

A Losing Battle?

In the backdrop of the hijack episode, M Abdul Hafiz looks at how Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee is handling his fight against, which he calls, terrorism

WHEN on the New Year's eve, a sombre Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee vowed to join hands across nations to rid the world of terrorism, his resolve lacked credibility and sounded hollow. Because only hours before he had to make an awkward decision that, in the perception of many Indians, amounted to surrender before terrorism.

Indeed, as the country's Foreign Minister Mr Jaswant Singh escorted three terrorists to their freedom in Kandahar there was among the public a mixed feeling of ecstasy for what they got in return and an anguish for spectacle of capitulation that had to be watched in utter helplessness. An early assertion by the prime minister that his government will not bend before such a terror turned into a meek submission only with the consoling words as to his government's ability to 'substantially scale down' the hijackers' demands. It was an odd anticlimax to the high voltage performance of the hero of Kargil only months before when he led India to national resurrection of sorts. Exactly

ten years before a similar compromise for the release of Rubaiya, the daughter of India's home minister, eroded Prime Minister VP Singh's political credibility which could no more be restored. There is no visible sign as yet that Kandahar episode will have same effect on Vajpayee's government.

While the rejoicing for the rescued hostages was limited only to the revived kith and kin there has however been nationwide indignation over the drama around the hijacked Indian airline flight IC 814. The common men of nuclear India find it difficult to reconcile to the humiliation resulting from the way five masked militants brought the authority to its knees. As the crisis surfaced the country's crisis management group remained baffled and the National Security Council delayed its decisions. RAW — the country's external intelligence agency failed to preempt the hijack as also the crack anti-terrorist team was unable to intercept the hijacked aircraft in Amritsar. Consequently it was a total despair in which the nation remained drowned for a

complete traumatic week.

India's humiliation was not confined only to dealing with the hijackers and conceding to their demands. She had also to stomach the embarrassment of doing it in a country and with the people not officially recognised by her. It was a challenge by itself to establish contact with Taliban authority which was obviously sympathetic to the hijackers' cause but at the same time a vital link for the diffusion of the crisis. In spite of India's support to Najibullah regime while the latter maintained ostensible neutrality during the bargain and extended courtesy and assistance to the Indians and others presumably to wash off their rogue image. Yet for India, it was a bitter pill to swallow because to have vital access to Taliban leader Indians had often to go through Pakistani interlocutors. Given the Taliban's duplicitous conduct, many felt later that Singh's visit to Kandahar where he had to rub shoulders with the same sort of people including three militants to be released was another ignominy.

Worse still is the event's fallout on strife-torn Kashmir valley which seemed to be at the heart of the crisis and where India claims to be fighting a cross border terrorism. Unfortunately for India, during the post-Kargil period her problems in Kashmir have multiplied and they seem to have shifted from the LOC (line of control) to deep into interior in the shape of increased militancy.

The militants' suicide missions have now crashed through hitherto impenetrable targets. The deal at Kandahar will undoubtedly embolden the militants in Kashmir — at least in the short run.

The swapping of the dreaded militants at Kandahar could not have come at a worse time for Kashmir where the insurgency has recently reached a new peak. The security experts reckon that the release of fear-fueled terrorists at Kandahar would certainly deal a serious blow to the sagging morale of the government forces, currently the target of increasing militant offensive.

According to observers, a

dangerous precedence was set in 1989 when the abduction of Rubaiya was settled with the release of eight militants by VP Singh. Thereafter the process went on unabated with the militants holding the hostage at ransom and successfully securing the release of their compatriots. JKLF activists kidnapped the daughter of a National Conference MP in 1991.

Prime Minister Chandra Sekhar struck a similar deal with the abductors to ensure her rescue. During the same year an Indian oil executive director, Mr K Doraiswamy, also was kidnapped in Srinagar. The kidnappers demanded in exchange arms, equipment and militants which was conceded to. Prime Minister Narashima Rao also could not devise a new strategy when confronted with the crisis of militants' siege of Hazratbal shrine during September-October of 1993.

For India, the fight against terrorism has rarely involved easy options. And after years of bloodying its nose against the terrorists it continues to be a soft target for them.

