

# From Jaffna to Wannai

The Third Eelam War is slowly drifting into a quagmire. V. Suryanarayan writes

TWO CONTRASTING scenarios provide insights into the fast changing fortunes of the Third Eelam War. On October 10, 1999 the Galle Face Green in Colombo witnessed a grand display of pomp and pageantry to mark the golden jubilee of the founding of the Sri Lankan army.

Among the dignitaries who were present on the occasion were the Pakistani Chief of Staff, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, the Bangladesh Army Chief, Lt. Gen. Muhammad Mustafiz Rahman, and the Indian Army's Deputy Chief of Staff, Lt. Gen. V. P. Chandrasekhar. Speaking on that occasion, the President, Ms. Chandrika Kumaratunga, proudly proclaimed:

"In the discharge of its responsibilities... the army has manifested professionalism and dedication of the highest order, earning for itself the deep gratitude of the entire nation." Within a month, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) inflicted stunning blows on the Sri Lankan army in the Wannai region.

It was the worst military debacle in the prolonged Eelam war. Code-named Oyathalaigal III (unceasing waves), the Tigers overran one military garrison after another. Iqbal Athas, the Correspondent of the *Sunday Times* rightly put it: "Years of gains were lost in days." More than the loss of territory, the death of hundreds of soldiers and the loss of arms and equipment worth millions of Sri Lankan rupees, was the dwindling morale of the Sri Lankan armed forces. Panic spread like wild fire; soldiers revolted; many preferred to flee from the battlefield. Following a warning from the Tigers that they will target Vavuniya, civilian administration collapsed.

mass exodus ensued and Vavuniya virtually became a 'ghost town'.

Taking place barely six weeks before the presidential elections, the reverses will have profound consequences. Censorship and muzzling of the media immediately followed. Rumour mongers had a field day. Equally deplorable the People's Alliance (PA) and the United National Party (UNP) resorted to mudslinging and levelled wild charges against one another.

In any discussion on the role of the armed forces, it is necessary to highlight the fact that during the 1950s and 1960s, the Sri Lankan army had only a ceremonial role, providing guard of honour to visiting dignitaries and holding march pasts on independence days. The first major challenge to the security of the island took place in 1971, when the Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP) raised the banner of armed revolt; the Sri Lankan army could not cope with the situation. The then Prime Minister, Ms. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, immediately contacted India, the U.K., the U.S., Yugoslavia, USSR and Pakistan for help. It was India's spontaneous response, which enabled Colombo to put down the JVP threat.

Equally significant, when the JVP resorted to armed struggle again following the India-Sri Lanka Accord, 1987, the Sri Lankan army could control the situation because the IPKF was fighting the LTTE in the north and the east. Today, the JVP has given up the path of armed struggle and has even fielded a candidate in the presidential election. But if the JVP gives up the parliamentary path and unleashes an armed struggle again, will the Sri Lankan

army be able to fight on two fronts? What will be the consequences if the JVP and the LTTE, for tactical reasons, come together against a common enemy? These are vital issues, which should be pondered over by South Asian strategic specialists.

The defence budget is assuming staggering proportions. In 1978, the budget amounted to only 560 million SL rupees; in 1983, it went up to 1800 million SL rupees. Since 1983, it has escalated year after year. The estimated defence expenditure for 1999 is 47.3 billion SL rupees. The corresponding figure for 1998 was 45.0 billion SL rupees. Defence expenditure accounts for nearly 13.26 per cent of the budgetary expenditure, one of the highest in Third World countries.

The armed forces, especially at the officers' level, are emerging as a professional group. They are relatively more sensitive to human rights. Most observers agree that the human rights situation has improved since Ms. Kumaratunga assumed power. It must be highlighted that the Sri Lankan army is facing acute shortage of manpower. What is more tragic, desertions are very high. According to reliable sources, one out of ten soldiers desert, some of them with arms.

Instead of punishing the deserters, the Government has repeatedly declared amnesty. Few deserters have responded to Government appeal, while many others are absconding. Equally deplorable, only six weeks' training is given before the soldiers are sent to the battlefield. The recruitment drive, despite a massive increase in salary, has not been very successful. Early this year,

the Government made concerted efforts to recruit Tamils into the army, but the attempt ended in dismal failure.

