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## Why Rajasthan is Invincible?



Wg. Cdr. CSV Ramany VM (G)  
The author is a retired IAF fighter pilot

It was in the late 1970s, and we of the Hunter Strike Squadron were in our Operational Location in the northwest corner of the Thar Desert. Life was good – zipping across the arid desert sands in the morning, delivering weapons load in the afternoon, followed by rum paani in the evenings. Our Rajasthan tea club major domo, Balbir, would pamper us all the while, twirling his huge moustache and imparting wisdom to us, in his typical Marwari bartome. Balbir was a non-combatant (enrolled) with us. He was the only one who had been given permission by Flight Commander Buzzy to dispense with his uniform head gear and wear a Rajasthanian turban instead. Balbir is now in the Vallhalla of fighter pilots, where he is undoubtedly pampering generations of fighter pilots with rum paani and boiled eggs, and continuing to impart his worldly wisdom. It was Balbir who would ask us to fly low in the northeast so that we could see for ourselves that, contrary to popular belief, Rajasthan

### #LORE

was not arid at all. The northernmost part of Rajasthan abuts two borders – the state of Punjab and Pakistan. But more about Pakistan later. Bordering the state of Punjab is Sri Ganganagar, which is rightly called "The Food Basket of Rajasthan", owing to its fertile land, just like its neighbour in Punjab. The whole area was once very barren and dry, but was converted to greenery due to the vision of Maharaj Ganga Singh, who constructed the Ganga Canal to carry surplus overflow water from Himachal Pradesh and Punjab to this town.

#### Tract Of Rajasthan

Today Sri Ganganagar is famous for its produce of wheat, cotton, mustard, bajra, grams and sugarcane, besides being one of the largest producers of blood orange kinnows. There is also a poultry industry here where you get almost circular shaped golden coloured eggs. Hard boiled and sliced, these eggs taste great with the evening rum paani, which Balbir would give us daily. The only fly in the ointment, was the very frequent and extremely erratic change in our "alert status" (state of readiness for military action). From "Stand Down" to "Standby 15" to "Standby 5" to "Standby 2", we would be shuttled between our alert status very regu-



Dried up Saraswati river.

larly, and for no apparent reason. While this severely called into question the state of the mental and gonadal faculties of the Generals next door, it's not as if we minded – it is after all what we had been trained to do. We just wished that the Pakistani Generals would make up their mind on their intentions, so that we could beat them to a pulp when they did. It was Balbir who gave us the reason for this too. He claimed to know for a fact from sources unrevealed, that whenever General Memshahib had a headache in the evening, the General would be on a warpath the next morning. When Memshahib's headache would abate, then our alert status would also de-

escalate to "Stand Down". It was after one particularly prolonged period of headaches, that Deepak Datta proposed air-dropping a carton of Aspirin over the General's home in Islamabad. Would not work – said Balbir – claiming that it was not Memshahib's propensity force phalalgia that worked in our favour. Why not, asked Deepak. This was all the invitation Balbir needed. Over the next several pegs of rum, some of which were secretly slipped to him as well, he pronounced that our squadron was totally invincible due to its geographic location. Two of the holiest rivers of yore, the Saraswati and the Drishadvati had flowed through this area, making this tract of

its people - that they would always be protected and invincible to enemies. It was due to this boon, as per Balbir, that our fighter base located in Brahmavarta, has always been immune to enemy action in the last few wars we have had to fight with Pakistan.

#### Divine Rivers

In the Manu Smriti the land between the rivers Drishadvati and the Saraswati is described as "that land created by the Gods which lies between these two divine rivers. It is the region where the "good" people are born with "goodness" being dependent on location rather than behaviour". The land is marked by Saraswati which made the northern boundary of Kuru Pradesh, while the Drishadvati flows in the south of Kuru Pradesh and north of Brahmavarta. Mahabharata explains the southern boundaries of Kuru Pradesh up to the Ashram of Guru Dronacharya. This corresponds to modern day Gurgaon on one end and Rohatk on the other, and comes upto Jhajar city.

