

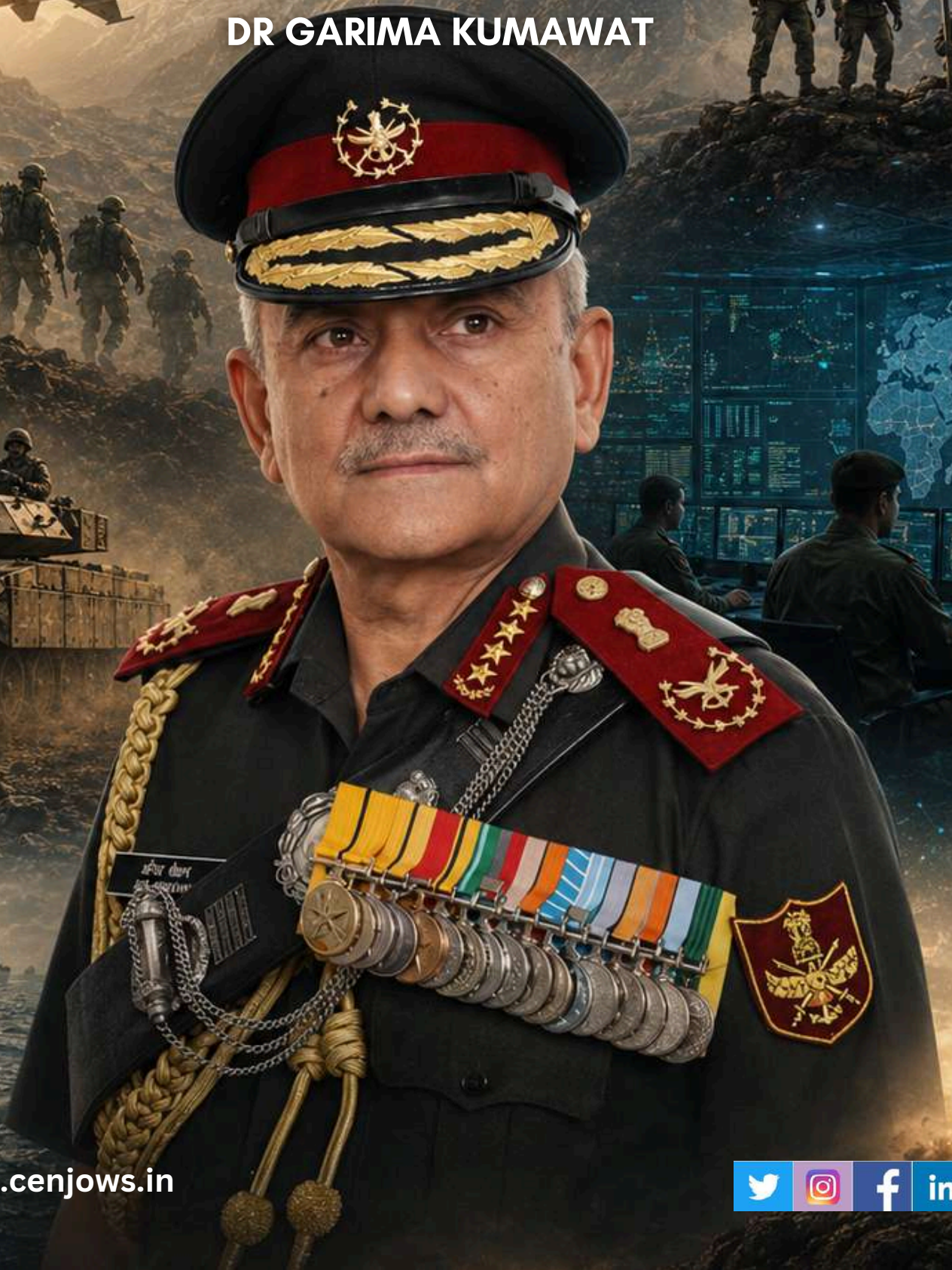


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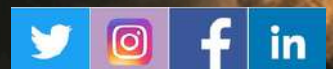
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A LIFETIME IN OLIVE GREEN: THE DEFINING LEGACY OF GENERAL ANIL CHAUHAN

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**A Lifetime in Olive Green:
The Defining Legacy of
General Anil Chauhan**



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As the term of General Anil Chauhan as the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) approaches its conclusion on 30 May 2026, it is an opportune moment to reflect on his impactful leadership and significant contributions to India's defence landscape. Throughout his service, General Chauhan has steered the armed forces with strategic foresight, overseeing critical operations and fostering greater integration among the Army, Navy, and Air Force. His tenure has been marked by a focus on modernisation, enhanced jointness, and strengthening India's defence preparedness in a rapidly evolving geopolitical environment. This article revisits his journey, leadership milestones, and the enduring legacy he leaves behind as CDS.

Service Chronicle

In September 2022, Gen Anil Chauhan, PVSM, UYSM, AVSM, SM, VSM was appointed as India's second Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), the country's highest-ranking military position intended to enhance the integration of the Air Force, Navy, and Army, thereby strengthening the nation's overall capabilities. General Chauhan's

contributions as a decorated officer and strategic visionary leader solidified his position as a key figure in India's national defence and security.