In an interview with *Janet's Defence Weekly* (June 16, 1999), the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, Mr. Lakshman Kadiragamar, admitted that Colombo did not have an external intelligence wing "until last year". He added, with unusual candour, that "our intelligence agencies are (still) very poor indeed."

It is unfortunate, but true, that vital decisions regarding troop deployment had been taken on the basis of political considerations. On several occasions, the military objective was to accomplish "spectacular success" against the LTTE to reap political benefits, be it the golden jubilee of independence, election to the provincial councils or the impending presidential election. Air Vice Marshal (Retd.) Harry Goonetilleke has pointed out that the military had been used "not to win the war, but to perpetuate its hold on political power." As a result, "capturing territory and holding on to it at any cost" became the objective, regardless of whether such territory is of strategic value.

Oyathalaigal III was planned and executed by Prabhakaran himself. Mr. D. B. S. Jayaraj highlights two incidents, which had far-reaching consequences. First, on the first day of the conflict, the Tigers successfully used anti-aircraft guns to bring down two helicopters and damage a plane. Fearing further damage, the Sri Lankan Air Force suspended all operations. Thus vital air cover was denied to the ground forces. Second, the army lost its communication code to the LTTE

Tamil boycott could make election outcome uncertain. Sugueswara Senadhira reports

WITH most of Sri Lanka's two-million strong minority Tamil voters likely to boycott the December 21 presidential election, none of the contestants is expected to secure an outright majority for victory.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga and opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe are the main contenders in the election which also features 11 other candidates.

Under Sri Lanka's election law, a winning candidate would require 50 per cent of the votes cast plus one. In case no one wins an outright majority, second-preference votes would need to be counted.

Although some Tamil political parties have urged members of the community to vote, most are likely to heed the boycott call given by the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), said Keeswaran Loganathan, of the Centre for Policy Alternatives. The votes that are cast would not go in favour of a candidate, making a clear outcome difficult, he added.

Loganathan said very few of the one million people in the Tamil-majority north would be able to cast their votes even if

they wanted to. He pointed out that while there was no chance for over 300,000 people in LTTE-controlled areas to exercise their franchise, only half of the 800,000 displaced people in the region's Jaffna peninsula had returned after the area was taken over by government troops in 1997. And of them, no more than 10 to 20 per cent were likely to cast their votes, he added.

The moderate Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), which had supported President Chandrika Kumaratunga in the 1994 election, has this time decided to remain neutral.

At least two other parties, a section of the Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) and the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO), have decided to support opposition candidate Ranil Wickremesinghe.

The move could badly affect Kumaratunga's re-election bid. A majority of Tamil parties had backed Kumaratunga in the last election, which she won polling a record 62 per cent of votes.

EPRLF general secretary Suresh Premachandran said the Tamils were unhappy over Kumaratunga's failure to keep

her promise to end the war and to remove their grievances. Although former EPRLF leader Vartharaja Perumal extended support to Kumaratunga, some other leaders of his party opposed the move, forcing the party to take a neutral stand.

TULF General Secretary Anand Sanghara said as the two main Sinhala parties, Kumaratunga's People's Alliance (PA) and Wickremesinghe's United National Party (UNP), were indifferent to the plight of the Tamil people, the party had decided not to support either of the two main candidates.

TELO leader N. Shrikanthasaid his party believed that Wickremesinghe would keep his promise to initiate talks with the LTTE to solve the ethnic problem if elected to power. "Wickremesinghe is a man of peace and we extend full and unconditional support to him," he said.

Wickremesinghe has said he would initiate talks with the LTTE and involve them in an interim administration to run the Tamil-majority north and east.

The EPRLF said in a statement that the two national parties did not have the inner strength to genuinely imple-

ment a solution satisfying the legitimate aspirations of the Tamil people. "Under these conditions, the EPRLF believes that we do not have the moral right to request the Tamil people to vote for either of the two main political parties," it said.

The Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP), which has some backing in Jaffna and the islands off the peninsula, is the only group in the north to support Kumaratunga. EPDP leader Douglas Devananda said a large majority of votes in the north would go to her. However analysts are of the opinion that the voting percentage in the peninsula would be very low.

The votes of the nearly one million Tamils living in the Sinhala-majority areas in the south and the central hill country are expected to be divided. While the Ceylon Workers' Congress (CWC), representing the Tamil plantation labour of Indian origin, has pledged its support to Kumaratunga, two of its breakaway groups are backing Wickremesinghe.

As the Sinhala votes will be divided between the two candidates, the Tamil voter turnout could well decide the outcome of the elections.

-India Abroad News Service

# The Going Gets Tough

South Asia needs unbiased, realistic, helpful and pragmatic policies from all the major power brokers, says Gen Khalid Mahmud Arif

ONE former prime minister of India argues that the Kargil episode cost 100 Lok Sabha seats to the Indian opposition in the recent elections. This assessment is questionable. Viewed candidly, India's electoral results were, in fact, influenced by multiple factors.

Among them are: decline of the Congress and split within it; communalisation of politics; upsurge of the regional parties; Mandal Commission Report; the tested ability of Prime Minister Vajpayee to form and function a political alliance of diverse parties; the strategy of the BJP to put more controversial issues in its party manifesto - Hindutva, Ram Mandir, uniform civil code and Article 370 in India's Constitution - on the back burner to keep the coalition alive; and Vajpayee's ability in mustering the support of the Hindu extremist voters on patriotic issues like conducting nuclear tests, announcing India's aggressive Nuclear Doctrine, Kargil crisis, and exploiting the bogey of an imaginary threat posed to India's national security.

Vajpayee exploited Pakistan's follies and dumped the blunders of his administration in the lap of his neighbour. Despite such factors favourable to it, the BJP secured only 181 seats in the 1999 Lok Sabha elections as opposed to 182 seats held by it in the outgoing assembly. However, the small and regional parties in the BJP-led coalition improved their parliamentary position enabling the National Democratic Alliance to form a government.

The success of the splinter groups is a double-edged weapon. On the one hand, the regional parties - emerging as king-makers - have an increased stake in the system. On the other, their enhanced bargaining position within the coalition may create difficulties

for the government in the future. A coalition rule, with its advantages and pitfalls, appears to be the fate of India in the foreseeable future.

India suffers from Pakistan phobia. Their chequered history demands Pakistan to understand the psyche of India's political leadership and their peculiar policies, before taking decisions that are timely and appropriate. Experience shows that India's foreign policy options in South Asia are based on the pillars of doublespeak and chauvinism.

General Brar (India) writes that at the time of nuclear tests carried out in 1998 Prime Minister Vajpayee had authorized the Indian Army to conduct hot pursuit operations across the Line of Control, in the disputed state of Kashmir. Brar laments that, days later, Vajpayee committed a blunder by reneging when Pakistan also carried out nuclear tests on 28-30 May 1998. India feels that while Pakistan should observe the sanctity of the LoC in Kashmir, she may violate it at will. Such arrogance cannot cement healthy bilateral ties.

Much of Pakistan's current difficulties are the result of its own acts of omission and commission. She has learnt a lesson or two. But many of them owe their origin to the acts of foreign powers. For example, the discriminatory policies of the US against Pakistan created hurdles for the latter in the economic and other fields and these were exploited, among others, by India for its own vested interests. Such US policies face severe criticism in Pakistan.

The list covers Pakistan-specific sanctions, Pressler Amendment, non-delivery of

purchased F-16s, US-encouraged IMF pressure, ignoring human rights violations and state-sponsored acts of violence committed by Indian forces in Kashmir, arm-twisting of Pakistan during the Kargil crisis and adopting double standards on nuclear-related and security-related issues between Pakistan and other countries.

Indo-US collaboration causes anxiety in Pakistan when it impinges on Pakistan's security and other interests. With the re-signment of the erstwhile Soviet Union, India's foreign policy took a pro-US turn. The US responded favourably and both the countries developed a wide-ranging 'strategic relationship' between them. New Delhi perceives this closeness as an approving nod from Washington to it to act tough with Pakistan. The discipline-Pakistan policy has caused tension and unrest in the region. Senator Larry Pressler says that "...The military coup in Pakistan could be a defining moment to enhance Indo-US ties."