The Rig Veda also states "may the glorious seventh stream Saraswati, mother of Sindhu charged with a large volume of water flow vigorously and give milk and water". The Drishadvati is also mentioned in the Brahmanas, written primarily in the state of Brahmavarta. This river is said to have originated from the pot of Brahma which is Pushkar Lake near Ajmer. The Saraswati with four branches flowing in different

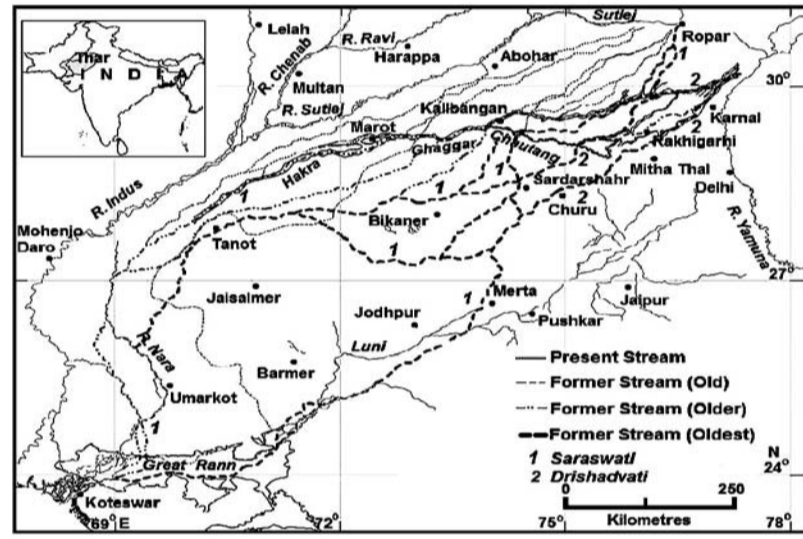
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During the Vedic period, this land was known as Brahmavarta, which was the confluence of the two Vedic rivers of Saraswati and Drishadvati. Balbir felt that this is where the rishis composed the Vedas and other Sanskrit texts of the Vedic period. These two rivers, as well as their precise location are also mentioned in the Rig Veda.

Rajasthan one of the most protected lands in India.

This area, due to the water of the two holy rivers, was home to tribes similar to Mohenjodaro and Harappa. However, the rivers started to dry up due to natural calamities and wiped out the tribes, leaving behind a barren wasteland. During the 15th century, Rao Bika established Bikaner and the territory of Sri Ganganagar was part of the princely state of Bikaner. Finally in 1927, Maharaj Ganga Singh constructed the Ganga Canal and the area was restored to its former fertile grandeur.

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also mentioned in the Rig Veda. According to later texts, Vedic sacrifices were also conducted on the banks of these two rivers. The confluence of these rivers is said to be exceedingly holy, and again as per Balbir, is the precise spot where our fighter base was located. During the time of the Rig Veda, Kashi and Ganga had not yet acquired the pride of place among the holy rivers of India. The two rivers Saraswati and Drishadvati were the holiest and the region covered by them being the holy Brahmavarta. It is said that the rishis of yore were so enamoured by the holy state of Brahmavarta and its rivers, that they granted a boon to this land and

directions, originated in the hills near Pushkar. Drishadvati was the branch flowing north. Most of the ashrams of the rishis who compiled the Rigveda were on the banks of Drishadvati and on the confluence of the Drishadvati and the Saraswati. This is why, as spoke Balbir, the ariga base located in northwest Rajasthan is virtually impregnable. Made us all feel nice, great in fact, that Balbir had the power of the Brahmavarta and its holy rivers guarding us as we flew low and fast over the desert. We only wished that the General across the border would also realise this and give copious amounts of Aspirin to his Memshahib. writearbit@ashtradrut.com

## Saraswati – the ancient river lost in the desert

By A.V. Sankaran

Saraswati emerged as a mighty river during the warm spell that succeeded the Pleistocene glaciation some 10,000 years ago. Flowing down the Himalayan slopes, it had coursed through northwestern India and drained into the ancient Arabian Sea. This river has been extolled in superlative terms in the Vedas and Puranic literature, and great civilizations had flourished on its banks during the river's heydays. After glorious existence for some 4000 years, the river declined and gradually vanished. The disappearance of this river has

been a subject of studies by teams of various disciplines for over 150 years, the last three decades of which saw considerable inputs from new approaches like satellite-based remote sensing and ground-based surveys, radio-isotopic studies and dating techniques. These have indicated that spells of intermittent tectonic activities associated with the rise of Himalayas, neotectonism in the Kutch region, climatic changes and desertification induced by variation in earth's orbit and tilt, diminishing supply of water due to river piracy, all appear to have had vital roles in the downfall of Saraswati River.

## Worldwide Food Service Safety Month

Worldwide Food Service Safety Month is observed in December, and while it focuses on keeping food prepared in the service industry safe, it also serves to remind us at home to ensure we are doing the right things to make sure what we eat stays free of risks. And since this is the month where there's a high amount of festive feasting, keeping food safe is more important than ever.

