

## Sri Lankan government's current strategy against LTTE

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BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

SRI Lanka on 4th February celebrated the 60th anniversary of its independence from the British rule. Prior to the British, the Portuguese and the Dutch administered the country and left their legacies. The country became a Republic in 1972 and changed its name from Ceylon to Sri Lanka.

The British brought Tamils from Southern India for tea plantations. Tamils are Hindus and speak Tamil, while the Sinhalese are mostly Buddhists and speak Sinhalese.

The Sinhalese constitutes roughly about 75% and the Tamils about 18% per cent of the total population of about 22 million.

History has it that during the 60s and 70s, the governments dominated Sinhalese politicians who attempted to marginalize the Tamils by suppressing their language and cultures and the Tamil minority did not approve such policies.

Although, since 1983, Sri Lanka has been engaged in a civil war between Sinhalese and Tamils, from 1987 the militant Tamil group, the

most important of which is the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), has been at arms in an armed conflict that had cost thousands of people of whom many were innocent civilians.

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Because of the consequences of the civil war, Sri Lanka is considered one of the "world's most politically unstable countries" by the World Bank and Asian Development Bank. The Economist labels Sri Lanka a "flawed democracy" in its 2006 rankings.

### Present policy: fight to finish of LTTE

Sri Lanka's President insisted on 4th February his government was winning the war against Tamil Tiger rebels as the island marked its 60th anniversary of independence after a bloody weekend of violence.

Kicking off a display of military hardware along Colombo's sea front promenade circled by stiff security. President Mahinda Rajapakse also brushed off threats of foreign aid cuts due to the worsening ethnic conflict and human rights situation.

Monday's celebrations went ahead despite threats from the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), and following two bomb-attacks over the weekend that killed 34 civilians and wounded nearly 200. Tamil rebels killed 12 civilians and a soldier on the day.

According to the defence ministry, the rebels - who are fighting for an independent ethnic homeland in the Sinhalese-majority island - have lost at least 908 fighters since the beginning of the year, compared to just 36 government soldiers killed.

At least 139 civilians have also died during the same period, according to both sides.

The worsening fight as well as mounting international concern over the human rights situation has led to threats of cut in foreign aid to the island.

President Rajapakse, however,



appeared to brush off such warnings by asserting that Sri Lanka has "established new relations with our neighbouring states, Arab states, and Buddhist states."

"Our neighbouring states trust us. Our problems and issues are also problems and issues of our neighbouring states," he said.

Last month, the government pulled out of a tattered truce with the rebels. Many believe that under

pressure from the government's coalition partner JVP, it has been abrogated. Some Sinhalese majority held the view that the ceasefire agreement provided too many concessions to Tamils, in particular the notion of lines of control with large chunks of territory in northern areas accepted to be under the LTTE and the acceptance of two armies are denounced.

### Is the government winning the war?

Many analysts believe that hard line policy of the present government would not eventually work for the following reasons:

First, military solution does not work in an ethnic civil war. The causes of civil war must be removed and most of them arise from political and economic deprivations. They are

resolved through political dialogue. Ethnic wars were seen in the Balkans in the 1990s and each one was resolved through dialogue.

Second, the LTTE has been around for over three decades during which it has taken control over large tracts of land of territory. It is doubtful whether an organization with military and administrative machinery can be eliminated militarily.

Third, the international community seems to be against the existing hard line policy of the government; they want a negotiated settlement. They expect that government needs to take decisive steps to re-activate the political process that could lead to political solution.

Furthermore, the abrogation of Norway-inspired ceasefire agreement of 2002 and the escalating violence followed a thinly veiled warning from Japan, the island's main financial backer, that it may review its aid policy unless there was a decline in the level of violence.

Japanese special peace envoy, Yasushi Akashi who visited Sri Lanka for peace efforts 16 times told reporters on 31st January that, if the violence in Sri Lanka continue to escalate at current rate, Japan could be forced to cut the financial aid to Sri Lanka.

The United States and Britain, Sri Lanka's former colonial ruler, last year announced aid cuts to the island citing human rights violations and high defence spending by the government. The US has also stopped selling military hardware to Colombo.

Fourth, one of the features of the conflict has been the violations of human rights at a high level. Human Rights situation in Sri Lanka has come under criticism by human rights groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, as well as the United States Department of State and the European Union, have expressed concern about the state of human rights in Sri Lanka.

Both the government of Sri Lanka and the separatist LTTE are accused of violating human rights. If the national government does not adequately address the issue, it is believed that at some point, international humanitarian intervention through the UN may likely be invoked.

