

Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and the Battle of Imphal-Kohima 1944

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Abstract: A new political development took place in East Asia after the fall of Malaya, Singapore and Burma which brought the Japanese military leaders and the Indian leaders in the region together. This development saw the birth of the Indian National Army (INA) which collaborated with the military government of Japan with the intention to free India from colonial rule. Subsequently, the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) and the INA launched a combined campaign in Northeast India in 1944. The objective of this joint arm operation against British-India during the Second World War was to safeguard Japan's "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere", especially Burma on the one side and on the other, to pave way for the INA to penetrate into the plains of India to stir anti-British uprisings for the liberation of the country. There existed an imminent possibility of merging Imphal and Kohima (if not the whole of India), as the frontier limit of the Co-Prosperity Sphere in the West, had the Japanese won the battles of Imphal and Kohima. The British troops fought some of the hardest land battles of the Second World War at Imphal and Kohima. The Japanese 15th Army and Bose's INA were defeated by the British 14th Army at Imphal and Kohima after months of heavy battles.

Keywords: Japanese, British, Imphal-Kohima, Dimapur, battle, GEACS

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I. INTRODUCTION

Japan issued a policy known as 'The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' during the 1930s with an idea of creating an economic zone wherein all the Asian nations could develop collectively. The Japanese Foreign Minister Matsuoka Yosuke used the term 'Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' officially for the first time in August 1940 (Taya & Cook, 1992, 50). The main objective of this policy was to promote co-prosperity of East Asia by ending the long-lasting Western imperialism in Asia and to establish Asia for the Asians (Yagami). In the West, the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (henceforth, GEACS) was generally viewed as an example of aggressive Japanese imperialism directed toward China and South-East Asia (Lebra, 1975, vii). But in the words of the former Japanese Prime Minister Fumimaro Konoe who planned the Sphere in 1940, the GEACS could not be fully understood unless one could see the unfairly structured world political and economic setting- a source of the world division into "the Haves nations and the Have-not nations," as the fundamental causes of world conflict. Konoe contended that Japan's issuance of the policy was also to a great extent attributed to her desire to end such inequality. But to Cordell Hull (the former US Secretary of State from 1933-1944), GEACS was nothing but an act of Japanese imperialism (Yagami).

The debate on the GEACS is endless but the concept undoubtedly had immense influence on the wartime policy of Japan. It became a national goal of the country and by the middle of 1941 the concept of GEACS was treated as a cornerstone of secret discussions of Japanese leadership policies. Major decisions were taken to promote the Co-Prosperity Sphere and the public quickly embraced it as their country's national goal. The concept of GEACS became an exciting dream especially for the young and well educated Japanese and it remained popular even after the WWII and had inspired the neo-nationalist ideologues like Ishihara Shintaro and Kobayashi Yoshinori (Duus, 2008, 143-154).

The prolonged Japanese war against China became too expensive because of which Japan shifted her attention to conquer the rich regions of Southeast Asia as part of the GEACS programme. Japan expected this move to strengthen her resources and economic power and simultaneously enable her to defeat the Chinese army with ease by blocking the country's supply line (Dupuy, 1963, 4). Therefore, on the morning of December 7, 1941 the Japanese carrier aircraft attacked the US Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbour in the Hawaiian Islands which led to the declaration of war against Japan by USA and Britain and the beginning of the Pacific War (Stokesbury, 1980, 200-201). Japan attempted to establish a strong defensive perimeter around the newly-

acquired territories around the Pacific region and Southeast Asia to safeguard the Co-Prosperity Sphere. This perimeter was to extend from the Kuriles, through the Wake Island to the Marshall and Gilbert and Sumatra, Malaya and on to Burma (Kirby, Vol.3, 2004, 71).

In 1942, the Japanese conducted an offensive against Burma that culminated in its occupation (Bond & Tachikawa, 2004, 103). The fall of Burma into the hands of the Japanese created a new political and military development in the Burma-China-India theatre. In late April 1943 General Kawabe, the Burma Area Army chief, accepted the suggestion of the commander of the Japanese 15th Army, General Mutaguchi, for an offensive beyond the Chindwin River. General Mutaguchi considered this offensive to be important after assessing the success of the first Wingate Operation in Burma. Therefore, a map maneuver was conducted in June 1943 in Rangoon and the plan for the Japanese 15th Army to wage a decisive war against the main force of the British was drawn. As per the plan, the Japanese 31st Division was to advance to Kohima from Homalin; the 15th Division from the east of Thangdut and Paungbyin was to attack Imphal from the north and the 33rd Division, in the sector between Fort White and Kalewa, was to attack Imphal from the south (JM-134, 2011, 27-29). Accordingly, this plan was executed in 1944 in collaboration with the INA with Imphal and Kohima as the primary targets.

