

**GS Foundation 2024: Modern India**  
**Handout 41: The Indian National Army**  
**Nikhil Sheth**

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*"Netaji's name is one to conjure with. His patriotism is second to none. The lesson that Netaji and his army brings to us is one of self-sacrifice, unity — irrespective of class and community — and discipline."*

Gandhi, Harijan 12 Feb 1946

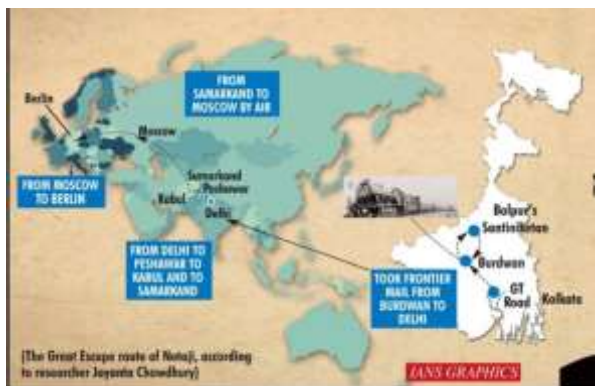
The Quit India Movement had spent its fury by the end of 1942. Political activity inside India came to a standstill for the time being. Most of the established leaders were behind the bars. The Indian national movement, however, found a new dimension outside the country's frontiers. This time the movement centred round Subhas Chandra Bose, one of the most dynamic political leaders the country had ever produced.

- **Bose' stance**

- Bose became increasingly convinced that the much-cherished dream of freedom from colonialism could never be achieved through peaceful negotiation. He was convinced that freedom could be achieved only through direct armed conflict with the British and to achieve this he was prepared to take the help of foreign powers, if necessary. The Second World War and the international situation created by the War offered him the opportunity he was looking for.
- The British authorities in India were aware of Bose's ultra-radical and they considered him as the most dangerous element among the Indian leadership. Subhas Chandra was arrested under the Defence of India Rules in **July, 1940**, as soon as the Second World War broke out.
- Bose undertook fasting in jail and fell ill. On **December 5**, he was removed to his Calcutta residence and kept in confinement.

- **The Great Escape**

- On **16 January 1941** he managed to escape from his Elgin Road residence by dodging the police and slipped away from Calcutta. It was one of the exciting escapes in the history of the revolutionary movement of the world. He travelled by 'road, rail, air, pack animal and on foot if necessary' in different disguises (eg Pathan) to reach Afghanistan.



- Bose's prayer for military assistance, however, was turned down as at that time Stalin, who was hoping to strike an alliance with Great Britain against a possible German aggression.
- Being denied Russian help, he reached Rome, and from there he travelled to Germany.

- **In Europe**

- **18 March** Bose reached Berlin.
- He met both **Hitler and Mussolini** assured Bose of all necessary help. But in reality, he did not get much support in Germany.
- He delivered **anti-British speeches** from the **Berlin Radio**.
- With the help of the German Government, he set up the **radio station** called **Azad Hindustan** in January, 1942.
- In Germany, Bose raised a 3000-strong army called **Free Indian Legion** in Jan 1942. This army was comprised of the Indian PoWs captured by Germany in North Africa.
- Bose wanted the German government to make a categorical announcement for Indian independence, which the latter was not willing to do. Also, at the same time, Germany had started to face reverse in Russia (battle of Stalingrad).
- When he met Hitler in May 1942, his suspicions were confirmed, and he came to believe that the Nazi leader was more interested in using his men to win propaganda victories than military ones.
- Consequently, Bose did not see much of an independent role for himself from the German territory, which prompted him to look for an alternative.



- **Developments in SE Asia (Eastern Theatre)**

- Japanese jumped in the war fray and made spectacular success in the Southeast Asian war front. When the **Japanese captured Singapore** on 15 February 1942.
- **Mohan Singh** enlisted the support of **15,000-20,000 prisoner soldiers** out of 40,000 (being the total number of the Indian prisoners of war, who had surrendered at Singapore in early 1942).
- **Indian Independence League** was formed as the civilian-political wing in Feb 1934, in the cause of Indian freedom under the leadership of **Rasbehari Bose**.
  - **Tokyo Conference** (March 1942): to discuss war and the Indian situation. Here, the idea of the Indian National Army emerged.
  - **Bangkok Conference** (June 1942): Bigger conference.
    - Attended by some of the representatives of the Indian PoWs captured by the Japanese.
    - Decided to extend an invitation to Subhas Chandra Bose to take up the leadership of the Indian National Army.

- **First Phase of Indian National Army** (Formal inauguration on 1 September 1942)

- At that stage the INA was prepared to go into action against the British only on the invitation of the Indian National Congress. The outbreak of the Quit India movement boosted up the INA. However, on the issue of the independent role for the Indian army, Mohan Singh fell out with the Japanese and was even arrested for a while. Mohan Singh disagreed with the Japanese and faced imprisonment.



