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Special Frontier Force: Vikas Battalion

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Why in News

The Special Frontier Force (SFF) unit, referred to as Vikas Battalion, had been said to be instrumental in preventing **Chinese occupation on the Line of Actual Control** (LAC) in Ladakh.

Key Points

- **History:** SFF was established on 14th November 1962 in the immediate aftermath of the **1962 Sino-India war**.
 - After the 1962 war, the **Central Intelligence agency (CIA) and Intelligence Bureau (IB)** decided to train a 5,000-strong force of Tibetans for possible missions against China.
 - The CIA had been involved in a covert programme to train Tibetan guerrillas to fight the Chinese forces in Tibet since the 1950s.
 - The Central Intelligence Agency is a civilian foreign intelligence service of the federal government of the United States of America.
 - During the 1950s, CIA and IB established Mustang Base in Mustang in Nepal, which trained Tibetans in guerilla warfare. The Mustang rebels brought the 14th Dalai Lama to India during the **1959 Tibetan Uprising**.
 - The recruits initially consisted of Tibetan refugees hailing from the Khampa community (now it has a mixture of **Tibetans** and **Gorkhas**).
 - It was previously named **Establishment-22** as it was raised by **Major General Sujan Singh Uban**, an Artillery officer who had commanded 22 Mountain Regiment.

- **About:** SFF falls under the purview of the **Cabinet Secretariat** where it is headed by an **Inspector General** who is an Army officer of the rank of Major General.
 - The units that comprise the SFF are known as **Vikas battalions**.
 - They are **highly trained special forces personnel** who can undertake a variety of tasks which would normally be performed by any special forces unit.
 - **Women soldiers**, too, form a part of SFF units and perform specialised tasks.
- **Link with Army:** The SFF units are **not part of the Army** but they function **under operational control of the Army**.
 - The units have their **own rank structures** which have equivalent status with Army ranks.
 - They have their **own training establishment** where the recruits to SFF are imparted special forces training.
- **Major Operations:** **Operation Eagle** (1971 war with Pakistan), **Operation Bluestar** (clearing Amritsar's Golden Temple in 1984), **Operation Meghdoot** (securing the **Siachen glacier** in 1984) and **Operation Vijay** (war with Pakistan at Kargil in 1999) and many counter-insurgency operations in the country.
 - **Operation Eagle:** In 1971, the SFF operated in the **Chittagong hill tracts in East Pakistan** (later Bangladesh) to neutralise Pakistan Army positions and help the Indian Army advance ahead.
- **Criticism:** Special Frontier Force was involved in a **joint operation with the CIA in 1965** to place a **nuclear-powered device on Mount Nanda Devi (Uttarakhand) to monitor China's nuclear weapons tests**. However, the mission had to be abandoned and the nuclear-powered device was lost on the mountain.
 - The **loss of the nuclear-powered sensor** was reported by Indian media outlets in 1978, prompting a response from the then Prime Minister on Indian involvement in the mission.

Source: IE