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* Attack on the PRO of the 15 corp HQ denying its all proof security net substantiates the analysts' claim that India's security precautions was a mismatch for Kashmiri environment where the population at large supported the guerrilla war against India's federal forces.

* It is learnt that weapon, equipment and ammunition of Indian forces was not only old but also inadequate. Newspapers revealed that India had to make emergency purchases of arms, equipment and ammunition to meet the demand from the front during the conflict.

* Although the world was made to believe that India has a well-trained army, the Kargil unfortunately gave a poor account of the training and valour of Indian forces.

* Indian forces were so terrified that they did not dare to cross the line of control in pursuit of the intruders fearing that Pakistan might open another front if such an operation was undertaken.

* India tasted success in the field of diplomacy by isolating Pakistan in their race for winning outside support. Convincing USA to restrain Pakistan from extending support to the guerrillas and subsequently ensuring that China does not lend her support to Pakistan was the outcome of India's astute diplomacy.

However, the clash in Kargil does not promise an end to the intriguing military situation that prevails around the border between India and Pakistan.

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A Turning Point?

Traumatic recent events in Sri Lanka unfold a new crisis which the political system might find it impossible to tackle given the dangerously widening ethnic rift. Paful Bidwai writes

SRI LANKA, which five years ago seemed all set to move towards far-reaching systemic reform and historic ethnic reconciliation, today teeters on the brink of a grim crisis. In an almost incredible turn of events, the forces of reform and progress have change appear exhausted; there is a sharp rise in ethnic tensions; growing insecurity grips the Tamil minority in the South; top functionaries of the state and the media indulge in paranoid statements accusing their opponents of plotting their killings. Ministers resort to inflaming crass majoritarian passions; and the air is thick with foreboding, sullenness and despair.

"To put it starkly, another 1983 stares us in the face today," says Kethesh Loganathan, a social scientist, who works on conflict and peace analysis at the Centre for Policy Alternatives in Colombo, referring to the fateful anti-minority pogrom that pre-empted the ethnic war that has convulsed Sri Lanka to this day, and to which there is no end in sight. Loganathan's view echoes growing fears not just among Sri Lanka's minorities, but a sentiment widespread among anti-majoritarian liberal elements in the Sinhalese population too. The nagging feeling is growing within the Sri Lankan liberal intelligentsia that yet another ethnic confrontation may break out, aided and encouraged, if not triggered off, by the state, which could play right into the hands of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the super-militaristic guerrilla group which opposes all efforts at reconciliation and peace in its struggle for a despotically ruled single-party Tamil Eelam.

Several developments and trends have conspired to create the present, dangerous, conjuncture. Among the short-term developments are: the campaign building up to the December 21 presidential election (which saw a sharp political polarisation); the very recent, successful suicide-bomber's assassination attempt on President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga on December 18