Mohan Singh, Major Fujiwara



### Japanese Success in Burma and British Retreat

Japanese captured Burma in 1942. The British, cut off from the supplies and facing reinforced Japanese army, began messy retreat to India during which they left behind much of their equipment. After the invasion, Japanese installed a puppet government in Burma. Many Burmese came to believe that Japanese had no intention of giving them real independence. The

Burma National Army, created under the leadership of Aung San changed sides in 1944 and fought with Japanese on the sides of allies. The Japanese were evicted from Burma eventually in 1945. During the occupation, almost 1.7-2.5L Burmese civilians died.



### INDIAN OCEAN ATTACKS

On April 5, 1942, the Japanese launched an aircraft carrier attack against Colombo, Ceylon; this was followed by an assault on Trincomalee on April 9. Eight British naval ships and five merchantmen were sunk and more than 40 aircraft were lost; hundreds of servicemen and civilians were killed on the ground. Five more merchantmen were sunk by submarines off the west coast of India. Attacks were also launched against three east coast Indian ports, with the loss of a further 23 merchantmen.

**KEY**

- Japanese fleet movements
- ✈ Japanese air attack from aircraft carrier
- 🚢 Sites of British ship and merchantmen losses

### • Bose in the East

- With Japanese progress in SE Asia and activiti

- es of India Independence League, Bose visualized better role for himself in the cause of Indian Independence, in the South-East Asian region.
  - Indian nationalist movement didn't view the Japanese as a friend of India as it was a Fascist govt. Its sympathies were with the people of those countries which had fallen victims to Japan's aggression.
  - Netaji however believed that with the help of INA, supported by Japan, and a revolt inside India, the British rule over India could be ended. Thus, slogans of Chalo Delhi and Jai Hind are a source of inspiration.
- 13 June 1943
  - Netaji made a secret and hazardous 90-days (U-boat) **submarine voyage to reach Tokyo.**
- June 1943
  - Bose met Hideki Tojo, the Japanese dictator, who said that he envisaged independence for India after the War. He had failed to get from Hitler such **assurance on the issue of Indian independence.**
  - Being assured by the Japanese that they had no territorial designs on India, he started a thorough reorganization of the Indian National Army.
- 2 July
  - He reached Singapore where a hero's welcome awaited him.



Netaji proclaims the Provisional Government on 21st October 1943, Singapore.



Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose reviewing his INA troops in Singapore in 1943.



Unity (Etihaad), Faith (Etmad), Sacrifice (Kurbani)



Rani Jhansi Regiment



Greater East Asia Conference in November 1943

Participants (L2R): Ba Maw, Zhang Jinghui, Wang Jingwei, Hideki Tojo, Wan Waithayakon, José P. Laurel, Subhas Bose.



○ 4 July 1943

- Rashbehari Bose generously offered Netaji the Presidentship of the Indian Independence League.
- He appealed to all **people of Indian origin living in the South-East Asian region**, to extend every possible help in the cause of India's freedom.



Indian National Army marching in Rangoon, 1944

○ 5 July 1943

- Formation of **Azad Hind Fauz**
- Clarion call of **Chalo Delhi**.



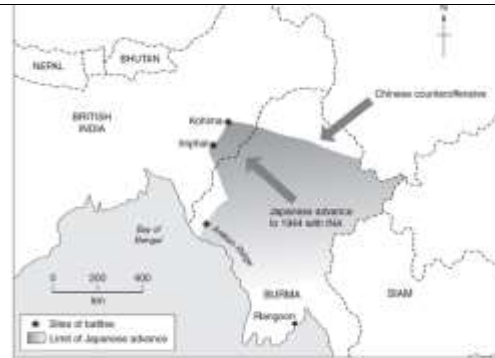
○ 25 August 1943

- Formally assumed the direct command of the Indian National Army.

● **Provisional Government**

○ 21 October 1943: Formation of the provisional government of India

- Bose as the head of the Government and the C-in-C of the Army.
- AC Chatterjee was to be the in-charge of Finance.
- SA Aiyar as the in-charge of publicity and propaganda
- Laxmi Swaminathan as the in-charge of women's affairs.



Japanese advance in Burma, showing battles involving the INA in 1944.

