

OP/ED

Brief on ongoing separatist war

By The Sunday Times Defence Correspondent

The Government last week exposed those at the forefront of Sri Lanka's defence establishment to envoys from the European Union to help them obtain a first hand account of the ongoing separatist war and other matters relating to it.

The occasion was a detailed two-hour discussion on Tuesday at the conference room of the Ministry of Defence.

Pitted before the envoys from the United Kingdom, Denmark, Spain, Belgium, Greece, France, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal and Germany were a host of top rung men. They included Defence Secretary, General Hamilton Wanasinghe, outgoing Army Commander, Lt. Gen. Cecil Waidyaratne, Navy Commander, Vice Admiral Mohan Samarasekera, Air Vice Marshal Terence Gunawardena, Inspector General of Police, Frank de Silva and other senior officials of the three services and the Police.

The dialogue began with a detailed brief on the current security situation by Brigadier Nalin Angammana, Principal Staff Officer (PSO) of the Sri Lanka Army and also the official spokesman of the Operational Headquarters of the Ministry of Defence. He explained the security situation, particularly after the Pooneryn debacle and emphasised the efforts being made by the security forces to fully secure the east to enable the government to hold elections.

Aerial bombings

As was expected, envoys raised queries on the human rights situation, particularly on reports of aerial bombings in Jaffna causing civilian casualties and damage to property. There were also queries on many other human rights issues.

Brigadier Angammana won the praise of some of the envoys for his frank and comprehensive brief, Inspector General of Police Frank de Silva, won their admiration for his deft handling of questions relating to alleged human rights violations by the Police.

"He was not only forthcoming but showed keen resolve not only to tackle the issues in question but also the causes leading to it," one envoy said commenting on the latter's replies.

Mr. de Silva had, whilst not denying some of the issues raised, said that the police did not condone such actions. However, like in other areas, there were some inherent problems and efforts were being made to resolve them too, he had added.

It was not only the envoys who sought answers to their questions. Navy Commander, Vice Admiral Mohan Samarasekera, had one in store for them too. He asked the questions which has been posed many a time by government officials and its diplomats - why are some western countries encouraging or supporting the LTTE?

The soft spoken British High Commissioner Edward J. Field, volunteered to answer the question. Although he could not speak for all union members he said he was speaking for the United Kingdom. He said his government had condemned human rights violations by the LTTE, too, and had always stood for Sri Lanka's sovereignty and territorial integrity. He also referred to the



Library pic: a review committee on security recommends the streamlining of the procurement procedure of materials for the forces

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protests from senior officers that the disclosure was prejudicial to the ongoing inquiry.

Another sequel to the Pooneryn disaster ended a week ago when a team of senior retired Army, Navy and Air Force officials, who examined the security situation at the request of the Presidential Secretariat, handed in their report to President D.B. Wijekunga.

Five page report

The group was headed by Major General Denis Perera, a distinguished officer, a former Army Commander and Sri Lanka's High Commissioner in Australia. Others included two former Air Force Commanders - Air Marshal Harry Gunatilleke, Air Marshal Pathman (Paddy) Mendis - two former Navy Commanders - Rear Admiral Alfred Perera, Rear Admiral Basil Gunasekera - Col. Sunil Peris, Col. Douglas Ramaniyake and Lt. Col. Lalin Fernando.

Their five page report (see box story on this page) begins with the preamble that the nation is quite

What they say on national security

A former Army Commander, two former Navy Commanders and two former Air Force Commanders were among a group of high ranking retired security forces officials who were called upon by the Presidential Secretariat to review the ongoing security situation, particularly in the aftermath of the debacle of "Operation Yal Devi" and the Pooneryn disaster.

Here is their report:

The nation is quite perturbed by the recent events in the north. These feelings are manifest in various ways and there is an expectation of some positive measures being taken to redress this situation. This concern is shared by retired officers of the Armed Forces.

Some very senior and experienced officers (including retired Commanders of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force) met informally in this context and decided to make some recommendations to government which might assist in tackling the present crisis.

These recommendations are made in a spirit of patriotism and not as a criticism or condemnation of the "status quo."