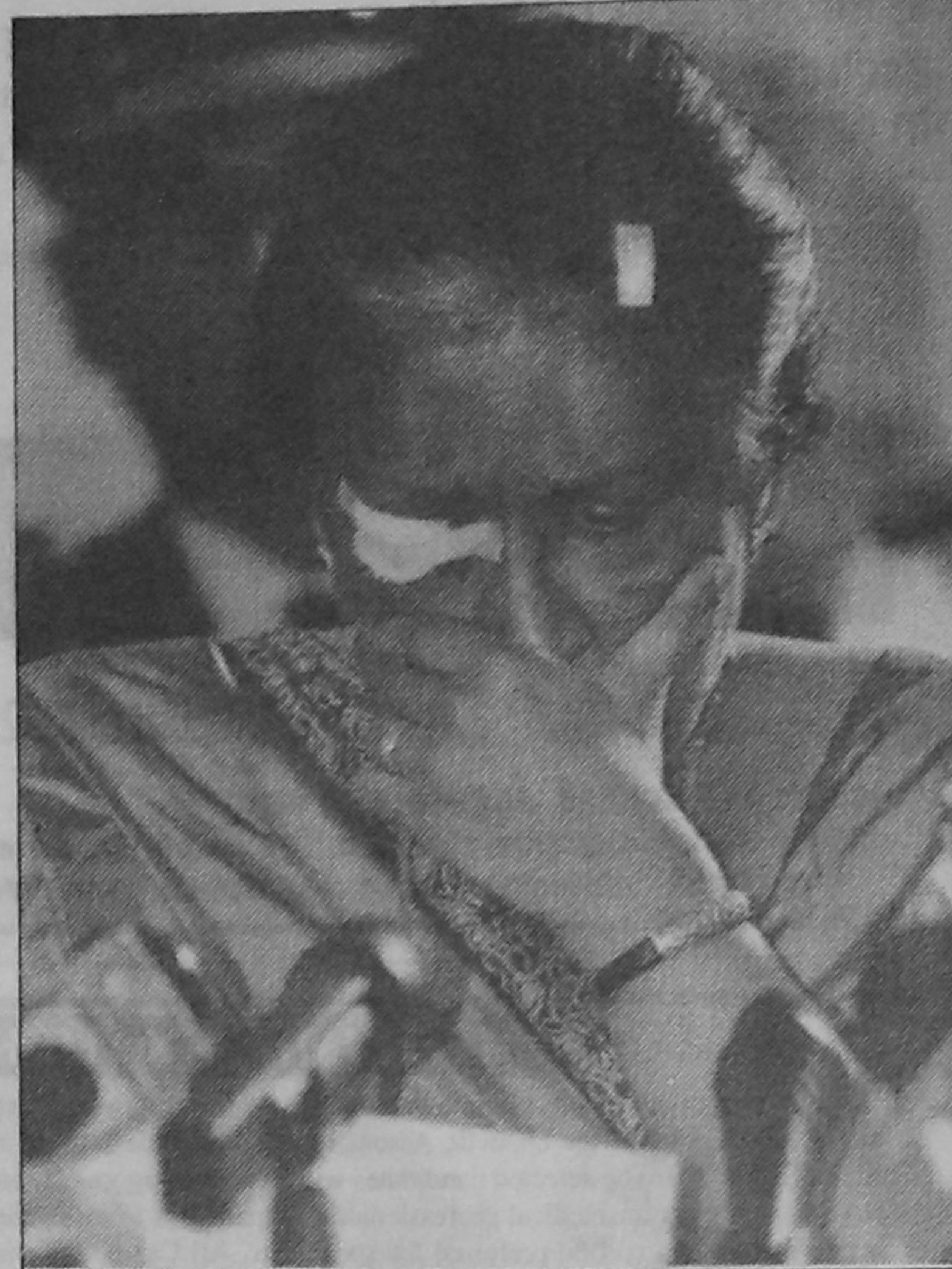
and the simultaneous, successful, attack on United National Party leader, and former General Lucky Algamu, a considerable hardening of her political stance along with some loss of her credibility within the progressive intelligentsia over the conduct of the election, the January 5 bomb blast near the Prime Minister's Office on Flower Road in the heart of Colombo and the killing that very day of LTTE sympathiser and Tamil politician Kumar Ponnambalam. As important as the events themselves have been the responses to them from the general public, the government, different political parties and ethnic formations, and the media.

Thus, the unprecedentedly bitter and confrontationalist election campaign, with both Kumaratunga and United National Party (UNP) leader Ranil Wickremesinghe trading accusations, the former charging the latter with having "let out" to and colluded with the Tamil "separatists" - elevated the majoritarian pitch of Sri Lanka's electoral politics. The LTTE's call to single out and defeat Kumaratunga, virtually naming her as the main enemy of the Tamil people, seemed to harden the ruling People's Alliance (P.A.) position on the ethnic issue and facilitate the transition to the present "mainstream" rhetoric in the mouth of the barely concealed anti-minority prejudice.

By the end of December, the P.A.'s stand had been radically transformed: from making a clear (and necessary) distinction between the LTTE and the Tamil people for years, even Kumaratunga (December 22) had begun to remind the latter of their "responsibility" to bring the LTTE to the negotiating table: "those who aid and abet terror" were now under scrutiny and stood "warned". They would be answerable if they "by act or omission support terror" or "secretly or openly endorse the path of violence". This reflected not just personal bitterness at the assassination attempt - itself horrific for its purposiveness and significant for the chinks in the security armour it exposed - but the P.A.'s greatly altered political priorities and orientations.

