Leh met with success only towards the end of operations. By the third week of June, our Army had started making considerable progress in recapturing the intruded areas. The fact that on most occasions, recapture had been preceded by air strikes was testimony to the skill of our pilots and effectiveness of air power even under severe constraints. On 12th July, it was decided to call off the use of air power in offensive role but 'war alert' was maintained till 29th July 99.

The fighter aircraft in the valley flew more than 2000 sorties including 250 by night. Mirages and Jaguars flew 150 sorties. Helicopters flew 23 strike sorties and 2100 sorties for other tasks. Our aircraft targeted enemy positions with approximately 330 tonnes of bombs, 4000 rockets and many thousands of gun ammunition. IAF's tasks comprised missions involving strike, interdiction, air defence escorts, ELINT, reconnaissance, casualty evacuation and air logistics. For the first time after 1971, IAF personnel were exposed to a war environment and the experience would be beneficial to all those involved.

The victory in Kargil operations resulted from excellent jointmanship, and without doubt, from the sacrifices of the Indian Military, the courage and determination of the young officers and soldiers of the very professional Indian Army and the exceptional marksmanship and intervention of the Air Warriors of the Indian Air force.

This is an article written many years ago. It is a brief on IAF operations. The serial 'Op Safed Sagar' was initially envisaged as one about 17 Sqn and it was titled 'The Golden Arrows.' Later, it was changed to its present form. The people involved in creating the serial had interviewed me. That I do not figure in the serial is a decision by the writers and others and I have nothing to comment. The serial does show IAF in a very positive way and I am certain that it will draw more youngsters into its folds.

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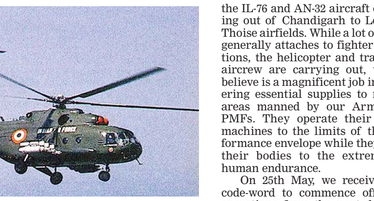


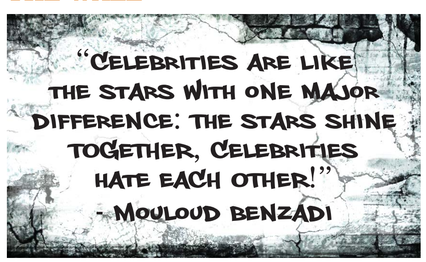
Brig Lakhwinder Singh (Cdr Arty Bde), ACM Tlpnis, Gen VP Mallik, Lt Gen Kishan Pal, Maj Gen Mohinder Puri, AVM N Menon, Brig MC Bhandari (DDG MO).

Receiving PM Vajpayee at Udhampur, accompanied him to Kargil.

RM Interacting with Air Warriors.

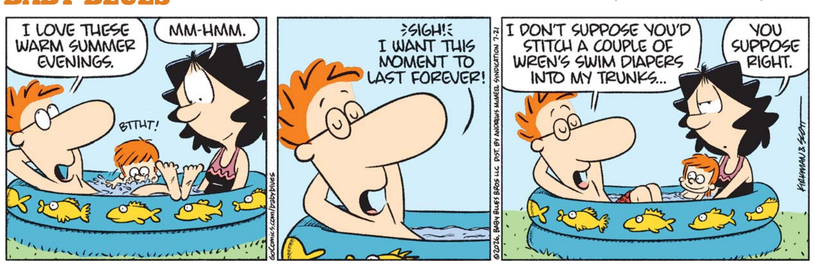
Intro to Officers on Line up.

THE WALL



BABY BLUES

By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott



ZITS

By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman