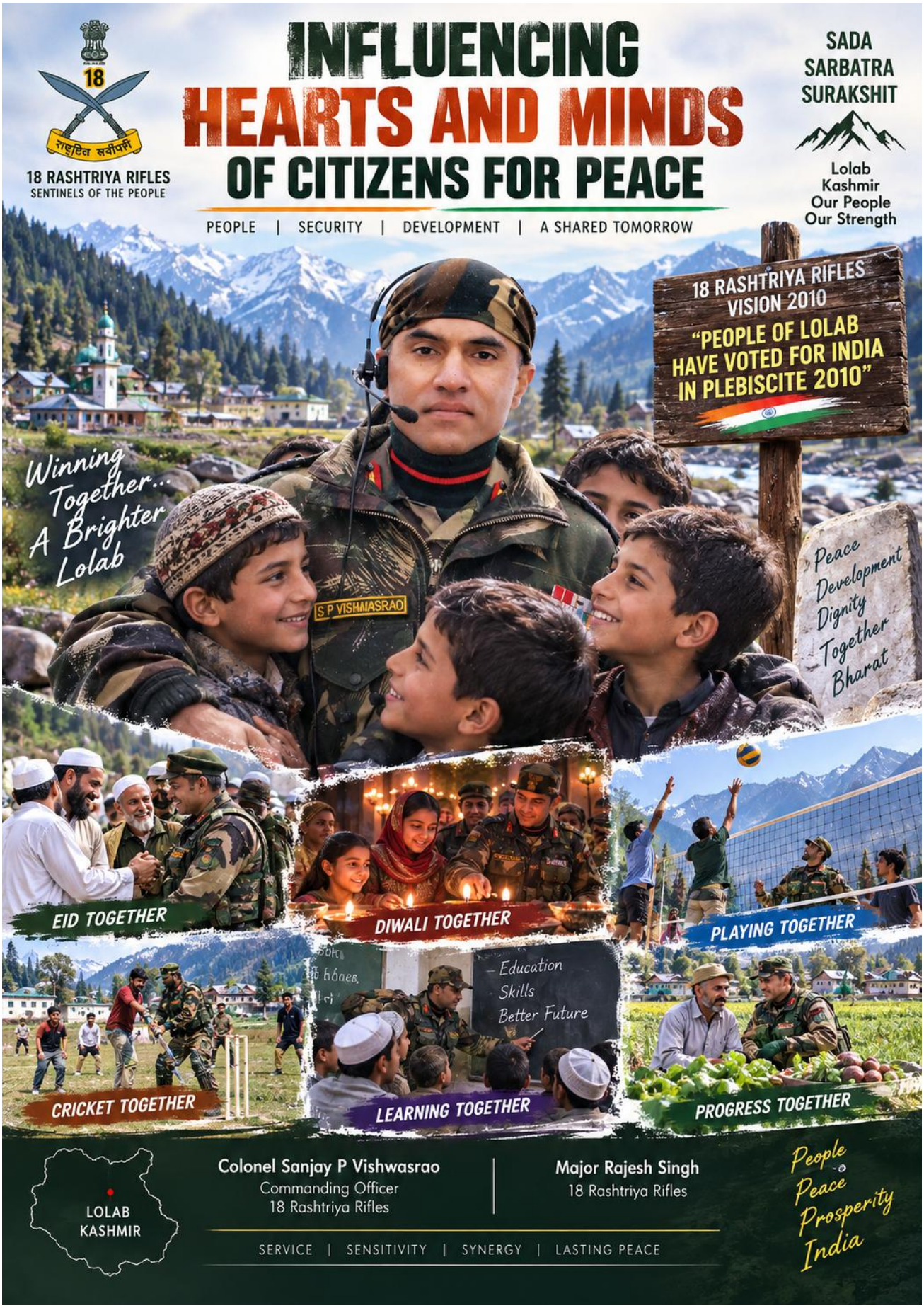

INFLUENCING
HEARTS AND MINDS
OF CITIZENS FOR PEACE
18 RASHTRIYA RIFLES
SENTINELS OF THE PEOPLE
PEOPLE | SECURITY | DEVELOPMENT | A SHARED TOMORROW
SADA SARBATRA SURAKSHIT
Lolab
Kashmir
Our People
Our Strength
18 RASHTRIYA RIFLES
VISION 2010
"PEOPLE OF LOLAB HAVE VOTED FOR INDIA IN PLEBISCITE 2010"
Winning Together... A Brighter Lolab
S P VISHWASRAO
Peace
Development
Dignity
Together
Bharat
EID TOGETHER
DIWALI TOGETHER
PLAYING TOGETHER
CRICKET TOGETHER
Education
Skills
Better Future
LEARNING TOGETHER
PROGRESS TOGETHER
LOLAB
KASHMIR
Colonel Sanjay P Vishwasrao
Commanding Officer
18 Rashtriya Rifles
Major Rajesh Singh
18 Rashtriya Rifles
SERVICE | SENSITIVITY | SYNERGY | LASTING PEACE
People
Peace
Prosperity
India

Influencing Hearts & Minds of Citizens for Peace

Originally written in 2007. Adopted in 2026 for a broader audience.

A Company Commander's Account of Carrying a Boardroom Vision to the Ground — and Why 'People First' Wins in a Congested Market

Sanjay P Vishwasrao, Major General, Retired

Co-written in 2007, as Colonel Sanjay P Vishwasrao — Commanding Officer, 18 Rashtriya Rifles, and 'the old man' of this account — and Major Rajesh Singh, company commander: a first-person field account of carrying a unit's vision into daily life in Lolab Valley, Kashmir.

> *"Lolab has voted for India in Plebiscite 2010."*
> **— Vision, 18 Rashtriya Rifles, 2006**

WHY THIS ANALYSIS CARRIES WEIGHT

This is a first-person account, written in 2007, of carrying a commanding officer's vision from intent to daily, door-to-door reality in one of Kashmir's most contested valleys. It is offered as a rare, on-the-ground case study in vision deployment and culture change — the same discipline behind a boardroom strategy that either dies in a slide deck or genuinely reaches the front line. The vision it describes was, in the end, substantially realised: neutralisation of 28 terrorists between 2006 and 2008, the highest figure ever recorded for the area, a Ashok Chakra for Captain Harshan, a Shaurya Chakra each for Major Rajesh Singh (co-author) and for Rifleman Abdul Hamid Chara, a Sena Medal for Gallantry for the author and a Unit Appreciation for 18 Rashtriya Rifles in 2009.

The Vision