Chandrika Kumaratunga could not have been pleased with her greatly reduced vote margin (down from 62 per cent in 1994 to 51 per cent) and representing a slender lead of just seven lakhs over Wickremesinghe. Nor could her Sri Lanka Freedom Party cadres have relished the prospect of a major vote erosion. There were charges of stuffing of ballot boxes and "booth capturing" from a significant number of constituencies, reported by the Centre for Monitoring Election Violence and other voluntary bodies, despite the international election observers' general conclusion that the polls were "by and large fair and free", or at least fair "by South Asian standards".

The perceived flaws in the election process further eroded the clan and the general appeal of the P.A. government. The fact that Kumaratunga, who until a couple of years ago campaigned for abolishing the presidential system, was elected under that



very system, with no route of transition to a Westminster system visible, did little to boost the P.A.'s credibility. The December 18 bomb attempt and the chaos that reigned for several long minutes after the explosion rudely underscored the lack of wisdom in using purely physical or military methods of putting down or containing discontent. Had a second bomber or even a sniper been present on the spot, she or he would almost certainly have succeeded in killing the President.

Relief at the failure of the assassination attempt had barely set in before it was disclosed that the President had probably lost an eye. Her interview on the BBC Asia File programme further aggravated matters: a new, combative, perhaps driven by anger at the UNP leadership, seemed to have taken over, as also an assertiveness about her historic, if not divinely ordained, mission to bring peace to the island. The tone of this interview only served to create fresh fears and forebodings among the minorities, as well as the P.A.'s opponents.

This was not the Chandrika Kumaratunga of 1995 or 1996, even of 1998, trying to build bridges, create a consensus in favour of devolution and systemic reform, or appealing to the UNP to lend support to her devolution proposals in Parliament. This was an altogether, less tolerant, preoccupied with security issues, unwilling or unable to break out of the mould of thinking within the centralised unitarist state - a persona that appears harsh and unfriendly to ethnic minorities, hostile to political opponents, and capable of using methods far removed from the UNP period to many political observers. Since then, the official media have made high-pitched allegations about collusion between Tamil businesspersons and army officer's in conspiracies to kill Kumaratunga. This is a serious matter.

The two assassination attempts of January 5, one of them successful, become significant here. The first, the bombing on Flower Road, leading to 13 deaths, was widely attributed to the LTTE. The official response was to tighten security further, re-draw protocols and drills, and impose a 14-hour curfew in Colombo and its suburbs on January 7, leading to the arrest of over 1,200 people, mostly Tamil. The second, Ponnambalam's killing, produced widespread fear among the minorities. The killer has neither been identified nor apprehended. But it is widely presumed and feared that either a clandestine security agency of the state, or an anti-LTTE Tamil group, or a combination of the two, was involved in the killing. (One possibility is the involvement of a new and virulently unknown group claiming to be the National Front against the Tigers.) Only a full investigation can establish the whole truth, but a few things can still be said with confidence today.

Ponnambalam was a totally committed and unabashed supporter of the LTTE, who not only defended its cadres as a successful lawyer, but advocated its deplorable brand of P.T. politics. He was less known for an abiding commitment to the Civil Rights and Free Media Movement (although he helped them in the early stage) than for his high-profile family connections (especially through his illustrious father and former Minister, G.G. Ponnambalam), his collection of Mercedes-Benz cars, and his LTTE sympathies. These sympathies extended to his thoroughly despicable defence of Neelan Tiruchelvam's assassination last year. But it must be conceded, says political scientist Jayadeva Uyangoda, of Colombo University and the Social Scientists' Association, that Ponnambalam was one of the few Tamils in Sri Lanka

who "could talk and did talk boldly to the Sinhalese people directly, not just to their two traditional dialogical communities, the Tamil masses and the Sinhalese ruling class."

Ponnambalam's elimination has sent shivers down the spines of the ethnic minorities not so much because he was popular or highly regarded as an intellectual (as Tiruchelvam was), but because his killing seems to pose the question whether this signalled a return to an authoritarian era where political opponents were physically eliminated.

