



The New Indian Express

Saturday, February 26, 2000

Review without a view

Will the Kargil report help prevent another Kargil? No

THE four-member Subrahmanyam Committee began its inquiry into the Kargil episode in July with two broad terms of reference. First, it was asked to review the events leading up to the Pakistani aggression in Kargil, and second, it was to recommend such measures as were considered necessary to safeguard national security against such armed intrusions. At the end of the exercise, the nation is left fairly clueless on both counts. This is not to say that there are no concrete suggestions that have emerged from the four-member committee's exertions over six months and which included some 100 meetings. No less than 25 recommendations have been put forward, ranging from acquiring equipment like high altitude unmanned aerial vehicles, to improving the interface between the defence ministry and Army headquarters.

What is disappointing is that the committee chose the soft option of targeting faceless men in various intelligence agencies for their various acts of omission and commission, apart, of course, from heaping blame on the already discredited Brigadier Surinder Singh. To state that the Pakistani intrusions came as a "complete and total surprise to the Indian government, the Army and intelligence agencies" is to state the obvious. If the Indian government erred, the nation would have liked a clearer view on the various levels of government that had failed it. This reluctance to name names was already evident. The chairperson of the committee, K. Subrahmanyam, had gone on record that he and his colleagues were more interested in learning "what went wrong rather than who". Unfortunately, often it is the *who* that directly influences the *what*. The committee is certainly right in express-

ing its dismay at the inability of the Research & Analysis Wing (RAW) in identifying enemy infantry battalions deployed across the LoC and failing to trace the movements of various Northern Light Infantry formations. But did the defence ministry, on its part, display the necessary awareness and response required of it? While the Subrahmanyam Committee believes that "it is reasonable to assume that Nawaz Sharif was at least aware of the broad thrust of the Kargil plan when he so warmly welcomed the Indian Prime Minister in Lahore", it chooses to waffle over the Indian political leadership's own lack of alertness. Similarly, while opinion may differ on whether the absence of Army chief, General V.P. Malik, during the early days of the Kargil war proved costly, to flatly state that "there was no need to cancel the Army Chief's visit" at that juncture borders on the casual.

The result is that this much-anticipated report demands very little in terms of government reaction. It does not disturb the status quo; it does not hold up a mirror in which it can perceive itself, warts and all; it does not provoke searching questions or demand urgent action. Indeed, it is fitting then that the government's response to it was marked by characteristic bureaucratese: "After due consideration of these recommendations, a thorough review, through an appropriate body, of the national security system in its entirety, including the areas covered by the above recommendations of the committee, is being ordered by the government." Great. So what does the nation get after a war that claimed at least 470 Army personnel and which cost Rs 2,000 crore? One committee after another which say nothing.