## #HAPPENINGS@QATAR

"Mbapre" ...Just doesn't score goals, but destroy the opposition



Atreyo Mukhopadhyay from Qatar

Mbapre'. Saw a tweet saying this a few days back during the course of the ongoing World Cup. This was actually the headline on the sports pages of a Chennai-based daily I used to work for. This was in 2018, after the France-Argentina last 16 match. Can't stick my neck out and say that I liked it, because I am not in favour of mixing English with Hindi. But let me admit, it has some meaning.

The phenomenon born in Bondi in France to parents of Cameroonian and Algerian lineage is becoming a terror for the oppositions, more so for the right-backs, because he is bursting down that left flank. Speed, acceleration, power, stamina, hunger for goals and zeal, Kylian Mbappe has everything and more. Nine World Cup goals (four in 2018, five in 2022) before turning 24, this is not normal.

Football is about goals and those who get them are the game's most precious possessions. There are different types. There are those who kill you softly with minimal use of force, like Lionel Messi. Then there are others with dazzling skills and power, like Cristiano Ronaldo. There are the cheeky-canny types, like Neymar. Some of them are supreme opportunists and lurk inside the box to make the smallest of chances count, like Roberto Lewandowski. And then there are some who pulverise the defence. They possess that extra bit of power, acceleration and finishing accuracy that make them fearsome figures. They don't just score goals, but destroy the opposition. The goals they score have a numbing effect on them. The power-bank turning 24 on December 20 belongs to that rare category. France's biggest hope for a World Cup encore has shown that repeatedly and mainly



FIFA WORLD CUP Qatar 2022

The second one was even scarier if you were Polish. Roughly from the same position at the top left of the box, the technique was similar. As in, it was another in-swinging curler. But this time, the ball rocketed into the far corner of the net. Power, precision, vision and confidence to pull these off in a World Cup knockout match make Mbappe special. He believes he can achieve these things. Not many do. And he has been doing this since he was 19!

Having scored five times already, he is this edition's leading scorer. Anything can happen in the knockout stages of a World Cup. But one thing is certain. He has already instilled fear in the opposition, whoever they are. They know that they have to contend with a force of nature, a sort of turbulence, who is unstoppable on his day.

fighting, looking for that gap in the French defence. This World Cup has seen some famous incidents of teams squandering 1-0 leads. And then comes the blast. It had in-swing and placement with dazzling skills and power, like Cristiano Ronaldo. There are the cheeky-canny types, like Neymar. Some of them are supreme opportunists and lurk inside the box to make the smallest of chances count, like Roberto Lewandowski. And then there are some who pulverise the defence. They possess that extra bit of power, acceleration and finishing accuracy that make them fearsome figures. They don't just score goals, but destroy the opposition. The goals they score have a numbing effect on them. The power-bank turning 24 on December 20 belongs to that rare category. France's biggest hope for a World Cup encore has shown that repeatedly and mainly

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## How Far Will Mbappe go?

But to reduce Mbappe's impact to cold numbers alone is to vastly underplay his influence on this French team.



Boria Majumdar from Qatar

ust where does Kylian Mbappe sit in the pantheon of French goal-scorers? First, the disclaimer. Neither he nor anyone else will ever come close to matching Just Fontaine's record of 13 goals from six matches at the 1958 World Cup. But that unreal strike-rate needs to be viewed in context, with 1958 being the last of the 'open' World Cups, before strategies based on sound defense came to dominate tactics boards across the planet. To

Of the others currently ahead of Mbappe in France's all-time goal-scoring charts, Antoine Griezmann had five goals before his 24th birthday. Karim Benzema had 13, and David Trezeguet 16. Olivier Giroud, who now sits atop the list with 52 goals, didn't even make his debut until after his 25th birthday.

Much of Mbappe's value to France stems from the way in which he creates opportunities for others.

Mbappe? He now has 33 goals from 63 caps, after scoring just once in his first ten appearances for Les Bleus. But to reduce Mbappe's impact to cold numbers alone is to vastly underplay his influence on this French team. When he didn't start, against Tunisia in France's final group game, the North Africans took the game to France, with their full-backs bombing forward at every opportunity.

This is one of the defining characteristics of modern-day football. Whether it was Dani Alves and Jordi Alba at Barcelona, Marcelo at Real Madrid or Trent Alexander-Arnold at Liverpool, the best teams have often used their full-backs as auxiliary attackers. That becomes impossible when you're faced with Mbappe. In most matches, he hugs the

debut in March 2017 bear this out. In his first 59 games for France, Giroud had 21 goals. From his next 58 caps, he has 31. It's no one-sided connection either: Tall and strong, Giroud is many ways an old-style centre forward. Mbappe also thrives on his ability to hold up the ball and play him in.

