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These boots were made for surviving landmines

By David Boey

AN INDIAN national is still alive to help clear fields of mines and do it on his own legs too because of a pair of Singapore-made boots.

Mr Partha Sarathy was wearing the boots, which are made of the same material as bulletproof vests and have a steel and aluminium sole and heel, when he accidentally detonated a landmine while on a mission to remove mines in Sri Lanka in August.

The former Indian Army soldier in his late 40s had lifted a Pakistan-made mine from the ground and was taking it away to be disposed of when he slipped and dropped it. His foot landed smack on the device, which exploded.

When the smoke cleared, his colleagues were surprised to find him still alive, though stunned. His right ankle was dislocated and his right leg was broken.

The boot on that foot was shattered.

He and 30 others were probing for anti-personnel mines in a field when the incident occurred on Aug 5.

A spokesman for Horizon, a non-profit organisation which is carrying out the clearance operation, said Mr Sarathy is the first of its staff to be hurt on the Sri Lanka job, where they have removed 2,500 mines.

The mission in the island country, which has been involved in a civil war for many years now, is supervised by the United Nations and sponsored by Norway.



The steel and aluminium sole saved a man's leg - and life when he stepped on a mine in Sri Lanka.



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Mr F.K. Lee, chief executive officer of BfR Holdings, the Singapore company which makes the boots, said Mr Sarathy's grateful colleagues sent a thank-you note to the company and a picture of what was left of the boot that saved his life and leg.

The boots, which look and weigh the same as regular army ones, were invented by Singaporean Andrew Vaz, who used to work for the Defence Ministry.

He was inspired to come up with the boots after seeing the injuries caused by landmines while on a business trip to Cambodia.

Mr Lee declined to name his customers, citing non-disclosure agreements, but said 'more than half a dozen' armed forces in Europe, South-east Asia and the Middle East have bought 'a substantial number'.

The Indian Army and Sri Lankan Army have also looked at the Blast and Fragment Resistant boots after learning how they saved Mr Sarathy, he added.

'My initial reaction on hearing the good news was one of satisfaction in knowing we saved someone's leg from amputation,' he said.

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