Recommendations

1. The first requirement in the present circumstances is for the government to make known in unambiguous terms, the national objective, which is discerned by this group to be "national unity." A bland statement alone will not suffice. Positive efforts to achieve this

4. To meet these objectives strategies have to be clearly worked out and pursued without change. Some of the strategies recommended are:

(a) Mobilisation of the nation to achieve the national objective - As a first step the Public Service must be placed on a war footing. They should be trained and geared to work in a "warlike" situation where crisis management is of essence. There should be "Task Forces" trained and geared to take over administration in "liberated" areas with a view to re-establishing the government's writ in these localities. If there are signs of these measures not being effective, steps will have to be taken to introduce "national service."

(b) A maritime strategy is necessary to reinforce the protection of Sri Lanka's territorial waters. We are fortunate to be an island, but we have not exploited this natural asset. The illicit entry or exit of persons and cargo must be stopped and this responsibility cannot be shared with our neighbours. It is one that should be executed with patriotic zeal. This strategy involves a continuous vigil by air and naval forces reinforced by ground troops at certain strategic points. This operation is one which requires a special command to control and co-ordinate.

(c) An offensive ground strategy to ensure, (i) that existing bases and vulnerable installations,

(b) At operational level there should be Commanders subordinate to the DCC, thus relieving Service Chiefs from direct involvement with operations. It is recommended that there should be:

- (i) A Field Force Commander responsible to the DCC for all ground operations with air and naval support.
- (ii) A Maritime Force Commander responsible to the DCC for all "off-shore" operations.

The DCC must allocate resources (of manpower and material) to their subordinate Commanders and direct them to execute operations. They should visit operational areas regularly to assess the security measures of the camps and bases.

6. The procurement of materials must be streamlined and controlled by a special secretariat comprising Treasury and Armed Forces personnel. Decisions on the material required should be made by the DCC and in the case of capital equipment such as ships, aircraft, armoured vehicles, etc, should be at Cabinet Sub-committee level. The secretariat must expeditiously obtain the sanctioned material.

Some immediate measures which must be taken if not already carried out.

- 1. Training - should be thorough and personnel motivated to be patriotic and loyal to the service. A

...and had always stood for Sri Lanka's sovereignty and territorial integrity. He also referred to the events that followed the recall of his predecessor, David Gladstone and how things have improved since then.

Even while Brigadier Angammana was briefing the European Union envoys about the Pooneryn aftermath, the Chairman of the Military Board of Inquiry into the incident, Brigadier Nanda Silva was busy finalising their report from an office in the Military Cantonment at Panagoda.

Board of Inquiry

There were indications that the Board of Inquiry report is to be handed over to Army Commander Cecil Waidyaratne before he goes on retirement on December 31. In such an event, the Army Commander is expected to make his own recommendations to the Ministry of Defence on the findings of the Board appointed by him.

Last week, Lt. Gen. Waidyaratne, was reported taking responsibility for the Pooneryn disaster.

He has, however, asserted that other senior officers who exercised authority in taking decisions in the north should share the blame for not keeping alert to the situation.

Linked to this assertion were reports identifying the names of three officers - a move which sparked off

Their five page report (see box story on this page) begins with the preamble that "the nation is quite perturbed by the recent events in the north. These feelings are manifest in various ways and there is an expectation of some positive measures being taken to redress this situation. This concern is shared by retired officers of the Armed forces."

The report not only underscores the concerns expressed for many months by those who are in the security establishment and those concerned with it.

One of the significant recommendations of the senior retired military officers is that the procurement of materials must be streamlined and controlled by a special secretariat comprising Treasury and Armed Forces personnel. Decisions on the material required should be made by the Defence Co-ordinating Committee and in the case of capital equipment such as ships, aircraft, armoured vehicles etc should be at Cabinet Sub Committee level. The secretariat must expeditiously obtain the sanctioned material.

Defence sources said yesterday that this recommendation would obviate corruption in arms deals and related purchases.

Government sources said a fuller streamlining of the security establishment will get under way beginning January, next year.

terms, the national objective, which is discerned by this group to be "national unity." A bland statement alone will not suffice, positive efforts to achieve this must be evident. It simply implies the need for all parties to get together on "national security," irrespective of their beliefs and policies on other matters. This is fundamental and unless this is achieved all other efforts will be fruitless.