Another team would have wilted if they'd lost the services of the Baku D'Ou water before the tournament began. But Benzema's absence has barely been felt. As legendary as his feats have been in Real Madrid colours, France hasn't always seen the best of Benzema. And it's impossible to escape the feeling that Mbappe dovetails better



Kylian Mbappe.

Cups, while Zinedine Zidane and Michel Platini each scored five in three tournaments. Mbappe is halfway through his second World Cup. At 24, Platini – whose nine goals led France to a first major title at Euro 1984 – had scored just 10 times for France, including a goal against Argentina, the hosts, at the 1978 World Cup. Henry had also netted 10 times before turning 24, with his tally including three on home soil at the 1998 World Cup.

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left touchline, and then cuts inside to create maximum chaos. By and large, Poland's Matty Cash, who plays for Aston Villa in England, did an excellent job of tracking Mbappe. But even in a match where he was a little below his sublime best, Mbappe set up Giroud for the opening goal, and then finished Poland off with two Exocet missiles.

Cash likes to venture forward and is a good crosser of the ball, but he was almost invisible as an attacking threat because of Mbappe duty. England will face a similar problem in the quarter-final. Kyle Walker is lightning quick, and his overlapping runs from right-back have been a big part of Manchester City's success under Pep Guardiola. But against France, he'll rarely be able to venture out of his half. If he's caught out of position, Mbappe will tear apart the rather pedestrian centre-back combination of John Stones and Harry Maguire.

Much of Mbappe's value to France stems from the way in which he creates opportunities for others. With teams invariably having to put two men on Mbappe, space is created for the likes of Giroud to exploit. The upturn in Giroud's goal-scoring numbers since Mbappe made his



Michel Platini.

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Miroslav Klose's record of 16 World Cup goals is just one of many under threat from Kylian Mbappe. Not even 24, there are few limits to what he can go on to achieve.

with Giroud. Apart from the undoubted riches that Paris Saint-Germain put on the table to hold on to him, it's also likely that Mbappe's shock decision to stay on in Paris last summer had something to do with Benzema currently being top dog in Madrid.

The France-England contest will depend largely on what kind of service Mbappe gets from Aurélien Tchouaméni and Adrian Rabiot in midfield. It will also be decided by the kind of protection that Declan Rice, Jordan Henderson and Jude Bellingham are able to give the English centre-backs. If Mbappe is allowed to run at them, there's only going to be one outcome.

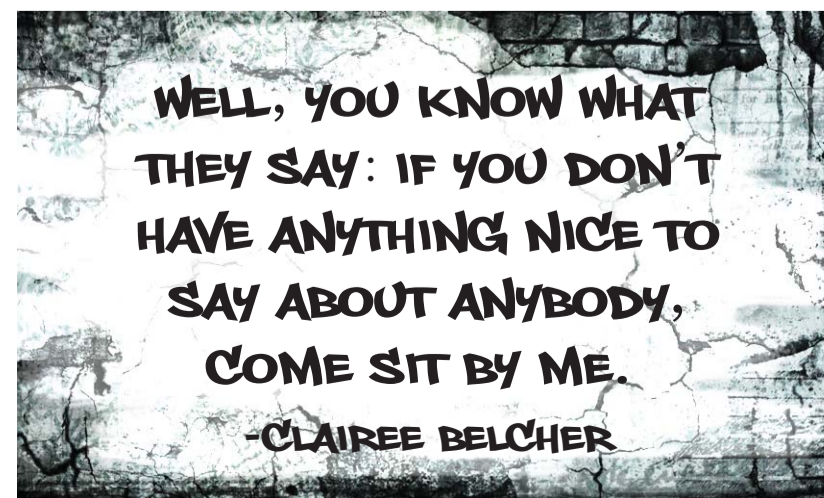


Ganga Canal.