The arm offensive against Imphal by the Japanese 15th and the 33rd divisions started on 8 March and was already in progress. On 5th April, the 3rd Battalion, 58th Infantry Regiment 31st Division captured Kohima town in the morning and occupied the Garrison Hill before sunset (JM-134, 121). The battle of Imphal-Kohima lasted from March to July 1944. The battle of Imphal was a complex series of battles and lasted for five months "ranging from the banks of the Chindwin to the road beyond Kohima, well inside Assam" (Allen, 2000, 191). The battle of Kohima was intensely fought for sixty four days and is acknowledged as one of the most important land battles of the WWII. Mountbatten, the Allied Supreme Commander for South-East Asia described the battle of Kohima as "Probably one of the greatest battles in history, naked unparalleled heroism, the British/Indian Thermopylae" (Edwards, 2009, 11). The commander of the British 14th Army, William Slim, stated that the Japanese army had suffered the greatest defeat in its history in the Imphal-Kohima battle. Fifty thousand Japanese had been killed or died in the Assam and Arakan region and five Japanese army divisions- the 15th, 18th, 31st, 33rd and the 55th had been destroyed as effective fighting force and two of its divisions and an independent division and many on the line-of-communication got badly mauled (Slim, 1961, 307). The British 14th Army under the command of Field Marshal William Slim played decisive role in the defeat of the Japanese at Kohima and Imphal. The 4 Corps commanded by Lt. General Geoffrey Scoones at Imphal and the 33 Corps, commanded by Lt. General Montagu Stopford, in-charge of the Naga Hills, and Major General Orde Wingate's 'Chindits' contributed to the victory of the Allied forces. The contribution of the British 2nd Division led by Maj. Gen. John M.L. Grover in the battle of Kohima was immense.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Some of the most standard works on the military history of the Second World War in the India-Burma theatre are Defeat into Victory by William Slim (GB, 1962); Kohima by Arthur Swinson (GB, 1966); Imphal by Evans and Brett-James (London, 1962); Kohima: The Furthest Battle by Leslie Edwards (GB, 2009) and Kohima 1944 by Robert Lyman (GB, 2010). There are informative accounts on the battles of Imphal and Kohima in The Burma Campaign by Frank Mclynn (USA, 2011). The Decisive Battle: The War against Japan, Vol.3 (United Kingdom Military series, 1961) is the official British history of the WWII which deals with the battles of Kohima and Imphal and is very informative and highly reliable. Imphal and Kohima by Maj. Higgins and Staff Group 10C (Kansas, 1984) provides analytical accounts of the battles of Kohima and Imphal. Burma: The Longest War 1941-45 by Louis Allen (London, 2000), is the work of a soldier who fought in Burma during the WWII. Allen's account is based on his unique command of the public and private archives in Tokyo and London. A.J. Barker's The March on Delhi, received positive note from Renya Mutaguchi, the general who commanded the Japanese 15th Army. A valuable book based on the Japanese perspective of the war is the Japanese Monograph No. 134 (US Military History Department, 2011). The work is based on the recollections of the former Japanese generals and army officers of the 15th Army. The Rising Sun by John Toland (USA, 1970), is the history of the WWII told from the Japanese perspective. Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere in World War II by Joyce Lebra (Kuala Lumpur, 1975) is an important work for understanding the origin and objective of Japan's war time policy. Lebra's work is useful for understanding the concept and the GEACS at work. My Memories of INA & Its Netaji by Maj. Gen. Shanawaz Khan (Delhi, 1946) and India's Struggle for Freedom by Maj. Gen. A.C. Chatterji (Calcutta, 1947) provide valuable information on the war from the INA perspective. The Springing Tiger by Hugh Toye (Bombay, 1959); Testament of Subhas Bose 1942-1945 by Arun (Delhi, 1946) and The Indian National Army: The Second Front of the Indian Independence Movement by K.K. Ghosh (Meerut, 1969) are very valuable sources for the study of the INA movement and its relationship with the Japanese army. The five volumes of T.R. Sareen's Indian National Army: A Documentary Study (New Delhi, 2004), are store houses of archival source, especially on the INA and the Japanese. R.C. Majumdar's

History of the Freedom Movement in India, Vol.III (Calcutta, 1996) and History of the Freedom Movement in India, Vol. IV, by Tara Chand (New Delhi, 1992) contains useful information on the INA movement. These two works are indispensable for understanding the political developments in India during and post-war period.