'We in 18 Rashtriya Rifles have a Vision that is our guiding light,' said the Adjutant, walking me through the measured steps of introducing me to my

new unit. A dozen thoughts raced through my mind: is the old man too ambitious to have a vision? Is his team of officers simply telling him what he wants to hear? Will the *awaam* (the people) really accept our Nation so wholeheartedly? As if reading my mind, the old man took the time to explain the unit's vision himself, and made me swear that I would dream big, think about what could be, innovate, and change the game to make it happen. I have spent a year doing exactly that, and have come to appreciate just how far-sighted the team that built this vision really was. Convinced now of its effectiveness and its potential, I think the time has come to let the idea travel beyond the narrow minds and self-interest that so often keep a good idea contained — so, with Team 18's permission, I am sharing our most closely held professional secret: the vision of 18 Rashtriya Rifles for Lolab.

We in Team 18 call ourselves 'manoeuvrist counter-terrorist operators,' because we have embraced the tenets of manoeuvre warfare in our pursuit of lasting peace in Lolab. We aim to secure the environment so thoroughly that the enemy loses his freedom of action, and the initiative passes to us. Winning minds, in this reading, comes before influencing hearts — because as fourth-generation warriors, we understand that victory means denying the enemy his political goal. Our strategy is idea denial; our approach is manoeuvrist; our targets are the terrorist leadership and policymakers across the border in Pakistan; and our focus, throughout, is our people of Lolab. Our plan is built around creating multiple, non-cooperative centres of gravity across Lolab, while reorienting — Indianising — the ones separatists currently depend on, so as to amplify friction, break cohesion, induce paralysis, and bring about the collapse not just of the foreign terrorists present, but of the separatist movement itself. It may sound far-fetched — but then, as I said: dream big, think about what could be, innovate and change the game. Like Apple's iPod. Like Kishore Biyani's Big Bazaar. Like Tata's Nano.