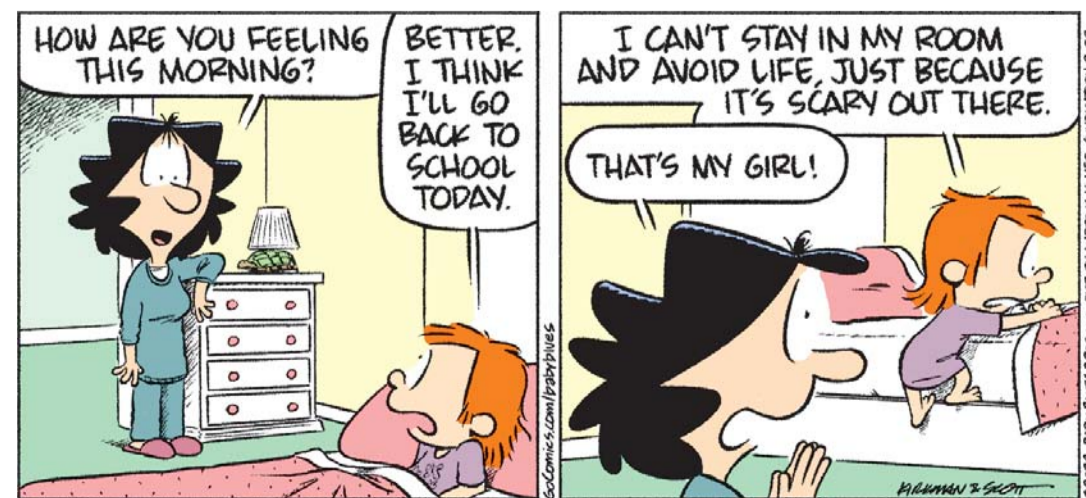


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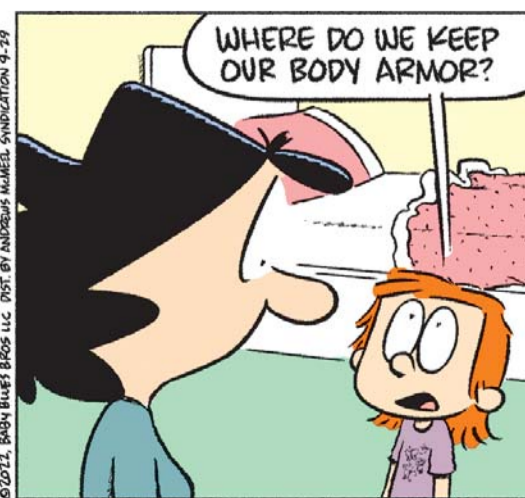
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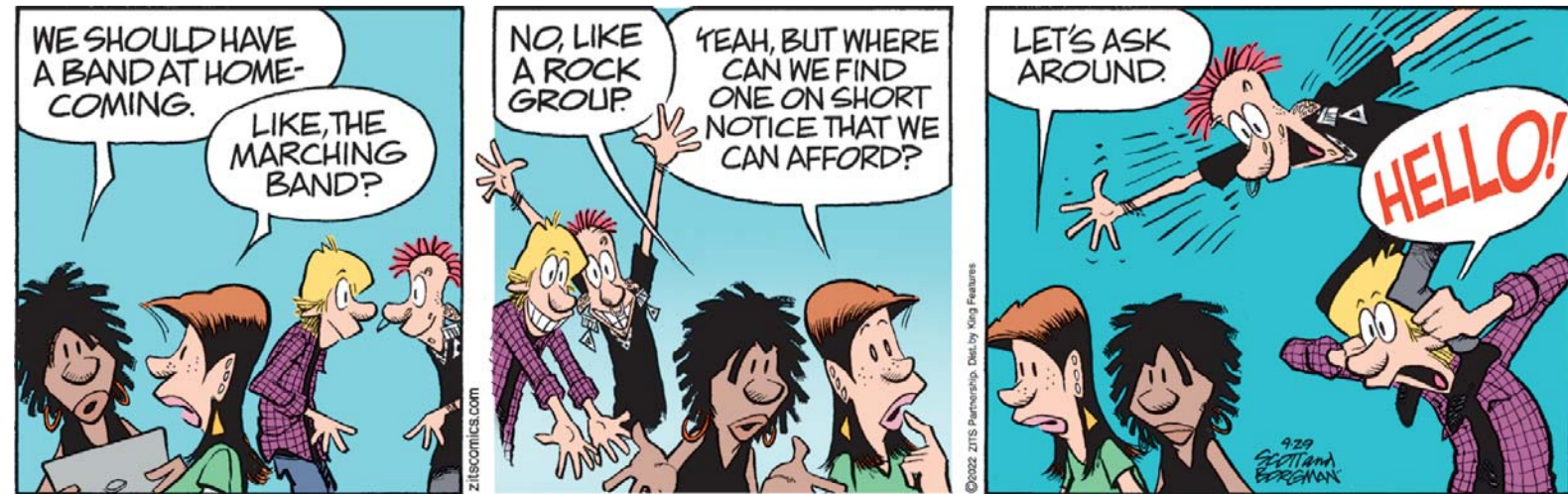
## BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott



## ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman



Poland's Matty Cash.