

## **Gurkha Brigade Association Reunion 2023**

### **Welcome – svagata cha!**

We meet in the 207<sup>th</sup> year of the unique partnership between Britain and Nepal at a time when there are members of the Royal Brigade of Gurkhas serving in almost every part of the forces of the Crown.

This is an opportunity to remember the past and especially this year, the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of the Malaysian Federation. Gurkhas played an essential role in the creation and preservation of the new state. We salute all those who participated in the successful conclusion of the Malayan Emergency, the suppression of the Brunei revolt and the defeat of Konfrontasi. In this service we shall give especial thanks for the life and inspiration of Captain Rambahadur Limbu VC MVO.

Our memories on this anniversary refresh our sense of virtues Gurkhas admire and our common spiritual values. Strengthened by our remembering, we look to a challenging future and commit ourselves afresh to the service of our countries, to the preservation of international peace and to the deepening of the spirit of brotherhood between all Gurkhas living and departed.

### **Address**

We wrestle not with flesh and blood but with the rulers of the darkness of this world equipped with the whole armour of God and with the sword of the Spirit. [Ephesians VI]

Sixty years ago the Malaysian Federation was born and the Gurkhas played a vital part both in defeating the terrorist movement which would have aborted the birth of the new state and in the subsequent defence of its borders following the suppression of the revolt in Brunei. As we all know Gurkhas still guard the independence of the Sultanate of Brunei.

We are fortunate that some of those, who participated in these actions, wrote vivid accounts of their experiences. The Claret operations were secret at the time but the passage of the years has made it possible for the ignorant, like myself, to appreciate the scale of the challenges involved in jungle warfare and in navigating through uncharted swamp land. No wonder that one youthful commander of a successful Claret operation remarked that the prospect of action “called for whisky and Edith Piaf”.

Hard and intelligent fighting preserved the infant Federation but not before, the then Lance Corporal Rambahadur Limbu, had written another chapter in the Gurkha book of heroism. It was 1965 when having engaged the enemy with astounding

courage, he made three attempts under heavy fire to rescue wounded comrades. The citation which accompanied his VC records that “His actions on this day reached a zenith of determined, premeditated valour”. In the years that followed Captain Limbu VC MVO was, as one senior officer put it, “a guiding light to the Brigade”.

More recently Colour Sergeant Kailash Limbu wrote an account of his own service when the Gurkhas once again found themselves in Afghanistan. He was able to tell Captain Limbu, personally, how his example had been an inspiration “in the darkest moments of our time in Now Zad”. Colour Sergeant Limbu goes on to say “to us Gurkhas our history is very important. It is how we keep our tradition alive. We remember and honour the great deeds of our ancestors”.

There is a lesson here for contemporary Britain. It is right to acknowledge the blemishes and injustices in our national story but failure to acknowledge great deeds enfeebles us all. In a dangerous world it is salutary to remember that civilisations can die suddenly in the night when no one can be found to give their lives for them.

Captain Limbu died full of years peacefully in Nepal on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of April. May light perpetual shine upon him.

Since the events of sixty years ago, as we all know, the world has changed profoundly. We are not going to be permitted a holiday from history as some deludedly thought in the years following the fall of the Berlin Wall.

One of the most obvious things is how technology has transformed both our surveillance and offensive capacities. The swarm of drones assaulting Kyiv night after night is an intimation of what is to come.

Perhaps belatedly, a public debate is starting about the possibilities and perils of the next wave a technological change, AI. We have of course got used to relying on IT in our day to day lives. If vicars are scarce you can get answers to questions from a new generation of IT resources. There is Robo-Rabbi; a Polish Catholic competitor called “Santo” [Sanctified Theomorphic Operator]. There is a feeble Protestant version called “BlessU-2” and perhaps the most advanced of all, Mindar, a futuristic representation of the Buddhist goddess of Compassion.

More recently however there has been a fresh development. The AI bot Chat-GPT introduced in November, and already used by millions, is capable of generating text and can even produce sermons in your preferred style. More seriously there is also the obvious potential that non-human intelligence and decision making will play an ever greater part on the

battle field. Such is the rapid rate of self-improvement in AI bots it is difficult to keep abreast of the risks.

Generative AI can simulate human emotions but it has no spirit. Recently the Australian singer-song writer Nick Cave was sent a lyric composed by Chat-GPT “in the style of Nick Cave”. His response was very significant. He said that his songs “arise out of suffering”. He is a man who has suffered the grievous death of two sons and he went on to say that “data doesn’t suffer. Chat-GPT has no inner being, it has been nowhere, it has endured nothing.” AI can simulate human emotions but it has no spirit.

If we want to grow spiritually there is no substitute for membership of a community of people who have shared memories, who have suffered and are honest enough with each other to admit to pain and doubt and open enough to receive encouragement and hope.

Brigades, regiments and platoons should be just such communities but it takes work and more than that the right spirit. I know that the Brigade is serious about its work, getting to know one another, building a team out of an aggregation of individuals; going beyond our comfort zone in service to one another and to our country.

But as Kailash Limbu says it is vital to connect our personal story to the story of the Brigade over the past more than 200 years. Remembering shapes the future and opens up fresh possibilities. Remembering is not just a case of taking a file down from the shelf. It always involves interpretation in the light of fresh experience. The exciting new plans for the Gurkha Museum in Winchester illustrate the creative potential of rehearsing and refreshing the Gurkha story for the contemporary world.

Remembering is at the heart of the Christian faith and is a vital ingredient in living and growing in the Spirit. As we remember the night in which Jesus was betrayed, the night when he handed over his life and his future in the world to his friends, he is at work re-membering us as his representatives in the here and now.

Re-membering is not just a business of assembling the data from the past, recalling events of long ago and far away. It is the antidote to dis-membering our community. It can help to engender the right spirit. For Christians the Spirit makes Jesus Christ himself, not data about him, present in his love and self-sacrifice. The Spirit translates data about Jesus into living truth.

All the great wisdom traditions of the world recognise the reality and the centrality of the spirit. Just as the main business of the Christian life is to

live and grow in the Holy Spirit, the Spirit manifests itself in different forms in the other traditions represented here. It is hard to capture the “spirit” in definitions but you know it when you see it. It is accompanied by an infectious joy and releases us from fears and inhibitions. Even when we do not understand someone else’s language, we are able in the spirit to communicate and to speak heart to heart and not subject to object.

Not all the data and all the information in the world will rescue a people or a nation destitute of the Spirit who translates ideas and data into living truth that liberates energy and is attractive.

Technology has been part of the solution to many of the world’s problems as well as adding to the threats facing us in this century of possibility and peril. As technology makes us smarter we urgently need to develop the gifts of the spirit to assist us to use wisely the awesome power that we possess.

Traditionally in the Christian faith the gifts of the Holy Spirit include wisdom, courage, piety and the fear of the Lord. Men like Sergeant Limbu teach us that these vital human attributes are not the sole property of any particular tradition but are part of our common inheritance and at the heart of what makes human.