The Mission

'Rajesh, our mission statement requires that you first and foremost develop real cultural intelligence of Lolab — the why, when, who, what and how, across past, present and future,' the old man told me. The mission statement itself reads:

> *18 Rashtriya Rifles dedicates itself to Lolab's quest for peace through ethical and friendly counter-terrorist operations, genuinely caring civic action, and heartfelt love and respect for all.*

Cultural intelligence of Lolab matters because terrorism today ignores national boundaries and increasingly plays out as a clash between cultures; bridging that cultural gap becomes the whole point. The unit's vision and mission are the old man's own intent, and they shape our operational design, our day-to-day methods, and our daily interaction with the *awaam*. Genuine, unwavering commitment to both has produced a real transformation in how the *awaam* sees us. This is the story of Team 18 successfully bridging the cultural gap between the *'Hindustan ki fauj'* (the Indian Army) on one side, and a Muslim-majority population on the other.

Consider a simple question: when, to whom, and about what do we actually speak during a train journey? Every barrier breaks down once real communication starts — and the barrier to that communication is itself bridged by cultural understanding. Today we train our troops in the Kashmiri way of life, and introduce them to Muslim religious practice and festivals. Our platoon and section commanders, and our scouts, are expected to learn workable Kashmiri phrases — *'As-salamu alaykum,' 'Shukur Khudha ka'* (thank God), *'Varey chuk ha?'* (how are you?), and *'Khuda Hafiz.'* The most sought-after role in the unit, that of 'scout,' has had its own meaning reversed entirely — from 'Gabbar,' the soldier who instilled fear, to *'Dost'* (friend), a Muslim heart in a soldier's uniform who hands out respect and small gifts as

skilfully as he once handled his rifle. Squads distribute kheer, firecrackers and toys on Eid al-Adha, mutton on Bakra Eid, and dates and kheer through the holy month of Ramzan. On India's National Days, we hand out miniature tricolours too — giving the cultural bridge its own Indian accent.

RELEVANCE FOR CORPORATE LEADERSHIP AND THINK TANKS — CARRYING A VISION TO THE FRONT LINE

This is what actually happens when a leader's vision survives contact with the ground: it gets translated, person by person, into concrete, culturally literate behaviour — a phrase learned, a festival observed, a role redefined — long before it shows up in any dashboard. Most corporate strategies and government policies fail not for lack of a good vision, but for lack of exactly this translation work between the boardroom and the front line. The 18 Rashtriya Rifles model — a CO's vision, a written mission statement, and a company commander personally accountable for turning both into daily practice — is a transferable template for any organisation trying to move a strategy from the page to the ground.

What Team 18 Does Differently

So, what does Team 18 actually do differently?

- Waiting in the company operating base for an informant to turn up is potential energy with no actual potential. Commanders down to squad level are empowered to run informal *'chowpal'* tea meetings in their own village or neighbourhood of responsibility.
- Jamming terrorist and over-ground-worker radio communication has been replaced by Team 18's own cellular network of contacts — company and platoon commanders each maintain a personal network of 'cellular friends' covering their entire population of responsibility.
- The old days of raucous cordon-and-search operations, humiliating searches of the traditional phiran cloak, and irritating, repetitive vehicle

checks are behind us. Team 18's house and vehicle searches today are courteous, unobtrusive of privacy and daily routine, and genuinely interactive.