Finally, a considerable optimism that LTTE can be effectively defeated has been marred by the blasts on 4th February.

### Conclusion:

Centralization of power by majority ethnic groups largely alienates minority ethnic groups. It is counter to democratization of administration.

Ethnic identities are hardened by armed conflict. As conflict escalates, each ethnic group (Sinhalese and Tamils) comes increasingly to hold enemy images of the other group. Ethnic conflicts are different from ideological conflicts. The conflict needs to be resolved through political dialogue.

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## Super Tuesday showdown

BRIG GEN JAHANGIR KABIR, *ndc, psc (Retd)*

THE caucus of super-duper Tuesday with nearly half of American voters is just over. Obama put up a good fight bagging 528 delegates but Senator Clinton with 635 appears to be buoyant in

the Democratic camp.

Democrats are still on long shot for the magic number of 2025 delegates. McCain with 487 for minimum of 1191 delegates, is slowly but surely emerging as clear frontrunner among the Republicans. Romney, his nearest rival has only 176. In many ways the

race-2008 is unprecedented. Never in US has history had a woman vied for the White House, and never has an African-American dream of occupying the White House. That pushes the Fahrenheit high and controversies into shrill cries. Rumor mills, conspiracy slug shots, political grave diggers are on round

the clock vigil; too early to say who will rise and who will fall.

Hillary was way ahead of others for a year but Iowa delivered a shock by endorsing Illinois senator Barack Obama, New Hampshire quickly reversed it by choosing Hillary, repeated in Michigan, Florida and Arizona. She is the winner in

Michigan and the big state, Florida, but without delegate as punishment for advancing the caucus for a month. Obama may make a good president one day, but democratic loyalists want a winner first. Senator Clinton is a great survivor and ruthless fighter. Democrats, pushed away from the White House in 2000, are looking for a gladiator to win. For many Democrats, Hillary has that in her. But many Democrats love to hate her too. Kennedy sister Shriver and ex presidential candidate John Kerry have endorsed Obama for personal reasons more than the party's.

In the Republican camp Governor Mike Huckabee was the winner of Iowa Caucus only to come a poor third in New Hampshire and trailing ever since. Senator McCain had a slow start but emerged the winner in New Hampshire, appears on course now for nomination after Super Tuesday. Both Rudy Giuliani once a great Republican hope and democratic gentleman John Edward have not shown enough staying power and gone rather early. It is too early to say who will rise and who will fall; nomination is at stake now, race for presidency will be after the party conventions.

Hillary could not hang the cultivated confidence after she came close third behind Obama and John Edwards in Iowa. Obama was surging ahead in the fiercely independent New Hampshire, taken to be in Hillary's camp all along except the week before the caucus. The pollsters were predicting Obama's stunning victory in Iowa would avalanche in New Hampshire, to the peril of Senator Clinton. In a desperate bid she emotionally charged the day before New Hampshire caucus 'may be I have liberated us to actually let

women be human beings in public'. The gamble paid off. Sixteen years ago New Hampshire primary made Bill Clinton a 'comeback kid' to run straight to the White House upsetting the incumbent President Bush sr. Will Hillary run that far while fighting her protégé image of the come back kid? When Obama said he was not sure which Clinton he is running against, the shot is aimed to kill? If Bill Clinton overshadows her leadership ability, Bill plays mostly offstage music to masquerade his visible influence on her presidential bid. It is time for the accomplished-magician of American politics to repay his dearest wife for saving his presidency from the Lewinsky affair. Hope and despair runs together for the moment. Obama and Hillary are in a dead heat.

After sub-prime disaster the most concern area is economy. The debate between war and economy as election issue appears to be on photo-finish now. Years of concern for the casualties of war in Iraq and failed effort to trace Bin Laden in Afghanistan, is hotly chased by the economic worries now. America is in the grip of recession. Loss of job in manufacturing and emigration are the issues of 37 million poor, besides, health care, abortion will have a say in the election. American voters appear to be not much concerned yet about environmental issues that Noble Laureate ex VP Al Gore is crusading. Lobbies are most active during election that narrowly beams on their issues that make politics fierce horse-trading. Many do not take interest in broader issues more than the vested concern. Like law of gravitation, the winner emerges from political gravitation through a grueling

process of give and take. Americas are proud citizens but not unnecessarily patriotic.

American voters are also going through a tough choice. With poor approval rate of Bush and without incumbency since 1928 hope for change is sticking which Obama is vigorously marketing. In the Democratic camp the choice between an Obama and a woman; apprehension is also rising in parallel to enthusiasm. It was clear from her autobiography 'Living History' published in June 2003, that she had an aspiration for the White House. I suppose she came one election too late to evade the charge that woman commander in chief is unfit to conduct wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Wars have lost glamour now; looking for reconciliation that gives Hillary a fine sense of timing. But the question still hangs - are Americans ready to send a woman to the White House?

