

PRESS INFORMATION BUREAU (DEFENCE WING)
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

ANDAMANS MILITARILY MOST IMPORTANT

- Shri R. Venkataraman

New Delhi, March 15,

Defence Minister Shri R. Venkataraman said that Andaman and Nicobar islands were among the most militarily important areas in the country today, their strategic importance having been further enhanced by increasing tensions in the Indian Ocean.

He was addressing a joint services parade at Port Blair on the concluding day of his three-day visit to Andaman and Nicobar islands on March 13. Shri Venkataraman, who was accompanied by Deputy Defence Minister Shri K.P. Singh Dev and senior civil and military officers, watched Naval exercises in the Bay of Bengal, visited ex-servicemen settlers at Great Nicobar island, inspected defence establishments at Port Blair and held discussions with civil officials and military commanders.

Shri Venkataraman reminded Army, Navy and Air Force personnel on parade that they were an elite force, chosen for shouldering extremely arduous responsibilities, thousands of kilometres away from the mainland. He exhorted them to continuously improve upon their high professional competence and be fully prepared at all times.

Referring to the impressive discipline and dedication of Defence personnel whom he had met during the visit, Shri Venkataraman said, "I am sure that the confidence reposed in you by the nation will be fully requited, when any challenge to national security confronts you",

NATIONAL INTEGRATION

The Defence Minister said that the Armed Forces were perhaps the best example of national integration, having a cross-section of religious, races and languages. He said, "It is

the duty of the Services personnel stationed here to project the picture of national and communal harmony to the local population... If this picture of harmony could be successfully projected, the process of national integration here would be considerably speeded up, since the local population would realise that they are no different from the rest of us." Suggesting that the welfare of tribals should be an important concern for Defence personnel, Shri R. Venkataraman said, " A well integrated nation can be defended more effectively than a weak nation ... by promoting national integration, you would actually further the case of national security." The Defence Minister had no doubt that the local population would look upon the military not only as the "defenders of national security but equally as their friends-in-need".

Among the Naval exercises watched by the Defence Minister was an amphibious beach landing demonstration on March 13 in which Army troops were landed by a Naval Landing Craft supported by the frigate, INS Dunagiri and two patrol vessels. They were preceded by Naval frogmen in the commando role, who cleared the beach of land mines and indicated the landing point. He was accompanied by Defence Secretary Shri P.K. Kaul, Vice Admiral M.K. Roy, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Naval Command, Air Marshal B.W. Chauhan, Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Central Air Command.

Earlier, the Defence Minister watched a Naval exercise in the Bay of Bengal on March 12 in which the India-built frigate and patrol vessels engaged simulated 'enemy' surface ships and submarines, firing medium and close range guns, rockets, depth charges and torpedoes. The ships also demonstrated replenishment at sea and concluded by manoeuvring close to each other as the ships' company manned the decks and cheered the Defence Minister who was witnessing Naval exercises for the first time.

...3... Shri Venkataraman

Shri Venkataraman, accompanied by Deputy Defence Minister Shri K.P. Singh Dev and the Director General of Resettlement in the Defence Ministry, Major General S. Krishnamurthy assured the quake-stricken ex-servicemen settlers at Great Nicobar island, India's southernmost territory, that the government were alive to their problems, particularly relating to communications, including inter-island ferries and assured them that all possible help will be given. Earlier, in a welcome address, the ex-servicemen thanked the Defence Ministry and the three services for the prompt help following the recent earthquake. "We are scared, but we have not run away," they added.

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