- Catcalling of women has been declared a serious offence. It has been rooted out through firm punishment, with the victims and their friends made part of the disciplinary process itself.
- Splashing pedestrians with roadside slush, clearing traffic by waving batons, and blunt 'Overtaking Prohibited' signage have given way to courteous, civil driving — 'Please overtake safely' is now the standard courtesy to the local taxi driver, and the sentry on vehicle escort duty waves and salutes every pedestrian he passes.
- Summoning the parents of local terrorists for mandatory reporting has been dropped. Instead, squads call on them at home — reaching a son's heart by first reaching his parents' minds. Requests of 'please, call them back to us' are becoming more frequent, and more heartfelt.
- Medical camps are no longer just about physical ailments and prescriptions — they are a chance to relieve stress, enjoy some time together, reconnect with our 'cellular friends,' and bring the *awaam* a little closer to India through an impromptu, light-hearted 'mad sports day.'
- Republic Day and Independence Day are not military ceremony alone, but interactive celebrations that let thousands of people touch, feel and genuinely respect the Tricolour — a Attari-Wagah Border-style spectacle at every company operating base.
- Respected Hajis are not simply invited in for a felicitation — every commander calls on them at home instead, seeking their blessing for the mission's success, and in doing so, reaching their entire neighbourhood as well.

- Cricket, debate and essay competitions are not about winning — they are about building character, mutual trust, and genuine, sustained engagement with young people, deliberately spread out over three months to keep them busy and involved.
- Surrendered terrorists are not left exposed to exploitation by a corrupt local system. Company commanders personally supervise them, keeping them away from the gun culture through self-employment schemes the unit has built with local banks and contractors.
- Recruitment rallies do not end with an announcement at the mosque — that is only the start of a road the unit walks alongside every prospective recruit, from document checks and medical exams to training for the physical and written tests and transport to the rally itself.
- The Army Goodwill School in Lolab is the wellspring of everything we do to win minds — we are determined to shape the next generation into a force of genuinely inspired young people.

All of it, because we in 18 Rashtriya Rifles genuinely care for our *awaam*.

CORPORATE PARALLEL — EMPLOYEE, CITIZEN, CUSTOMER OR DEVOTEE FIRST AS UNBEATABLE ADVANTAGE

Every item on this list is the same move, repeated in a different setting: replace a transactional, top-down interaction with one built around genuine respect and care for the person on the other side of it. That is precisely the discipline behind a market-leading customer experience, an engaged and retained workforce, a trusted public institution, or a devotee-first religious trust — and precisely what a congested, commoditised market or a cynical public rarely expects, which is exactly why it becomes so hard for a competitor to copy. A rival can copy a product feature or a policy overnight; a genuine, sustained culture of putting the other person first takes years to build — and years for a competitor to catch up to.

What the Vision Bought Us

The open scorn now shown for Pakistan and its policies, the recognition that the 'flood of azadi' (independence) was a costly mistake, the fading of anti-India slogans, and genuinely wholehearted, freely chosen participation in Republic Day and Independence Day celebrations, all testify to one thing: separatism no longer commands real support in Lolab, and the occasional die-hard ideologue is now a rarity. That shift is captured in the title the community itself gave the unit — *'aman ke devta'* (angels of peace) — a spontaneous honour, bestowed after one of our impromptu sports days.

'What plebiscite?' a visiting senior officer once asked, sceptically. *'Respect the very people I despised in my first year here?'* an older company commander pushed back. *'A scout, handing out toffees?'* laughed a rather rustic colleague from Rohtak. But we kept pushing — the idea of winning minds in order to influence hearts — until it became the very blitzkrieg that changed how the *awaam* actually thinks. Any visitor to remote Lolab today cannot miss the turnaround in popular sentiment and political alignment, toward the nation in general, and toward 18 Rashtriya Rifles in particular.