Obama has little to lose. Many already predicted he is unelectable. With a Kenyan father and Hawaiian upbringing he represents neither mainland prejudices nor skin; if that's what the American voters would eventually look for. He is also a newcomer in beltway Washington. And that's what he is selling hard as he calls - remove poison from politics of Washington. He is also claiming to be the unifying messiah who wants to demolish the barrier of colour, religion or deprivation. His keyword is change, trying to be a Nelson Mandela; but does America need one? Election is still away, for the time being he is mounting a hope to break the social barrier, selling 'change and we can do' myth with mesmerizing persuasion. When he talks, colour melts; that happened in Iowa and drove many

predominantly white states towards Obama. African Americans don't like illegal immigrants dominated by the Latinos and Asians. Obama is selling less with Latinos and Asians.

When Martin Luther King said, I have a dream; injustice shivered, that finally gunned him down. But his dream lived to peel off injustice, to discover talents like Jessie Jackson, Barack Obama and many like them. The brilliant Jessie Jackson pushed on to presidency that he knew he would never make. Nevertheless, like the man behind wheel of the bullock cart painted by Zainul Abedin to symbolize struggling humanity, he pushed on and on, and handed the baton over to Obama to run the race. Colin Powell meanwhile, broke the barrier to become the first Chairman of Joint Chief of Staff's Committee, then secretary of state, handed over the baton to Dr. Rice. These are inevitable changes; irreversible progress, where race and religious prejudices are fast reaching the museum of relics. Even if Obama does not make a president, he carries the torch to the Olympian heights, that somebody someday among the underprivileged will reach the White House. Along with race and religion, sovereignty and national boundaries are also fading to the cherished values of humanity. Americans are a radical society, capable of undertaking big strides. White House is symbolic; injustice is real - heartbreaking and cruel. Colour, religion and sexism must go from politics everywhere. The very fact that both Obama and Hillary are pulling big crowds with a real possibility of one of them reaching the White House is close to a revolution.

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## Benazir Bhutto's assassination and the American elections

AVINASH GODBOLE

BENAZIR'S assassination is widely considered to be a serious jolt to democratization in Pakistan and a worrying factor for regional stability and security. At the same time, this tragic event is casting its shadow over the presidential polls in the United States. Bhutto's death is likely to influence the foreign policy agendas of the candidates and may provide support to hard-liner candidates' arguments.

Every potential candidate is claiming expertise on foreign policy and security issues, which is happening because of an important aspect of globalization - the modern news media. Benazir's assassination, particularly the visual impact of her entering the car, waving to the masses, and images of her death, is likely to be used by hardliner candidates in the American elections. Although it remains unclear who killed Benazir, the perception that a democratically-minded candidate fighting the elections in a democratic manner was killed, possibly by Islamic terrorists, will strengthen the issue of national security and American values, and extremism could well fuel conservative ideology.

So, how have the aspirant candidates reacted to the news of this

assassination? Its overall effect was quickly noticed in the change that occurred in the candidates' advertisements. While in the Christmas week, everybody spoke about social security issues or health and medicare as their gifts to the US people, the focus in the next week after Benazir's killing, was "national security." Basically everyone claimed that the United States would be more secure and better prepared under their command!

Take the case of Rudy Giuliani. Giuliani's claim to fame is his tenure as the mayor of New York on 11 September 2001. He has consistently supported the Bush line on dealing harshly with terrorism and supported the invasion of Iraq and the war that followed. Recently, after he saw his ratings drop, Giuliani came up with advertisements that compared him with the Second World War generation in their common resolve to safeguard American values. In his statement issued after Benazir's assassination, Rudy said that "the murderers must be brought to justice," and ".....terrorism anywhere - whether in New York, London, Tel-Aviv or Rawalpindi - is an enemy of freedom." While Giuliani played it almost perfectly, other Republican candidates like Mike Huckabee fumbled to find the right language of national security.

Democratic candidate Hilary Clinton, on the other hand, said in one of her speeches that she knew Benazir well and remembered her "as one who was willing to take risks for the sake of democracy." Hilary also added that she (as American President) would do everything possible in helping the democratization of Pakistan. It is not just the vocabulary of the war on terror, democracy and American values that resurfaced in the candidates' speeches following the tragic event in Pakistan. Candidates like Obama used this opportunity to take potshots at other candidates to advance their claims a little more.