○ Activities of the Provisional Government

- Declared war against the Allied powers.
- Within a short period



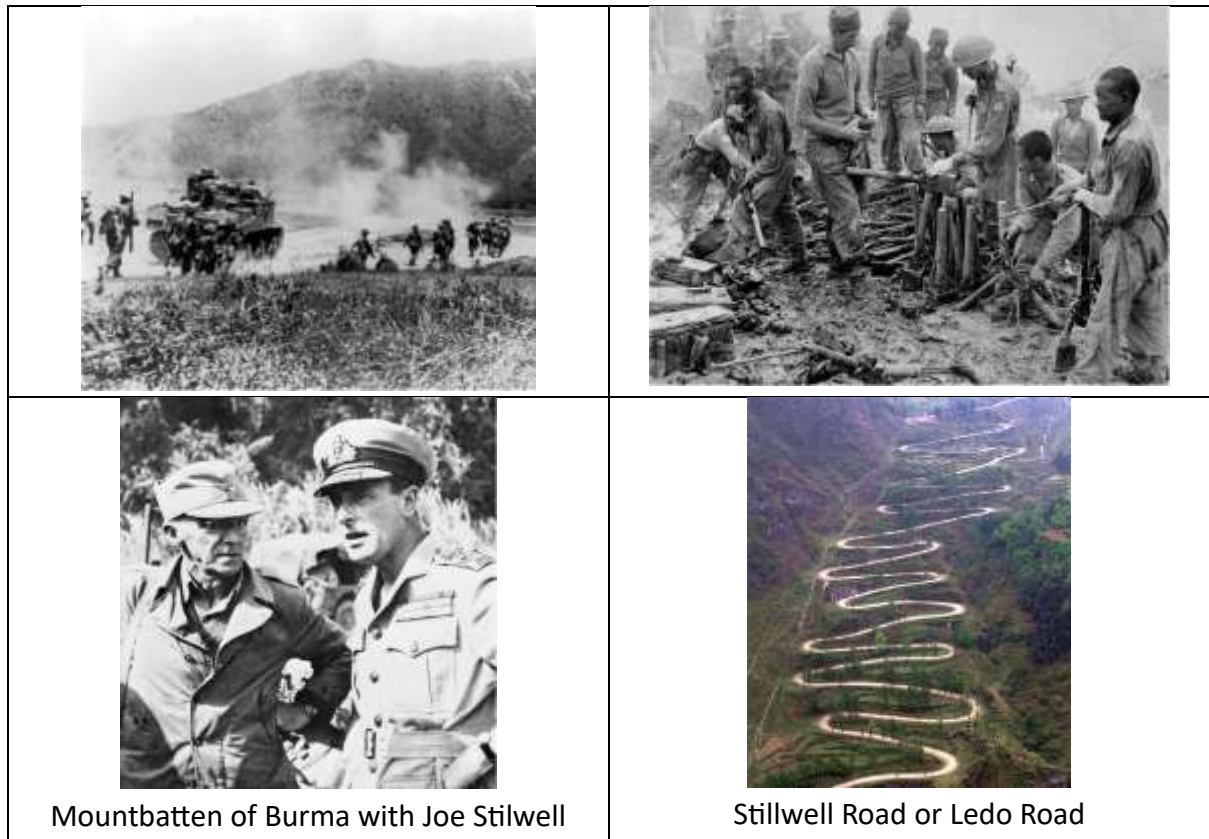
Burma Campaign (1942-44)

of time Japan and eight other countries (Germany, Italy, Croatia, Burma,

Thailand, Philippines, Manchuria etc) offered diplomatic recognition to this Provisional Government.

- 6 November 1943
  - Japanese handed over the islands of Andaman and Nicobar to the provisional government of India, and Subhas Chandra Bose set his feet on the soil of India, renaming them as **Shahid and Swaraj Islands**.
- **Second Phase of Indian National Army**
  - After the arrival of Bose, it reached around 40,000.
    - Civilians, such as Indian plantation labourers in Malaya, petty traders in Burma and shopkeepers in Thailand, swelled its ranks.
    - *“Punjabi, Muslim, Sikh and Pathan professional soldiers mingled with Tamil and Malayali workers in a “national army” led by a Bengali” - Ayesha Jalal*
    - *“Bose’s instantaneous and electric leadership turned the INA affair from a footnote in history into enough of a threat to create serious concern among the British” – Stephen Cohen*
  - Bose set up two INA headquarters in Rangoon and Singapore. Recruits were trained and funds were raised.
    - Different training centers for male and female recruits.
    - The training period for the recruits lasted for six months.
  - Regiments
    - Gandhi Brigade, Nehru Brigade and Subhas Brigade (guerilla warfare)
    - Rani Jhansi Brigade headed by Laxmi Swaminathan (women recruits)
  - Important commanders: Shahnawaz Khan, G.S. Dhillon and P.K. Sahgal.
- **The INA Campaign was a part of the U Go Offensive (March 1944):**
  - It was a Japanese offensive aimed at the Brahmaputra Valley. The offensive culminated in the Battles of Imphal and Kohima. It was one of the last major Japanese offensives during the Second World War.
  - Bose was eager for the INA to participate in any invasion of India, and persuaded Japanese that a victory would lead to the collapse of British rule in India.
  - INA launched an organized armed struggle against the British from the north-eastern frontier of India. The idea was to march, along with the Japanese army, through Burma to Imphal (Manipur) and then to Assam, where the Indians were expected to join them in an open struggle to free India.
  - Achievements
    - Entered inside the Indian Territory near **Mowdok post** – fifty miles east of Cox's Bazar.
    - Battle of **Imphal**, Battle of **Kohima**
- However, Japanese as well as INA were first held and then pushed back. The Japanese defeats at Kohima and Imphal were the largest up until that time.
  - The British and Indian forces had lost around 17,000 men. The Japanese suffered 60,000+ casualties. Most of these losses were the result of starvation, disease and exhaustion.