Gen Anil Chauhan, born on 18 May 1961, hailing from Gwana Village, Pauri Garhwal, Uttarakhand, was commissioned into the 11 Gorkha Rifles (11 GR) in 1981 after graduating from NDA and IMA.¹ Throughout his nearly 45-year career, General Anil Chauhan held a variety of command, staff, and instrumental positions where he gained vast experience in conducting counter-insurgency operations in diverse terrains and challenging operational settings like Jammu & Kashmir and North East India.

He was promoted to the rank of colonel and given command of a battalion of the 11 Gorkha Rifles in 2005. As a brigadier, he was designated as the commandant of the 11 Gorkha Rifles Regimental Centre in Lucknow. Subsequently, he was assigned to the Directorate of Indian Army Veterans (DIAV), where he formulated policies for ensuring the welfare of Indian Army veterans. In 2010, he authored a book entitled "Aftermath of a Nuclear Attack: A Case Study on Post-strike Operations," in which he succinctly explored incidents that might occur following the conclusion of a nuclear conflict. This exemplified his strategic intellectual acumen, defence policy proficiency, and intellectual contributions to the national security perspective. In January 2014, during his tenure as Major General and Chief of Staff of the Kashmir-based 15 Corps, popularly referred to as the Chinar Corps, serving until 2015. He held pivotal tasks encompassing Kashmir Valley operations, Cross-LoC operations, counter-insurgency coordination, border security management, international border duties, and internal security operations. He then commanded India's most important Baramulla Division, the 19th Infantry Division. Later, he was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant General and became GOC of Dimapur's 3 Corps in 2017. After being designated as Director General Military Operations (DGMO) in January 2018, two significant military operations took place under him: the 2019 Balakot attack against Pakistan and Operation Sunrise (2019).

As DGMO, he played an instrumental role in the strategic planning and implementation of the Balakot airstrike. He executed force deployments to dissuade the Pakistan Army from any ground misadventure.² This operation signified a substantial alteration in India's military stance, indicating a proactive and measured retaliation for the Pulwama terror attack in 2019, when the Indian Air Force attacked the Jaish-e-Mohammed

terrorist training centre within Pakistan. His leadership in orchestrating activities across the Army, Air Force, and intelligence services was pivotal to the strike's efficacy and ensuing operational security.

In February and May 2019, the Director General of Military Operations led a two-phased joint operation named 'Operation Sunrise' to eliminate militants near the eastern border.³ The operation targeted NSCN-K, ULFA(I), NDFB, KLO, and Arakan Army camps near the border. DGMO oversaw intelligence exchange, operational planning, and synchronisation between the Indian Army and Myanmar's Tatmadaw.⁴ Myanmar military targeted rebel positions while Indian forces blocked border escape routes.⁵

In 2019, he assumed the position of General Officer Commanding-in-Chief (GOC-in-C) of the Eastern Command, overseeing various states in Northeast and Eastern India. He orchestrated the military buildup in the Eastern sector of the LAC in response to the Chinese Army's escalation along the Northern frontiers in Eastern Ladakh. Maintaining a discreet presence and positioning units such as the 17 Mountain Strike Corps at forward areas obfuscated the enemy's understanding of India's response to any provocations.⁶

Transformative Reform -Integrated Theatre Command

After his retirement in May 2021, he was appointed as India's second Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) in September 2022, with his tenure extended until May 30, 2026. One of his main duties as CDS was to advance India's long-needed integrated theatre command reforms. The three services operated in silos for decades. These reforms consolidate Army, Navy, and Air Force assets to improve operational readiness. He employed both top-down and bottom-up approaches to encourage not only the military leadership but also the subordinates to collaborate. He stressed that ITCs must collaborate and integrate to decisively delineate operational activities from administrative Raise-Train-Sustain (RTS) functions, allowing commanders to focus on security and operations.⁷

During the inauguration of the annual DRDO Directors' Conclave, he said, "It is one of the most ambitious changes with far-reaching implications attempted post-independence. The start of this journey depends on the right steps being taken first

towards jointness and integration. Theaterisation involves the creation of tri-service-specific structures for effective response along the entire spectrum of conflict.”⁸

To tackle information warfare, grey zone wars, and sophisticated adversary capabilities, the CDS advised employing jointmanship, modern military doctrines, and innovative technologies.⁹ Efforts in this regard signify the initiation of broader reforms aimed at multi-domain operations, the integration of space and cyberspace with conventional domains, and the fostering of digitisation and data-centric warfare.¹⁰

Jointness (Sanyuktikaran)

At Kalam Kavach 3.0, at Manekshaw centre, New Delhi, Gen Chauhan, in his talk on efforts taken towards Jointness, Atmanirbharta and Innovation, highlighted that ‘it was a slogan given by the Prime Minister at the Combined Commanders conference at Calcutta.’¹¹ To him, Jointness, in its true essence, refers to efforts to establish structures ready for multi-domain operations, where theatre commands represent the culmination of the process. He said, Theatre command is the responsibility of the Secretary of the DMA, distinctively differentiating between force application and force generation, thus shaping the way we fight and defend ourselves in future wars. The objective of jointness is to cultivate faith, camaraderie, and a unified service ethos among the Army, Navy, and Air Force. He attributed its origins to the National Defence Academy, where the three services would be forged together from the outset of their military careers. He acknowledged the presence of three service-specific cultures, each of which is firmly embedded and has its own distinct source of identity and coherence. Thus, rather than replacing service-specific culture, he emphasised the formation of a joint culture through common symbols, tri-service recruitment advertisements, etc., which integrates rather than undermines them.¹² Jointness (Sanyuktikaran) largely works in the cognitive domain and thus is difficult to quantify.

