



Science Reporter

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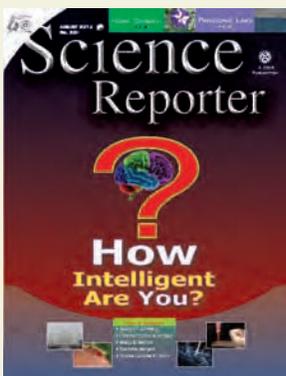
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AN ASSET TO THE NATION

A recent trip to the beautiful yet rough, and often risky, terrain of Srinagar-Leh-Ladakh brought one face to face with the gargantuan task of ensuring connectivity in the mountainous regions. Driving up the hills and through the mountain ranges and enjoying the scenic beauty of the surroundings, one fails to appreciate the ingenuity, labour and hardship that go into laying down roads on the treacherous terrain.

How do you build roads across one of the highest mountain ranges in the world? Carrying machines and men to the inhospitable and remote reaches of the mountains is an uphill task indeed. Worse still, how do you maintain these roads given that the region is covered in a thick blanket of snow for almost half the year? Yet, some roads on these stretches could even put the best city roads to shame.

One cannot help paying a tribute to the tenacity with which the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) has been laying down roads in some of the remotest and highest regions of the world and connecting the inaccessible border areas of the country. Being border areas, these regions often see heavy army movement to move supplies and troops. At heights where even walking a few yards is a breathtaking maneuver and in conditions almost beyond human endurance, for labourers to be working day in and day out to keep the lifeline of roads obstacle-free requires a high level of commitment and zeal. No wonder many lives are also lost. A very high level of ingenuity is also required to maintain roads in a working condition in areas that are frequented by landslides, mudslides, avalanches, cloud bursts and blizzards.

One can appreciate the perseverance of the BRO when one realises the fact that a road constructed in such regions one day could be suddenly wiped out the next moment due to a cloud burst or damaged due to landslides. Often the roads have to be cleared of snow. The BRO works day and night to keep Changla and Khardungla, two of the highest motorable roads in the world, open throughout the year. It is a constant battle against the elements that the BRO engineers and labourers are waging to keep the communication lines open.

The BRO has adequately measured up to its task handed over to it some 52 years ago. Raised on 7 May 1960, and starting out with just two projects, the BRO has constructed almost 50,000 km of roads in some of the most treacherous terrains. And road building and maintenance is just one of its expertise. BRO is now even diversifying into construction of airfields, hospitals, bridges etc. It has even lent its expertise to countries like Bhutan and Afghanistan.

A tribute goes out to all the officials and workers of the Border Roads Organisation who not only ensure a smooth and safe passage for the millions of tourists who throng these areas but also ensure that communication channels in some of the most perilous border areas do not ever get choked.

Hasan Jawaid Khan



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