

President salutes the soldiers

'We are in safe hands'

KIBITHU, Apr 03: President Pratibha Devisingh Patil today saluted the dedication and commitment of the defence forces, saying "the nation appreciates you while the sheer grit and determination on your faces assures me that we are in safe hands."

Addressing a *sainik sammelan* here along the Sino-India border today, just before concluding her three-day maiden trip to this frontier state, the president said, "It gives me a great sense of pride and happiness to be amongst you all today in one of the farthest areas of the country. During the journey, I was able to get a picture of the overall terrain and the harsh conditions under which you are operating," report PIB.

It may be mentioned here that though the armies of India and China have been holding formal border personnel meetings (BPM) as a confidence building measure along the entire Sino-India border at Chushul (Ladakh), Nathu La



Warm send-off given to the president at Raj Bhawan helipad-DIPR

(Sikkim), Bum La (Tawang), the BPM started here in Anjaw district on 18 Nov, 2006.

"Your brigade sector has seen the 1962 Indo-China war, during which our soldiers displayed exemplary endurance and courage."

Following a battle here, the first Vir Chakra of the 1962 war was posthumously awarded to Naik Bahadur Singh of the 6 Kumaon regiment.

The president also recalled the Battle of

Walong, a bitterly fought battle in which the Indian soldiers fought with indomitable spirit and courage despite being low on ammunition, rations, drinking water, clothing and defence stores. This battle was summed up by an observation made by a leading magazine - 'At Walong, Indian troops lacked many things but guts.'

"We have come a long way since then," Patil said. "Today, in this age of

science and technology, our Army is amongst the best in the world."

She saluted the soldiers' families who bear the burden of living alone while the soldiers serve the nation, thousands of miles away from their homes.

"I have come to visit you not only as the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, but also to felicitate you and to give you my best wishes as a mother and a sister," Patil said. "I am confident that you all will keep the boundaries of the nation safe despite all odds. My feelings of affection and appreciation will always be with you," she added.

Earlier, the president was given a warm send-off at Itanagar by Governor Gen (Retd) JJ Singh, ministers and senior civil and police officers. The governor and Finance Minister Kalikho Pul accompanied her to Tezu and Kibithu, besides to Chabua Air Force base in Assam from where her special Boeing business jet flew the presidential entourage back to the national capital.