Integration (Ekikaran)

Further, to achieve more effective integration (Ekikaran) of the three forces, he worked across eight verticals, including operations, intelligence, logistics, training, communication, and human resources. This approach combines unique capabilities in a synchronised way for each service, across processes, procedures, and structures, producing results that can be easily quantified. For instance, he said, India has created a joint communication architecture framework in which the three services can speak

to each other. A secure mobile communication service, 'Sambhav', was used by forces during Ops Sindoor. Further, in this regard, the forces have a common cybersecurity policy, tri-service emailing solutions, tri-service messaging services, along with developing an interservice cryptographic system.¹³ With respect to Air Defence, these structures were designed by three services in a standalone fashion, like Akashteer by the Indian Army, IACCS by the Air Force, and TRIGUN by the Indian Navy. India has been able to integrate these air defence systems. Taking integration forward, all three services had a huge inventory, and now a system is being put in place in which inventories in offline and online modes can connect and rationalise their buffer stock, demands and cost of procurement, along with maintenance of these assets. He said there are around 197 initiatives identified for integration, and work on them is progressing in parallel.¹⁴

Atmanirbharta and Innovation

Atmanirbharta, on the other hand, moves beyond the military and involves multiple stakeholders like the defence manufacturing industries, DRDO, Department of Defence Production, Department of Defence for Policy formulation, three service headquarters, along with HQ, Integrated Defence Staff, to provide long-term security and create strategic autonomy through economic strength for ourselves. Whereas innovations lead to the establishment of innovative warfighting structures like theatre command and act as a critical link between jointness and Atmanirbharta. On integration, he further opined that it aims to enhance administrative, operational, and procurement efficiency, improve situational awareness, and increase battlefield transparency, which was evident during Operation Sindoor, where superior integration provided a decisive advantage in escalation management and ceasefire negotiations.¹⁵

Operation Sindoor

His efforts in this regard were very much reflected during Operation Sindoor, which was launched by India to avenge the Pahalgam terror attack on 22 April, 2025. He characterised it as distinctly dissimilar to India's previous military operations, describing it as a multi-domain and technology-centric initiative that depended significantly on collaboration across the armed forces and other entities.¹⁶ During his speech at Sena Samvad in New Delhi, he identified it as predominantly a non-contact

kind of warfare, employing advanced technology such as cyber and space capabilities extensively. He believes the Indian Armed Forces are transitioning from network-centric warfare to data-centric warfare, and Artificial Intelligence is becoming a key capability for tackling future security challenges.¹⁷ He further highlighted that during the operation, the Indian armed forces projected and achieved a significant level of jointness, merging centralised planning with decentralised execution.¹⁸

Future Warfare Challenges and Reform Momentum

As per him, creating joint defence structures is one of the most transformative reforms that India has undertaken. Numerous nations have endeavoured to accomplish this, and invariably, disparities in the three services have been observed across all countries. He underscored that the Indian approach diverged from that of other nations by prioritising consensus-building and inclusivity over a top-down methodology, by conducting more than 100 presentations to military institutions to enhance awareness of the complex and evolving nature of warfare. However, the biggest challenge he faced in this process was not structural but changing the mindset. He said there was a need to make the best use of available resources through optimisation, restructuring, delayering of HQ, and faster decision-making. He recognised the need for simultaneous implementation of reforms along with enhanced speed and scale, instead of doing it sequentially, as India is already lagging 10-15 years behind other nations in theaterisation.¹⁹

When asked about the cognitive and information warfare, he drew references from oriental thoughts derived from the Mahabharata and Sun Tzu, and highlighted that it was always part of war-fighting strategy, contrasting with the Western focus on kinetic force to win the wars. He noted that the use of such warfare tactics is unfolding and still developing creatively and precariously. Countries are experimenting and trying to connect the physical aspect of warfare with the metaphysical to deal with it.

As his tenure concludes in May 2026, General Chauhan affirms that the momentum towards jointness and integration is irreversible. He equates the transformation to uniting three distinct religions into one, a process that has gained sufficient speed and direction (“gati” and “disha”) to ensure its continuation beyond his leadership.

DISCLAIMER

The paper is the author's individual scholastic articulation and does not necessarily reflect the views of CENJOWS, the Defence forces, or the Government of India. The author certifies that the article is original in content, unpublished, and it has not been submitted for publication/ web upload elsewhere and that the facts and figures quoted are duly referenced, as needed and are believed to be correct.

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