It is not known if the Pressler statement had the blessings of the US establishment, as was the case when the Pressler Amendment was enacted. While responding to Pakistan's unconditional offer for a meaningful and result-oriented dialogue, Vajpayee wants Pakistan to "create the right environment and honour 'in letter and spirit' the Simla Accord and the Lahore Declaration. Such absurd pre-conditions show India's inflexibility and expose her real intention."

India aims at delaying the bilateral negotiations with Pakistan for two main reasons. One, to ease the external pressure created during the Kargil crisis which brought the Kash-

mir dispute under a sharp international focus. Other conflicts in the world, so hopes India, may soon divert the global attention from Kashmir. Secondly, President Clinton's impending exit from the White House will end the personal commitment of a US president to get the Kashmir dispute settled. The countdown has started and as weeks and months go by, so hopes Vajpayee, Clinton will gradually become a lame-duck President with his authority on the wane and interest in Kashmir declined. India will start a new ball game with the next US President. Why settle the Kashmir dispute at this time? So is India's game plan for Kashmir and for Pakistan.

Vajpayee has reportedly said in an interview that 'efforts are being made by his country to get Pakistan declared a 'terrorist state' by the US. India emits 'honour' more than any other country in South Asia. Sikkim, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan are its victims. India also has a history of wriggling out of its solemn commitments. Examples: India's five decade-long sermons about its 'peaceful nuclear programme'; Nehru's unambiguous undertaking for holding a plebiscite in Kashmir; and a U-turn in its firm commitment to the CTBT regime. Despite maintaining diplomatic ties with Pakistan, India ever looks for opportunities to stab this country in the back.

The postponement of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit in Kathmandu with the active connivance of India shows its animus. Mr Vajpayee's negative role in Durban of seeking Pakistan's suspension from the

Commonwealth was hitting Pakistan below the belt. Pakistan's policy of unilaterally withdrawing the freshly inducted troops from the Indo-Pakistan border has neither been reciprocated by India nor positively responded to. Its belligerent attitude has deprived the region of one important confidence-building measure. South Asia needs conciliation not confrontation; peace not conflict and political wisdom not arrogance. Prudence demands all the major powers and the neighbours of India to judge this country by its deeds and not by its words.

SAARC is a victim of India's negative attitude, arrogance and inflated ambition. Its one step forward and two steps backwards approach is a rebuke to the collective wisdom of its top leadership. The largest country, India, is more to blame for this performance.

Religious and sectarian intolerance is writ large in the land of Mahatma Gandhi. Desecration of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, torching the Hazrat Nizamuddin shrine, playing Holi with the blood of Sikhs inside the holy Golden Temple in Amritsar and the rape of the Christian nuns and burning of Churches are ugly reminders of religious extremism that grips this country. Secularism is such an abused word in India that even the ultra extremist political parties claim to be secular. In practice, religious and sectarian riots are regular features of India's political landscape.

South Asia may become a peaceful region if India leads from the front and sets a high moral example of good-neighbourliness. It is in a unique position to settle disputes with its neighbours in a spirit of give

more and take less. Such a policy will bring it respect and credit not only in the region but also beyond it. Prime Minister Morarji Desai is remembered with respect much after his death because of the pragmatic policies followed by his government with India's neighbours. India needs a leader with vision.

India and Pakistan need result-oriented negotiations on all contentious issues. Who rules India is not the concern of its neighbours. Pakistan included. But, they cannot remain indifferent to the Indian policies affecting them. Both India and Pakistan have developed national consensus within their respective countries on the vital issues of their national security and foreign policy. In their own national interest, they may wish each other well and resist the temptation of seeking gains from the temporary setbacks faced by either country. A short-sighted policy cannot achieve long-term goals.

South Asia needs unbiased, realistic, helpful and pragmatic policies from all the major power brokers of this time. The writing on the wall is transparently evident. Guns cannot conquer hearts. Souls defy imprisonment. Oppression cannot be human rights violations are unacceptable. Freedom is sacrosanct. The socialist structure crumbled in East Europe, Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya and East Timor provide the same lesson - tyranny destroys itself. The Berlin wall fell. The Line of Control in Kashmir will go, sooner than later.