2. There should be a Cabinet Sub-Committee (Waf Council in other words) on "national security". This sub-committee should comprise the President, the Prime Minister, the Ministers of Finance, Home Affairs and National Security (this appointment must be made without delay). It should be ideal if the Leader of the Opposition could be included. This sub-committee will make the ultimate decisions on national security matters. It must be serviced by a Secretariat and assisted by a team of experts who could study and advise the sub-committee on matters submitted by defence officials.

3. The military objective must be clearly enunciated and understood by all the forces. This group discerns the military objective in the present conflict to be "destroy the military capability of the LTTE and its sympathisers". There should be no confusion with other objectives such as "restriction of Law and Order" which is essentially a Police task.

(c) An offensive ground strategy to ensure,

(i) that existing bases and vulnerable installations (such as harbours and airports) are well protected and defended from enemy attack. Palali and Karainagar must be held at all costs.

(ii) that all ground south of the Jaffna lagoon are dominated and denied to the enemy.

(iii) that existing military bases are held in strength and troops are not "penny packeted", but made to move forward from bases by aggressive patrolling.

(iv) that offensive action is taken to re-establish the government's writ in areas controlled by the enemy.

(d) Well co-ordinated media relations to ensure the credibility of government and government forces. Concurrently effective "psy ops" should be conducted by professionally trained persons. A positive propaganda campaign (with professional approach) in external relations is also lacking and should be activated.

5. The existing command structure is certainly more logical than the previous arrangement. However, it lacks two elements, viz

(a) Ministerial participation at DCC level. This is necessary and a national security Minister should chair this committee.

1. Training - should be thorough and personnel motivated to be patriotic and loyal to the service. A positive attitude at all levels.

2. Capital equipment must be protected if abandoned, must be immobilised. If lost must be recovered or destroyed. The use of 4.5 mm mortars and naval water jets (mounted with .50 guns should be denied at any cost.)

3. Relief of personnel - in operational areas must be ensured. Therefore, there should be a proper assessment of troops to task.

4. Welfare - a command function and should not be entrusted to well wishers because there may not be equitable distribution.

5. Rehabilitation - should be a Ministry of Defence responsibility and not a burden on service Commanders.

6. There should be accountability at all levels and no shirking of responsibility.

7. There should be strict adherence to standing operating procedures and rehearsals/practices regularly carried out.

8. Any "post-mortem" on a situation should be objectively assessed by outsiders together with serving officers, because apart from fault finding, the truth will emerge and lessons can be learned.

Gerry: man with a mission in life

Maj. General G.H. (Gerry) de Silva was on Friday appointed as the Commander of the Sri Lanka Army by President D.B. Wijetunga. Here one of his long-time colleagues Colonel Sunil Pieris, pioneer and then chief of the Army Commando unit, explains the characteristics and personal qualities that have taken Gerry de Silva to the top.

It dates back to 1967 when I was participating as a school cadet in the regimental sports meet - a dashing young Captain of Gemunu Watch standing six feet in his boots called me after my event and "marked" an army career. I was quite impressed with what it had to offer and more impressed with the officer, who was the Adjutant of one of the cadet battalions, who I later found out was Capt. G.H. de Silva. Almost two years after that impressive sales talk, I met this gentleman, this time when I was being initiated into the highland regiment of Gemunu Watch.

The insurgency of 1971 brought me to serve with Capt. Gerry in Moneragala. I saw in him the determination and dedication he applied to the task at hand. He was baptised into the army, being the son of an Army officer and he spoke their language and understood a soldier faster than anyone else did. Besides the publicity he had gained through his achievements in sports, his men in the field were ready to go to hell and

back' with him. No doubt, there is no comparison to the battle that holds out in the North or East today, but, leadership two decades ago was no easier or different to what it is now. The fog of war blinds many an officer, but to remain calm in a crisis and to be determined when desperate, brought out the leader in the man. The limited operations in the form of patrols and ambushes were the order of the day. To get the army to accept this new form of life needed direction, leadership, example and dedication. He did this with tremendous success. Even today to face a battle of a different magnitude and complexity one would have to rely on these same principles and there is no doubt he would use them to good measure.