The booklet, The Battle of Kohima by Mekhrie Khate, Aphrülle Iralu, Dieze and Khriemezo Iralu, Neigusalie Khruomo and Shürhosielle Nakhro (Kohima, 2007), is a very informative work on the battle of Kohima based on the oral accounts of the war witnesses. *Chakhesangs: A Window to Phek District*, written by Rekha Rose Dukru and Vishü Rita Krocha (Kohima, 2013), contains account on the WWII period in Phek district. It reflects the relationship of the Nagas and the Japanese- the bitter as well as the sweet memories of the year 1944.

III. OBJECTIVE

The main objective of this study is to find out the reasons behind the Japanese campaign of Imphal and Kohima in 1944. Second, it is to understand the nature of relationship between the Japanese army and the Indian National Army and the political aspect of the campaign. Third, it is to examine the likely status of India vis-à-vis the GEACS in the event of Japanese victory in the Imphal-Kohima battle.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Some of the popular war literatures and books relevant to the study area form the basis of this paper. Archival sources and literatures on the war, based on oral history, have been consulted to incorporate the viewpoint of the war witnesses. Web sources have been used wherever needed and necessary. Some of the standard works on the battles of Kohima and Imphal which are based on the Japanese viewpoints, but penned by non-Japanese writers, have also been referred to in the construction of this paper.

V. REASONS BEHIND THE OPERATION U-GO

As soon as the Japanese occupied Burma in 1942, its Southern Army directed the 15th Army to prepare a plan for conducting an invasion of Assam code-named 'Operation No. 21'. The targets under this Operation were Imphal, Kohima, Dimapur, the Chin Hills, Silchar, Golaghat, Ledo and Tinsukia. However, the proposed 'Operation No. 21' had to be abandoned because of several physical challenges cited especially by the commander of the Japanese 18th Division, Lt. Gen. Mutaguchi. But in the subsequent years, the draft plan of the 'Operation No.21' led to the Imphal operation after the reorganization of the Northern Burma Defence into the Burma Area Army (BAA) with Lt. Gen. Masakazu Kawabe as its commander. The Japanese 15th Army operated under the BAA with four divisions (the 18th, 33rd, 56th and the 31st) under its command (JM-134, 2011, 13-15). The Japanese army in Burma realised the urgency for a military campaign into Imphal. Lt. Gen. Mutaguchi was strongly opposed to the Imphal-Kohima campaign when he was the commander of the Japanese 18th Division. But after he took over the command of the Japanese 15th Army in Burma, he turned into an ardent advocate of the 'Operation No.21' - renamed as 'Operation U-Go or U'.

General Tojo, the Prime Minister of Japan had long contemplated the possibility of striking at British India politically. Therefore, on 9 January 1944, he gave the go-ahead for the U-Go, an attack on Imphal (McLynn, 2011, 324). Apart from the successful penetration of Orde Wingate's column deep behind the Japanese line in 1943, an act which was taken as a challenge and as a threat for the Japanese base in Burma by Lt. Gen. Mutaguchi, several other factors also necessitated the Imphal-Kohima campaign. One of these was the impending danger of Allied offensive into Burma which prompted the Japanese 15th Army to launch the offensive first (Evans & James, 1962, 56). The Japanese High Command had drawn the conclusion that if they were to hold the country against the expected Allied offensive, they would have to advance into Assam and seize Imphal, the base from which any large-scale British offensive would have to be launched. The 31st Division under Lt. Gen. Kotuku Sato which was assigned Kohima was to hold off any British reinforcements sent up from India while the 15th and the 33rd divisions conducted a pincer movement on Imphal from the north and south. After the occupation of Imphal, the Japanese army was to hold the passes over the mountains extending from Kohima and thence west of Imphal and the Manipur River to the Falam and Haka (Kirby, 73-74). The worsening situation in the Pacific region for Japan was also a factor for launching the offensive in India (Allen, 390). The reversals in the Pacific Ocean compelled the Japanese army to take one offensive action after another as there was growing sense of urgency to regain the initiative somewhere. The Imphal-Kohima campaign was seen as one of such initiatives to boost the morale of the Japanese government and the people back home. The activities of the anti-British Nationalist, Subhas Chandra Bose, also inspired the Japanese offensive in Burma. The personality of Bose fascinated Kawabe and the latter assured the Indian nationalist leader in 1943 to launch a major operation against India in the Great East Asian War (Bond & Tachikawa, 111).