The short-term causes and phenomena that fuel these fears are themselves embedded in a long-term process of causation, the structural crisis of the Sri Lankan state, and what Uyangoda calls its "unreformability" once it reached a "point of no return". Th us Sri Lanka's politics, he says, has "acquired a distinctly reform-resistant character. Reform resistance is distinctly present in two spheres, political and social." The major actors in politics have either never had or lost the will to democratise the state through power-sharing between ethnic groups and its radical restructuring in relation to society. After 16 long years of the ethnic war, even the long-overdue attempt at constitutional reform has all but petered out, paving the way for the triumph of a unitarist-majoritarian model in the South and the Centre, coupled with an unremitting Tamil separatist movement. There are no major forces in Sri Lanka today that are not statist-conservative, or that are not themselves dominated and controlled by the larger phenomena of militarisation of daily life, extreme regimentation, and paranoid minority nationalism, as in the North and the East.

The war has proved socially destabilising, militarily crippling and economically ruinous. The National Peace Council of Sri Lanka, a non-governmental organisation (NGO), estimates that the real cost of prosecuting the war, in which official forces have recently suffered huge setbacks, is not, as claimed, 6 per cent of GDP, but something of the order of 21 per cent in direct and indirect military expenses, and in lost opportunities and missed output. (This is a 1996 estimate; the expense is likely to be even higher today.) And yet there are no signs that the war is about to end, or even enter a period of "stable stalemate". The state's attempt to "contain" and confine the ethnic conflict to the North has demonstrably failed. The LTTE can repeatedly wreak havoc in the heart of Colombo. And yet, the LTTE is in no position to win Eelam by military means.

There is a real danger that the forces of moderation and conciliation will soon become marginalised, fears Kumar Jayawardena, one of Sri Lanka's tallest public intellectuals. This will produce even greater despair and paralysis. The likelihood will then grow of a serial breakout of ethnic conflict, or state attacks on the minorities. In pursuit of "national security" and "defence". That could give the LTTE precisely the handle it has been looking for - something that helps it win a degree of international sympathy, despite its own devotion to ultraviolent and inhuman methods. Messy mediation by third parties in these circumstances - without any real meeting of minds of the contesting parties - can further complicate matters. In such a situation, the Sri Lankan cauldron could boil over. India has a historic responsibility - not to over-react, interfere, mediate or mess around, as it did 15 years ago. But we must know that this could be the next turning point for Sri Lanka after 1983.

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OPINION

Kargil - a No-winner Episode?

ZA Khan

IT was painful to observe India and Pakistan locked in a foolhardy contest on the snow-capped crests of Kargil with extraordinary obstinacy. Inspired by the nationalistic and military ardour, the Pakistan-backed Mujahideens intruded into Indian administered Kashmir and fought, perhaps, to settle old scores. About Pakistan, one wonders whether it was good in supporting the Mujahideens in the Kargil episode. Although the balance sheet of Kargil campaign is yet to be revealed, and the military analysts may draw intriguing conclusions about the victor and the vanquished, yet Kargil in any case deserves a page in the history of the second millennium.

Kashmir - a cliff-hanger in the South Asian politics, has been a flashpoint since the partition some 52 years ago. There has been several rounds of talks on the fate of disputed but strategically located Kashmir as it dominated the geopolitical landscape of the region for past five decades. Kashmir borders with China, India and Pakistan and all these countries have stakes in Kashmir because of its strategic importance. If Kashmir is held by India then she may concentrate on regaining the territories lost to China in 1962 and her nagging problems with Pakistan will be solved which will reduce inter-border tension thus enable

withdrawal of troops from this sector to be deployed against China. If it is held by Pakistan, its security umbrella will be strengthened in the northeast. China, which had been trying in vain since 1962 to bring India not to lend support to Dalai Lama and recognise the current line of control in Aksaichin and Thangla sector is likely to feel happy considering Chinese warm relationship with Pakistan and this might help China to consolidate her hold on Tibet and disputed Aksai China. Astute in politics and strategy, China never threw any indication in this direction. Rather she is concentrating to take up a few confidence-building measures for trade and commerce in India.

Kargil - the highest peak on the Indian Kashmir, has witnessed a fierce battle that lasted over a quarter of a year, still seems to be a terrain in trouble as Indian forces have not yet cleared the area of intruders. Some even say that the intruders are still around. So the danger of a few more incursions looms large and it is learnt that they are interfacing each other eyeball to eyeball with their guns ready. People of the entire region are holding their breath with the hope that there would be no more violence because such actions sends tremors to all the adjoining countries. A rough estimate reveals more than 2000 dead and twice this number wounded in

the Kargil campaign which ended without any substantial sign of conclusion. The situation is so fragile and tense that any flimsy reason may throw the jingoists to lock themselves in sabre-rattling. Now that the first round is over, we may try to analyse how did it go and who could be declared winner. Was there really a winner?

