“Mindfulness improves the performance of Special Ops”
AFTER FOUR WEEKS OF MINDFULNESS TRAINING – THEY MAY WELL BE MORE CAPABLE AS THEY DEAL WITH HUMANITARIAN, ENVIRONMENTAL, AND SECURITY CHALLENGES THAT OUR COUNTRY AND THE WORLD FACE.”

We often find ourselves juggling numerous tasks and distractions, which make us undergo many challenges in our day to day life. At times we get distracted, which could lead to harmful consequences that may or may not affect us. The consequences of such distractions can be extremely dire for soldiers deployed to a war zone. A mind lacking
The U.S. military has started offering mindfulness training to soldiers to optimise their cognitive performance and well-being.

‘UMindfulness Initiative’ was formed in 2010 by University of Miami’s Associate Professor Amishi Jha and Scott Rogers. It offers innovative ways to optimise performance, enhance wellness, and promote resilience to people working in challenging fields. They researched the effects of mindfulness on soldiers in a two-month study. 120 soldiers of Special Operations Forces (SOF) participated in a month-long mindfulness course and it was discovered that the training could improve their attention, working memory, and problem-solving skills.

Jha said, “We found that – after four weeks of mindfulness training – they may well be more capable as they deal with humanitarian, environmental, and security challenges that our country and the world face.”
Mindfulness training involves teaching people skills to focus their attention, with a keen awareness of their present experience, without judging or reacting emotionally. As it develops, a person becomes more skilled at remaining attentive amid moments that might otherwise trigger an emotional overreaction, and compromise their focus. To explain this Jha said, “When we get cut off by another motorist in traffic, we may get angry and lose concentration on the task at hand – driving safely.” She added, “Mindfulness training may help in stressful everyday moments, as well as more extreme life and death moments, by strengthening cognitive capacity that gets readily depleted when the mind is hijacked by anger, fear, worry, and rumination.”

Before the mindfulness training, the soldiers’ attention was evaluated by a computer-based task where they had to focus and respond to numbers on the screen while being distracted. To measure
their performance accuracy and response time, they were presented with complex visual information to remember for short intervals while being bombarded with distractive images.

The researchers then tracked the performance changes after the mindfulness training which were conducted either once or twice a week for 8 hours in a classroom setting and 15 minutes a day practicing mindfulness through audio recordings.

However, Jha’s team was interested to find out, if the four-week mindfulness training programme could be shortened. For this, a variant of a mindfulness training program called Mindfulness-based Attention Training (MBAT) was established where they compared cognitive task results between those who received a two-week version of MBAT and another group which received a four-week version, and those who received no training. The four-week training programme obtained the highest results.
Apart from MBAT, previous research has shown that mindfulness meditation exercises help soldiers train their minds, deal with high-stress situations and increase their cognitive performance. The research study, named as the STRONG project led by principal investigator and neuroscientist Dr. Amishi Jha, used computer-based testing to investigate if and how resilience training may improve the ways in which the brain can pay attention and manage stress.

For this research, Jha studied three groups of military Service Members. One group received Mindfulness-based Mind Fitness Training, also known as MMFT, which emphasised engagement during class meetings. The other group received a different type of MMFT which comprised of more didactic information and discussions that revolved around resilience and stress. It turned out that the first two groups became more aware of themselves and were able to focus
Mindfulness training is important for mental health. Mentally fit person can improve their cognitive performance, overcome stress, solve complex problems and react better in high-demanding environments.