'Kashmir's history was written by God with glittering letters upon the pages of our hearts, and the heroic deeds of its freedom fighters cannot be effected by the age'.

Khalid Gibrar (paraphrased) 'Spirits Rebellious' Courtesy: The Dawn of Pakistan.

# Fleet for Future

Indian Navy to have full-fledged blue water capability. Retired Major General Ashok K. Mehta of Indian Army talks to the present Indian Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Sushil Kumar

INDIA'S navy chief, Admiral Sushil Kumar, has said the expected acquisition of force multipliers would provide the force with a "full-fledge blue water capability" in the next millennium.

In an interview on the occasion of Navy Week, Kumar said the navy's national aim was to maintain a conflict-free zone to allow for unhindered economic activity in the Indian Ocean region.

The strategic content of India's maritime power was highlighted by two recent events: the combined deployment of the eastern and western naval fleets in the Arabian Sea during the Kargil war and the fluent seizure on the high seas of the pirate Japanese merchant ship, M.V. Asha Rainbow.

Both demonstrated India's maritime prowess and naval skills as a growing stand-off deterrent. The first deterred Pakistan from escalating the war beyond Kargil. The second, and only case in maritime history of a pirated ship being recovered, will deter militancy in the Indian Ocean area.

Armed with a robust conflict-prevention naval doctrine, the Indian Navy is refurbishing its blue and brown water capabilities. The combined strength of the navy and the Coast Guard in the next 20 to 25 years will grow to 250 ships with scores of

with Klub cruise missiles (range 300 km) and Talwar Class destroyers equipped with 16 vertical launch cruise missiles, will reinforce the offensive sea-going capability of the navy: The existing fleet of K Class submarines is also being made other thrust area is fitting the existing long range maritime patrol aircraft with air-to-surface missiles and acquiring a squadron of TU 22 supersonic maritime patrol aircraft.

Q: What role do you see for the navy in the 21st century? A: Our national aim is to maintain a conflict-free zone so that Indian economic activity is not imperilled in the Indian Ocean region. For this we will engage in preventive defence. The Indian naval doctrine rests on three pillars: maritime diplomacy, that is, navy-to-navy exchanges; robust forward presence to curb militancy in the Indian Ocean area; and strategic agility in raising the threshold of confrontation. (He cited Kargil and the seizure of Alondra Rainbow to illustrate the last two ingredients of the doctrine). As part of maritime diplomacy India is holding the first-ever international fleet review in 2001 and also training sailors from 25 countries.

Q: How do you see the future role of the Pakistan Navy?

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modern maritime aircraft. The coastal offshore brownwater tasks will go to the Coast Guard, freeing the navy for prosecuting its blue water capability in preventive defence.

The navy is hoping it will shortly get the second aircraft carrier, Admiral Gorshkov. Ideally it requires three carriers, one for each seaboard and one in refit.

The navy's modernisation programme calls for an additional Rs. 10 billion (\$232 million) annually over the next three to four years over its lowly 13 per cent share of the defence budget which is expected to increase from the present 2.4 per cent to three per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP).

On the occasion of Navy Week, Admiral Sushil Kumar, outlined his priorities in an interview.

Q: What is the focus of the navy's modernisation programme?

A: The expected infusion of the naval budget would cater for the acquisition of strategic programmes to provide us a full-fledged blue water capability. In littoral warfare, credible land attack capability is a key requirement. The induction next year of Sindhushastra Kilo Class attack submarine armed

A: It will continue with its limited sea denial role. The Agosta 90 B submarines have a missile capability of 50 to 70 km. Unlike in India, I do not expect any significant augmentation of naval assets in Pakistan.

Q: What shape of navy are you looking for? A: We're looking essentially at a vessel strength of around 115 ships with a potent power punch. These platforms have to be blue water, versatile and multi-role. That is anti-ship, anti-aircraft and anti-submarine. In addition we seek to maintain minimum brigade size amphibious capacity for defence of our island territories.

