

Brigadier (Retd) Gurmeet Kanwal on **Helming the MoD**



Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar, has been sent back to Goa in the party's interest to take over as the Chief Minister once again. His departure has created a void at a critical time when the state of defence preparedness and slow pace of military modernisation need the government's urgent attention. Major operational voids in the war establishment of the three Services need to be made up early in order to enhance combat readiness.

It is only in the last six months that Mr Parrikar had launched a concerted drive to make up the existing deficiencies by invoking emergency financial powers of the government. The government had at long last begun to address the 'critical hollowness' plaguing defence preparedness – a term used

by General VK Singh. He had also initiated reforms in the procedures for the acquisition and indigenous manufacture of weapons and equipment. A new minister will take time to settle down and learn the ropes of defence procurement.

Large-scale deficiencies in ammunition and important items of equipment continue to adversely affect India's readiness for war and the ability to sustain military operations over 20 to 30 days. According to a CAG report, the Army is reported to have some varieties of ammunition for barely ten days of conflict and it will cost over Rs 20,000 crore to replenish stocks. It will be recalled that during the Kargil conflict in 1999, about 50,000 rounds of artillery ammunition had to be imported

from South Africa. The occurrence of such a situation during a time of crisis must be avoided through a prudent replenishment and stocking policy.

The government has signed contracts with Russian manufacturers to procure ammunition and spares worth Rs 5,800 crore for the Army and Rs 9,200 crore for the Air Force. Similar deals are being negotiated with French and Israeli companies. However, it has been reported that the traditional norms of stocking ammunition at intense rates for 30 days of fighting and normal rates for 30 days are being watered down. If this is true, it would be a retrograde step.

Modernisation of the armed forces has been proceeding at a slow pace due to