Lt. Gen. Mutaguchi's 15th Army was assigned the Imphal-Kohima campaign. In the assessment of the General, the three British strategic positions in north-east India were Imphal, Kohima and Dimapur. In Dimapur,

there were stores sufficient to sustain the Japanese army for several months. And if the Japanese could capture Kohima, Imphal would be cut off from the rest of India by land (which they achieved). Mutaguchi thought that the capture of the massive depot at Dimapur was bound to be a devastating and a terminal blow for the British. It would not only destroy their ability to defend Imphal but was bound to affect the supply of Stilwell and the chances of Allied offensive in Burma. Above all, Mutaguchi assessed that if Dimapur could be captured, Bose and the INA could pour into Bengal and initiate the long-awaited anti-British uprising (Lyman, 2010, 23). However, the Japanese generals failed to execute their war plans effectively with concerted effort, especially at Kohima.

Both Lt. Gen. Kotuku Sato and the BAA chief, Lt. Gen. Kawabe, did not see the feasibility of taking Dimapur at the time when the Japanese troops at Kohima were fighting the heavily-armed and well-reinforced British 33 Corps in starving condition. General Sato stated that the 15th Army had failed to send him supplies and ammunition since the operation began (Swinson, 1966, 281). Hence, Lt. Gen. Kawabe prevented Sato's 31st Division's pursuit of the enemy toward Dimapur (Bond & Tachikawa, 114). In fact, the Japanese had missed the best opportunity to win the Imphal-Kohima battle by giving up Dimapur. However, both Lt. Gen. Kawabe and General Sato applied their common sense and could save the lives of thousands of soldiers who were already trapped in critical situations at Kohima due to want of rations, ammunitions and medical attention. On the other hand, Maj. Gen. Shahnawaz Khan mentioned that the INA and the Japanese failed to take Imphal due to sheer bad luck. He stated that they nearly captured it once and even the British attempted several times to retreat to Dimapur but for the road-block between Imphal and Kohima by the INA and the Japanese. The British forces were likely to evacuate from Imphal if the road was left open but the object of the INA and the Japanese was to capture all the British forces and war materials at Imphal. Thus, with all the roads for retreat cut off, the British forces were compelled to fight with their backs to the wall (Khan, 1946, 124-125). Hence, blocking of the Kohima-Imphal road was seen as a tactical error by the INA military top brass. Ultimately, with strong air support and reinforcements, the British forces at Imphal defeated the Japanese and the INA after the siege of Kohima was over.

It can be generally understood from the above that the main focus of the Japanese campaign of 1944 was not beyond Imphal and Kohima. For instance, both Terauchi, the Commander-in-Chief of the Japanese Imperial Forces in Southeast Asia and Kawabe, the commander of the Burma Area Army, the two top Japanese army leaders in the region did not want to invade India as they neither felt any interest nor received any encouragement from the prominent leaders of the people of India. On the other hand, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and others had declared in open terms their dislike for the Japanese and their aggressive policy in China. The Japanese were, therefore, not at all interested else they could have invaded India immediately after their victory in Burma in 1942 (Chatterji, 1947, 294-297).

V. THE RELATION BETWEEN THE JAPANESE AND THE INDIAN NATIONAL ARMY

The Indian National Army (INA) came into existence during the Japanese Malaya operation in December 1941. The Indian prisoners of war in Malaya became the main force of the INA. It grew rapidly after the fall of Singapore and the Japanese Imperial General Headquarters adopted a definite policy towards India based upon the INA and the Indian Independence League (IIL). The main objective of the policy was to help the Indians to intensify the anti-British and the independence movements and check Britain to exploit India in the war against Japan. Subhas Chandra Bose conferred with the Japanese government authorities in Tokyo in their policy towards India. Bose strongly desired a Japanese invasion of India in collaboration with the INA. The development of Japanese political policy toward India had its influence on the Imperial General Headquarters and on its grand strategy in the Burma operation (JM-134, 35-36).