The biggest concern that the US presidential candidates have expressed about the present political scenario in Pakistan is about the country's nuclear weapons. The current Pakistani regime lacks credibility and has performed numerous flip-flops on the possible causes of Benazir's death; hence, several candidates have expressed concern over how this regime will protect its nuclear weapons and weapons technology from falling into the hands of "rogue elements." These concerns are based on reports of al Qaeda's resurgence in Pakistan's border regions. Most Democrat candidates have criticized the Bush Government for its

failures in Pakistan and Afghanistan by focusing its attention unduly on Iraq. The general feeling is that Musharraf has not done enough to contain and eliminate extremism inside Pakistan; therefore, the candidates are not sure if the present regime is part of the problem or part of the solution to the present crisis. So, even as the candidates seek a democratic Pakistan and view it as an opportunity, they have expressed their preparedness to enter Pakistan if the situation worsens, even if this remains a last option.

The assertion that the modern media has created an influence of the Benazir assassination on the American elections suggests that it can certainly spread the message of peace and progress as well. However, it can just as easily spread fear and suspicion and promote hardliners, especially in a scenario where contrasting values are seen and promoted as being contradictory. One can argue that all these remarks by the candidates are the natural reflection of an interconnected world, but if the hardliner candidates' credibility increases because of Benazir's death, the assassins would have succeeded in denigrating Pakistan politics as a whole.

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## Russian Arms Exports to China in Collapse: Report

MOSCOW Russia's arms industry is suffering a near collapse in exports to China as military top brass agonize over which technology the neighboring state should be allowed, a Russian daily reported Jan. 29.

The independent newspaper Nezavisimaya Gazeta said that Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov would visit China to try to resolve problems in this key relationship before President Vladimir Putin's final term ends in May.

From a situation where 40 percent of Russian earnings from arms exports came from China, "recently exports to China of our military equipment and weapons have dropped almost to zero," the paper said.

One problem is the recent breakdown of a contract to supply transport and refueling aircraft after problems at an Uzbek contractor, the paper said. But the main issue is indecision over which technology can safely be sold to China, as well as Beijing's desire to receive licenses to do the work itself, the paper said, citing a senior officer overseeing the arms industry, Mikhail Dmitriyev.

Russia's arms export agency declined to comment on the report when contacted by AFP, as did the defense ministry.

The paper said Moscow's willingness to deliver cutting-edge technology to India, another major importer of Russian weapons, had "embittered the Chinese generals," the paper said.

Russia has sought close military ties with China, particularly through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, while the two countries have often aligned their policies as permanent members of the United Nations Security Council.

Source: defenseneews.com

## Second Dutch Navy Corvette Arrives in Indonesia

JAKARTA The Indonesian navy has taken delivery of the second of four corvettes ordered from the Netherlands, the navy said here Jan. 30.

The 1,600 ton Sigma-class corvette, which was named the KRI

Hasanuddin-366, arrived from its shipyard in the Netherlands at Jakarta's Tanjung Priok port Jan. 29 and will join the navy's Western Fleet as a patrol ship, a fleet spokesman said.

Four of the missile-equipped ships were ordered from the Schelde naval shipyard in the Netherlands in January 2004. The first ship arrived in August, while the third and fourth ships are expected to arrive between late 2008 and mid 2009, the spokesman said.

Source: defenseneews.com

## India-Israel Defense Links Raise Political Conflict

NEW DELHI India-Israeli defense ties are threatening to blow up into a major political controversy here as the parties on the political left, whose support the government needs to remain in power, have severely criticized the Jan. 21 launch of an Israeli spy satellite from Indian territory.

The left parties want the Indian government to describe the scope of the India-Israeli satellite tie-ups.

"The UPA government is keeping a shameful silence on this criminal blockade by Israel. It is instead collaborating with Israel to enhance its military capability. The launch of an Israeli satellite from Sriharikota shows how India is aiding military efforts of Israel," the Communist Party of India polit bureau said in a statement.

The Israeli spy satellite was launched aboard an Indian-built rocket. India has been on a global hunt to acquire a military satellite and had been discussing with Tel Aviv the lease of the Ofeq 5 spy satellite. There are no details available on the specifications of the Israeli satellite, but sources in the Indian Defence Ministry said the Israeli satellite has a very high resolution.

The Indian government will find it difficult to give the details sought by the parties on the left on the Israeli-Indian space program because most involve co-development of critical technologies, like the development of India's homegrown anti-ballistic missile system with Israeli help and the co-development of a 1,000-kilometer-range cruise missile.

Source: defenseneews.com