And what did Team 18's people's war actually produce? Intelligence flow has increased, though there is still real distance to cover before it becomes a flood. The *awaam* now joins us for Diwali and Holi celebrations at our company operating bases. 'Jai Hind' — a greeting we had deliberately replaced with 'As-salamu alaykum' — is now back in circulation, this time offered by the *awaam* themselves. Children wave at passing vehicles, and fall into easy conversation with our patrols. And, not least, the separatists now stand genuinely isolated by a steadily narrowing cultural gap — terrorists today have to coerce, or pay for, the logistics and early warning that once came to them freely.

RELEVANCE FOR HR AND CHANGE MANAGEMENT — READING THE SIGNS OF A CULTURE ACTUALLY CHANGING

None of these are hard KPIs, and that is exactly the point: a rising intelligence flow, a greeting reclaimed by the community itself, children waving at a patrol, festivals shared rather than merely tolerated — these are the leading indicators of a culture that has genuinely shifted, long before any lagging metric (a survey score, a retention number, an approval rating) catches up. Any change-management programme that only tracks the lagging metric will miss the moment the culture actually turned — the moment this account is really describing.

'Barriers break when people talk, and when people talk, sanity dawns.' Respect, trust and affection now flow both ways, freely. Young people who were once under the influence of Jamaat sympathisers, and subjected to anti-India propaganda, have gradually been brought round through a combination of interaction, counselling and guidance. They have come to realise that their own future is bound up with an India growing at 8.5% a year.

One shining example of the spirit behind this vision is the 26 January 2008 award of the Shaurya Chakra, posthumously, to Late Rifleman Abdul Hamid Chara of 162 Infantry Battalion (Territorial Army) — Home and Hearth — who gave his life for Lolab's future on 12 June 2007, in an encounter with Team 18, after killing a notorious terrorist commander at close range. His widow, Gulshan Bano, would go on to become the first person from Lolab to watch the Tricolour fly over Rashtrapati Bhavan in his honour. His brother, Ejaj, has since enrolled in the same unit. The floodgates of local valour have opened, with Hamid and Ejaj leading the way in ridding their home of terrorism, and securing a better future for their families and their nation.

Slowly, and surely, 18 Rashtriya Rifles has succeeded in bridging the cultural gap between itself and the *awaam*. The ultimate aim is political maturity, and a genuinely pro-India political will among the people themselves — helping the *awaam* believe in its own ability to bring about real change in the valley, and to see that the choice, and the responsibility, for its own future rests with itself. Team 18's vision and mission are, we believe, precisely on time and on target for the State Assembly elections of 2008 and the Parliamentary elections of 2009.

End Note, by the Old Man

Boots on the ground still matter — force saturation remains essential in internal-security operations. But the conduct of the individual wearing those boots matters more. Moral power is, and will always remain, more effective than kinetic power.

Surely, Team 18 will make *'Lolab has voted for India in Plebiscite 2010'* happen. Perhaps, in time, all Rashtriya Rifles units together can make *'the State of Jammu & Kashmir has voted for India in Plebiscite 2010'* happen. And only then can India's defence forces truly set the stage for India's own Vision 2020 to happen.



Colonel Sanjay P Vishwasrao — 'the old man' of this account — Commanding Officer, 18 Rashtriya Rifles, Lolab, Kupwara, 2007.



Major Rajesh Singh, Shaurya Chakra, Sena Medal, 18 Rashtriya Rifles — company commander and co-author of this account, 2007.

RELEVANCE FOR CORPORATE RECRUITERS, THINK TANKS AND GOVERNMENT POLICY INSTITUTIONS

This is a rare, primary-source account of exactly the work most strategy documents never show: a vision, set at the top, reaching the ground through named individuals, specific behaviours, and a genuine change in how people were treated — with results that were independently recognised through decorations, a Unit Commendation, and the community's own spontaneous honorific. For a corporate recruiter, it is direct evidence of the ability to translate strategy into front-line execution and measurable culture change. For a think tank or government policy institution, it is a field-level case study in winning legitimacy and cooperation from a sceptical population — the same challenge behind any counter-insurgency, public-trust or citizen-engagement policy. I am available to advise, write, and speak on this same discipline — turning a boardroom or policy vision into an unbeatable, people-first advantage on the ground.