Subhas Chandra Bose arrived in Tokyo from Germany on 13 June 1943 and was received by Japanese Premier, General Tojo, the next day (Majumdar, Vol.3, 586). The Japanese Premier frankly told Bose that whether India was invaded or not, she would come under Japanese control on the defeat of the British. But Tojo added that Japan had no demands to be made on India beyond the necessities of war and wanted India to be independent. Tojo assured Bose that India could take any action on her own which would be supported and appreciated by Japan. Bose was also encouraged in the formation of the Provisional Government which would take control of the liberated territories in India as the Japanese forces moved on. The Japanese Premier also made a declaration in the Diet that Japan "firmly resolved to extend all means in order to help to expel and eliminate from India the Anglo-Saxon influences which are the enemy of Indian people, and enable India to achieve full independence in the true sense of the term (Toye, 1959, 81-82)". Subhas Chandra Bose took over the leadership of the Indian Independence Movement and the Indian Independence League on 4 July 1943 from Singapore (Majumdar, 586).

The first official contact with the Indians in Southeast Asia was the liaison arranged by the F. Kikan with the Indian Independence League (IIL) under Pritam Singh (Lebra, 1965, 552). The F. Kikan or the Fujiwara Kikan, the Japanese military intelligence, created in 1941 was instrumental in the formation of the first

INA headed by Captain Mohan Singh for the liberation of India (Sareen, Vol.4, 2004, 300). The Iwakuro Kikan was reorganised into the Hikari Kikan (liaison office) with the coming of Bose to the East to ensure closer cooperation and better coordination with the Indians and their leaders. Colonel Yamamoto, who was personally known to Bose when they were in Berlin, was made the new Kikan. Colonel Yamamoto abolished the Political Division and the Propaganda Cell of the Hikari Kikan as it was decided to entrust these two to the Provisional Government. The Hikari Kikan became more of a military body without these two functions. The change in the character of the Kikan was a reflection of Japan's policy towards India. Japan recognised the political aspiration of the Indians and saw that the world war was an opportunity to achieve it with the friendly role of Japan. The role of the Hikari Kikan was to spearhead such a policy of Japan and extend material help to the Indians. The restructuring of the Kikan enabled leadership of the Indian freedom struggle to Indians by relegating the Kikan to background role. Colonel Yamamoto was able to give a concrete shape to the above line of thinking of Japan because he had firsthand knowledge of Subhas, his outlook on politics and the independence movement. The Japanese Government had made it clear that it had no design on post independence India (Sareen, 312-313). Joyce Lebra the American historian observed (Lebra, 1965, 551):

“Japan in her drive into Southeast Asia during World War II found an ally in the Indian National Army and the Indian Provisional Government organised by Subhas Chandra Bose. The resultant cooperation was from the Japanese standpoint an attempt to use the Indian National Army and Free Provisional Government for the aims of the campaign in Burma and for the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, and from the standpoint of the Indian National Army a search for a powerful ally in the drive to liberate India from the common foe, Great Britain.”

The formation of the Provisional Government of India was an important political land mark for the freedom movement of Bose. Lt. Gen. Kawabe had stated in his memoir that the Provisional Government was the brain child of Bose and Japan did not even drop a hint in its formation and it was not at all a puppet of the Japanese government. Japan, of course, immediately recognised this provisional government but its support to it was more of spiritual and not official or diplomatic in nature (Lebra, 1965, 326). On 23 October 1943, the Cabinet of the Provisional Government declared war against Britain and USA and the declaration was made over the Radio by Bose himself. Soon, nine world powers- Japan, Germany, Italy, Croatia, Burma, Thailand, Nationalist China, the Philippines and Manchuria gave their recognition to the Provisional Government of Azad Hind (Majumdar, 588).