The author does not intend to declare the winner in Kargil campaign but is inclined to probe as to what Kargil has brought home to these two warring countries. These are:

Pakistan

* Kargil has dealt another blow to already tottering economy.

* Pakistan's diplomatic image has been battered, as she did not even receive any moral support from traditionally friendly countries like USA and China. None of the Muslim countries also lent its support.

* Created division of opinion between the government and armed forces.

* Pakistan had to relent to outside pressure to withdraw her support to the Mujahideens.

* Affected the morale of the people and the ranks of armed forces in particular for withdrawing support to Mujahideens.

* Reluctant strained relationship between government and armed forces caused dis-

missal of senior officers of armed forces which paved the way for the grand finale that brought removal of the government by a military coup.

* Pakistan has been able to internationalise the Kashmir issue which ought to have been bilateral issue under the Simla Accord of 1972.

India

* Kargil campaign brought to fore poor state of India's intelligence. The myth of RAW's invincibility has once again been questioned after its failure in Sino-Indian campaign of 1962. According to Indian media, despite the presence of 15 corps intelligence outfit, India did not have any clue about the ensuring Pakistan supported guerrilla type of operations till the first bullet was fired.

* It is learnt that India's force mobilisation scheme was outmoded and outworn. It took the 15 corps over two weeks to start facing the situation.

* Guerrillas withdrawal from the trenches due to US intervention, may have given the ruling BJP a handle to win in the national hustling of 1999, it has at the same time fanned turmoil in entire Kashmir and in the troubled states of India where guerrilla wars are being waged against the Indian federation.

Although death casualties of Indian forces are estimated by the government were 520, but unofficial estimate, like the newspapers, reveals the num-

A Weary Scene Re-enacted

Ayaz Amir explains why he thinks Pakistan is a land where many things don't seem surprising any more

POLITICS in Pakistan is the death of the imagination. The same scenes repeated endlessly, even some of the directors, as in the case of Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada, performing the same role from one generation to the next. The actors of course change but as in obedience to a higher dramatic law they too stick closely to the ancient script.

Consider the latest circus (for it is a bit more than a play) arranged for the benefit of their lordships of the superior courts. Such a circus was expected because with the Constitution set aside and displaced by the Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO), it stood to reason that sooner or later this contradiction would have to be resolved. But the need for such a circus also stood on firm historical ground.

In March 1981 a similar exercise was ordained by another benign military figure, General Ziaul Haq, whose protestations to hold elections in 90 days were, if anything, more vociferous than General Musharraf's proclaimed determination to return Pakistan to the fold of "real" democracy. Barring a few honourable exceptions, most of their lordships, led by the pragmatism which has been the guiding spirit of the Pakistani higher judiciary, preferred discretion to valour by swearing allegiance to General Zia's PCO. The master of ceremonies on that occasion too was Syed Sharifuddin.

As if to prove that while the world may have moved on we remain stuck in the same grooves, 19 years later as Pakistan heroically enters a new millennium, another generation of judges has been called upon by another military saviour to negotiate a similar obstacle course. Again, shunning rashness and opting for pragmatism, the overwhelming majority of their lordships, 89 out of 102, have sworn fealty to another PCO.

In a land where nothing is surprising anymore, it is still not a little remarkable that the moving spirit behind both the circuses, otherwise separated by a distance of 19 years, should be the same eminence grise: Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada. Active in General Ayub Khan's service when many of us were in

school, he has raised a monument to longevity by serving another military figure as his principal legal adviser, with a seat in the National Security Council and the freedom to continue with his legal practice. If Pakistan's fate is to remain in the grip of military rule, it is the fate of our military rulers to remain captive to Syed Sharifuddin's beguiling advice. This is the closest thing we have to immortality in this country.

