

# Indian National Army (INA): Notes for UPSC Indian History

The Indian National Army (Also known as the Azad Hind Fauj) was an armed force formed by Indian Nationalists in 1942, through the patronage of the Imperial Japanese Army, to secure the Independence of India.

This article will further highlight the details of the Azad Hind Fauj within the context of the IAS Exam.

## Background of the Indian National Army

Following the outbreak of World War II, Japan invaded South East Asia. At the time 70,000 troops were stationed in the region, most of them along the Malayan coast. Japan conducted a lightning campaign which culminated in the fall of the Malayan peninsula and Singapore in 1942. In the Singapore campaign alone, 45,000 Indian prisoners of war were captured. It was from these prisoners of war that the Japanese decided to create an auxiliary army which would fight against the British.

The first INA was formed under Mohan Singh, a former officer of the British Indian Army captured during the Malay campaign. Conditions in the prisoner of war camps, as well as resentment against the British in general, saw many prisoners of war volunteer join the Indian National Army

The initiative received considerable support from the Imperial Japanese Army and from the ethnic Indian population of South-East Asia. However, disagreements between Mohan Singh and Japanese Army Command regarding the autonomy of the Indian National Army led to the disbandment of the first INA in December 1942

## Subash Chandra Bose and the second INA

Although Mohan Singh had angered the Japanese Army Command through his actions, they relented to form a second Indian National Army. Mohan Singh himself recommended that Subash Chandra Bose for the leadership role. His reputation as a committed nationalist was known to both the Indian diaspora of South East Asia and the Imperial Japanese Army. As such, they were more open to the idea of a nationalist army led by Subash Chandra Bose. The activities of Subash Chandra Bose in India had forced the British authorities to imprison him, but he escaped and reached Berlin in 1941.

Although the German leadership were sympathetic to his cause, logistic problems prevented them from granting any support to his quest for raising an army to fight the British. However, the Japanese were ready to support him and upon their personal invitation, Subash Chandra Bose arrived in Singapore in July 1943 to take command of what would be known as the second Indian National Army, now known by its alternative name as the Azad Hind Fauj.

## Operations of the Azad Hind Fauj

After Subash Chandra Bose took command of the Azad Hind Fauj, there was a swell of volunteers looking to join the INA. Although Subash Chandra Bose agreed for the INA to remain subordinate to the Japanese Army, he saw it as a necessary sacrifice towards the fulfilment of the ultimate goal of freeing India from the British Empire. The Azad Hind Fauj participated in operation U-Go, the 1944 Japanese campaign towards British India. Although the INA saw initial success during the early phases of the operation, they were forced to withdraw during the battle of Imphal and battle of Kohima (Fought on April 4th, 1944) which saw the disastrous defeat for the Japanese Army at the hands of the British.

The INA lost a substantial number of men and materiel in this retreat. A number of units were disbanded or used to feed into new divisions of the now declining Japanese Army

Following the Japanese defeat in World War 2, most of the members of the INA were captured by the British. Subash Chandra Bose himself eluded capture and was reported to have died in a plane crash near Taiwan in September 1945.

## Fate after World War 2

The surviving members of the INA were to be tried by the British Colonial government for treason. The trials would take place at the Red Fort. However, their decision to make the Red Fort trials public proved to be a grave miscalculation on the part of the British as it led to a new wave of nationalism unseen during the entirety of the Independence Struggle. The Indian population saw them as patriots fighting for independence rather than traitors to an empire they never wanted to fight for.

The progress of the trial also led to mutiny within the British Indian Army, most notable being the mutiny of the Royal Indian Navy. although the mutiny was quickly put down, the British realised that they were effectively losing the support of the very institution that kept them in power for so long - the army.

Coupled with the launching of the Quit India Movement, the British sought to hasten the independence of India which was the ultimate aim of the Azad Hind Fauj at the very beginning of its inception.

It can be safely said that even in defeat, did the Indian National Army win against its colonial oppressors.