On 24th November 1943, Bose announced in Free India Radio from Saigon that “the INA, in close collaboration with the Indians of East Asia and with the assistance of the invincible might of Japan, was soon going to embark on its historic march to India for the liberation of her millions” (Arun, 1946, 154). There were military disagreements because Bose originally consented to place the INA under Japanese command but later raised objection against it at the time of the Imphal campaign (Lebra, 1965, 557). Bose resolved the issues to do with the active role to be played by the INA in the Indian campaign with the Field Marshall Terauchi, the C-in-C of the Japanese Southern Expeditionary Forces. The Field Marshall had low opinion on the efficiency of the INA and considered the soldiers as ‘demoralized’ after their defeat in Malaya. In his opinion, the INA soldiers were trained differently and were not conditioned as the Japanese soldiers. Besides, they were used to good rations of the British and it would be difficult for them to resist the temptation to defect to the other side again. However, Bose made his point clear to Terauchi that any liberation of India by the Japanese army was not worth having and that it was proper to let the Indians make the maximum sacrifice. Hence, it was agreed between the two leaders to send one INA regiment to take part in the Imphal campaign and the rest to be sent up later, based on the satisfactory performance of that regiment (Ghosh, 1969, 148-149). The strength of the Japanese 15th Army which fought at Imphal and Kohima was 84,280 and the INA, 7000 and 4000 reinforcement (Kirby, 372).

It is worth noting that, unlike the British who had made best use of the native sepoy to fight their wars, the Japanese failed to utilize the INA to the full advantage in the Imphal-Kohima campaign. Way back in 1942, the Japanese failed to repose their trust on Captain Mohan Singh who tried to persuade the Japanese for an India campaign towards the later part of 1942 or in the beginning of 1943 (Chatterji, 295). Bose publicly expressed his trust in the sincerity of Japanese assistance but privately vowed not to allow the Japanese to replace the British in India. The Japanese-INA alliance was an uneasy one which survived mainly because the two had a common enemy (Lebra, 1965, 561). Field Marshall Terauchi himself had no trust in the fighting efficiency of the INA. The INA was made to fully depend on the Japanese army and had no air cover and artillery of its own. The army did not even possess mortars and the machine guns were only of medium size and without spares. Vital communication means were lacking as also transport and medical facilities. All these affected the fighting capacity of the INA (Chand, Vol.3, 1972, 420).

Despite the nature of relationship that existed between the Japanese and the INA during the Imphal-Kohima campaign, the former also had done its best for the latter in some ways. Lt. Gen. Kawabe had mentioned in his memoir that criticism levelled against the Tojo government on the ground that the Imphal operation was carried out under pressure from Bose was incorrect. He added that Bose could not be held directly responsible for the said operation even though the decision to order the Japanese force to fight to death by the top

leadership was considerably influenced by Bose's attitude towards the Imphal operation. In this, Japan had tried to fulfil its international obligation even by sacrificing thousands of soldiers to cement Indo-Japanese friendship and co-operation (Sareen, 352-353).

VI. THE CO-PROSPERITY SPHERE IN THE CONTEXT OF INDIA

There were opinions in 1942 that "India should be included in the Greater East Asia which will then be self-sufficient and more complete and powerful than any other economic blocs which were to be formed after the restoration of peace" (Lebra, 1975, 95). The objective of the Japanese 15th Army campaign of 1944 can also be understood from this perspective. It has been stated earlier that General Tojo, the Prime Minister of Japan, was committed to the political cause of India which he emphatically declared in the Japanese Diet. But the BAA chief Kawabe mentioned in his memoir that the Imphal operation was conceived out of strategic consideration alone. Therefore, the only objective of the Imphal campaign was to neutralize the British desire to launch counter offensive for recapturing Burma. This plan was not conceived as a part of India policy of Japan (Sareen, 352). Perhaps, Imphal was treated as part of the Co-Prosperity Sphere by the Japanese army because just before the attack started, Bose was asked to deliver a radio broadcast on the Emperor's birthday, offering him Imphal as a present (Toland, 2003, 613).

In retrospect, Bose attended the Great East Asia Conference in Tokyo on 5th November 1943 with the Indian delegates as observers (from Free Nations of Greater East Asia). Bose took the observer's seat because in his view the Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere did not include India. The Great East Asia Declaration made by General Tojo also had no direct reference to India. Bose expressed his happiness of being able to attend the conference in observer's capacity and Tojo once again pledged Japan's firm support to the Indian independence struggle. He also declared the preparation which was underway for the transfer of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands to the provisional government of independent India (Sareen, 328-329). However, this was seen as an empty gesture because the islands were penal colonies in the Bay of Bengal and were under occupation of the Japanese Navy (Allen, 169-170).

