Overreach of the Army Chief

What is the issue?

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- Army General Bipin Rawat has been speaking out of turn on many critical issues.
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- This has potential consequences for the Army's institutional autonomy and its perceived political neutrality.
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What are some of his excessesive statements?

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- **Awarding Cariappa -** General Rawat had publicly recommended Field Marshal Cariappa for a Bharat Ratna.
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- Such remarks are not in good taste as an army chief isn't expected to make such personal recommendations in public forums.
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- Even if it was a collective army demand, it should've been made through a personal letter to the Rastrapathi Bhavan.
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- **Sensitive Statements -** He compared stone-pelters in Kashmir to terrorists in an interview.
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- Such statements also could potentially sabotage the tag of political neutrality that the forces enjoy.
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Why is institutional autonomy critical?

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- Excessive political interference in public institutions has decayed their autonomy considerably.
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- Over the years, at both Central and state levels, many government departments have become mere extensions of the party in power.
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- Election Commission, RBI, the Supreme Court and the Armed Forces are among the few institutions that have survived intact.
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- But here too, their functional autonomy is on display only if headed by people of principle and courage.
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- Lack of moral courage or the lure of a post-retirement job have sometimes led people to uphold the agenda of their political masters.
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How has Army's autonomy fared?

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- While some officers have been known to have political loyalties, most chiefs of army staff have carefully stayed away from politics.
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- Among those who admirably upheld the traditions of office and political neutrality of the forces was General T.N. Raina
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- He firmly stood his ground during the challenging times of emergency and its aftermath.
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- Most chiefs of army staff have eschewed public commentary on issues as a conscious move to stay clear of sensationalism.
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- It is hence important to reign in our current Army General to preserve the sanctity of the institution.
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- Notably, it's the non-political nature that differentiates our forces substantially from the Pakistani Military.
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Source: Indian Express

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