

IMA trains growing number of young foreign army officers



PHOTO LEFT: Cadets at the passing out ceremony of the Indian Military Academy (IMA) in Dehradun. PHOTO RIGHT: The War Memorial at the IMA. PHOTO BELOW: IMA's prestigious Sword of Honour, which is presented to the best Gentleman Cadet in a batch.

It prepares the officer cadre for the Indian Army, the fourth-largest in the world, but the Indian Military Academy (IMA) in the hills of Dehradun in northern India has also been the training ground for a growing number of young officers from foreign countries. One of the oldest and most prestigious military training establishments in the country, set up during British rule, the IMA has as its alumni several others who have reached important positions in the armies of countries like Nepal, Bhutan, Nigeria and the Philippines.

The eclectic nature of the IMA was established in its foundation year in 1932 itself when three officers from its first batch — Muhammad Musa, Sam Manekshaw and Smith Dun — went on to head the armies of Pakistan, India and Burma (as Myanmar was then called), respectively. Set in the picturesque Doon valley in India's northern state of Uttaranchal, the IMA continues the tradition as it provides training in new-age combat to officers from friendly foreign armies.

"The number of foreign cadets in our academy has been gradually increasing. A large number of foreign cadets have completed full-term courses here while others have taken short-term training," said Lt. Gen. Kamal Krishna Khanna, commandant of the IMA.

In the passing out ceremony of the institution on December 10, 2005, an officer from the Royal Bhutan Army, Penjor Gyeltshen, became the first foreigner since India's independence in 1947 to

win IMA's prestigious Sword of Honour, which is presented to the best cadet in a batch.

Interestingly, it was Smith Dun (a Briton) of the first IMA batch of 1932 who was the first foreign cadet to win the Sword of Honour and went on to become chief of the Burmese army.

Of the 533 cadets who passed out of the academy in December 2005, 16 were foreigners. Among them, 13 were from Bhutan and one each from the Maldives, Nepal and Lesotho.

While the 16 foreign officers left to report on duty in their respective armies, the Indian officers are to be posted to various regiments of the Indian Army.

Shajendra Lal Shreshtha, a Royal Nepalese Army officer who trained at the IMA, said, "The people here were excellent and I wish to carry the message of friendliness and peace to Nepal from here."

Since 1948, a limited number of cadets from African and Asian countries with close ties with India received "pre-commission training" at the IMA. Till 1987, 568 cadets from 18 countries had trained here. These countries include Angola, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Myanmar, Ghana, Iraq, Jamaica, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Nepal, Nigeria, the Philippines, Singapore, Tanzania, Uganda, Yemen and Zambia.

In recent years, cadets from France, Sudan, the Maldives, Botswana and Lesotho have also trained at the academy. ■

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Factfile

- The Academy became functional from October 1, 1932, with a course strength of 40 Gentlemen Cadets.

- Located between the Shivalik and Himalayan foothills in the scenic and charming Doon Valley, the Academy's campus covers an area of about 1,500 acres mid-way between the Ganga and the Yamuna rivers.

- Brigadier L.P. Collins, DSO, OBE, was the first Commandant. The first batch had on its rolls Sam Manekshaw, Smith Dun and Muhammad Musa. All of them later became the chiefs of the armies of their respective countries, namely India, Burma (now Myanmar) and Pakistan.

- In 1934, Lord Willingdon, the Viceroy of India, presented the Colours to the Academy on behalf of the King-Emperor, as not merely a mark of royal favour but also as acknowledgement of sacrifice and common endeavour. The parade was commanded by Under-Officer GC Smith Dun.

- In 1949, the Academy was redesignated as the Armed Forces Academy which later became the National Defense Academy (NDA) in 1950.

- The Academy's flag is steel-grey and blood red. The grey denotes strength and resilience while the red signifies sacrifice and devotion.

- The Crest of the IMA is composed of crossed swords with a flaming torch symbolising knowledge, superimposed in the middle by the Dharma *chakra* of Emperor Ashok. Under the Crest the scroll bears the motto 'Veerta aur Vivek' meaning 'valor and wisdom'.

- Between 1934 and 1941, 16 regular courses passed out of the Academy and 524 Gentlemen Cadets (GCs) were commissioned. The scale of the Academy's operations can be gauged from the fact that over 50,000 cadets have received commissions till now.