Bose had hoped that GEACS would pave the way toward a Pan-Asiatic Federation, which in turn would eventually lead to a world federation (Lebra, 1965, 556). But Bose also saw some problems when the demand for more Japanese support failed as the resources declined. This led Bose and his followers to suspect the danger of Japan replacing Britain in India (Lebra, 1965, 561). In fact, there was no agreed geographical limit of the GEACS and there were many diverse views on this. Speculations were there since 1941 that the 'Greater Sphere', or 'sphere of influence', would sweep across Asia and encompass India, Australia and New Zealand. As per the Japanese military plan, the western limit of the sphere was not beyond Burma. But how much of Burma was to be embraced was in dispute within the army even as late as 1942. India was included in the 'vision' of the sphere of influence and Imphal inside the Indian border was the westward limit of the strategic operations (Lebra, 1975, x).

A confidential document entitled 'Manipur Operation 1944' dated 1st January 1945, containing several captured Japanese documents and POW statements following the battles of Imphal and Kohima revealed the long-term aims of the Japanese in India. The captured maps of Dimapur indicated that the Japanese objective was the Bengal to Assam railway. The Japanese were also not clear of what to do next (after the battle of Imphal and Kohima). One of the documents, 'Order of the Day' issued by Mutaguchi on 18 February 1944 stated the 'ultimate Japanese aim to occupy, or at least assist nationalists in the take-over of India'. It declared that the Japanese army had achieved the stage of invincibility, and went on to add that the day when the Rising Sun would proclaim its definite victory in India was not far off. And most importantly, the 'Order of the Day' stated that India was inextricably bound up with the GEACS, and its people would lend their cooperation to the Japanese army, and for which the soldiers were advised to be disciplined and not to commit offence against the people who were not guilty (Edwards, 458-459).

The Japanese 31st Division fought at Kohima for more than two months and had close association with the Naga people of the present day Phek and Kohima district. During their entry into the Naga villages, they had stressed the importance of the racial affinity of the Mongolians, a basis of the GEACS. The people had been told about their "professed mission to protect the Mongoloid race from the rule of the white British" (Dukru & Krocha, 2013, 119). In some places, they exhorted the people on the similarities they shared with the Nagas and on the other hand, the dissimilarities between the Nagas and the British (Khate, 2007, 14). Likewise, in another village, the Japanese addressed the villagers as their brothers and sisters on the ground that they belonged to the same race of small bodied people. The villagers were also reminded of the British who were well-built and hence, not their brothers. They informed the Naga villagers about the importance of helping one another as brothers (Khate, 76). Similarities in race, culture and food habits were some of things that the Japanese soldiers had emphasised in every Naga village they entered. The Japanese army established three informal schools in the Naga Hills district amidst the war and imparted their language and national anthem to the children (Chatuo & Pukoho). A colonial record also shows that a Japanese Nishi Kikan, who styled himself as the "Nippon Government and Naga Commissioner" had come to Ukhrul area (Manipur) during the war. He had exhorted the

headman of the village that the Japanese and Indians were the same in every respect. He made out that Nippon rule was much finer than British rule (ASA, File No.140). Instances of indoctrination activities in line with the GEACS ideals were carried out by the Japanese military intelligence service in 1944 to win the support and favour of the natives.

VII. CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that Imphal, Kohima or for that matter, India as a whole, was not completely outside the sphere of influence of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere in 1944. The Imphal-Kohima battle was a decisive operation which led to the destruction of the Japanese and the Indian National Army. The Imphal-Kohima battle also led to the destruction of the western frontier of GEACS which the Japanese attempted to defend by launching the operation 'U-Go'. The British 14th Army gained a clear tactical victory at Imphal and Kohima. The success of the British victory was because the Japanese failed to appreciate the importance of Dimapur. The British army had the advantage of logistical support; the air power and rail enabled them to transport reinforcements into the battle fields. The Japanese suffered from this as they had overstretched their lines of transport and communication. The 31st Division never received any supply and reinforcement from the 15th Army. In terms of combat equipments also, the British had distinct advantage over the Japanese (Higgins, 1984, 77-78). Lt. Gen. Mutaguchi admitted that the Japanese failure was partly due to the army's command structure and partly due to the differences which existed between him and the Army Group Commander, Lt. Gen. Kawabe, as to how the operation was to be conducted. The cancellation of Mutaguchi's order to Lt. Gen. Sato by Kawabe, to make a dash for Dimapur changed the whole prospect of the Japanese winning the war. Mutaguchi concluded that "the British won the war due to the ability of the commanders to select a promising course of action and then pursue it with resolute intent" (Barker, 1963, 15). The battle of Imphal-Kohima ended the myth of Japanese invincibility and with it came to an end, the INA march onto Delhi.

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