- In May 1945, the British troops occupied Rangoon and 20,000 INA troops were obliged to surrender.



### Causes of the failure of INA

- Bad **monsoon**, tough and treacherous **topography** of the fighting zone.
- INA was not significant enough to militarily beat the British Indian Army.
  - Bose was aware of this and formulated his own strategy of avoiding set-piece battles, garnering local and popular support within India and instigating revolt within the British Indian army to overthrow the Raj.
  - **The Forward Bloc** underground within India had been crushed well before the offensives opened in the Burma-Manipur theatre, depriving the army of any organised internal support.
- **Big British counter-offensive** (1944-45): By May 1945, both the Japanese army and the contingent of INA had to withdraw from the Indian front when Rangoon was captured by the British force.
- **Withdrawal of the Japanese support** was the main reason for its defeat.
  - **Without air-support**, the INA became weaker as a fighting force.
  - **Hiroshima and Nagasaki** (August 1945): Immediate surrender by Japan
- **Alleged death of Subhas Chandra Bose** in an air crash on 18 August 1945.

Thus ended the brilliant political career of one of the bravest sons India ever produced.

### **The larger perspective of Indian soldiers in World War 2:**

Despite the opposition, the impact of INA soldiers, fighting on side of Axis powers, was slight compared to the Indian soldiers fighting on the side of Allies, in British Indian army. INA strength of around 15,000 while British Indian army expanded greatly in wartime, reaching around 26,00,000 in 1945.

The INA's role in military terms is relatively insignificant, given its small numerical strength, lack of heavy weapons (it utilised captured British and Dutch arms initially), relative dependence on Japanese logistics and planning as well as its lack of independent planning.

Indian units were deployed widely – in Iraq, Ethiopia, North Africa, Italy – but their main goal was to prevent Japanese from crossing over to India (1942-44) and to defend Burma against the Japanese. It failed in the spring of 1942 but succeeded in 1944-45, when they drove out Japanese from Burma, with the help of Allied forces.

### **The contribution of the Indian National Army:**

It is true that the Indian National Army, despite its valour and dedication, failed to achieve its basic objective of freeing the country from the British yoke. There were many reasons for it including lack of resources, limited number of soldiers, lack of proper training and its dependence on Japanese support.

Despite apparent failure, it made a singular contribution in the cause of the Indian independence. It constitutes a glorious chapter in India's freedom struggle.

- The INA, during the war, **penetrated 150 miles inside** the country.
  - **4000+ Indian soldiers** gave away their lives in the war in a courageous attempt.
- The attempt of Subhas Chandra Bose and the INA **quickened India's freedom**. The tale of their bravery and sacrifices caught the imagination of people all over India.
- The sacrifice of INA men struck a sympathy in the hearts of Indian soldiers fighting on British side.
  - It soon affected the Indian army and revolt of the Royal Navymen was partly attributed to the resentment among the Indian armed forces against the INA trial. Perhaps the fear of a wider revolt by the Indian armed forces also contributed to the hastening of the end of the British rule.
- INA experiment underlined the fact of the composite nature of our culture and the fact of Hindu-Muslim unity. This was remarkable as it was during that period that the Muslim League led by Jinnah was playing its nefarious game of Hindu-Muslim disunity. INA played a glorious role in promoting the secular character of our freedom struggle.





(Padmashri) Janaki Thevar took over the (second in command) leadership of INA's Rani of Jhansi regiment in Burma when she was just 18 years old.



Nikhil Sheth with Captain Lakshmi Sahgal



### INA Monument, Singapore

Bose built in 1945, Mountbatten destroyed it  
Restored in 1995 with diaspora donations

*"The future generations of Indians who will be born, not as slaves but as free men, because of your colossal sacrifice, will bless your names and proudly proclaim to the world that you, their forbears, fought and suffered reverses in the battle of Manipur, Assam and Burma. But through temporary failure you paved the way to ultimate success and glory."*

—Subhas Chandra Bose while paying homage to the martyrs of the INA while laying foundation stone of the Former INA Monument at Singapore on 8 July 1945.