Deprived of the opportunity to be the Adjutant of his regiment and later overlooked to command his own regiment, this man still went on to stand alone like a colossus not depending on godfathers. With the most coveted appointments of an officer's career denied him not because of unsuitability or incompetence, the gentleman in the man was seen when he did not resort to the backroom tactics to secure those appointments. Today he comes out on top once again as the most popular choice of the rank and file as a leader on whom the nation will place their faith, not to lead divisions or brigades or battalion into battle, but, to lead an army. He has stood out as a man of impeccable character of

Man of dedication and integrity



Maj. Gen. Gerry Silva

moral integrity and unquestionable honesty.

It is refreshing to see the government standing by its own convictions of the man most suitable, despite the pressures that have been brought by other aspirants to the post and members of the public whose national interests have been blinded by that of petty personal gains.

In recent years, Gen. Gerry has seen the war develop with a total participation. But yet as it has been the recent culture of this war machine, suitability and capability were often overlooked - no godfather - no place. Today he has silently emerged from the sideline to be the major playmaker would have

quite a few people smarting under their shirts. Yet as a man with tremendous knowledge of the ground and our own army's limitations and the capabilities of the vastly experienced opponent, can anyone doubt the ability of the man destined to lead the senior service. Vadamarachchi is synonymous with the late Generals Denzil and Wijaya but alas no one sang of the brigade which was employed on a diversionary role into Kadduwan. Military pundits would know the importance of a diversion and the Generals of Vadamarachchi will testify to the importance of that operation - but there lies the tale of the dark horse that ran the race relying on his own steam.

Perhaps this man for all seasons cannot turn the legacy he has inherited into the most nippy outfit during his tenure of command. The need of the hour is leadership with honesty, integrity and dedication and this not from the physical front of the FDL's or the Start Line but, from the front of commitment, accountability and spirit. The nation is looking on to salvage the army from the depths of a directionless sojourn - the material is excellent the equipment passable, but, it is the fighting spirit that needs to be galvanized to deliver the goods to the Government, for it to proceed with a solution!

The nation looks to you Sir, in this hour of need - Manawaththa Abakkani - Tarry not, go forward.

Keyhole

Fat hopes

Remember the workout that Princess Diana had in a London gym? The one where the gym-owner installed a secret camera and took pictures and sold them to a tabloid?

This is what nearly happened in our country as well, when somebody spies-the leader of a political party having his "workouts" at a five-star gym.

But it never materialised, for a few good reasons.

Firstly, our man was liberal both in his policies and his curves, so he didn't cut a figure like that of Diana's. And then, some were not sure whether papers would sell even if they carried pictures of him in the gym, trying to get rid of those extra pounds of fat.

Facts are stubborn

Even though the Boss is on his way out, faxes are working overtime.

And this 'fax' details the life and times of the Boss and maligns his meteoric rise to the top.

But even though someone ordered all faxes circulating among the officers of his establishment to be destroyed, there were a few that escaped the shredder and the photo copiers have done the rest...

From glitter to gutter

Then there is controversy over mechanised gemming. Some were for it, some were against it and yet others were changing their opinions about it from time to time. Now, to sort the mess, a commission has been appointed.

Nevertheless, when someone asked the man in charge of the environment what he thought about it, he says: "I won't allow it in my electorate..."

When he was told that since he is the man in charge of the environment so he had the power not to allow it anywhere in the country he says: "that's a different matter..."

PEEPING TOM

Appreciation

Lucky: dreamt of peace

Sri Lanka must, one day, come to terms with the magnitude of the disaster this decade long war has wrought on the country and its people.

Thousands of men and women whose contributions to their society can never be estimated, have sacrificed their lives in a war that defies a solution simply because political considerations take precedence over a realistic assessment of the problem, and the lack of honest commitment to resolve it.

How does one justify the deaths of men like

Major General Chulabhaya Lakshman Wijayaratne? Today, three years after the brave soldier was killed in action, the question is still unanswered. Many will be quick to say that Lucky did not die in vain; that he died defending the sovereignty and territorial integrity of his motherland. But I often wonder, will that answer hold true a decade from now, when we are into the next century?

The deaths of brave soldiers can be vindicated only if their achievements are built upon and exploited by those who guide the

destiny of our country. Each day that passes without progress in this direction brings misery to the families and loved ones of departed soldiers.

And as we sorrowfully commemorate yet another year in the tragic death of Lucky Wijayaratne, we only hope that not too many of his colleagues will be forced to follow in his footsteps because this war is finally brought to an end.

A friend and colleague



Maj. General Wijayaratne: a dedicated soldier