Q: What other assets are you coveting? A: My main concern is to harness info-tech, technicalising manpower to build a robust command and control. We showed our future potential for this through international networking in the run-up to the seizure of M.V. Alondra Rainbow. The communication network established brought International Maritime Bureau, Tokyo, Piracy-Reporting Centre, Kuala Lumpur, Coast Guard, Western Naval Command, Naval Headquarters and fleet units at sea on one grid. This was no mean achievement.

-India Abroad News Service

# Like Ayub, Like Musharraf

Mansoor Mamoon tries to investigate similarities between 'basic democracy' of Ayub Khan and 'real democracy' of Parvez Musharraf of Pakistan

STRUKING similarities between Pakistan's first military ruler Field Marshal Ayub Khan and the current Chief Executive General Pervez Musharraf are increasingly becoming evident with the passage of time. Both the army takeovers took place in the month of October -- Ayub Khan in 1958 and Musharraf in 1999. When Ayub Khan took the reins of Pakistan the very first thing he did was to hound the political leaders into prisons, blame them for corruption and for the failure of democracy, keep the National Assembly under suspension and the constitution in abeyance. General Musharraf's actions so far are like a copy book imitation of the *modus operandi* and *modus vivendi* of Ayub Khan. The only difference is that Ayub Khan had put Pakistan under direct Martial Law, while General Musharraf had proclaimed a state of emergency and has not bundled out the sitting President as Ayub Khan did.

In the same vein, General Musharraf has started his 'crusade' against corruption among mainly politicians. Ayub Khan held summary trials of the political leaders and barred them from participating in future elections through his infamous EDDO and PRODO. General Musharraf, through a proclamation, is also planning to ban politicians found guilty of corruption up to a period of twenty-one years. If implemented, it can be safely deduced

that there will be no politicians in the field to run Pakistan for a pretty long time. Because in the dragnet that Pakistan's Chief Military Executive is spreading all the top leaders belonging to either Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League (PML) or Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) are destined to be in trouble. Politics indeed is being made difficult for the politicians.

Ayub Khan found fault with Pakistan's democracy. So he came up with 'Basic Democracy' -- democracy at the grassroots or Union Council level and introduced indirect election to the Presidency and national and provincial assemblies with the elected UP representatives as the electoral college. General Pervez has already made known his intention to establish what he termed as 'real democracy' so that the 'corrupt politicians will not be able to be elected through their feudal influence and using black money which they stolen from the state coffers'.

The military ruler has already spelt out his 7-point plan for economic and political reforms. The economic reforms include ploughing back the default loans. Political reforms stipulate installing elected district authorities, recasting electoral system, strengthening the National Election Commission, completion of the process of electoral rolls and registration of voters and delimitation of



The Liberals with the General

the constituencies. The General had no bone when he unequivocally announced that these are the priorities before the people of Pakistan and hence no timeframe could be given for the revival of parliamentary democracy before this reform package is

completed. He was more specific when he said that the elected district authorities could be installed by the end of next year. Whatever may be the feeling of the political leaders to Musharraf's strategies, one point is, however, clear that western donor countries and agencies

have expressed their satisfaction at the installation of local bodies and decentralisation of power. A high level IMF delegation visited Pakistan to negotiate badly-needed one hundred fifty million US dollars. Initial negotiation had to be postponed as the Nawaz government reportedly failed to bring about appropriate reforms and holding the local bodies for a long time.

Musharraf is doing all these apparently with an eye on the western countries without whose fiscal back up he is bound to be in a tight corner before long.

Pakistan's foreign loans now stand at over 300,000 million US dollars. The donor countries and agencies seem to have accepted the realities in Pakistan and have already softened their attitude to the military administration. The US has recently called for the highest level talks between India and Pakistan on all irritants, including the disputed territory of Kashmir. This was what General Pervez was seeking since assumed power on October 12. The Indian government was refusing to meet "the man who masterminded the Kargil invasion".

Bill Clinton, who is scheduled to visit India early next year, is likely to use his influence as the detente between Delhi and Islamabad, notwithstanding India's objection to a meeting with the Chief Execu-