Whether the superior judiciary - its conduct tarnished in many ways - deserves what it has got is beside the point. Of greater relevance is to see the implications of the latest move for the country's immediate future. Since this is a nation where the level of gullibility remains high, it was scarcely surprising if on the morrow of the celebrated "counter coup" of October 12 there was no shortage of people who were ready to believe that the promised land had been sighted and a new coming was at hand. In that ex-

alted mood the pronouncements of the Chief Executive were greeted with enthusiasm and criticism of his intentions was considered almost akin to sacrilege.

That was then. Today the feeling is different. The performance or rather non-performance of the military government over the last 100 days (which is the time it took Napoleon to leave the island of Elba and fight the battle of Waterloo) has been such that even some of the fiercest partisans of military rule are a bit down-at-heart. After the judicial drama just enacted in Islamabad this mood can only be strengthened because by now it should be clear even to the congenitally benighted that what we are witnessing on the national stage is not so much a temporary reform movement which will pick up its tools when its immediate task is done - as the kind of long-drawn-out military rule which (to its grievous cost) the nation has experienced

once too often in the past. That General Musharraf seems to be playing for keeps is the real significance of the trauma through which their lordships have been put.

To be sure, judicial freedom and military rule were incompatible from the start. But it is only now that this incompatibility was about to be tested in the shape of the constitutional petitions before the Supreme Court challenging military rule. The critical hour approaching, it was judicial independence which had to submit before the exigencies and higher requirements of military rule.

Nor could it be otherwise. In Pakistan it is not only power which flows from the barrel of a gun. Legality and validation also flow from the same source. Every dictator in Pakistan's history has received approval and benediction at judicial hands. It would have been unrealistic to assume that General Musharraf or anyone else in his place would have allowed this

hallowed tradition to be broken. Why after all was Sharifuddin Pirzada hired in the first place? Just for this eventuality.

The trouble is that there is so much else that is incompatible with military rule: fundamental rights as a whole for one, press freedom for another. How long will the saviour in General Musharraf tolerate these deviations from the military norm? One illusion that it is in our best interests to get rid of fast is regarding the American concern for democracy in Pakistan. From Washington Pakistan is just a blip on the world screen and although democracy and human rights are issues with which the US likes to whip other countries when it wants to, of greater concern to the US as far as Pakistan is concerned is a raft of other issues: terrorism, Osama bin Laden and the CTBT.

If we are forthcoming on these issues democracy can take a back seat.

Courtesy: The Dawn

Gujral for Early SAARC Meet

Sugeeswara Senadhira writes from Colombo

Gujral said that calling for the postponement of a SAARC summit over bilateral differences was not proper. "SAARC, under no circumstance, should be linked to bilateral issues and the summit should be held as early as possible because the progress achieved in the last 14 years should not be damaged," he said.

Gujral said both Islamabad and New Delhi were responsible for the deterioration in bilateral relations, though India as a vibrant democracy was more restrained than Pakistan. However, he added that Musharraf's recent statements were "more positive and encouraging".

Gujral, who was in Colombo to inaugurate the Neelan Tiruchelvam commemoration meeting, said international cooperation was essential to eliminate terrorism. Tiruchelvam, a former parliamentarian belonging to a moderate Tamil party, the Tamil United Libera-

tion Front (TULF), was killed by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) last year.

Admitting that his much vaunted 'Gujral Doctrine' was not 'working full time' as far as India's relations with Pakistan were concerned, he pointed out that it had a very positive effect on New Delhi's relations with other neighbours. "Improvement of economic ties with Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal is a very positive sign for the future of South Asia as a free trade area," he said.

"I am very happy that details have been worked out for early implementation of the Indo-Lanka Free Trade Agreement," he said. "We have to move from SAFTA (South Asian Free Trade Area) to SAFTA (South Asian Free Trade Area) as early as possible and the bilateral free trade agreements will set the ball rolling".

On Sri Lanka, he said President Chandrika Kumaratunga had told him about the steps she had taken to find a political solution to the ethnic problem in the country. "The devolution package covers devolving power and authority to grassroot levels and it is much wider than what we have in Indian states," he said. "This experiment, I hope, will set an example for other countries, including India."

Gujral said Kumaratunga expressed considerable optimism about opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe's recent statement that his United National Party (UNP) would support the devolution package. He said cooperation among national parties was essential for finding a lasting solution which would preserve the unity of the country while ensuring that all segments of people enjoy equal rights.

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