

THE BLEATING INDIAN TIGER?

Kashmir Times Jun 03, 2002

In his very analytic and thought provoking article - "A diabolic plan that went awry" (KT May 24) - Mr. MM Khajuria has referred to a taunt, often hurled at us, that the Indian Tiger only bleats but dare not bite. While one may not be able to deny that such a taunt is, in fact, hurled, one might protest that the taunt is a little unfair, as it does not depict the whole truth. It is not that the Indian Tiger is afraid and it dare not bite. It is because it has never been provided with the teeth to bite incisively enough. Apparently the expectations from India in this regard are based more on its physical size than the size of its armed forces. If that were so, elephant would have, perhaps, been a more appropriate metaphor to use for India than the tiger.

Unfortunately not many people realise that the Indian Armed Forces are way short in strength in relation to their operational commitments. Outwardly they may be double the size of those of Pakistan, but with the Chinese threat and the numerous insurgencies to handle, the Indian Armed Forces available against Pakistan are totally insufficient for producing decisive results. Why this has been so would appear sad and tragic considering the fact that India has a perennial source of the finest fighting material in the world. Remember Kargil. Even as hundreds of soldiers sacrificed their lives while evicting the intruders out of their trenches, thousands thronged the recruiting centres for getting themselves enrolled in their place. Where else in the world would one find such wonderful fighting material.

The bane of Indian defence planning since Independence has been that the requirement of the force level to be maintained for the defence of the country, has, more often than not, been dictated by convenience rather than necessity based on enemy threat. The threat itself has most of the time, not been correctly perceived or calculated. Probably because of the colossal effort that is required to meet the country's defence needs an ostrich-like attitude has generally been adopted, whereby the threat that is not so immediate has been wished away. We have been reacting to enemy action in this regard rather than acting on our own and have, as a matter of fact, been repeatedly pushed by the enemy into acquiring even the present military stature. The periods of peace that are generally utilised by every country for preparing for the future, are, therefore, the worst for India as far as military preparations are concerned. For, it is then that a period of general neglect of the Armed Forces sets in. Every penny that is spent on the armed Forces is hotly debated in the Parliament and every effort is made to reduce the 'great burden' of defence on the exchequer. It is unbelievable but true that for nearly thirty years after the end of the 1971 War and before the coming into power of the NDA Government very little effort was made towards even updating the existing weapons and equipment of the Armed Forces, let alone adding to their strength.

The NDA Government is, no doubt, presently engaged in doing all that is possible for the Armed Forces. In military circles George Fernandes is generally even counted among the best Defence Ministers that India has had. But even this Government is engaged in only strengthening and maintaining the present force level and not raising it to the required strength. The numerical superiority against Pakistan required for producing decisive results is being sought to be created through transfer of troops from east to west, under the hope that China will not intervene on the side of Pakistan. However, with the Americans occupying bases in Pakistan, India appears to be in a Catch 22 situation and whether the Indian Tiger will be able to strike this time still continues

to remain a million-dollar question. The diplomatic pressure on America is on for it to either force Pakistan to end cross-border terrorism or vacate its bases in Pakistan to allow India the freedom of action for acting on its own.